

Sefer Toledot Yeshu

The Book of the Generations-History-Life of Jesus

It once happened with a certain man whose name was Yoḥanan and whose wife was Miriam, that he had a certain Hebrew maidservant who was espied by a man whose name was Joseph, the son of Pandera. He had taken notice of the man's maidservant and came upon her whilst she was impure, by reason of her natural purgation, and had laid with her when she was lying alone in the dark. At which incident, she became startled and could not answer him a word until the morning, when she then said to her husband: “Yoḥanan, my master! Why hast thou done this night that which is not lawful? For thou hast come upon me twice. Moreover, I did warn you that I was unclean, yet, hast thou not heeded my warning.”

At this saying, he was very much distraught and went and told the matter to Shimon, the son of Shetaḥ. He said to him: “I will tell thee what happened to me this night. For my wife came and said unto me that such and such a thing had befallen her, but it was not me who had connexion with her.” He then answered: “Who is it that thou dost suspect?” He said: “A certain one of my neighbors whose name is Joseph, the son of Pandera.” He asked him: “Hast thou any witnesses?” He answered: “I have no witnesses.” He then replied: “Go and conceal the witnesses from the culprit, for if he went in once, he will go in again. If you will do this thing, thou shalt make him liable thereby to the death penalty.”

Yoḥanan sat there idly and did not do a thing, until he overheard the town taken up entirely with the gossip over this matter, even those who were saying she committed an act of whoredom. Now because of the public's slander, he went off into Babylonia, and did not return. Meanwhile, his wife gave birth to a son whose name is Jesus, may the name of the wicked rot. Now he excelled in wickedness until he had been heard saying: “Since Jethro the mere proselyte was Moses' master, the greatness of Moses is

thereby diminished.” At this, the Sages replied: “This is none other but a bastard, and the son of a menstruate woman.” They went also unto his mother. They asked her: “What is the nature of this youth?” She replied unto them: “I was conceived with child by Yoḥanan, my betrothed, but he is now gone into Babylonia, and I wot not what he doeth.” Shimon, the son of Shetaḥ, then interrupted and said to them how Yoḥanan had told him such and such an affair had befallen her. The Sages asked him: “What shall we do to the woman?” Shimon answered them: “She is not liable to anything on that account, for she has not become impoverished by her own volition.” When she heard that they did not make her liable to the death penalty, she then told them the true account of the matter, and said: “It was, afterwards, made known unto me the affair, namely, that it was Joseph, the son of Pandera, by whom I was conceived with child.”

When the son whom she had borne heard his mother confess, and heard that the Sages made only him liable to the death penalty, he withdrew himself to the Temple precincts. Now the express letters of God's ineffable name were written upon the *Foundation Stone* within the Holy of Holies, and anyone who learnt them could do by them whatsoever he wished. Moreover, the nation of Israel used to fear lest perhaps the wicked of Israel should learn them, and thereby destroy the world. So it was that they made two brazen dogs, and had them tied at the entrance to the Temple Sanctuary, and anyone who learnt the express letters of the Divine name and then went out of the Sanctuary, when he saw the dogs, would anon forget from his heart that which he had learnt.

Now the land of Israel was given over unto the hand of a queen in those days, whose name was Helena, Jesus entered the Temple Sanctuary and learnt the letters, and made a stipulation over them that he shall not feel hurt at the rending of his flesh, and so wrote them down upon parchment. Then did he rend his thigh, and prepared the parchment for insertion, and replaced the torn skin. When he departed, he forgot them. Yet, when he reached the house, he ripped open his thigh and took out thence

the parchment and learnt once again the letters. He then gathered together some young men of Israel, to wit, three-hundred and ten, and said unto them: “Ye call me a bastard, but I am the Messiah, and it was concerning me that Isaiah did prophesy and say, *Behold! A young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Immanuel* (Isaiah 7:14). Moreover, it was said about me, *Thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee* (Psalms 2:7). That is, without my father and mother lying together carnally. Yet, do ye seek your own self-aggrandizement.”

They answered him: “If thou art Messiah, shew us a sign!” He then replied: “What sign is it that ye seek from me?” They brought unto him a lame man who had never yet stood upon his feet whom, when Jesus had seen, spoke over him the express letters and forthwith did he begin to walk. At their seeing this, they bowed down before him. When the Sages heard this report, they brought him unto Helena the queen. They said unto her: “Your Majesty, the Queen, this one here is a sorcerer.” He then said to her: “I am the Messiah, and it was said about me, *Who shall rise up for me against the wicked?*” (Psalms 94:16) The queen then asked: “Is there aught in the Law (Torah) of which he saith?” They answered: “There is. But the Messiah whom we do expect hath with him other signs, namely, *In his days, Judah shall be delivered* (Jeremiah 23:6). Moreover, concerning him it hath been said: *He shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and by the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked* (Isaiah 11:4). However, concerning this man here, it was said, *And that false prophet shall die. And again, And thou shalt put away the evil from amongst you*” (Deuteronomy 18:20; 19:19). He then reiterated what he had said: “I am he, the Messiah, and I resurrect the dead.” She, at hearing this, sent with him certain of her emissaries, and he did resurrect those who had been dead by the express letters of God's Divine name, and the people of Israel were on his account in a state of consternation.

After many days, he conveyed himself away. The Sages then came unto the queen and said: “Your Majesty, the Queen, seest

thou how he hath fled by the sorceries that be with him? For they have not suffered him to remain standing in one place! His reproach has become evident!” She then sent horsemen unto him, as far as Babylonia where he had gone, but the citizens of Babylonia would not suffer him to go with them. They waged war one with the other. Jesus then said to the men of Babylonia: “Do not fight with them. My father who is in heaven, and the Divine letters which art in mine own hand, they shall deliver me!” He said unto them: “Bring unto me a millstone,” which doing, he rode upon it and called out the express letters, whereby he floated while sitting thereon upon the surface of the water. Likewise, they made birds out of clay and brought these before him, and they began to fly. He said unto them: “Go ye forth and say to your lady, the Queen, what ye have seen.” They then went and told the queen, saying unto her: “They brought unto him a great millstone and he mounted it, and began floating while sitting upon it over the surface of the water, like as one floateth an eggshell.”

She then summoned the Sages together and said unto them: “This Jesus, whom ye did dismiss as a sorcerer, is none other but the son of God! For how many [wonderful] signs hath he wrought!” They replied unto her: “Your Majesty, the Queen, let not a word of his sorcery enter into your heart, whereas we [too] are able to perform as he hath done.” She then sent unto him several of those who believed in him. They entreated him, saying: “Come back unto the queen, for she is startled by the signs that thou hast wrought.” He, at their entreaty, gathered together his following and came back into the land of Israel. Yet, meanwhile, those in Israel had taken a certain man by the name of Antichei, and brought him into the Temple precincts, and he wrote them (i.e. the express letters) upon a piece of parchment, and he began to do just as Jesus had done. Then were they all come together unto the queen, and they made their accusations against him, having come there to make themselves victorious over him. He then began to say: “Behold! It is written, *He shall take me*, (Ezekiel 3: 12-14), that is to say, like as a bird is taken up in the air.” Antichei answered: “But it is

written elsewhere, *And the children of those who go unrestrained of thy people, [etc.]*” (Daniel 11: 14).

He (i.e. Jesus) then spread out his hands as the wings of a vulture and began flying in the air. Those of Israel said to Antichei: “Do thou as he hath done, for thou hast learnt as he hath learnt!” Forthwith did he fly away after him, until at length he attained unto him, and he would call out the express letters of God's name for an imprecation against him so as to cast him down from the sky, while the other would also call out the express letters so as not to be cast down from the sky. When he saw that he did not fall down, for he had learnt just as he had learnt, he (i.e. Antichei) then stood up and made an abominable act upon him. When they had thus been defiled, they both fell down to the earth. Those of Israel then caught hold of him and brought him to the queen. They said unto her: “Your Majesty, the Queen, ask him where are now the signs that were with him!” When he understood that the express letters of God's name had vanished from his heart and that he had fallen captive in their hands, he said: “It is written, *Their faces are become harder than flint stone* (Jeremiah 5:3). And again it is written, *Happy is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*” (Psalms 1), at which saying he escaped from them, and stood up, he and the following whom he had coerced through words, and began to make war, each man's brother against his brother, and father against his son, until at length his following delivered him, and fled away with him, remaining in a certain place until the Passover. Then he took an ass and mounted it, and gathered together his following, and went up to Jerusalem. He then said to his following: “Consider ye how the Scripture hath been fulfilled, *He is poor, and riding upon the foal of an ass*” (Zechariah 9:9).

They came to offer the Passover offering, when one of his own party came and said to those of Israel: “Are ye willing to have Jesus?” They asked him: “Where is he?” He answered: “In Jerusalem.” They said to him: “Shew him unto us.” He answered: “He hath already adjured us by the authority of the Ten Commandments not to reveal himself unto others, and hath

clothed me (*sic*: should be “us”) in common attire. Nevertheless, come and salute us, and I will then come in and bow down before him, and thereby ye shall know that he is that wicked one.” When they had come, he presently bowed down unto Jesus. Those of Israel, at this betrayal, stood and caught him, and they said unto him: “Thou art the Messiah. Deliver thyself from our hands!” When he had fallen into their hands, he said: “It is written, *A priest and a prophet have they killed*” (Lam. 2:20). And it is written, *For thy sake are we killed all the day long*” (Psalms 44:23). His companions began to weep when they realized that they could not deliver him from the people of Israel, and so they killed him and they proceeded to hang him. Now this same wicked person had made a stipulation over the trees, whilst he had still the express letters of God's Divine name with him, that they should not receive him, for he knew that they would not suffer him to be left alone. So it was that on every tree that they came to hang him, that tree would break whilst he was put thereto, until at length they brought the tree of the carob, and thereon they hung him, and it did not break. For he had made no stipulation over the carob tree. Thus his following began to weep and exclaim: “Out of his abundant righteousness, the trees would not receive him.”

At eventide, they came to take him down, on account of that Scripture which saith: *Thou shalt not suffer his corpse to remain on the tree* (Deuteronomy 21:23). So did they bury him, and his following began to weep again at his tomb while saying: “Ye have become liable to the death penalty, because ye have slain the Messiah!” Yet, those of Israel retorted by saying: “Ye, yourselves, have become liable to the death penalty, because ye have believed in a false prophet!” His following then said to themselves: “Come and let us take him out of his tomb.” They opened the tomb, but did not find him there, and so did they go unto Helena the queen. They said unto her: “Consider, your Majesty, the Queen, how many signs he hath wrought, and how that now he hath gone up into heaven”. At this declaration, she did send unto the Sages, and inquired of them: “Where is it that ye have buried Jesus?” They answered: “Near unto the waters of

Siloam.” She then returned answer unto them: “If ye do not bring him unto me, I shan't leave off from harassing a single one of you.” They sought him, but could not find him. They then said unto her: “Give us time.” She gave them time, and meanwhile, the people of Israel had all taken upon themselves a fast of affliction until the appointed time had expired, yet still they did not find him, by reason of which they began to flee from before the queen. Rabbi Tanḥum did also flee unto the field, and there found a certain gardener eating. He said unto him: “Thou wicked man! All of Israel hath undertaken fasting and they art in sorrow, but thou sittest here eating!” He then replied: “My lord, on what occasion hast this sorrow come over the nation?” Rabbi Tanḥum then told him the account of the matter. He furthermore said: “If they shall perchance find him, Israel shall find some relief.” The same man (i.e. the gardener) answered: “I have stolen him and buried him in my own garden, so as not to give an opportunity for the wicked to steal him away.” Rabbi Tanḥum, at hearing this, returned unto the city and exclaimed: “This day is a day of good tidings!” So those of Israel went and took him out of his tomb, and did tie a rope around his leg, and began to drag him along the city lanes of Jerusalem, until they brought him unto the queen. Forthwith did she praise the Sages and became wroth with the following of Jesus, banishing certain of them – three to a mountainous place, three to Greece, and thirteen of their number to Rome, while the rest were scattered among the nations. Then did the Most Holy, blessed be He, demand his judgment in every place. But, even so, those in Israel who stood up to make this breach in faith, got themselves up and opposed openly the Sages, and said: “He is the Deliverer.” Thus, there was a schism in Israel.

Now after Jesus had been slain some thirty years, the Sages then said: “Come and let us remove them from the commonwealth of Israel. For on account of our many transgressions, they have stood up and opposed us, thereby fulfilling what hath been said, *They have made me jealous over that which is not a God, even made me angry over their vanities. Yet shall I make them envious over those who are not a people, yea over a foolish*

nation shall I anger them” (Deuteronomy 32: 21). They stood up and called unto one from the Rabbinic Court in Tiberius, whose name was Elijah. They said unto him: “Come and separate from amongst us these wicked persons, and thou shalt find great reprieve from the God of Israel. Meanwhile, we shall also pray for thee that there shall not be imputed unto thee thereby any sin from the Lord.” So what did this wise man do? He stood up and made a declaration throughout the entire border of Israel, saying: “I am an apostle of Jesus. All those who believeth in him, let him come unto me, and I shall inform him about what must be done.”

At this invitation, the entire wicked following of Jesus were gathered together. They answered the man: “Art thou an apostle of Jesus? Shew us a sign.” He replied: “What sign is it that ye demand of me? I shall simply do what Jesus hath done.” They brought unto him a lame man, and he called out over him the express letters and did forthwith stand up. They then answered the man: “In truth, thou art his apostle.” He said unto them: “Jesus doth have somewhat to give unto you.” He said: “Know ye of a certain what is written in the Law: *Thy new moons and feasts hath my soul hated* (Isaiah 1:14). Seeing that the Most Holy, blessed be He, already hateth those days, rather, come now and let us cease from all our labor on the first day of the week, for it was on this day that the Most Holy, blessed be He, enlightened His world. And let us make unto ourselves new festival days, such as the day in which Jesus was born, and the day in which he was appointed by God's holy spirit, and the day in which he died, as well as that day in which he rose up into heaven. And know ye that our Father in heaven catcheth hold of iniquity, and doth know that Israel at some future time will be brought to give an account before the Most Holy, blessed be He, over what they have done. Moreover, indeed, he could have easily delivered himself from them, but rather said, ‘It was better for me to be killed than to behave in a presumptuous manner. And, as for you, if ye shall meet with an Israelite and he smite thee on thy left cheek, turn unto him the right cheek also;

And if he shall sorely abuse you with blasphemous words, do not answer him a word.””

At this great deliberation, he forthwith did separate them from amongst themselves, and they are those who are called to this very day Nazoraeans. Then did Israel find some reprieve in those days. Now that man who did perform this act, may God forgive him over what he had done.