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# Jesus, White Nationalism, and the Queen of Sheba

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30-38 minutes

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In honor of Kelly Davis<sup>[\*]</sup>,  
who has bravely risen up to  
demand justice for her  
husband from our  
generation.

Lately I have been studying three of Jesus' sayings that shed light on his call to repentance. Whereas readers of the Gospels often assume that Jesus' summons to repentance was a demand to engage in private soul-searching, the passages I have been studying suggest that Jesus' call to repentance was addressed more toward the public than to individuals, and focused more on social evils than on personal transgressions.

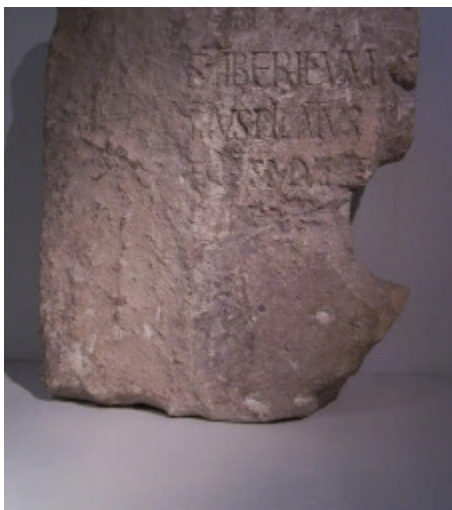
The three passages that indicate Jesus' understanding of repentance was a corporate one, are the story about Pilate's massacre of a group of Galilean pilgrims (Luke 13:1-5), Jesus' denunciation of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. 11:20-24 // Luke 10:13-15), and Jesus' prediction that his generation would be condemned by the Queen of the South and

the people of Nineveh (Matt. 12:41-42 // Luke 11:31-32).<sup>[1]</sup> It is this final passage that sparked the inspiration for the present essay, but it will first be necessary to discuss the other two passages in order to establish that Jesus' call for repentance was corporate and social in nature.

## **Pilate's Massacre of the Galilean Pilgrims**

In the first story certain persons inform Jesus about a group of Galilean pilgrims whom Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had massacred. It is my opinion that the standard commentaries on the Gospels have misinterpreted this story on at least two counts. First, scholars often assume that the victims of Pilate's massacre were somehow to blame for the violence that was inflicted on them. Bible commentators frequently assert the Galilean pilgrims must have done something to provoke the Roman authorities; they cannot imagine a scenario in which unarmed civilians could be murdered by law enforcement authorities without probable cause. Second, scholars erroneously accuse Second Temple Judaism of espousing the view that personal misfortune was proof of prior hidden transgression. They claim that first-century Jews would have concluded from the massacre that the victims had committed some heinous sin against God. It is my conviction, however, that these two assumptions are false, and have far more to say about the imperialist sympathies, white privilege, and anti-Jewish bias of so many New Testament scholars than they do about the true nature of Second Temple Judaism.





A Latin inscription from Caesarea bearing the name of Pontius Pilate.

Based on these two erroneous assumptions, the majority of New Testament scholars interpret Luke 13:1-5 as follows: Having been informed of the massacre Jesus said, “Do you suppose these Galilean pilgrims were worse sinners than all the rest? I know you do! But you’re just as bad as they were—in fact, even worse! But unless you repent you will be destroyed as well.” This traditional interpretation is rife with anti-Jewish Christian triumphalism, implying that Jesus came to set us free from false Jewish notions about innocence and guilt. That is bad enough, but the dominant interpretation also has the more subtle effect of evicting Jesus from the public and political spheres (where he might be dangerous to entrenched interests) and relegating Jesus to the religious sphere (where he can be safely left to deal with internal ‘spiritual’ matters).

Yet from an historical perspective, the dominant interpretation of Jesus’ words in Luke 13:1-5 is completely nonsensical. In the first place, Second Temple Judaism did not equate tragedy with guilt.<sup>[\[2\]](#)</sup> It is true that many ancient Jews believed that suffering in

this life could be a divine chastisement for sin, but ancient Jews were acutely aware that the innocent also suffered. Jews living under repressive regimes then, as now, were fully aware that the majority of suffering is undeserved. By the first century martyrdom for one's faith already occupied an important place in the Jewish consciousness. Far from attributing guilt to those who died for their faith, the Jewish community celebrated their martyrs as heroes.<sup>[3]</sup> Surely the coreligionists of the pilgrims who were massacred in the act of bringing their offerings to the Temple would have regarded them as martyrs.

When Jesus asked the rhetorical question "Do you think these massacred Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" the historical probability is that he would have received in reply a resounding "No! Of course not!" The murdered Galileans had demonstrated their piety by making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, whereas the rest of the Galileans (including Jesus) had stayed at home. If they Galilean pilgrims were not righteous, then no one was. It would have been just as offensive to blame the victims of Pilate's massacre for their deaths in the first century as it is to blame the victims of mass shootings for their deaths today.

Neither is there anything in Luke's account of the incident to suggest that the Galileans were the cause of their own misfortune. Luke does not say—and neither should we infer—that the Galilean pilgrims had taken part in some protest against the Roman authorities (not that we can blame them if they had). It can hardly come as a surprise that the subjects of repressive regimes are often brutalized without cause. Moreover, there is a

shocking inconsistency in condemning Judaism for teaching that suffering was proof of sin, while at the same time blaming the victims for having provoked the Roman massacre. Too many interpreters of this passage have fallen prey to their own false dichotomy between the religious and political spheres.

How, then, do we make sense of Jesus' reply? First, we must consider the motive behind reporting the massacre to Jesus. This was no idle gossip. The report of Pilate's atrocity was politically explosive. For many of the inhabitants of ancient Palestine the incident would have served as a rallying call to take up arms against the Roman empire. While I think it is highly improbable that this report was merely propaganda manufactured by Jewish revolutionaries,<sup>[4]</sup> we can be assured that militant Jewish nationalists would have exploited the incident for their own political interests.<sup>[5]</sup> Those who brought the report to Jesus would have wanted to hear Jesus' take on this outrageous event.

In his response, Jesus neither endorsed militant Jewish nationalist demands for revenge, nor condoned Roman imperial brutality. Rather, Jesus issued a prophetic warning to his contemporaries that violent nationalist extremism was an existential threat to the Jewish people. Only if Second Temple Jewish society collectively rejected a "Judea First" policy would it be able to escape destruction. For Jesus rejecting revolutionary zeal was not merely prudent—for Jesus was enough of a realist to be aware that the military capacity of the Roman Empire was vastly superior to that of the Jewish people—it was God's will. In Jesus' view God himself was opposed to violent revolution as a means for achieving political independence. According to Jesus

God would redeem Israel through the liberating power of the Kingdom of Heaven, which would be unleashed when (and if) his fellow Jews joined him in pursuing the Ways of Peace.[\[6\]](#)

Bloodshed would only defile the land, drive the divine presence away from Israel, and bring judgment upon the entire community.

Far from changing the topic from an horrific external political event in order to talk about an internal spiritual exercise, Jesus called upon his entire generation to repent from the public evil of nationalism because that is what the Spirit of God demands. Of course the Galilean pilgrims Pilate murdered had been pious. Their martyrdom, however, should be taken as a warning. If the Romans were capable of doing such things to innocent unarmed civilians, they would do far worse to the Jewish people if they started a rebellion.

Jesus' political analysis of Pilate's massacre parallels his commentary on his own execution at Pilate's orders: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but for yourselves and your children.... If they set fire to green wood, what will they do with wood that is dry?" (Luke 23:28-31). In other words, if the Romans were capable of executing Jesus, an outspoken advocate for peace, what would the Romans do to the women of Jerusalem and to their husbands and children if the Jewish people took up arms against the empire?

The events that took place in the late 60s and early 70s C.E., when the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, razing the holy city and engulfing the Temple in flames, proved how correct Jesus' warnings had been. The disastrous revolt against Rome in the first century, and the even more devastating defeat of the Bar

Kokhva revolt in the second century C.E., changed the course of Jewish history and the shape of the Jewish religion forever. This crisis could have been averted, but only if the foolhardy methods and the cruel aspirations of the militant Jewish nationalists had been rejected by the Jewish people as a whole. Repentance from the sin of violent extremism must be a collective effort if it is to be of any use.

### **Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum**

The second passage in which Jesus revealed his social conception of repentance is in the woes he pronounced against Chorazin and Bethsaida and his denunciation of Capernaum:

Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the powerful deeds that were preformed in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be easier for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than it will be for you.

And as for you, Capernaum! Will you be exalted to the heavens? You will be brought down to the netherworld! For if the powerful deeds that were performed in you had been done in Sodom it would still be standing today. But it will be easier for Sodom in the judgment than for you. (Matt. 11:20-24; cf. Luke 10:13-15)







Synagogue remains at the site of Chorazin.

The social dimension of repentance in this passage is undeniable, given that Jesus condemns entire communities rather than individuals in these pronouncements. The political aspect of Jesus' saying is more difficult to discern until we take into account that one of the ways the militant Jewish nationalism of Jesus' time expressed itself was through ever-increasing intolerance for social interactions between Jews and Gentiles. Jewish nationalists began to insist that the Holy Land should be purged of its non-Jewish population by whatever means necessary. With such anti-foreigner sentiment on the rise, the purpose of Jesus' reference to the Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom becomes clear. These Gentile cities were notoriously wicked. Tyre and Sidon to the north of Israel are condemned in the prophetic books for their arrogance and rapine. Sodom in the south was famously destroyed because of its intolerance for outsiders, its exploitation of the weak, and its sexual predation. To claim that these cities would fare better on the day of judgment than for Jewish communities that rejected the Ways of Peace was a sharp rebuke to Jewish nationalism.

### **The Queen of the South and the People of Nineveh**

Finally, we turn to the third passage, which was the inspiration of this essay:



The Queen of the South will be raised up in the judgment with this generation and she will condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom, and now that which is greater than Solomon is here. The people of Nineveh will arise in the judgement with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now that which is greater than Jonah is here. (Luke 11:31-32; cf. Matt. 12:41-42)

The example of the Ninevites responding to the proclamation of Jonah makes it clear that corporate repentance, not a private exercise of self-examination, is once again at issue. As the Book of Jonah states: *they turned* [i.e., together] *from their evil way* [i.e., from the public evil way they all pursued together, not private evil ways from which each turned individually] (Jonah 3:10). Rejecting their evil way was a public, collective endeavor. Even the animals belonging to the Ninevites participated in fasting and donning sackcloth as a sign of their abject submission to God. The political aspect once again emerges from the two examples Jesus cited. The Jews of Jesus' generation will be measured against the example of two non-Jewish witnesses: the Gentile inhabitants of Nineveh in Assyria and the Gentile Queen of Sheba (referred to here, for reasons we will explore momentarily, as the "Queen of the South").<sup>[7]</sup>

According to Jesus a non-Jewish city and a non-Jewish woman will bear witness of their deeds before God on the day of judgment. Their testimony will be damning to the people of Jesus' generation. But why? Christian readers often assume that in this passage Solomon and Jonah serve as prefigurations of Christ. These prefigurements of Christ condemn Jesus'

contemporaries by making the following argument: If Gentiles in Solomon's day were able to recognize Solomon's divine appointment to the kingship, then Jews of Jesus' time ought to have recognized Jesus as the Messiah. And if Gentiles of Jonah's day were able to recognize Jonah's divine appointment as a prophet, then surely the Jews of Jesus' time ought to have recognized that Jesus was the Christ. But such an interpretation of this passage is uninstructional and self-congratulatory. It allows us to accuse others of wrongdoing (or at least of wrong thinking) without challenging ourselves. So rather than giving a Christological interpretation to Jesus' announcement of "that which is greater than Solomon/Jonah," I suggest an interpretation that pays greater respect to the form of Jesus' argument. The Queen of Sheba traveled from the ends of the earth to seek out wisdom, but Jesus' generation rejected wise counsel, rushing headlong into a violent confrontation with Rome. The people of Nineveh repented when their city was threatened with destruction, but Jesus' prophetic warning of Jerusalem's destruction went unnoticed. That is why the exemplary actions of the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh will condemn Jesus' contemporaries. Not because they recognized prefigurements of Christ, but because they accepted the right and rejected the wrong. The "something greater" than Solomon was not the Christ, it was Jesus' wise counsel to walk in the Ways of Peace. The "something greater" than Jonah was not the Messiah, it was Jesus' prophecy of doom proclaimed so much more urgently than Jonah's reluctant "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jonah 3:4).

## How the Queen of Sheba Become the Queen of the South

Aside from later works influenced by the New Testament, this saying of Jesus is unique in referring to the Queen of Sheba as the “Queen of the South.” What might be the origin of this unusual designation? And what meaning might Jesus’ use of this unusual title for the Queen of Sheba have for us today?

From an historical perspective, the Queen of Sheba most likely came from the kingdom of Saba, which was located in the southwestern corner of the Arabian peninsula in what is present-day Yemen.<sup>[8]</sup> The kingdom of Saba was, indeed, south of the land of Israel, but so were many other kingdoms, countries, and uninhabited places. So it is odd that Jesus should have used such a generic term, especially when the person whom Jesus mentioned was more familiarly known by another name: the Queen of Sheba.

Some scholars have noted that the Greek designation βασίλισσα νότου (*basilissa notou*, “queen of [the] south”), not only looks like it could be the translation of a Hebrew construct phrase,<sup>[9]</sup> but one possible Hebrew reconstruction of this Greek phrase, מַלְכַּת תֵּמָן (*malchat tēmān*), can mean either “Queen of the South,” or more specifically “Queen of Teman,” *Teman* being the Hebrew name for Yemen. This explanation, which has long been popular among Hebraists,<sup>[10]</sup> appears to give a satisfactory explanation for why Jesus referred to the Queen of Sheba as the “Queen of the South”: Jesus had simply used updated geographical terminology. The problem with this explanation is that the geographical terminology is a little too updated. The

name “Yemen” for the southwestern corner of the Arabian peninsula is not attested until the third century C.E., which makes the Greek *notos* = Hebrew *tēmān* = Yemen explanation an anachronism.<sup>[11]</sup>



The Queen of Sheba as depicted in a manuscript (ca. 1405) of Bellifortis by Conrad Kyesser. Image courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#).

When we turn to the only other first-century account of the Queen of Sheba, namely, that which is given by Josephus, we find that, like Jesus, Josephus did not refer to this remarkable woman as the Queen of Sheba at all. Instead Josephus calls her the “Queen of Egypt and the Ethiopians” (*Ant.* 8:165, 175). Thus according to Josephus, the Queen of Sheba was not from the Arabian peninsula at all. Rather she was the ruler of a large portion of the African continent, and therefore, quite possibly a black woman.<sup>[12]</sup>

How is this transference of the Queen of Sheba from the Arabian peninsula to Africa to be explained? Some scholars have

suggested that Josephus relied on a passage in the Book of Isaiah that mentions Egypt, Cush (= Ethiopia) and Seba being given in exchange for Israel (Isa. 43:3).<sup>[13]</sup> Seba (סְבָא [s<sup>e</sup>vā]) is not the same as Sheba (שֶׁבַע [sh<sup>e</sup>vā]), the land from which the historical queen originated, but Seba and Sheba were almost always mentioned as a pair in Scripture (Gen. 10:7; Ps. 72:10; 1 Chr. 1:9), and the translators of the Septuagint transliterated both names in exactly the same way—Σαβα (*Saba*)—in certain verses (Gen. 10:7; 1 Chr. 1:9). So it is quite possible that by the first century a tradition had developed that equated Seba with Sheba, and this development would have facilitated the use of Isa. 43:3 to reimagine the Queen of Sheba as a royal African personage. Could Jesus, like Josephus, have imagined that the Queen of Sheba was a black woman who ruled much of Africa? I think so. If we read a bit further in the same Isaiah passage that informed Josephus, we find the key term *tēmān* used in a most illuminating manner:

I gave Egypt as your ransom; Cush [LXX: Ethiopia] and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes you are honored and I have loved you and I will give a human in exchange for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. From the east I will bring your offspring, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, “Give [them to me]!” and to *tēmān*, “Do not withhold [them from me]! Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth!” (Isa. 43:3-6)

An interpreter of this passage might have concluded that *tēmān* was not a point on the compass, but a geographical term that

encompassed Egypt, Cush (= Ethiopia) and Seba/Sheba. In other words, both Josephus' description of the Queen of Sheba as ruler of Egypt and Ethiopia and Jesus' description of the Queen of Sheba as the Queen of Teman—always supposing that βασίλισσα νότου [“queen of south”] reflects an underlying Hebrew expression—likely relied on the same ancient Jewish tradition that depicted the Queen of Sheba as a black African woman.

### **Jesus, the Queen of Sheba, and This Generation**

Jesus' call for repentance was an appeal to his generation to disavow a populist ideology that stoked hatred for non-Jews (not just Roman oppressors) and fueled intolerance toward fellow Jews whose attitudes were not as extreme as their own.<sup>[\[14\]](#)</sup> Jesus knew that if militant Jewish nationalism gained legitimacy in his society the reckless behavior it encouraged would lead to a catastrophe for the Jewish people as a whole. Since all would suffer the consequences of Jewish nationalism, it was necessary that repentance should be a collective endeavor. Jesus knew that the people must be united against radical nationalist extremism in order that a minority not cause the destruction of all.

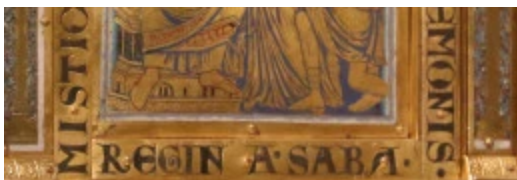
Jesus' call to repentance in our generation is likewise a summons to collectively reject seductive ideologies that seek self-interest ahead of the good of all humankind. For white people (like myself), repentance means disavowing white nationalism and actively working to reverse the evil effects of white supremacy in our societies. For citizens of the United States (again, like myself), repentance demands total rejection of

the kind of nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, misogynistic, homophobic, science-denying, alternative-fact loving, “America First” policies touted by president Trump and his administration. His fearful, suspicious, greedy, pompous and violent ideology is totally opposed to the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus describes in the Beatitudes and articulates in the Gospel.

But woe to our generation that such a deceitful and destructive ideology should gain acceptance at such a time as this! For the stakes are far higher today than they were in the first century. Whereas Jesus’ generation was threatened with the destruction of the Temple and devastation of the Jewish people, today we are threatened with the annihilation of the entire planet and the extinction of the human race. As a species we have pushed nature to her limits, defiling the land, polluting the air, poisoning the waters. In our fear of our neighbors and in our animosity towards our brothers we have devised weapons of ultimate destruction, capable of wiping out all life from the face of the earth. And it is in this moment of crisis, when only by the full cooperation of all humankind can we hope to save one another, that isolationist ideologies have arisen the world over to divide humankind against itself into races and nations and parties and tribes.







The Queen of Sheba as depicted by Nicholas of Verdun (ca. 1181) on an altarpiece in the Klosterneuburg Monastery, Austria. Image courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Wretched creatures that we are! Who can lead us out of the mess we have created? According to Jesus the Queen of Sheba can. This black queen of Africa left her native land, forsaking her power and privilege, crossing borders, learning new languages and meeting people whose customs and appearance were strange to her, all in order to seek out divine wisdom. The elusive wisdom she so earnestly sought she discovered with King Solomon, whose name stems from the Hebrew word for peace. What was the wisdom the Queen of Sheba acquired in the company of this king of peace? Did she discover that the highest expression of love for God consists in loving one's neighbor?<sup>[15]</sup> Did she learn that it is only through peacemaking that we truly become sons and daughters of God?<sup>[16]</sup> Or did she receive a revelation that all human beings—no matter what color or gender or preference or creed—all of us—in our uniqueness and in our togetherness, in our abilities and in our limitations, in our failures as well as in our achievements—are created in the divine image of God? Whatever facet of wisdom it was that the the Queen of Sheba discovered, she gained it by being open to conversing with and learning from women and men (and perhaps even children) quite different from herself.

Her openness to human beings so different from herself brought

the Queen of Sheba into the presence of divine wisdom. And her encounter with divine wisdom made the Queen of Sheba a blessing to all humankind. The openness she displayed toward her fellow human beings is the antithesis of the nationalist instinct, which closes the hearts of one people against another and in its fear of difference is blind to the divine image in which all human beings are made. That is why Jesus commended the Queen of Sheba and held her up as an example for later generations to follow. Jesus' generation was unable to resist the evil tide of nationalism and, as he predicted, it was swept away. But we do not need to be like Jesus' generation. Our generation can choose to repent, as did the people of Nineveh. The crisis can be averted. A black woman from Africa is waiting to show us the way.



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## Notes

[\*] To learn about the police shooting of Keith Davis, Jr., his subsequent wrongful conviction, and the courageous struggle of his wife, Kelly Davis, for justice on his behalf, I recommend listening to the “[State v. Keith Davis, Jr.](#)” on the [Undisclosed](#) podcast.

[1] I have dealt with these passages more thoroughly in

forthcoming articles co-written with David Bivin entitled, “Calamities in Yershalayim,” “Woes on Three Villages,” and “Generations That Repented Long Ago,” to be published as part of the [Life of Yeshua](#) commentary on [JerusalemPerspective.com](#).

**[2]** The view that according to Second Temple Judaism guilt could be inferred from misfortune is an old one, being popularized in Alfred Edersheim’s *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1883; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 2:221. It was canonized in critical scholarship by Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck in their influential *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (4 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922-1928), 2:193-197. Their work, despite its clear agenda to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity at the expense of Judaism, continues to be treated with undue deference by New Testament scholars.

**[3]** In some ancient Jewish sources we do encounter the belief that martyrdom is a symptom of societal ills: had the Jewish people been more faithful to God they would not have experienced the sufferings they had endured (cf., e.g., 2 Macc. 6:12-17; 7:18-19, 32-33). The notion that martyrdom is a result of divine displeasure against the people as a whole, and not of the individual sufferers, is akin to the ideas behind the sayings of Jesus discussed in this essay. According to Jesus, the small-scale tragedies the Jewish people were currently suffering were harbingers of the wholesale destruction of the Jewish people that awaited them if they failed to change course and abandon militant Jewish nationalism.

On the subject of Jewish martyrdom in the Second Temple Period, see David Flusser, “Martyrology in the Second Temple Period and Early Christianity,” in his *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: The Jewish Sages and Their Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2009), 248-257.

Unfortunately, the English translation is marred by several errors, which are noted in “[Corrections and Emendations to Flusser’s Judaism of the Second Temple Period](#)” on JerusalemPerspective.com.

[4] For the view that the massacre was a fiction designed to stir up popular support for an uprising, see Thomas Walter Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus as Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Matthew and St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, [1937] 1957; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 273; Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Combined Edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 2:75.

[5] On populist militant Jewish nationalism and its place on the ideological-religious spectrum of Second Temple Jewish society, especially in relation to Jesus’ place on that same spectrum, see “[Locating Jesus’ Place on the Political-Ideological Spectrum of Second Temple Jewish Society](#).”

[6] On the ancient Jewish concept of the “Ways of Peace” and its place in the teachings of Jesus, see “[A Mile on the Road of Peace](#)”.

[7] The judgment scene Jesus depicts in which the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites bear damning testimony against Jesus’ generation presupposes the resurrection, since the Queen of

Sheba and the people of Nineveh had long since perished. See John P. Meier, “The Debate on the Resurrection of the Dead: An Incident from the Ministry of the Historical Jesus?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 77 (2000): 3-24, esp. 17-18. The preview of the eschaton described in Matt. 11:20-24 // Luke 10:13-15 envisions a final judgment in which peoples are judged collectively, rather than as individuals. The same is true in the judgment scene in which the Gentiles are separated like sheep from goats (Matt. 25:31-46). On this judgment scene, see “[Build That Wall!': The Morals of Wall Building in the Light of Jesus' Gospel](#),” under the subheading “When I Was a Stranger.”

**[8]** On the south Arabian origin of the Queen of Sheba, see John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 194-195; Gus W. van Beek, “The Land of Sheba,” in *Solomon & Sheba* (ed. James B. Pritchard; London: Phaidon, 1974), 40-63, esp. 41; Christian Robin, “Saba’ and the Sabeans,” in *Queen of Sheba: Treasures From Ancient Yemen* (ed. St John Simpson; London: British Museum Press, 2002), 51-58, 208, esp. 58; G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82.

**[9]** We might have expected to find ἡ βασίλισσα τοῦ νότου (*ē basilissa tou notou*, “the queen of the south”), with definite articles, if Jesus words had originally been spoken (or composed) in Greek.

**[10]** The first example of the Queen of Teman solution I have encountered dates to 1813 and appears in a Hebrew translation of the Gospels published by the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews ([Berit Hadashah al pi Meshiah](#)). It

also appears in Franz Julius Delitzsch's, [Hebrew New Testament](#) (11th ed.; British and Foreign Bible Society, 1891). More recent proponents of this solution include Jehoshua M. Grintz, "Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960): 32-47, esp. 39; David N. Bivin, "[The Queen of Teman](#)," *Jerusalem Perspective* 7 (1988): 4. Ullendorff mentioned מְלֶכֶת יָמִין and מְלֶכֶת יָמִין as the two most probable Semitic phrases that might stand behind βασίλισσα νότου in Matt. 12:42 // Luke 11:31. See Edward Ullendorff, "The Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian Tradition," in *Solomon & Sheba* (ed. James B. Pritchard; London: Phaidon, 1974), 104-114, esp. 114.

**[11]** To salvage this explanation some scholars have suggested that Jesus' words about the Queen of the South are the earliest attestation of the name Teman/Yemen for the region where the kingdom of Saba was located.

**[12]** According to Josephus, Σαβά (*Saba* [= Sheba]) was the capital city of the Ethiopian kingdom (*Ant.* 2:249). So it is likely that Josephus envisioned the Queen of Sheba as an Ethiopian woman whose empire extended into Egypt, rather than as an Egyptian woman whose empire extended into Ethiopia. The Greek adjective Αἰθίοψ (*Aithiops*) means "burnt face," from which the term "Ethiopian" derives, refers to the skin color of the African peoples who lived up the Nile from Egypt. Hence the Greek term Αἰθιοπία (*Eithiopia*) was applied to regions south of Egypt including, but not limited to, Nubia and Abyssinia. See Edward Ullendorff, "Candace (Acts VIII. 27) and the Queen of Sheba," *New Testament Studies* 2.1 (1955): 53-56, esp. 53.

Incidentally, Josephus reports that Moses married the daughter of the Ethiopian king who reigned in Saba (*Ant.* 2:248-253), so it is possible that Josephus also envisioned the Queen of Sheba as a descendant of Moses.

[13] See Marcus' note in H. St. J. Thackeray, Ralph Marcus et al., trans., *Flavius Josephus, Works* (Loeb Classical Library; 12 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926-1965), 7:304-305. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Anchor Bible; 2 vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981-1985), 2:936; Michael Wolter, *The Gospel According to Luke* (2 vols.; trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig; Waco, Tex.: Baylor, 2016-2017), 2:114.

[14] On the rising tide of a militant form of Jewish nationalism in the first century as witnessed in the works of Josephus and the New Testament, see Peter J. Tomson, "Romans 9-11 and Political Events in Rome and Judaea with Some Thoughts on Historical Criticism and Theological Exegesis," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 33.1 (2017): 48-73; idem, "Sources on the Politics of Judaea in the 50s CE: A Response to Martin Goodman," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68.2 (2017): 234-259.

[15] On expressing love for God through loving our neighbors, see "[The Other Greatest Commandment \(Lev. 19:34\)](#)."

[16] On becoming children of God through peacemaking, see "[Perfect Children](#)."