

Dr. Seraphim Steger: Tidbits of 1st Century Christian History Preserved in the Babylonian Talmud and their Relationship to St. Simeon the Righteous



Tractate Yoma of the Babylonian Talmud, first page The Babylonian Talmud written in Hebrew and Aramaic, containing 63 tractates and some 6200 pages, is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. It contains the Mishnah (Second Law redacted by Rabbi Judah haNasi c. AD 200) and the Gemara (Rabbinic Commentary compiled c. AD 500). The Tractate Yoma shown here deals with the Festival of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

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Tidbits of 1st Century Christian History Preserved in

the Babylonian Talmud and their Relationship to St. Simeon the Righteous

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Early Church history (circa A.D. 30) as recorded in the New Testament (Acts of the Apostles 6:7) states that a great number of the priests, members of the party of the Sadducees became obedient to the faith [in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel]. However, many others did not, some either remaining entirely indifferent to or violently opposed to Christ and the new Nazarene Sect.

Some 40 years later circa A.D. 70 just before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Roman army led by Vespasian, one of the leading sages of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, was captured by the Romans according to one early Palestinian tradition and taken against his will to the town of Yavne'el / Jamnia (modern Yavne on the Mediterranean coast) which served as a place of detention for those who had surrendered to the Romans. In Jamnia Rabban Yochannan ben Zakkai reconstituted the Sanhedrin, proclaimed New Moons and leap-years, and proceeded to construct a new religion for the war torn nation: "Rabbinical Judaism" which was centered around the beliefs of the Pharisees as well as the practices of the Synagogue [the priests having become superfluous since the destruction of the Temple and the discontinuance of its services and sacrifices]. He preserved the oral traditions of the schools of the Pharisees encompassing the years 536 BC to AD 70. Jamnia subsequently became the new spiritual center for those Jews who survived the war.

Some 150 years later Rabbi Yehudah haNasi set to writing a broad and comprehensive redaction of the Oral Law known as the Mishnah. Subsequent rabbinical commentaries, the Gemara, were added to each of the individual tractates forming two authoritative collections known as the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmudim. These contained 700 years worth of the oral tradition

of the rabbinical schools. Their final forms were completed around AD 600.

The rabbinical leadership of the Jewish people, having now been at enmity with the Nazarene Sect (the early Jewish Church in Jerusalem) and the Church for nearly 6 centuries nevertheless preserved some very interesting, if not amazing historical details in these commentaries. Consider the following:

In reading the Babylonian Talmud in the Tractate Yoma [for “Yom” Kippur] (Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed Yoma, Socino Press, New York, NY, 1974), I ran across these interesting passages some 25 years ago while involved in various Jewish studies. In Chapter IV, page 39a of the Babylonian Talmud, in reference to the drawing of lots by the High Priest for the scapegoat on Yom Kippur reads:

MISHNAH: “HE SHOOK THE URN AND BROUGHT UP THE TWO LOTS. ON ONE WAS INSCRIBED: ‘FOR THE LORD’, AND ON THE OTHER: ‘FOR AZAZEL’. THE DEPUTY HIGH PRIEST WAS AT HIS RIGHT HAND. THE HEAD OF THE [MINISTERING] FAMILY AT HIS LEFT. IF THE LOT [HAVING] ‘FOR THE LORD’ [INSCRIBED THERON] CAME UP IN HIS RIGHT HAND, THE DEPUTY HIGH PRIEST WOULD SAY TO HIM: SIR HIGH PRIEST, RAISE THY RIGHT HAND! AND IF THE LOT [WITH THE INSCRIPTION] ‘FOR THE LORD’ CAME UP IN HIS LEFT HAND, THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY WOULD SAY: SIR HIGH PRIEST, RAISE THY LEFT HAND! THEN HE PLACED THEM ON THE TWO HE GOATS AND SAID; ‘A SIN-OFFERING UNTO THE LORD!’ R. ISHMAEL SAID: HE DID NOT NEED TO SAY: A SIN-OFFERING, BUT ‘UNTO THE LORD’. AND THEY ANSWERED AFTER HIM: BLESSED BE THE NAME OF HIS GLORIOUS KINGDOM FOR EVER AND EVER!...”

GEMARA... Our Rabbis taught: Throughout the forty years that Simeon the Righteous ministered, the lot [‘For the Lord’] would always come up in the right hand; from that time on, it would come up now in the right hand, now in the left. And [during the same time] the crimson-coloured strap would become white. From that time on it would at times become white, at others not. Also: Throughout those forty years the westernmost light was shining, from that time on, it was now

shining, now failing; also the fire of the pile of wood kept burning strong, so that the priests did not have to bring to the pile any other wood besides the two logs, in order to fulfill the command about providing the wood unintermittently; from that time on, it would occasionally keep burning strongly, at other times not, so that the priests could not do without bringing through the day wood for the pile [on the altar]. [During the whole period] a blessing was bestowed upon the omer [dry grain offering], the two breads, and the shewbread, so that every priest, who obtained a piece thereof as big as an olive, ate it and became satisfied with some eating thereof and even leaving something over. From that time on a curse was sent upon omer, two breads, and shewbread, so that every priest received a piece as small as a bean: the well-bred ones withdrew their hands from it, whilst voracious folk took and devoured it...

GEMARA... [39b]: ... Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘for the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand, nor did the crimson-colored strap become white, nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the Hekel would open by themselves...

Now to whom and to what does this all refer to and mean?

Who is this Righteous Simeon that Tractate Yoma refers to, and when did he live? There are several contenders in Jewish history: Simeon the Righteous or Simeon the Just, **שמעון הצדיק** *Shimon HaTzaddik*, was considered by the rabbis to be a High Priest during the Second Temple period. Some of the sayings attributed to him were recorded in the Mishnah. Nevertheless, his identity remains a mystery. This Righteous Simeon has been considered to be either (1) Simon I (310-291 or 300-273 BCE), son of Onias I, or (2) Simon II (219-199 BCE), son of Onias II, (3) Simon Maccabeus, and or (4) Simon the son of Gamaliel. Recent academic scholarly consensus favors Simon II, but the very nature of and late redaction of Jewish rabbinical literature casts a shadow of doubt on any and all of these potential candidates.

The Babylonian Talmud, the Antiquities of the Jews [by Flavius Josephus, who, incidentally identifies him as Simon I], and the Biblical Books of Sirach and 2

Maccabbes contain accounts of a Simon/Simeon. He was termed “the Righteous” or “Just” by Josephus because of the piety of his life and his benevolence toward his compatriots (Josephus, *Antiquities* bk 12, chap 2, § 5 “*When Onias the high priest was dead, his son Simon became his successor. He was called Simon the Just because of both his piety towards God, and his kind disposition to those of his own nation.*”). According to Sirach 50. 1-14, Simon the son of Onias was a great priest. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, repaired the damage done to the foundation-walls of the Temple court, and enlarged its cistern. However, he was not called “Just” or “Righteous.” The statements in Sirach 50 can be applied only to Simeon I as shown by Gratz and are in agreement with the Talmudic accounts of Simeon’s undertakings).

According to the Babylonian Talmud, when Alexander the Great marched through the land of Israel [Note: this was in the year 332 BCE], Simeon the Just, dressed in his eight priestly garments went to Antipatris to meet him (*Yoma* 69a). However, Alexander’s appearance in Israel chronologically took place some 13-23 years prior to Simon I’s high priesthood, which makes this anecdote highly suspect as to person, time, and location.

In contrast Josephus (xi.8, § 1-6) states that Alexander himself came to Jerusalem and met Jaddua the High Priest in the Temple--both a different High Priest and a different location.

The Mishnah (Parah 3:5) records that during the priesthood of Simeon the Just there were two Red Heifers burnt at the sacrificial place built in the days of Ezra on the Mount of Olives, but no other information is given.

Simeon the Righteous is said to have held office for forty years [presumably as high priest] (*Yoma* 9a; *Yer. Yoma* i.1, v.2; *Lev. R.* xxi). On a certain Day of Atonement he came from the Holy of Holies in a melancholy mood, and when asked the reason, he replied that on every Day of Atonement a figure clothed in white had ushered him into the Holy of Holies and then had escorted him out. This time, however, the apparition had been clothed in black and had conducted him in, but had not led him out—a sign that this year was to be his last. He is said to have

died seven days later (*Yoma* 39b; *Tosef.*, *Sotah*, xv; *Yer. Yoma* v.1).

In *Pirkei Avos, The Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter I (1-3)* Simeon the Just is also called one of the last members of the Great Assembly, but it is no longer possible to determine which of the four who bore this name was really the last.

After Simeon's death men ceased to utter the Tetragrammaton aloud (*Yoma* 39b; *Tosef. Sotah*, xiii).

So of the few recorded passages most really fail to specifically identify which Simeon is indicated in tractate *Yoma* above as the Righteous.

In *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented*, Brill, Boston, MA, March 2013, Amram Tropper, Ph.D. (Oxford University 2002), a Senior Lecturer at Ben Gurion University in Jewish Studies, investigated the rabbinic traditions about Simeon the Righteous, a renowned Jewish leader of Second Temple times. Tropper not only interprets these traditions from a literary perspective but also deploys a relatively new critical approach towards rabbinic literature with which he explores the formation history of the traditions. With the use of this new approach, Tropper sought to uncover the literary and cultural matrices, both rabbinic and Graeco-Roman, which supplied the raw materials and literary inspiration to the rabbinic authors and editors of the traditions. Tropper's analysis suggested that in reinventing the legend of Simeon the Righteous, the rabbis reconstructed/fabricated the Second Temple past in their own present image.

Consequently, it is most difficult to ascertain who this specific Simeon the Righteous may have been. [Indeed, we might be able to add another candidate, Righteous Simeon, from the Gospel of Luke! We will speak of this a bit later.]

Let's define terms in the above quoted passage from Tractate *Yoma*
(1). The *lot* refers to the selection of the scapegoat. On the Day of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish Festal calendar, according to the Torah (Leviticus 16:7-10), two goats were chosen by lot, one for the LORD and one for Azazel [the scapegoat]. If the lot drawn for the LORD came up in the right hand of the High

Priest it was considered a good omen, if in the left, it was a bad omen for the country for that year. The scapegoat had a crimson strap tied to its horns, whereas the goat chosen as a “sin-offering” for the LORD had a white strap tied between its horns. The High Priest confessed the sins of the nation of Israel before the LORD while laying his hands on the head of the scapegoat, in essence transferring the sins of the people to the scapegoat. The scapegoat was then used to carry those sins far away from the nation of Israel. According to the Torah (in Leviticus 16:10) the scapegoat was to be sent out into the wilderness. However, in actual practice it was led out by a non-Jew into the wilderness to a desolate area and tossed off a cliff to its death thus ensuring that the scapegoat couldn’t wander back into Jerusalem bringing the sins of the people back upon them.

Now, if the LORD accepted the sacrifice of the scapegoat for the nation, another crimson strap tied between the horns of a bullock close at hand in the Temple miraculously turned white as a sign of the the LORD’s forgiveness of Israel’s sin.

(2). The *western most light* refers to the western most of the lamps on the Menorah in the Holy Place in Herod’s Temple. [Note: the Menorah was a single 7-branched candlestick with 7-oil lamps and three legs placed in an east-west orientation according to Raavad, north-south orientation according to Rambam, Bais HaB’chirah. There were 10 other menorahs for ornamental purposes (Menachos 99a), 5 north and 5 south of the Menorah.] The footnote in the Socino Press edition of Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed Yoma on the Gemara at this point says: “The westernmost light on the candlestick in the Temple, into which as much oil was put as into the other. Although all the other lights were extinguished, that light burned on, in spite of the fact that it had been kindled first. This miracle was taken as a sign that the Shekhinah [i.e., the Glory of God] rested over Israel. V. Shab. 22b and Men. 86b.”

(3). The *wood* was the firewood which was placed on the altar and was kindled each morning presumably for burning various offerings to the Lord.

(4). The *omer* רמ, [o (Lit. sheaf) besides being a unit of volume equal to 43.2 average eggs also was the name for the *sheaf* of barley grain, the first fruits of the

early spring harvest, lifted up and waved before Ha-Shem [the LORD] at the Festival of First Fruits (Leviticus 2:14-16, 23:6-14) to gain His acceptance. The barley grain was to be parched with fire, mixed with oil and frankincense into a dough, brought near to the altar, 1/10 of it burned before the LORD by the ministering priest, and the remainder eaten by the priests. After the presentation of the *omer* the nation could then eat from the new barley harvest.

(5). The *two breads* of leavened bread (Leviticus 23:17-20) were offered on the Festival of Weeks (Shavous), but not on the altar because of the leaven. After the completion of an offering of 2 lambs, the priests could then eat the two loaves. Also, after the presentation of the *two breads* the nation could then eat from the new wheat/grain harvest.

(6). The *shewbread* (show bread) were 12 loaves baked weekly and placed on the Golden Table in the Holy Place. Each Sabbath day the breads were removed and replaced with new ones. The priests may then eat the old loaves.

Now for the interpretations. Referring to GEMARA 39b first:

Historically we know that the Second Temple completed by King Herod stood on the Mount Zion above the spring of Gihon until destroyed in the Roman Wars by Vespasian in the year 70 CE. Thus, we can say that the last 40 years the Temple stood dated from 30 CE to 70 CE. a bad omen occurred on Yom Kippur every year because:

(1) the Lot for the LORD came up in the left hand, not the right hand of the High Priest of Israel on Yom Kippur. What happened in 30 CE that might have caused this? Could it have been the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? Could it have been that the High Priest of Israel had lost his authority because now there was a new High Priest in town, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? In his *Letter to the Hebrews* the Apostle Paul speaks of Yeshua Ha-Maschiach as a High Priest after the Order of Melchezadek sitting at the right hand of the Father in the Heavens.

Because the crimson ribbon tied between the horns of the bullock did not

miraculously turn white for the last 40 years the Temple stood when the scapegoat was thrown over the cliff in the wilderness, we can say that the LORD did not accept the Temple sacrifice of the scapegoat for the nation of Israel on Yom Kippur. Why? Could it be because Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, our Passover (Pesach) Sacrifice has been slain for us once and for all had been accepted by the Father on our behalf? Consequently, there was no more need for a scapegoat because Christ not only was a propitiation for our sins, but has carried our sins away from us as far as the East is from the West.

(2). We can say that for the last 40 years the Temple stood neither did the westernmost Menorah lamp miraculously shine longer than the others as it had once done now indicating that the Presence of the Lord, the Shikinah glory, had deserted the Temple all those last 40 years. Was the Shikinah, the glory of the Lord, now to be found outside the Temple? Could it be that it was now to be found in the Church, having descended upon the Church at Pentecost some 50 days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua?

(3). We can say that during those last 40 years the Temple stood, the doors to the Hekel/Hekhal, the Holy Place/sanctuary, opened repetitively during those last 40 years by themselves, when they should have been closed, showing that access to the LORD in the Holy Place was not limited to the priests in their daily service, or the Holy of Holies to the High Priest but once a year. Could it be that through the risen Yesua Ha-Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah, “the Door” as He is sometimes called in the New Testament Gospels, that worship in the “Holy Place” was now open not just to the priests but to all who wished to enter in and to draw close to the Holy God of Israel, through faith in Yeshua, in the Church?

Now, this testimony of the last 40 years that the Temple stood, is juxtaposed to the passages about a Simeon the Righteous who ministered in the Temple for 40 years [so presumably a priest, or levite at a minimum], during whose time the Temple was blessed.

Reading this gemara again we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered, the sacrifices for the Israel were blessed and the scapegoat accepted,

(removing the sins of the entire nation) because the *lot for the Lord would always come up in the right hand*. I.e., the people of Israel were being blessed by the LORD. Interestingly, after those 40 years, sometimes the sacrifices were accepted, sometimes not. Also, the priests suffered from the curse on the omer, two loaves, and shewbread--i.e., they were not nourished by the bread of the Temple as they were before.

Who is Simeon the Righteous?

Thus, we saw above, there is controversy over who this “Righteous Simeon” may have been since there are 4 that have born this name in traditional Jewish history and there is some question of later Rabbinical fabrication of their tradition to favor their views at that later time. Perhaps this Simeon was none of the four major candidates. Could this Simeon possibly be Simeon the Just and Pious mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 2:25-36, the Simeon the Orthodox Church remembers as “Righteous Simeon” who held in his arms infant Jesus Christ at His presentation in the temple? Let’s look into this a bit further.

We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Lord forgave the sins of the nation of Israel because *the crimson-coloured strap* [tied between the bullocks horns] *would become white* after the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness. As part of the blessing of the nation of Israel the Lord was forgiving the sins of the Israelites, sanctifying and preparing them for the enfleshment of the Logos.

We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Shekhinah Glory/ Holy Spirit remained present in the Holy of Holies blessing the nation [in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God] because *Throughout those forty years the westernmost light was shining*, having been lighted first and burning longer than the other lights. The Lord was blessing and preparing the Temple and its priests for receiving God in the flesh.

Lastly, we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered *the fire of the pile of wood kept burning strong* on the altar showing that the Lord was accepting of all

the animal, meal, grain, oil, and wine sacrifices commanded in the Torah, the Law of Moses, under the Old Covenant, further underscoring the sanctifying the Temple, the priests, the nation, and all the people by the various offerings.

In the Orthodox Church Simeon the Righteous, commemorated on February 3, died at an advanced age shortly after Christ's presentation in the Temple (c. 3 BC). Although nothing is said to this effect in the Gospel, some have thought this Simeon to have been a priest. In the Gospel of Luke 2:25-35 Simeon's meeting in the Temple with the infant Jesus and his parents 40 days after His birth is described as follows:

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Symeon, and this man was just and pious, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been divinely revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he should see the Christ of the Lord. And he came in the Spirit into the Temple. And when the parents were bringing in the little Child Jesus, in order to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he also received Him into his arms and blessed God and said, "Now lettest Thy slave depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou didst prepare before the face of all the peoples, a light of revelation to the nations and the glory of Thy people Israel." And Joseph and His Mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning Him. And Symeon blessed them, and said to Mariam His Mother, "Behold, this One is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign which is contradicted, and as to thee a sword shall go through thine own soul also, in order that the reckonings of many hearts might be revealed."

Righteous Simeon saw the Salvation of Israel, the Light of revelation to the nations, the Glory [Shikhinah] of His people Israel. The nation had been blessed for 40 years, preparing the Temple and the Holy of Holies for receiving and nurturing the Theotokos until such time as she could give birth to God Incarnate! Consequently, Simeon could now die in peace, which he did shortly. If the

Babylonian Talmud Yoma 39b is correct and this is the same Simeon, he died after the Feast of Booths in the fall--some six months later. Note, in the Talmud, immediately following Righteous Simeon's death, the *lot* for the Lord no longer came up exclusively in the right hand of the High Priest nor did the *crimson strap* tied between the horns of the bullock in the Temple always turn white, nor did the *westernmost light* lit first always burn the longest, nor did the *pile of wood* on the altar always burn strong. Rather, the pattern was now random, vacillating. Israel's future, its faith, its priesthood, its atonement and salvation, etc., didn't appear secure. The Romans held political sovereignty and power over the province of Palestine even as the spiritual sovereignty of the people vacillated between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. This vacillation/doubt/insecurity continued for some 30 years and then intensified as the Lord Jesus Christ came of age (30 years according to the Torah) and ministered to the nation of Israel as her new High Priest and to the nations, i.e., the gentiles as their savior. More interesting is the Gemara's comment on the *omer, two loaves, and shewbread*. After Righteous Simeon's death they were cursed. They didn't vacillate, but remained cursed. The priest's bread portions at Passover/First Fruits, Pentecost/Weeks, and weekly were greatly reduced to *a piece as small as a bean*. The greedy were said to have devoured it but were evidently not satiated by it. Thus, a new generation of priests, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9-10), was being prepared to receive a different bread, a new manna from Heaven (John 6:31-59). In essence their earthly bread was disappearing, creating a fast, a fast in preparation for the Word of God, a fast for the Bread of God, so that once Christ began His ministry they might partake of the living bread of His flesh in the bread of communion in the new Israel, the Church. And, as we read in the New Testament (Acts of the Apostles 6:7), many priests did become obedient to the faith and partook of that new bread.

In summary, from A.D. 30, (i.e., from the time of Christ's condemnation, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection forward) the Temple, its light, and all its sacrifices ceased to be of any significant spiritual value because the risen Christ had now become our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, our First Fruits (our Omer), our Perpetual Offering, our Pascha (Passover, Pesach), our Peace Offering, our Chagigah (our Festival Offering), our Scapegoat, our Thank Offering, our Sin Offering, our Living Water, our Bread of Life, our Chrism, our

Sanctification, our Atonement, and our Light providing His many mansions in the Heavens instead of booths in the wilderness. During the three years of His ministry, c. AD 27-30, like the fruitless fig tree He gave Israel (the Jewish leaders and Priesthood) 3 years to bring forth good fruit, but it failed to produce it. Only the New Israel, the Church, produced it. The Holy Place and Holy of Holies were now open to all, every day, through Christ the Door, both to the Jews and to the nations to worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth.

Addendum: Another Tidbit from the Babylonian Talmud

The Condemnation of Christ as Documented in the Babylonian Talmud:

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate SANHEDRIN (43a):Mishnah 6.1. IF THEN THEY FIND HIM INNOCENT, THEY DISCHARGE HIM; BUT IF NOT, HE GOES FORTH TO BE STONED, AND A HERALD PRECEDES HIM [CRYING]: SO AND SO, THE SON OF SO AND SO, IS GOING FORTH TO BE STONED BECAUSE HE COMMITTED SUCH AND SUCH AN OFFENSE, AND SO AND SO ARE HIS WITNESSES. WHOEVER KNOWS ANYTHING IN HIS FAVOUR, LET HIM COME AND STATE IT.

GEMARA. Abaye said; It must also be announced: On such and such a day, at such and such and hour, and in such and such a place [the crime was committed], in case there are some who know [to the contrary], so that they can come forward and prove the witnesses Zomemim.

*AND A HERALD PRECEDES HIM etc. This implies, only immediately before [the execution], but not previous thereto. [In contradiction to this] it was taught: **On the eve of the Passover Yeshu** {Jesus' appellation in Aramaic} [Footnote: Ms. M. adds '**the Nasarean**'] **was hanged**. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald*

went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover! [Footnote: A Florentine Ms. adds: and the eve of Sabbath] — 'Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a Mesith [enticer], concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him? With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government [or royalty, i.e., influential].

Here is an impartial (?) witness, i.e., the Jewish Rabbis of the Talmud, as to the day and date of the crucifixion. Their testimony is clear in this passage -- Jesus was hung (on the cross) on the eve of the Passover which was also the eve of the Sabbath. It was before the Passover Seder. This passage has often been expunged from copies of the Talmud in response to Christian persecution, a passage that immediately strikes a Christian as libel against his Messiah and Lord. However, when considered from the view point of the Pharisees of that time, i.e., of those who had condemned and executed Him, the Talmudic testimony appears quite consistent with our understanding of their jealousy and hatred of Him. Additionally, it conveniently justifies their own actions as appropriate for saving the nation at the expense of one man. Jesus the Nazarean was convicted of sorcery and apostacy. In their opinion, He was an enticer who shouldn't be spared, one who was then hanged on the eve of Passover – on the eve of the Sabbath. Not only is the chronology clearly spelled out by these adversaries of Christ and of the Church, but how well their testimony corresponds to the Gospel testimony of the actions of the High Priests and Pharisees involved in the conspiracy against Jesus. Had they not condemned Him far in advance of the Passover? Had they not sought information concerning His whereabouts so they might seize Him? Had they not threatened to cast those out of the Synagogue who believed in Him? And had they not sought [false] witnesses against Him? But did they really follow their

own law? Of course not, neither in letter or in spirit. They did not really try to find impartial witnesses in support of Christ. Rather the following false statement was written to justify their own crimes, to provide justification for their murderous actions. *For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.'* *But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!*

So in conclusion, here in the Babylonian Talmud we have a bit of unique witness to Christ Jesus [Yeshua Ha-Mashiach] through those who have no reason to bear true witness to Christ of their own volition, i.e., those who denied Him, wrote blasphemous things of Him, and tried to construct life without Him to their own destruction and still continue to do so today with the Jewish religion of the rabbis.

Appendix [Historical Notes]:

Interesting and pertinent quotes from: **Simon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented**, Amram Tropper [Oxford University, senior lecturer in Jewish History at Ben Gurion University], Brill, Leiden/Boston, Netherlands/US, 2013, pp. 249.

“There are a number of reasons why Simeon the Righteous’s biography cannot be written and all stem from the limitations imposed by the narrow scope or particular nature of the rabbinic evidence. Setting aside for the moment the question of the historical reliability of rabbinic literary traditions, there are two other fundamental difficulties with any attempt to write Simeon’s biography on the basis of rabbinic literature. First, we simply do not have enough rabbinic (or Second Temple) materials for a proper biography of Simeon the Righteous. Rabbinic literature only preserved a handful of sources which refer to Simeon the Righteous and these fall far short of sketching a robust and nuanced portrait of the man, a portrait that does justice to the character, beliefs and life of Simeon the Righteous. Second, even if the biographical materials in rabbinic literature were deemed sufficient, any chronological organization of the disparate events recounted in rabbinic literature would be baseless conjecture. The rabbinic sources on Simeon the Righteous never refer to one another and only a single tradition mentions a phase in his life (i.e., his death); hence there is no objective way to decipher the chronological order of the events related in the sources. *In short, rabbinic literature neither provokes sufficient*

material for a biography of Simeon the Righteous nor indicates how to integrate the material it does provide into a chronological framework necessary for biography.

“Above and beyond the two fundamental difficulties just noted, the writing of a biography of Simeon the Righteous (or most anyone else) on the basis of rabbinic literature is rendered nigh impossible because of the historical unreliability of rabbinic sage stories and similar literary genres such as the rabbinic chain of transmission.” (pg. 4)

“...However, two features of rabbinic sage stories and other similar narrative forms, their late dating in respect to ancient figures like Simeon the Righteous and their artistic literary genre, severely undermine the traditional assumption of their basic historical credibility.

“Insofar as the late dating is concerned, even the earliest rabbinic materials about Simeon the righteous are found in compositions that were edited hundreds of years after his lifetime and this substantial time-gap renders their historical reliability highly suspect.” (pg. 5)

*“The very fact that the tradition appears in rabbinic literature, the **rabbinic accounts cannot corroborate the historicity of the events reported elsewhere.** The very fact that the tradition appears in rabbinic literature does not bolster the historical veracity of the non-rabbinic parallel [account] since the **rabbis would not have hesitated to repeat and develop the tradition even if it were entirely fictitious.** In addition, details of the rabbinic story cannot be used to supplement the non-rabbinic account since there is no reason to posit the historicity of any added details in the rabbinic version.” (pg. 6)*

Avot 1, 2: Simeon the Righteous was of the remnants of the Great Assembly. He used to say: On three things the world stands: on Torah, on worship and on the bestowal of kindness.

“In Avot, the Great Assembly links the classical age of prophecy to the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, a transition which the rabbis dated to the early Second Temple period. In a similar vein, Avot portrays Simeon the Righteous as the link between the Great Assembly of the Persian era, the final historical era explicitly discussed in the biblical narrative, and the Jewish leadership of the Hellenistic period. Although the Persian period actually ended nearly two hundred years after the erection of the Second Temple, it is well known that the rabbis were unaware of (or elected to ignore) the

true duration of the Persian empire and that they collapsed Persian rule in the early Second Temple period. *George Foot Moore has argued that since Persian rule in rabbinic chronology lasted for only thirty four years after the construction of the Second Temple, the rabbis may have concluded, not unreasonably, that one of the last living members of the Great Assembly, i.e., Simeon the Righteous, survived into the Hellenistic period as well. Indeed, Simeon the Righteous, survived into the Hellenistic period as well. Indeed, Simeon the Righteous's successor in Avot's chain of transmission is Antigonus of Sokho and his Greek name is far more typical of the Hellenistic period than that of the Persian. Hence it seems that Avot depicts Simeon not only as a member of a grand institution which flourished during the Persian times, but also as a sage who transmitted the Torah received by the Great Assembly to his disciple Antigonus, a man of the Hellenistic era.*" (pg. 29)

"In Avot, Simeon the Righteous is assigned an important place in the rabbinic narrative of Second Temple history, a narrative in which the rabbis constructed the past in their very own image." (pg. 67).

"A general reason to discount the veracity of the attribution to Simeon the Righteous is that the institution responsible for the oral transmission of tanninic tradition did not exist yet during this lifetime [third century BCD]. *Rabbinic traditions were carefully memorized and transmitted with the beit madrash, the house of study, and scholars have demonstrated that the beit madras, the earliest rabbinic institution, only emerged in the first century CE. Consequently, it is highly unclear how Simeon's saying would have been orally transmitted during the centuries prior to the advent of the beit madras.* Indeed, the fact that rabbinic literature records no other teachings of Simeon the Righteous only reinforces the notion that his teachings were not preserved by the rabbis for posterity. [Note: This would lend credence to the theory that Simeon the Righteous could have been Simeon the pious and just of the New Testament Gospel of Luke. The 40 years leading up to the birth of Yeshua ha-Mashiach may very well have been those 40 blessed years that Simeon the Righteous presided over.]

"More specifically, Shamma Friedman has demonstrated that Simeon's saying could not have been formulated prior to the first century CE) since the word "olam," "world," only acquired a spatial meaning at that time...Friedman has shown that "olam" originally meant forever and only in the first century CE did "olam" come to denote the world as well. Since Simeon lived centuries before the first century CE, Friedman surmised that his saying was pseudoepigraphic and we may conclude that

Simeon's saying was formulated sometime between the first century CE and the editing of *Avot* in the third century CE. (72)...the pillars of (72) Simeon's were inspired by the first three blessings recited by the high priest after the Torah reading on the Day of Atonement as recorded by *Mishnah Yoma* 7,1, blessings that offered a doubly appropriate source for Simeon the Righteous' saying. As blessings pronounced by the high priest on the most important day in his calendar year, the blessings were obvious source material for an author who sought to invent a saying that was to be ascribed to a high priest...Using varied source material, it seems that *avot's* editor fashioned a wisdom-saying that embodied rabbinic values but also could have been easily articulated by a high priest in Second Temple times ." (pg. 79)

"in the days of the Greeks, when I raised up for them Simeon the Righteous and Matityahu ben Yohanan the High Priest and Hashmonai and his sons." Babylonian Talmud Megillah 11a. Here Simeon the Righteous safeguards his people against Alexander the Great and the Greeks.

"Babylonian Talmud Yoma 69a: When he (Alexander)] saw Simeon the Righteous, he descended from his chariot and bowed down before him. They said to him: A great king like yourself should bow down before this Jew? He said to them: The image of his likeness vanquishes before me in battle. He said to them (the Jews) : Why have you come? they said to him: (is it possible that) the place where we pray in it for you and that your kingdom not be destroyed, the gentiles will mislead you and have you give it to them?..." (pg. 138)

[In Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews, II, §§ 326-339, it is the high priest Jaddus (Jaddua), not Simeon the Righteous, who intercedes for the Jewish nation.

Although the history is highly questionable on many levels among scholars, Simeon the Righteous was inserted by the rabbis for Jaddua because they thought that Simeon lived in that era. This is an obvious rewriting of history]

Jerusalem Talmud Yoma 5, 1 42c; *"A story of one (high priest) who prolonged (his prayer in the sanctuary when he exited the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement) and they decided to enter after him--they said it was Simeon the Righteous. They said to him: why did you prolong (your prayer)? He said to them: I was praying for the Sanctuary of your God that it not be destroyed. They said to him: even so you should not have prolonged (your prayer). ["lest he terrify Israel" by his delay to exit the sanctuary. The jews believed that the high priest risked his life in entering the Holy of Holies and ever year they waited with baited breath to see whether he would emerge alive and well."* (pg. 155)

"In previous chapters, we explored various features of Simeon the Righteous's literary persona and certain events in his career as imagined by the rabbis. More specifically, we examined the formation and significance of Simeon's roles as faithful transmitter of Torah, historical link to the biblical past, holy high priest, sympathetic cleric, notable savior, ghostly apparition and Jewish representative to the gentiles. In contrast, the current chapter

focuses on events surrounding Simeon's death. Both Talmuds state that shortly before dying Simeon designated his successor to the high priesthood...(pg. 157)." [Josephus's accounts (2 of them) are conflicted and contradictory]

"Forty years Simeon the righteous served Israel in the high priesthood and in the final year he said to them: During this year I shall die. they said to him: Who shall we appoint after you" He said to them: Behold Onias my son is before you...Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 6, 3 43c-d.
" (pg. 64)

"For it was taught (in a barite): In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said to him: Whence do you know it? He said to them: Every Day of Atonement there met me an old man, dressed in white and wrapped in white, who entered with me (into the Holy of Holies) and left with me; but this year there met me an old man, dressed in black and wrapped in black, who entered with me but did not leave with me. After the Festival (of Tabernacles) he was ill for seven days and then died. Thereafter his brethren the priests forbore to pronounce the Name in the priestly benediction.

"In the hour of his departure (from life), he said to them: Onias my son shall assume the office (of high priest) after me...Babylonian Talmud, Menahot 109b." (pgs. 172-173).

"...some of the expansions in the *Babylonian Talmud* discussed below disclose that the *Babylonian Talmud's* versions underwent post-tannaitic editorial revisions in Babylonia." (pg. 174)

"...This interpolated tannaitic tradition appears in the *Tosefta*, the *Palestinian Talmud*, *Leviticus Rabbah* and elsewhere in the *Babylonian Talmud*, and the *Babylonian Talmud's* version is closest to the Toseftan parallel:

"In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said to him: Whence do you know it? He said to them: Every Day of Atonement there met me an old man, dressed in white and wrapped in white, who entered with me (into the Holy of Holies) and left with me; but this year **he entered with me but did not leave.** After the Festival (of Tabernacles) he was ill for seven days and then died. **After Simeon the Righteous died**, his brethren the priests forbore to pronounce the Name in the priestly benediction. Tosefta Sotah MS Vienna 13, 8." (pg. 175).

"Our first example of a foundation story for a non-rabbinic group is the rabbinic account of the creation of the Sadducees and Boethusians. According to *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, these non-rabbinic groups split off from mainstream rabbinic Judaism just a generation or two after the tenure of Antigonus of Sokho, Simeon the Righteous's intellectual heir according to

Avot.” (190)

“Antigonus of Sokho received from Simeon the Righteous. He used to say: Be not as slaves who serve the master with the intent of receiving compensation; but be as slaves who serve the master without the intent of receiving compensation; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you; and you will receive a reward, both in this world and in the world to come, as if you had done (it yourself). Avot de Rabbi Nathan B 10.” (pg. 191)

“All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive it (i.e., the scapegoat sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement) would not make it to the middle of the mountain before it came apart limb by limb; once Simeon the Righteous died it would flee to the wilderness and desert-dwellers would eat it. All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive the lot “For the Lord” would always come up in the right hand; once Simeon the Righteous died sometimes it came up in the right sometimes in the left. All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive the westernmost light (upon the temple’s candelabra) was always lit; once Simeon the Righteous died sometimes it was extinguished and sometimes lit. All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive the crimson-colored strap (tied to the bullock’s horns) would become white (on the Day of Atonement signaling that the people of Israel’s sins were forgiven); once Simeon the Righteous died sometimes it would become white and sometimes it would become red. All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive the fire of the pile of wood (on the altar) burned strong and rose up, so that when they placed two logs in the morning they would not have to place additional logs all day long; once Simeon the Righteous died the fire of the pile weakened and they could not do without bringing wood throughout the day. All the days Simeon the Righteous was alive a blessing was bestowed upon the two breads and the shewbread, so that every (priest) would receive an olive-sized portion, and some would eat and become satiated and others would eat and (even) leave over; once Simeon the Righteous died the blessing was removed from the two breads and the shewbread, and every (priest) would receive a bean-sized portion, the modest would withdraw their hands, while the voracious would extend their hands. Jerusalem Talmud Yoma 6,3 43c CF Tosefta Kippuron 13, 7; Babylonian Talmud Yoma 39a.”

“Indeed, the full tradition as presented here strengthens the impression that Simeon’s death, sealed a golden age. Simeon is portrayed here as a holy and almost magical or angelic figure whose presence miraculously influenced six different aspects of temple service. Upon his death, these miracles ceased and temple life passed from the supernatural sphere of the extraordinary into the natural world of the ordinary...”

“Simeon thus represents for the rabbis a glorious age in Jewish history when the temple functioned ideally and miraculously, when the men of the Great Assembly restored the Torah to its rightful place and when the Jews overcame their threatening samaritan neighbors and destroyed the temple in Samaria...the rabbis emphasized that the

miraculous gave way to the mundane when Simeon the Righteous passed from the world.” (pgs. 196-197)

“The rabbinic legend of Alexander the Great...dates Simeon the Righteous to the time of Alexander’s conquest of Palestine, a conquest which took place in the year 332 BCE. In contrast, the accounts of the founding of the temple of Onias...relate to events that occurred during Antiochus Epiphanes’s rule (175-164 BCE) and therefore seem to date Simeon to the early second century BCE.” (pg. 99)

“Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* is the only Second Temple source to actually mention Simeon the Righteous (*o dixaios*) by name, more precisely by cognomen, and *Jewish Antiquities* dates Simeon the Righteous to the early third century BCE:

“On the death of the high priest Onias, he was succeeded by his son Simeon who was surnamed the Righteous because of both his piety toward God and his benevolence to his countrymen. But as he, when he died, left an infant son named Onias, his brother Eleazar, of whom we are now writing, took over the high priesthood. Jewish Antiquities 12, 43-44 ”

“According to Josephus the very Jaddua who had met Alexander the Great was succeeded by his own son Onias I who, in turn, was succeeded by his son Simeon I, or Simeon the Righteous. Thus, our only explicit Second Temple evidence dates Simeon the Righteous to the early third century BCE.

“Despite Josephus’s explicit testimony, scholars have questioned the accuracy of his identification of Simeon the Righteous because Josephus seems to have been lacking authentic and accurate evidence for Jewish history between Nehemiah and the Hasmonean era (pg. 200)...numerous scholars have questioned his identification of Simeon I with Simeon the Righteous.”

“In contrast, Simeon II is the climactic figure in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Fathers where he is the subject of practically an entire chapter [Ben Sira 50, 1-36].” (pgs. 201-2)

“Although Ben Sira never explicitly identifies Simeon II as Simeon the Righteous, his glorious description of Simeon II has led many scholars to conclude that Josephus confused the two Simeons and that, in reality, Simeon II was Simeon the Righteous.

“The tannaitic tradition consists of a list of individuals, arranged in chronological order, who prepared the ashes of a red heifer:

“And who prepared them (i.e., the ashes of the red heifers)? Moses prepared the first, Ezra prepared the second, and (there were) five more from Ezra on--these are the words of Rabbi

Meir. And the sages said: Seven from Ezra on. And who prepared them? Simeon the Righteous and Yohanan the high priest [Yohanan Hyrcanus, a Hasmonean leader of the late second century BCE] prepared two apiece, and Eliehoenai ben Haqqof and Hanamel the Egyptian and Ishmael ben Piabi prepared one apiece. Mishnah (not referenced)

similarly in the Babylonian Talmud

“...Take off therefrom the forty years which Simeon the Righteous served, eighty years which Yohanan the high priest served... Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9a (206-7)

“In short, none of the rabbinic sources surveyed till now are compatible with one another and the majority of them lead to the very same conclusion: Simeon the Righteous served as high priest shortly before the Hasmoneans rose to power. Second Temple sources reveal that the Simeon who lived shortly before the Hasmoneans was Simeon II and, indeed some of the rabbinic traditions cited above are apparently indebted to our Second temple sources on Simeon II. “ (pg. 208)

[This last summary paragraph is the author’s personal opinion. Since the Rabbinic literature was originally oral tradition that was written down and edited centuries later than the events themselves, and probably no earlier than the 1st Century AD, with no specific knowledge of who Simeon the Righteous was, they could easily have fabricated a place for him in Jewish Tradition that suited their needs. So Righteous Simeon may well have been the Simeon the Righteous that we find in the Orthodox Christian Tradition, whose life is celebrated on February 3 every year.]