

Preface

Two questions have provided the framework for this volume. How have the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and revolutions in the methodology of biblical scholarship in the past two generations changed our perceptions of Judaism in the Greco-Roman period, and how do—or should—these developments lead us to rethink the origins of Christianity? In attempting to answer these questions, I sought to highlight major aspects of the past fifty years of scholarship, and to synthesize my own work over four decades.

I intend the book for a broad audience consisting of biblical scholars who do not specialize in the study of Judaism; college, university, and seminary students; clergy; and laypeople who have some familiarity with the methods of modern biblical interpretation. I especially hope that it will engage persons participating in Jewish–Christian dialog.

The genesis of the book was a set of five seminar papers (chapters 1–5) prepared in 1993 for discussion in a number of venues in South Africa. After my return to the United States, the manuscript sat in the queue for eight years as I served as director of the University of Iowa School of Religion and then completed work on volume 1 of my commentary on *1 Enoch*. A month's fellowship at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center on Lake Como provided the occasion, the quiet environment, and the impetus to bring the task to fruition.

I cheerfully express my thanks to the Bellagio Committee of the Rockefeller Foundation for their support, and to the Universities of South Africa (UNISA), Potchefstroom, Bloemfontein, Stellenbosch, and Capetown, the New Testament Society of South Africa, and the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa for the invitations

and resources that made the trip possible. I remember with gratitude the gracious hospitality that Marilyn and I received from Pieter and Helen Botha, Pieter and Leona Craffert, Jasper Burden, Fika van Rensburg, Hermie van Zyl, Jan Botha, Bernard Lategan, Bernard Combrink, Daan Cloete, and Charles Wanamaker, as well as their concern and care for us during some very difficult days in South African history.

I wish also to thank colleagues and friends for their contributions to the completion of the book. Harold Rast, former director of Fortress Press, invited me to write the book and then waited a very long time to edit it. Erich Gruen, Hermann Lichtenberger, Eric Meyers, Jacob Neusner, Birger Pearson, and Norman Petersen read parts or all of the manuscript at various stages and offered helpful suggestions and corrections. Beth Wright designed the book and its cover with imagination and saw it through production. Gary Lee was a careful copy editor. To Marilyn, who always seems to stand and wait, once again I say “thank you; things will slow down!”

I dedicate the book, first, to Birger Pearson and Norman Petersen with appreciation and respect for our forty years of friendship and intellectual comradery. Many of the ideas expressed here percolated during our unofficial seminars at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature.

And finally there is this. More than twenty-five years after I began to publish on early Judaism and early Christianity, and a few years after I drafted the first five chapters of this book, I discovered my Jewish great grandfather. From archives in Germany, I learned that his father had sat on the praesidium of his synagogue and that, as far back as I could trace, the family had always married within the faith. Four gravestones bear the title *hakohen* (“the priest”). The timing of these discoveries was fortuitous, because it had allowed me to pursue my study of these two religious faiths and their interconnections with no hidden, existential agenda. What I had written, I had written because it interested me and it seemed intrinsically important. Nonetheless, the family silence about my Jewish roots has provided an additional compelling

reason to publish the book. This is a probe into that misty time two millennia ago when a family that should have stayed together broke up. To the extent that we begin to understand the causes of the schism, we can find some of the means by which to heal it and in other ways to deal with it.

So, within the microcosm of my family, I dedicate the book to the memory of those of my direct ancestors whose names I have been able to recover and with whom I would have enjoyed some interesting theological discussions.