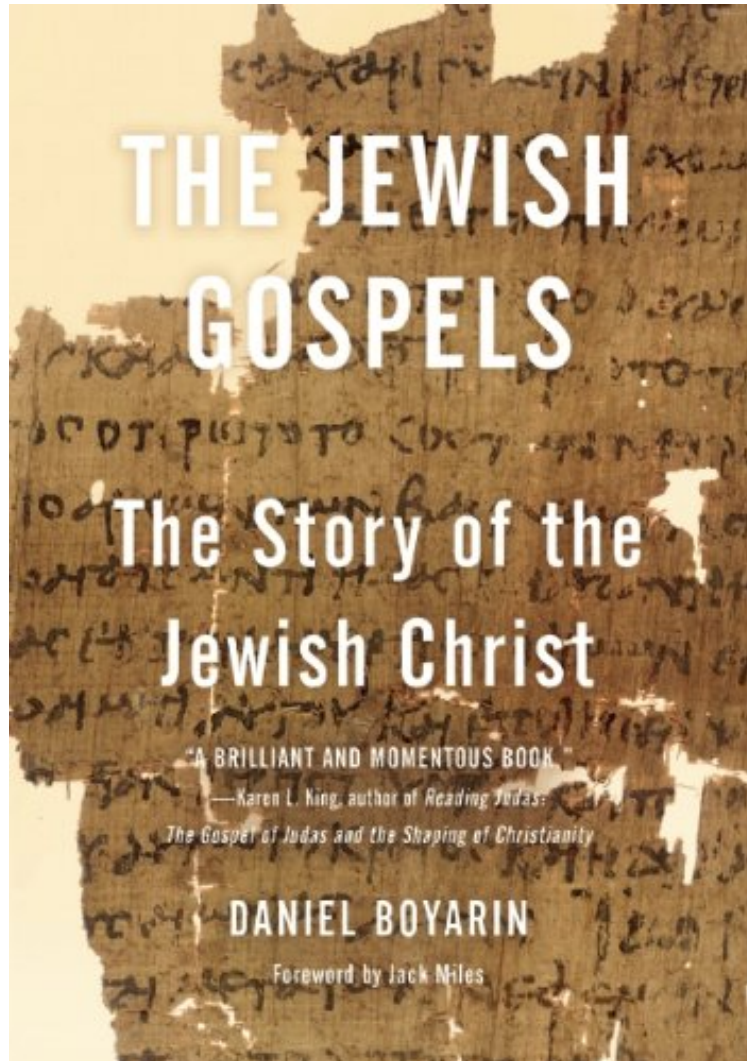


## The Jewish Gospels

*Daniel Boyarin*

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**Daniel Boyarin : The Jewish Gospels** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Jewish Gospels:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I felt somewhat disappointed with it By Daniel D. This book was written by a Jewish scholar, with the apparent intent of demonstrating the Jewish character of Jesus of Nazareth and the Gospels to a lay Christian audience. Dr. Boyarin cites a number of informative references from the Mishnah and Talmud that few Christians would know about. He offers his own informed interpretation of the diversity of Messianic expectations in the first Centuries BCE and CE. And he goes on to discuss the Son of Man character from the Book of Daniel as the prototype for, or as prophecy of, Jesus as the Son of God. At the same time, the only mention of the suffering "Messiah ben Joseph" is relegated to an end note. Other scholars have linked that particular Messianic

character to Jesus. I believe that it would have further strengthened Dr. Boyarin's hypothesis had he discussed it. A glossary would have been very helpful addition to the book, as it contains a number of words and concepts that the target audience is not likely to understand. Dr. Boyarin makes some sweeping assumptions about what Christians believe regarding the Trinity and Incarnation. That's what you expect when a scholar of one faith tradition writes for an audience of a different one. Readers interested in the Biblical version of Jesus will likely find new and interesting material in this book. Still, I felt somewhat disappointed with it. 79 of 84 people found the following review helpful. A book all serious students of the New Testament and the Jewish Roots of Christianity cannot do without. By Mike Davis Th.D.

Daniel Boyarin has done a great service for the Body of Christ and especially for those who are involved in the study of the Jewish Roots of Christianity. Over the past few decades it has become increasingly clear that to understand more fully the New Testament writings we need to have a greater, more in-depth understanding of the conceptual and cultural world in which these texts were written...and this is primarily the world of Judaism. Understanding the Jewish conceptual and cultural world in which Jesus, the disciples and writers of the New Testament lived and moved in has opened up the richness of Scripture and given it greater clarity in innumerable ways. One area that has now been greatly enriched by understanding the Jewish Background involves the Deity of Jesus. Boyarin's work deftly demonstrates through the use of various streams of Jewish thought and literary works that the idea of a Divine Messiah was not foreign to Jewish thought and belief...and was even expected. He lays out the various beliefs about the Messiah down through the centuries before and during the time of Jesus using texts such as Daniel 7:13-14, the Similitudes of Enoch, First Ezra as well as insights from the Talmud and other rabbinic literature that may reflect earlier Jewish thought on this subject. Boyarin's view is that the seeds of the concept of a divine Messiah were present in Judaism before and during the time of Jesus. This is important for three reasons: 1. It explains how the first century disciples and followers of Jesus could believe that Jesus is God/deity. Boyarin's work demonstrates pretty well that such a belief and concept was NOT outside the scope of Jewish belief within the First century. 2. It helps present day believers in Jesus, who also study the Jewish roots of the faith to see that there is no contradiction between Jewish Monotheism and belief in the deity of Jesus. This has become an increasing problem and a source of cognitive dissonance for some within the "Jewish Roots" movement and Messianic Judaism. "Would first century, observant Jews who hold that there is but one God also hold to a belief that the Man Jesus is also God? How does this fit with Jewish/rabbinic belief in monotheism?" This has led some to deny the deity of Jesus while holding to his Messiahship as they are seeking to be faithful to their understanding of Judaism of the First Century and of the Bible. Hopefully Boyarin's book will help many to see that if they take into account that there are different and various views concerning the Messiah within early Jewish thought itself (and not just within the Talmud) then they will see that Jesus as a "divine messiah" is not a contradiction at all but rather is in harmony with different streams of Jewish thought in the First century Jewish World. 3. It locates Jesus' divinity in his identification of himself as The Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14; This helps us to see that Jesus' view of himself was NOT shaped by later Christians borrowing these ideas from the Roman concept of Caesar as the divine son of god (or borrowing the concept from other pagan sources concerning a god-man). This work is also important because it helps to clarify Paul's presentation of Jesus in his epistles as a cosmic, transcendent Being. Boyarin's work does not directly or specifically focus on Paul or his portrayal of Jesus but it does help to give an understanding as to how Paul may have come to his view of Jesus. Paul's view of Jesus is the Jewish View of the Divine Messiah/Son of Man. What I would like to have seen in the book is more development of some of Boyarin's ideas in detail. But what is written is enough to motivate myself and others to do further research on this fascinating subject by seeking out at my local theological library the numerous scholarly articles and books listed in his footnotes. Another great aspect of the book is chapter three "Jesus kept kosher". Here Boyarin demonstrates that Jesus, far from doing away with the laws of Kashrut was actually Kosher himself and was giving his halakha on a question concerning the rules of clean and unclean. I had read David Biven's synopsis of Yair Furstenberg's article (Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7:15 in *New Testament Studies* #54, 2008) in a Jerusalem Perspective online article a few years ago and then later read the full article by Furstenberg himself. Boyarin does a great job of simplifying and clarifying what was really going on in Mark 7:1-15. I especially liked the distinction he makes between the categories of clean and unclean and permitted and prohibited -with Mark 7 being about clean and unclean and Kashrut being about what foods are permitted and not permitted (or prohibited for food) -an important distinction that has been missed by many Christian commentaries on Mark 7:1-15, leading to a misinterpretation of the meaning of the entire passage. Boyarin is not a Christian nor a Messianic believer in Jesus. The book is thus not an attempt to try and win Jews over to a belief in Jesus and his divinity. Boyarin's stated goals early in the book (pages 6-7) are to change the vilifying dialogue between Jews and Christians that has gone on for centuries and to foster a better understanding of each other; and also to offer a challenge (and I would say critique) of liberal Christian scholars who see the idea of a divine, suffering Messiah as having been invented by the later Christian leaders who foisted these ideas upon the church. Boyarin again shows throughout the book that these ideas pre-date the time of Jesus and are found within Judaism itself. The book is an easy read and one that I feel further advances the understanding of the Jewish Roots of Christianity. I thought the book important enough that I bought a copy for a friend of mine and plan to re-read it myself. This is a book I highly recommend. 4 of 4 people found the following

review helpful. A must read for Christians and Jews alike  
By John G. Chase, Jr. Jesus was Jewish. Paul was Jewish. The first Christians were Jewish. Initially, followers of Jesus considered themselves to be a legitimate Jewish sect, and they were considered so by others, especially the Romans. The early Christians saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, while other Jews disagreed. Rabbi Boyarin does a wonderful job of highlighting the original Jewish disagreement and explaining how, with time and expansion of Christianity into the Gentile world, the argument changed. This book is, in my opinion, and absolutely must read for Christians who wish to deepen their understanding of the NT, as well as for Christians and Jews who wish to engage in dialogue about the commonalities and differences between our respective faiths.

In July 2008 a front-page story in the New York Times reported on the discovery of an ancient Hebrew tablet, dating from before the birth of Jesus, which predicted a Messiah who would rise from the dead after three days. Commenting on this startling discovery at the time, noted Talmud scholar Daniel Boyarin argued that some Christians will find it shocking a challenge to the uniqueness of their theology. Guiding us through a rich tapestry of new discoveries and ancient scriptures, *The Jewish Gospels* makes the powerful case that our conventional understandings of Jesus and of the origins of Christianity are wrong. In Boyarin's scrupulously illustrated account, the coming of the Messiah was fully imagined in the ancient Jewish texts. Jesus, moreover, was embraced by many Jews as this person, and his core teachings were not at all a break from Jewish beliefs and teachings. Jesus and his followers, Boyarin shows, were simply Jewish. What came to be known as Christianity came much later, as religious and political leaders sought to impose a new religious orthodoxy that was not present at the time of Jesus's life. In the vein of Elaine Pagels's *The Gnostic Gospels*, here is a brilliant new work that will break open some of our cultures most cherished assumptions.

"If Boyarin is right, the consequences go beyond making a few adjustments to our understanding of the past. As the Pulitzer Prizewinning author Jack Miles writes in his foreword to *The Jewish Gospels*, Jews and Christians will have to radically rethink their identities and relationship to each other." *Moment*  
"Boyarin proposes that by constructing the categories of religious orthodoxy and heresy, second-century Gentile Christians created the concept of religion which pervades the Western world to this day . . . intensely provocative and innovative." *Shofar*  
"A brilliant and momentous book." Karen L. King, Harvard Divinity School  
"Raises profound questions . . . this provocative book will change the way we think of the Gospels in their Jewish context." John J. Collins, Yale Divinity School  
"Its certainly noteworthy when one of the worlds leading Jewish scholars publishes a book about Jesus . . . extremely stimulating." Daniel C. Peterson, *The Deseret News*  
"[A] fascinating recasting of the story of Jesus." Elliot Wolfson, New York University