

# BETHANY - A NOVELETTE

## Using the *Reality Search* Analysis

### Introduction

Sometimes the outlines of a person's life and circumstance are well-known. Sometimes extra, apparent insights come to light and these can be used to fill in more connections. But a new framework may not be generally known or accepted. In the case of details revealed through the *Reality Search* analysis, it appears easier to provide an outline of non-traditional connections in a novelette form. Many films are based on historical novels. One is not absolutely certain that this or that detail is historical fact. But an attempt has been made to avoid contradiction of facts that have been handed down. An attempt has also been made to incorporate new, apparent facts that have come to light when original texts have been considered in a different way.

When well-known original texts are considered, there are usually a range of opinions about the historical correctness of this or that perspective. Some subjects are more controversial than others and probably the most controversial of all is that of religion. In the books of *Reality Search*, an analysis of Scriptural texts throws up connections that fit in with the texts, but the connections are not traditional ones. Also, it is not the primary aim of the *Reality Search* kit to speculate about historical possibilities. So mention of possible connections tend to be scattered throughout the Versions of *Reality Search*.

In terms of presenting an 'overview' of a possible background story, a step is being taken back here from the texts in order to provide instead, a 'parallel' account of what could have been. By changing the names of the major figures, a reminder is presented that this is a 'possible' story rather than an assertion that this is 'absolutely' what took place. By presenting references at the end of the novelette however, evidence is given to show that this or that connection or event, does in fact fit the text.

The "novelette" called *Bethany*, is a reminder of *The Life of Brian*, (c/f Monty Python) a popular film made several decades ago. *The Life of Brian* selected out some points in tradition and then developed these into a 'parallel historical' sketch with comic overtones. In the case of the novelette *Bethany* however, the story and characters are not intended to be comical. Also the story avoids any contradictions at all with the texts it is based upon.

Because *Bethany* is only a 'make-up' story it is possible to add to it, change it around and develop it, so as to clarify parallels between it and original texts. At the same time, in a novelette there is less academic pressure to provide justification for every single point that is made.



## Part One

# A Special Life

### First Century Jerusalem

In the early part of the first century, Jerusalem was the hub of the Jewish world. The Jews were a small minority of people who were monotheistic, that is, they only believed in the one God. Their society was (and is) ultimately based on their knowledge of "the Law", or *Torah*, c/f the first five books of the Bible.

People in Jewish society contrasted with that of their Roman overlords who had a pantheon of gods similar to that of the Greek world. Roman society was largely based on the philosophy of the Greeks, namely Plato and Aristotle (c.a. 500 B.C.).

On a Sabbath day the Jews assembled at the local Synagogue where their Scriptures were read out and discussed. In turn, the life of the Synagogue was structured around the celebration of Jewish festivals. A large number of Jews made the effort each year to travel to the Jerusalem Temple to worship.<sup>1</sup> This included the offering of sacrifices, by which they could be 'cleansed' of their inevitable sins, both against the 'Torah' and their fellows.<sup>2</sup> A key festival related to such cleansing was the feast of Atonement when sacrifice was offered on behalf of all, by the Chief Priest. There were other cleansing rituals as well, such as after child birth.<sup>3</sup>

Because sacrifices were only allowed at the Temple, the hierarchy of priests there had a special power and status over the thousands of Jews coming to the festivals.<sup>4</sup> These priests came from the tribe of Levi and could trace back their lineage to Aaron, the brother of Moses who led God's Chosen People into the promised land and who gave them God's Ten Commandments (about 1200 B.C.).<sup>5</sup>

Priests were not the only power group within Judaism. There were a considerable number of sects or groups that operated within Jewish networks. A reason for the number and variety of "sects" was the Jewish emphasis on practice of 'law' rather than on what people thought. Consequently people could hold a wide range of opinions, so long as they practiced what the law set out.

There were the **Scribes**, largely involved in paper-work including the copying of 'the law' on parchment scrolls. There were local **Synagogue Leaders** scattered around the Roman Empire. There were the **Pharisees** who took great care to follow the law in minute detail.<sup>6</sup> There were the **Zealots**. Some of these were keen to shake off the yoke of Rome so Israel could be governed by 'the law' directly.<sup>7</sup> Others focused instead on a strict observance of the law.<sup>8</sup> There were the **Sadducees** who did not believe in an after-life.<sup>9</sup> There were the members of the **Sanhedrin** who were mainly concerned about the governance of Judaism, especially around the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The range of sects included **Herodians** who followed the worldly King Herod.<sup>11</sup> There were the Nazarites who took a vow of commitment<sup>12</sup> and avoided alcohol. Another group again were the **Essenes**.<sup>13</sup>

## The Essenes

The Essenes focussed on an idealistic observance of the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses. In the first century there was a large monastery of Essenes at Qumran near the Dead Sea.

The Essene 'monks' in particular "raised the bar" of the Commandments given by Moses. That is, they not only tried to observe these commandments but they made their standard of observance as high as possible. In doing this they focused in particular on the key social commandments.

- They forfeited their right to personal property and lived a common life in community, (c/f 7th commandment, "Thou shalt not steal").
- The 'monks' were celibate (c/f 6th, "Thou shalt not commit adultery").
- Their life-destiny was determined within the group which helped to prevent them from interfering with the life destiny of others. (c/f 5th, "Thou shalt not kill").<sup>14</sup>

Thus their approach to the Commandments set extra controls on inclinations towards avarice, lust and self-promotion at the expense of other people. Essene monks who made this extreme form of commitment to the sect, lived in and around the monastery and eventually died there. Other, "fellow travellers" could practice a similar commitment within their marriage and to varying degrees.<sup>15</sup> As far as outsiders were concerned it appeared the Essenes were not only idealistic about the key social

Commandments, but about the whole of their lifestyle as well.

## **A Boyhood Scene**

For a boyhood scene against this background, consider two individual boys. One of them was called Joshua. He was the only child of Essene parents and this family lived in a village in Galilee called Nazara. They had come to this township from Egypt where they had fled as refugees about twelve years beforehand. The family fled from "King Herod the Great" who had built the present Jerusalem Temple. <sup>16</sup> Herod the Great was also father of the present King Herod.

When Joshua was born, Herod the Great heard prophecies from Eastern wise men who came looking for a child whom they described as a new-born king. They then went on to Bethlehem and found Joshua. Herod knew that Jews in general were waiting for some kind of Saviour who would fulfill a promise made to King David about 1,000 years previously. The promise was that his descendants would inherit a Kingdom that would last forever. <sup>17</sup> People were living in anticipation of this Kingship coming about. Herod however, was determined to eliminate any opposition to his own position. So he killed all the male children around Bethlehem under two years of age. As it turned out Joshua's family was warned about his plan through a dream and they escaped. <sup>18</sup>

Consider a second boy (against this first century background) who was called Lazara. Lazara belonged to a priestly family that was so well connected to the priestly

establishment in Jerusalem that he could bring his friends into the High Priest's inner courtyard.<sup>19</sup> Lazara lived with his family in the village of Bethany, a comfortable walk from Jerusalem

According to custom, priests of the day took turns serving in the Temple. This meant they could live outside of the city rather than inside of it. Lazara's father who was a priest, chose to live in Bethany and he was usually occupied in teaching and health care.<sup>20</sup> As a priest he did not have a 'secular' occupation such as farming, carpentry or trading. But one way his family could top up their income was by providing hospitality to pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. Several times a year, there would be thousands of people<sup>21</sup> looking for accommodation. Pilgrims appreciated the chance to stay with a priest's family because they could hear his explanations of the Scriptures in the evening and go to the festival next morning. Some such festivals lasted a week. Some regular visitors to Jerusalem had a 'permanent booking' with people who lived near the Temple. This accommodation was more comfortable than a 'tent city' on the outskirts of the city. For regular visitors, when their children were old enough for a long walk, they came with their parents to Jerusalem in a caravan group from their own district.<sup>22</sup> It was generally agreed that travelling in a caravan was safer and it was a chance for people to catch up with each other.

At the time larger homes were built like a 'compound', similar to those found today in the ruins of Pompeii. There would be a number of fairly independent rooms opening onto a central courtyard. Thus families could have their own room while they also shared a common, central space

in the middle of the compound. Here there were water storages and also a fire in winter.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes this central area was partially covered to protect against wind, rain and thieves.

## **A Significant Meeting**

Re-consider the two boys. When Joshua and Lazara were about twelve years old it was time for their Bar Mitzvah ceremony. This ceremony involved a public reading of Scripture to show that the boys were indeed literate. Literacy meant they were therefore capable of reading the Law for themselves and capable of taking responsibility for their own actions. Until then the parents were responsible for any misdemeanors. Bar Mitzvah ceremonies held at the Temple involved a number of boys. And, friendships formed here amongst the boys could last a life time. In the case of Joshua and Lazara, when they met at their Bar Mitzvah ceremony, there was an instant bond of friendship between them. Each found in the other 'the immediate brother' they had never had.

Over the next days Lazara took his new friend into the inner precincts of the Temple to meet with his teachers and friends. His father was there as well. Joshua was given the opportunity to ask questions of the scholars and he did so. In fact he confounded them with the depth of his understanding. As the hours slipped by Joshua, now responsible for his own actions, opted to stay on.

In the meantime, Joshua's parents' set off with their caravan group back to Nazara. When night came and the families re-grouped the parents discovered that Joshua was not with



them. They returned to Jerusalem in a state of "sorrowing". Then, after three days of searching they found Joshua deep within the Temple buildings and still in discussion with the scholars there.<sup>24</sup> In a burst of relief and emotion they challenged Joshua about his behaviour. But he replied that he had been busy about his (Heavenly) Father's business. With such a statement he showed that from now on his life would be focussed around a single purpose. He would return to Nazara and live a family life of obscurity. But during the years to come he would be preparing.

Time went by. Joshua and Lazara continued the friendship that they had struck up as boys in the Temple. Lazara's father, deeply impressed with Joshua, had extended an invitation to his parents to stay at Bethany when they came to Jerusalem on their annual pilgrimage. There was general agreement this would be more comfortable and the two boys could continue their studies together. Even so, while Joshua's parents accepted the invitation, they asked for caution about any public reference to their son's capacities.<sup>25</sup> The family knew that the present King Herod, like his father, would be watching out for anyone who could be seen as a threat to his own position.<sup>26</sup> For as long as possible therefore, Joshua would have to stay unnoticed.

As the two boys grew into adulthood they continued to formulate ideas about Judaism and the Roman Empire which surrounded them. Like other people at the time, they were assessing the advantages and limitations of both of the social systems in which they had to function.

Over the years Joshua's education continued. On the one hand he was given, through the connections of Lazara, an

inside view of the Temple system. There were so many things about this that he loved. On the other hand, through his parents and extended family back at Nazara, he was given an inside view of Jewish sectarianism. On top of that, travellers passing through Nazara provided a passing overview of Greek philosophy. This was basic to Roman society and its Empire. Joshua was aware that all of these groups were critical of each other and critical as well of other groups that existed within the Israel of the day.

For instance Joshua heard Essene criticisms of Pharisees who would break the fourth Commandment which requires respect for parents. He heard of how some Pharisees avoided supporting their parents by putting a religious caveat on their property. In this way they could keep their assets for themselves.<sup>27</sup> So much for their minute observance of the Law. Also Joshua had little time for the present King Herod whose self-interest was similar to that of his father. Again Joshua had first hand knowledge of Roman cruelty. He had realized from childhood experience that something was radically amiss with Roman ethics. How so? When Herod the Great died, Joshua's family returned to Israel and settled in Nazara hoping for a life of seclusion. But Herod the Great's death was followed by a drawn-out political uprising. Eventually the Romans crushed this. But in doing so they crucified two thousand people up and down the roads of the countryside - including around Nazara.<sup>28</sup>

## **A Gradual Parting of the Ways**

As Joshua grew up he not only adopted criticisms of the range of non-Essene sects around Israel and Jerusalem. He

also became critical of his own sect as well. He saw how the Essenes, like other groups, failed to pick up an increasing number of marginalized Jews.<sup>29</sup> Many people felt that the Essene's idealistic practice of the law as expressed in their "Book of Rules" was all too exclusive for them. At the same time people found the minute observances of the Pharisees, and the fanaticism of the Zealots were also beyond them. Also, the Jerusalem establishment treated people from elsewhere, especially from Galilee as though they were inferior and ignorant of the law <sup>30</sup> Ordinary people considered the Herodians (c/f King Herod) were too worldly. <sup>31</sup> etc.

In fact as far as Joshua was concerned, there was a danger that Jews in general would fall away from their religion and be absorbed into the lifestyle of the Romans. They would therefore miss out on an appreciation of what their own law offered them in terms of moral living.

Joshua's Essene relatives were aware of his brilliance and the power of his presence, as well as at least some of the prophecies about him. <sup>32</sup> They believed he could play an important role in their own hopes for the future. His parents had continued involvement with the sect and had entered so fully into its 'idealistic' practice of the Law that they had committed themselves to a life of celibacy. <sup>33</sup>

But Joshua had recognized elements of self-destruction within the Essene sect and others like it, such as the group of people who were living at a rock fortress at Masada to the south of the Dead Sea. For instance, hatred of the Romans was dangerous.

Joshua realised something else about the Essenes, though it was most unlikely they would ever admit to this. Joshua had indirect contact with the Greek philosopher Plato and his definitive work *The Republic* via travellers through Nazara. He saw there were parallels between an Essene practice of the Law and the pattern of governance held up by the Greeks. How so? In Plato's utopian *Republic* there was an "elite" group of people who did not have personal possessions. They did not lead a family life and they were totally committed to the welfare of the state. This "elite" was led by a supreme "philosopher ruler".<sup>34</sup> Where were the parallels? Like Plato's Elite, the Essene monks had few personal possessions but rather shared goods in common. They did not lead a family life and were celibate. Furthermore their life-destiny was focussed around the existence and promotion of the group's ideas. Another parallel was that the Essenes looked forward to the coming of a 'supreme' "teacher of righteousness"<sup>35</sup>

Also, Joshua saw a parallel between the Greeks and the Essenes which related to closure. Plato's *Republic* was a closed society because only some people were Greek citizens. On the one hand, the citizens were equal. But they were also set apart from others. In a similar way in the Roman Empire, only some people were Roman citizens with special rights. As with citizenship amongst the ancient Greeks and present Romans, amongst the Essenes there was a clear demarcation line between people who were "in" and people who were "out".

There was another form of closure in the Roman Empire as well. The Romans put a controlling 'blanket or blueprint' of governance over whole geographical areas. Ironically

enough, uniform local government in such areas opened up places to each other, especially with the straight and 'safe' roads and bridges built within the Roman Empire.

But it was not easy for the Essene Sect to practice such 'Closure'. Instead of applying this approach to places, the Essenes were trying to apply it to the practice of morality (or Law). How could they impose "idealistic behaviour" on people similar to the way that Romans imposed order? Or, to put it another way, how could they "force" people to measure up to idealistic behaviour. As far as the Essenes were concerned their main method of control would have to take the form of evictions and/or refusal to deal with certain individuals and groups to start with. But as far as Joshua was concerned this resulted in a rigidity that in itself was against the spirit of the Law. <sup>36</sup>

In Joshua's concern about marginalised Jews, he reflected that a policy of 'forgiveness' would provide the key to a more open approach. It would also promote a more 'three-dimensional' approach to Law as such, because it would put focus on some more pivotal laws, rather than on everything.

One person that he began to have more contact with about his concerns was his cousin Johan. Johan had been raised as a strict Essene. His father Zacharia was a priest and his mother Eliza was a cousin of Joshua's mother Miriam. <sup>37</sup> Johan had lived in the desert from a young age in the vicinity of the Essene monastery. <sup>38</sup> But he, like Joshua, realized there were numbers of mainstream Jews falling away from Judaism altogether. <sup>39</sup>

Johan reasoned that Judaism is centered around the understanding that the God of the Hebrews (or Jews) is essentially a moral, all pervasive God. Such a moral God wants obedience to the moral law. Johan saw that people needed to re-find themselves in terms of their own morality and they needed to repent of their sins - whether such sins consisted of apathy or of hypocrisy. Johan determined to preach a message of repentance to Jewish pilgrims on the outskirts of Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup> He based himself at Bethany and was baptising people in the Jordan river there.<sup>41</sup> Johan's baptism was not so much an initiation into a group (as with the Essenes)<sup>42</sup> but rather a rite to take people (any people) out of their condition of sin.

By this stage Joshua was also living in Bethany. Over the years he had continued to stay here each year with his parents. As he moved into adulthood the periods of his stay in Bethany had lengthened. In the course of time Lazara's father had died and now Lazara himself was a functioning priest and head of the household. This primarily consisted of himself and his two sisters Marthar and Maria. Mathar was a hard-worker and did the business-side of running the house/compound. On the other hand, her younger sister Maria tended to be more reflective. She loved to sit and listen to the discussions that were held in the Bethany house and in its surrounding gardens.<sup>43</sup>

Gradually Joshua had in fact become an extended part of Lazara's family. In his time in Bethany he continued to clarify his ideas about a society that he could put forward as the "kingdom of God". He continued to organise material that he wanted to preach, for example through parables. He was formulating ideas that incorporated the best elements

of societies around him while warning of their inherent deficiencies.

Back at Nazara Joshua's family members became aware of some of his ideas about outreach to marginalised Jews and disagreed with these. The extended family and friends were also indignant that Joshua's cousin Johan, had apparently moved away from the Essene Sect. He was extending the rite of baptism to people who had no hope of keeping to the Essene "Book of Rules"

They wondered if Joshua's defection would be next. Unfortunately for Miriam, mother of Joshua, she was caught up in all the resultant tension.<sup>44</sup> By now Miriam was a widow and Joshua an only son, was responsible for her care. Yet he was planning for a future that would involve teaching marginalized Jews about a new type of society or "Kingdom". He knew that in doing this he would be putting his own life "on the line". Given the social unrest and multiplicity of allegiances around Israel, it would not be that long before some fanatical individual and/or group killed him off. As a dutiful son he wanted to ensure that his mother Miriam would be cared for in a stable, supportive household. He was hoping that the haven of Bethany would continue on despite the impending crises. He hoped that Lazara would take on the responsibility of caring for Miriam. He did not want her to continue living in an extended family at Nazara. As far as he was concerned, it was becoming ever more critical of him and ever more dysfunctional.<sup>45</sup>

## The First Preaching

While forgiveness was to be a key theme of Joshua's thinking and teaching, the prelude to this forgiveness would be repentance. This was what his cousin Johan was now preaching.

People were coming out from Jerusalem to Bethany to hear Johan and to be morally re-born. But when the Pharisees and scribes came out, Johan challenged them with language such as "you brood of vipers."<sup>46</sup> He readily pointed out to them that a major reason why ordinary Jews were becoming disillusioned with Judaic law, was because of their own hypocritical behaviour. One day Joshua, came walking by. Johan pointed him out as "The Lamb of God."<sup>47</sup> Johan was in awe of the power of presence that emanated from his cousin and at times he felt he hardly knew Joshua.<sup>48</sup> When Joshua asked to be baptized along with everyone else Johan protested that he was 'unworthy to untie the strap of his (Joshua's) sandal'.<sup>49</sup> When he did baptize Joshua it seemed the heavens themselves opened and God Himself spoke affirming Joshua as "This is my son in whom I am well pleased". Later on two of Johan's followers approached him and asked "Master, where do you live?" He answered them "Come and see."<sup>50</sup> He then took them back to the Lazara's compound and began to teach.

The teaching of Joshua showed his awareness that people were searching. How could they focus on the essentials and spirit of the "law" rather than on its externals? How could the law be adopted as a support and guide to daily living rather than being such a burden? How could marginalized



people be made to feel welcome? How were Jews to deal with the Greek Philosophy of their Roman overlords?

Some people, like King Herod, were living a Roman lifestyle with a tendency towards a moral vacuum. As time passed, Joshua's cousin Johan challenged Herod about his marriage to Herodias, wife of his deceased brother. Such a marriage was against Jewish law. Herod was interested in what Johan said, but he put him in prison anyway and kept him there. In time when the glamour of court life and desire for popularity over-rode imperatives about respect for life, Herod caved into pressure from Herodias and had Johan beheaded.<sup>51</sup> With the death of Johan it became more apparent than ever to Joshua and their mutual friends, that even though the Romans did not allow Jewish leaders to impose a death penalty, Herod could get away with killing people if this suited him.

After Joshua began teaching, he had returned to Nazara. He went to the Synagogue and read a passage from Isaiah the prophet. This was about how he, Isaiah, had been sent to release the people who had been cursed and sent away. After reading the passage Joshua rolled up the scroll and sat down. He then claimed that this passage in Scripture referred to himself in the here and now. At first the people thought that he was applying the reading to themselves and they were full of praise for Joshua. But then he started talking of Scriptural stories in which it was non-Jews who were chosen by God. From this, his hearers realized that Joshua intended to go around and gather up the people that they themselves had rejected and would have nothing to do with. They were so angry about this that they threw him out of the synagogue. Then they hustled him outside the

town and to a cliff intending to throw him over it. But Joshua slipped through the crowd and walked away.<sup>52</sup>

As a township, Nazara already had a "reputation." In another context when someone was told that Joshua had come from Nazara they replied "Can any good come out of Nazara?"<sup>53</sup> But as far as Joshua himself was concerned, he had moved on.

## **The Disciples**

Around the time of the Nazareth episode Joshua approached a number of people that he knew were interested in the ideas being formulated in Bethany. He picked up these people as his disciples. Later on, from the numbers of people now constantly following him, he chose twelve 'special' men. These were to form an 'inner circle' and he would prepare them so they could take on the role of leadership when the time came for his fairly inevitable demise.

When Joshua took this step of choosing 'the twelve', his former friends were outraged. They arrived and attempted to take control of him by force, claiming that he had lost his mind.<sup>54</sup> Joshua ignored them. But he did understand their viewpoint. They were upset that he had turned away from a context they believed he was destined for. They had been looking forward to a future beside him. Also they were convinced that the journey he was now embarking upon would result in his own death. Joshua, like them, wondered if all the effort and sacrifice would be worth it. But in his heart he knew he had to try.

At a wedding feast at Cana Joshua met up with his mother Miriam. In her usual role of caring about others, she was helping with the catering and realised the hosts there had run out of wine. She nudged Joshua into exercising the extraordinary power she knew that he had over nature. She had retained faith in him despite all the pressures from her extended family around Nazareth. She continued to believe in his destiny as 'Saviour' to his people. At the feast there were some large jars of water standing by and at Miriam's prompting Joshua changed these into wine. Thus began his public ministry.<sup>55</sup>

As a human being Joshua realized he had an extraordinary connection with the creative energy that exists at the crux of the universe and beyond it. He addressed the Living Source of this Energy as His Father.<sup>56</sup> He realised Its Energy would work through him to help people who were sick<sup>57</sup> or who had been born with a range of deformities.<sup>58</sup> He channeled It to drive out the demons of people who were possessed, especially when these tried to point him out to frighten people.<sup>59</sup> The one thing Joshua did not do and did not want to do however, was to force people into changing their attitudes. Rather, he chose to use the ordinary powers of persuasion here, and he had varying degrees of success.

The first miracle or sign at Cana was to be followed by so many others that people were coming from near and far with their sick relatives and friends to be cured. Word about Joshua soon arrived at Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> The Scribes and Pharisees realised this person was going to be outside their own sphere of influence and began to criticise him.<sup>61</sup> It was not long before Jewish leaders in general were planning to

kill him. <sup>62</sup> As time went, on some Pharisees told him that Herod was looking for him to kill him (as well). Joshua sent a message back. "Go and tell that fox....." <sup>63</sup>

## **Lazara and His Family**

Meanwhile Lazara was having his own problems. When Joshua chose his 'special' twelve followers, he deliberately omitted Lazara from this group. Lazara was already familiar with Joshua's ideas and did not need a period of training in them. Nor did Joshua want Lazara to be part of his own public ministry. This was a mission towards marginalized Jews and it was with disciples who were fairly marginalized themselves. By contrast, Lazara was related to the highest echelons of Judaism. Also Joshua wanted to retain a connection to Temple worship through Lazara. And, he hoped that Bethany could continue to function as a home-base for himself during his public ministry and in the future as a home for his mother.

But it was not plain sailing for Lazara to 'keep the home fires burning'. As publicity about Joshua and his ideas increased, Lazara's standing within the heirarchy of priests was also affected. The hierarchy knew there was some sort of connection between himself and Joshua though they were unsure of how deep this relationship went. They did know however of Joshua's public hostility towards themselves and his prediction that the Temple and its system of worship would be destroyed. <sup>64</sup> As for Lazara, his training was geared towards functioning at the highest levels of the Jewish priesthood. When he was ostracised by the Jewish leaders he felt it keenly. Joshua was aware this was happening, even while his own life was full of dramas.

He and his disciples were living from day to day. At times they were so busy there was not enough time to eat. <sup>65</sup> His former "friends" considered he had lost his mind. His relationship with his extended family had become worse and his mother was constantly subjected to criticisms about him. At one stage the whole family arrived, even with his mother in tow, to take control of him. <sup>66</sup> Later his extended family were telling him to show himself at a Jerusalem Feast even while people there were wanting to kill him. And, there was on-going frustration in his efforts to train his disciples. They constantly voiced an expectation of moving into some sort of geo-political kingdom. But at the same time they were urging him not to risk his life (and theirs). <sup>67</sup>

When Joshua came to Jerusalem he continued to stay at Bethany. <sup>68</sup> He also continued to rely on the support of his friends and to be concerned about them. Amongst the stories he told in his preaching, there was a parable about a poor man called Lazara. The Lazara in this story was covered in sores and longed for some crumbs from a rich man's table. <sup>69</sup> But he was ignored. Joshua did not say that the story was about his friend in Bethany. But in the parable, there was a request that Lazara should return from the dead in order to warn the rich man's family about what was ahead of them. This part of the story did in fact have parallels with what was to come.

Lazara had more to contend with than just the Temple establishment. Over the years, an increasingly wide range of people were attracted to his compound/house in Bethany. <sup>70</sup> Amongst such people were non-Jews including soldiers who had already approached Johan the Baptist. <sup>71</sup> Unable to

enter a Jewish home, they gathered outside in the garden. However in the course of time something fairly likely but unplanned had taken place. Maria, the sister of Lazara, had fallen in love with one of their non-Jewish visitors. For the family of Lazara this was a disaster.

For the Jews of the day (and even for many at the present time) any hopes that such a couple could marry were out of the question. Maria was a Jewess and there was a strict expectation that she would marry another Jew. This imperative about a Jewish marriage had (and still has) a wider context. On the one hand a male child becomes a Jew with the ceremony of circumcision while he is still a baby.<sup>72</sup> But this is not so for a female. She is born a Jewess. In turn, her female children are also born as Jews. Thus if a Jewish woman marries an outsider, then the Jewish identity of her female children is compromised. By definition these females are Jewish children. But they are not being raised within their culture or law. In terms of Jewish theology, these girls have been chosen by God as Jews but they are ignoring the law that God has given them.

In the case of Maria, sister of Lazara, she belonged to a high-caste family of priests who were part of the governing body of Judaism.<sup>73</sup> With such connections she herself was a public figure. If she had a liaison with a so-called Gentile then whatever she did in relation to this would be broadcast amongst other Jews. Her break with a Jewish taboo would not only reflect badly upon her immediate family but on the aristocracy of priestly families as well. In a word they would be seething about any such liaison. They would also be scathing about any ideas they considered could have led her into thinking that this liaison was acceptable.

Unable to go through a formalised marriage, Maria eloped and went to live in Jerusalem. <sup>74</sup> In doing this, she technically became an adulteress. Shock waves about the elopement extended to the forums of the Sanhedrin and priests. There was public derision there about anyone from Galilee knowing the law. <sup>75</sup> (Recall the 1960's musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. The one action that was unforgivable in this story was the elopement of the main character's daughter with a non-Jew.)

Maria's elopement not only caused a scandal amongst the leadership and the Jewish community in general. It also caused a scandal amongst the close followers of Joshua and their wider following as well. These people felt that because of Maria's action, their own credibility had been seriously compromised. By now Joshua's immediate followers knew that the family of Lazara, which included Maria, was also his own adopted family.

While Joshua was in Jerusalem, some people went to the house where Maria was staying. They dragged her out and into Joshua's presence claiming that she had been caught in the act of adultery. After all, living in a Gentile man's house meant the same thing. They angrily pointed out that the law required she be stoned to death. Their challenge to start the stoning was all the more intense because they knew that Maria was Joshua's adopted sister. A custom, still observed in the Near East, requires that a brother should uphold the honour of his family by presiding over the execution of his wayward sister. But Joshua responded to the situation by saying that it should be the person who was without sin who threw the first stone. <sup>76</sup> In this sense he

threw open the definition of adultery and sexual sin and put it into a wider context of all sorts of sin.

The circle of Maria's accusers gradually went away until it was only herself and Joshua who remained. But while she escaped death by stoning, she did not escape his criticism. He told her to go and sin no more. Thus in the presence of his disciples on the fringe of the drama, he reprimanded her for following through with a relationship that had such a negative impact on the people around her. She had brought her whole family into disrepute. By breaking a taboo which in the context of a whole social system did provide some stability, she aroused further hostility amongst his enemies. She had put the safety of other people, indirectly linked with her family members, into an even more precarious situation.

Maria returned to Bethany and her sister Marthar and her brother Lazara. Then Lazara became ill. The sisters sent word to Joshua to come and cure him saying "the one whom you love is ill". However Joshua deliberately delayed his return. He was planning to do his greatest miracle yet by calling his friend back from the dead. By the time Joshua arrived, Lazara had been dead and buried for four days. Joshua waited at the outskirts of Bethany and sent word to Maria to come out and meet him there.<sup>77</sup> Given that she had just lost both her lover and her brother, Maria was emotionally in a very fragile condition. When the Jews present saw her get up and leave they and Marthar followed. When they linked up with Joshua they all went to the tomb together. Joshua himself was extremely upset and was weeping so much that people commented "See how he loved him." One reason for his upset was that



Lazara had been the one person who had never wavered in support of him.

## **A Kingdom For Ever**

Consider the theological background of the events that were taking place. God promised David he would give his descendants a Kingdom that would last for ever. Joshua realised that this Kingdom would not be in the sense of land control and secular power (despite the ideas of his disciples). Rather, it was to be a Kingdom of ideas - "the kingdom of God lies within you".<sup>78</sup> This kingdom would last forever because it would be based on the very structural crux of the universe - the nexus of time and place - ultimate authority and universal patterns of order. A lifestyle based upon such a nexus would extend from the present, material life into the next one. It would also reach backwards, into the very beginnings of the cosmos.

Joshua was determined to show that Lazara had in fact lived on beyond death. He stood outside the grave and told the other people there to roll back the stone. Then he shouted "Lazara come out". To the amazement of all, Lazara emerged with the burial bandages still wrapped around him.<sup>79</sup>

## **Danger increases**

After this miracle, instead of the enemies of Joshua being confounded and silenced, they were more desperate than ever to have him killed. They felt their control over Judaism was more threatened than ever. Now people were

not only flocking to see Joshua, but they were also going to see Lazara who had been raised from the dead.<sup>80</sup>

The Jewish leaders were afraid of arresting Joshua in public in case there was a revolt amongst the people. In any case, they had already tried to do this. But the soldiers they sent came back empty handed because they were so impressed with his teaching.<sup>81</sup>

The priests were devising another plan. They could undercut the position of Joshua by eliminating his key followers.<sup>82</sup> Herod had already beheaded Johan the Baptist, who was his cousin and a firm supporter. Herod would be capable of killing again and could be manipulated to please the Jewish leadership. The key followers of Joshua were well aware of this possible line of attack. They were wondering if and when they would be next.

Following Lazara's return from the dead, there was a celebratory dinner held in his honour at Bethany.<sup>83</sup> Joshua and his key followers were there. Marthar was serving at table. But tensions were high and there was an air of betrayal around. Even Simon the host showed hostility towards Joshua by failing to provide water to wash his feet.

In contrast to the others, Maria was at home. She reflected on the situation. Like other people she felt something terrible was about to happen. She herself had been nearly stoned to death. Then, when her brother died and was brought back to life, people who claimed to be supporting her reported back to the Pharisees.<sup>84</sup> Maria knew that Joshua's disciples were still angry and critical of her.<sup>85</sup> Yet she also realised how important these key followers were.

If they were killed off, as was possible, then the whole of Joshua's cause would be lost.

She realised that if his movement was to survive at all, it would have to be Joshua himself who was sacrificed. It would only be after his death that people could re-group and mould his movement into a different and more secure form. Maria determined that she would signal to him that his time had come. On an impulse she picked up a jar of expensive perfumed ointment that had been left over from her brother's burial. She took it to Simon's house and entered the banquet area. Then she tipped the ointment over Joshua's head and feet. The perfume from the ointment filled the whole house. With an out-pouring of emotion <sup>86</sup> she washed Joshua's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>87</sup> His acceptance of what she was doing showed his forgiveness of her. But as far as the disciples were concerned, it was the last straw. <sup>88</sup> Judase, who was in charge of the common purse but actually pilfering from it, protested most loudly. He complained that the expensive ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. <sup>89</sup> But Joshua defended Maria's action. He said "She has loved greatly" <sup>90</sup>. He went on to say she was preparing him for his own burial. <sup>91</sup> He then confronted the people around pointing out how they had been taking him for granted. In particular he chided his host Simon.

The priests, who heard about Joshua's forgiveness of Maria, decided to completely break with Lazara's branch of the family and kill him. But at the same time something unexpected happened. Judase left the banquet early, in disgust and soon went to the chief priests himself. He had

reflected that if he offered help to the enemies of Joshua he could possibly avoid being their target. Joshua had just publicly admitted that the anointing was for his own burial. So Judase reasoned that what he was about to do was only bringing about the inevitable anyway. He told the chief priests he could deliver Joshua to them without the outcry or bloodshed that might result from a public arrest. They paid him thirty pieces of silver.<sup>92</sup>

Within a few days Joshua was crucified, dead and buried.

