



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

Hasmonean III

IN 169 BCE THE SELEUCID KING, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, desecrated the Jerusalem Temple, pillaged its treasures and, among other vicious acts, rededicated the Temple to the Greek god, Zeus. After the Hasmonian rebellion, Antiochus sued for peace in 165 BCE. The Hasmonians then cleansed the Temple and instituted the eight-day festival of dedication, called Hannukah. According to legend, a sealed vial of oil was discovered during the restoration. “. . . [The Hasmonians] used this oil to rekindle the menorah, the sacred lamp in the Temple. The oil was sufficient for only one day. By divine miracle it burned for the full eight days of the festival. The miracle showed God’s pleasure with the newly rededicated Temple and the self-sacrifice of the Maccabees.”¹

With the subsequent emergence of apocalyptic and sectarian Judaism, the seven-branched candelabrum or menorah was given even deeper metaphorical meaning. The menorah became “the ancient sign of Yahweh’s presence with his people in the temple. . . . The Logos was the central stem of the *menorah*, dividing three lamps from three lamps . . . ”² The upper lamp on each side symbolized the “essence” or causative aspect of divinity — as God was in himself. The middle lamps symbolized the archetypal patterns of divinity — the blueprints for divine action. The lower lamps were symbols for divine immanence — the consequence of divine action within Creation. All three lamps on one side represented the beneficent (good) powers of God. The three lamps on the other side represented the punitive (authoritative) powers of God.³

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After long reflection on the meaning of the menorah, the sectarian Jews began to identify themselves with particular lamps. For example, the Pharisees believed that the Mosaic Law was in their hearts, and therefore they implicitly identified themselves with the lower lamp(s) of divine immanence. The Sadducees were descendants of the Zadokite high priests, who had passed through the veil and entered the Most Holy Place of the Temple. Thus, the Sadducees saw themselves as the archetypal pattern of the divine purpose and therefore as the middle lamp(s). The Essenes, who had largely withdrawn from society and lived ascetic lives in the Judean desert, believed that they represented the upper lamp(s) of the menorah. They were thus convinced that they either had achieved, or eventually would achieve, mystical union with God in his ultimate causative essence.^{4, 5, 6}

The distinction between the three beneficent lamps and the three punitive (authoritative) lamps was never fully resolved. “. . . [But] in 63 BCE the Roman general Pompey was in the Near East with his army. . . . Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II [the two sons of the Hasmonean queen, Salome Alexandra] were engaged in a civil war over the throne. Hyrcanus invited Pompey to come to his aid. Pompey marched into Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of Judah became the Roman province of Judea.

“Pompey entered the Temple’s inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, infuriating the Jews with his impiety. When Pompey and Julius Caesar engaged in a civil war for control of the Roman Empire the Jews supported Julius Caesar, the eventual winner. The affection of the Jews for Caesar was genuine, and for his part he respected the Jews. When he became emperor, Julius Caesar made Judaism a legal religion. He excused Jews from agricultural taxes during the Sabbatical year (the Seventh Year when Jews neither planted nor reaped). He excused the Jews from emperor worship, which he understood was impossible for monotheists. Instead, the Jews were to offer an additional morning sacrifice to God in honor of the emperor.”⁷

Soon after Julius Caesar was assassinated (44 BCE), the Roman Senate convened and declared that the deceased Caesar was god himself.⁸ Julius Caesar was succeeded by the Second Triumvirate (Antony, Lepidus and Octavius) (43-33 BCE). Later, Octavius was appointed as tribune (30 BCE) and then elevated to the Roman throne as Augustus Caesar in 27 BCE.⁹ “Augustus was the first Roman ruler to be worshiped as a son of a god (*divi filius*), and the day of his birth was considered the beginning of his glad tidings or ‘gospel’ for the world.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Roman Senate had received Herod and “unanimously appointed him king of Judaea in 40 B.C.E.”¹¹ Herod was the son of Antipater II, who had earlier served as procurator of Judea. Antipater’s family were Idumeans (Edomites) who had been forcibly converted into Judaism during the reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE). Sometime after Herod assumed the governance of Judea, he declared himself to be the long-foreseen Jewish Messiah.¹² Herod proceeded to rebuild the Jerusalem

Temple and, in deference to Caesar Augustus, also erected three splendid temples to Augustus.¹³

Thus, at the end of the Hasmonean dynasty, the punitive powers of Judea rested with Rome. The deceased Caesar was the essence of divinity itself and therefore was symbolized by the upper authoritative lamp of the menorah. The reigning Caesar Augustus was symbolized by the middle archetypal lamp. And Herod the Great, who was the Messiah, was symbolized by the lower lamp of the menorah.

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the *light* of men. And the *light* shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

. . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, (and we beheld his glory [power], the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. — John 1:1-5, 14, italics supplied.

Endnotes

1. Stephen M. Wylen, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 55.
2. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 126.
3. See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), pp. 217-226, 290, 291, 374, 375.
4. For the Essenes, see "The Reluctant Messenger: The Lost Doctrines of Christianity," at reluctant-messenger.com/Lost-Doctrines-Christianity003.htm.
5. The Sadducees left no known documents regarding their history and beliefs, but as descendants of the Zadokites, they undoubtedly accepted the convictions of their ancestral priests, who believed that they achieved divinity when they passed through the Temple veil into the Holy of Holies (see Margaret Barker, "Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses," at www.marquette.edu/maqom/veil).
6. The Pharisees believed that they had reached the "ethereal realm" and the heavenly throne when they embraced all five books of Moses (Pentateuch) in their heart. Jesus may well have been alluding to this belief when he spoke to the multitude and to his disciples, "saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat [in heaven] . . ." (Matthew 23:2).
7. Wylen, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus*, p. 69.
8. See *Frontline*, "From Jesus to Christ," at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/cron.html.
9. See Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 210.

10. *Frontline*, "From Jesus to Christ."
11. Moses A. Shulvass, *The History of the Jewish People*, vol. 1, *The Antiquity* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), p. 98.
12. See Louis H. Feldman, "Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism in the First Century," in Hershel Shanks, ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992): "The first messianic claimant of whom we hear is the infamous Herod . . ." (p. 6).
13. See J. Andrew Overman, Jack Olive and Michael Nelson, "Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus: Mystery Temple Found at Omrit," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29, no. 2: 40-49, 67, 68.

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