Paul Billerbeck as Student of Rabbinic Literature: A Description and Analysis of His Interpretive Methodology

Daniel J. Rettberg

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Abstract
This study is the result of several years reading and discussion on the general theme of 'Christian Students of Rabbinic Literature.' During this period of reading and reflection, three facts emerged. First, it became increasingly apparent that a Christian scholar making a serious study of rabbinic texts is not an isolated phenomenon in the history of the Church. A significant number of Christian scholars from the patristic period on have been actively engaged in such study. Second, few among them have been taken seriously either by Jewish or by Christian scholars. Third, many Christian rabbinic scholars have, nonetheless, shown themselves competent in the study of rabbinic sources. How to approach their work, and by what method one ought to evaluate it, remain the pressing problem for those who wish to utilize it in their own studies.

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Comments
PAUL BILLERBECK
AS STUDENT OF RABBINIC LITERATURE:
A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS
OF HIS INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY

by
Daniel J. Rettberg

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
THE DROPSIE COLLEGE
FOR HEBREW AND COGNATE LEARNING
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Paul Billerbeck as Student of Rabbinic Literature: A Description and Analysis of His Interpretive Methodology.

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An understanding of the approach and concerns of the many Christian students of rabbinic literature from the patristic period to the present has potential to provide a new perspective both on Christian-Jewish relations throughout the Common Era, and on rabbinic texts and their relationship to early Christian sources. The pressing problem for those desiring to profit from such a perspective is the lack of a consistent methodology for the study of such works. The present study attempts to thoroughly evaluate Paul Billerbeck, the noted compiler of the Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, to reclaim him for dispassionate scholarship, and to embody a methodology appropriate to the study of other Christian Hebraists.

The major element of this study is an analysis of Billerbeck's translations and interpretations of rabbinic traditions both in the Kommentar and in his published essays. This evaluation is supported by a study of Billerbeck's life and times, and a description of how Billerbeck's work was received both by his own contemporaries and later scholars. An attempt is also made to trace Billerbeck's development as a scholar. Further perspective is provided by an appendix describing Billerbeck's predecessors in the collecting of rabbinic parallels to the New Testament.
Billerbeck is an eclectic, rather than an independent thinker. He for the most part presupposes the authenticity of the historical attributions of rabbinic traditions as well as the appropriateness of quoting the later rabbinic material in interpreting the New Testament, never testing either attitude via an independent and consistent methodology. He, nonetheless, shows himself to have a thorough grasp of rabbinic language, as well as developing knowledge of critical trends within rabbinic scholarship, and an ability to use same for his own purposes. This does not, unfortunately, help him to overcome traditional Christian prejudices against Judaism. Billerbeck's later essays and the Kommentar remain of importance for the scholar provided he evaluates the individual translations and interpretations through the perspective of later more critical approaches, and replaces Billerbeck's theology with the help of other works more balanced in their approach.
APPROVAL

This dissertation, entitled

Paul Billerbeck
As Student of Rabbinic Literature:
A Description and Analysis
of His Interpretive Methodology
by

Daniel J. Rettberg
Candidate for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

has been read and approved by

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INTRODUCTION

This study is the result of several years of reading and discussion on the general theme of 'Christian Students of Rabbinic Literature.' During this period of reading and reflection, three facts emerged. First, it became increasingly apparent that a Christian scholar making a serious study of rabbinic texts is not an isolated phenomenon in the history of the Church. A significant number of Christian scholars from the patristic period on have been actively engaged in such study. Second, few among them have been taken seriously either by Jewish or by Christian scholars. Third, many Christian rabbinic scholars have, nonetheless, shown themselves competent in the study of rabbinic sources. How to approach their work, and by what method one ought to evaluate it, remain the pressing problem for those who wish to utilize it in their own studies.

Many know Franz Delitzsch and Hermann L. Strack as important Christian Hebraists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fewer know, however, that these two men were the center of an entire movement within Christian circles that emphasized the study of rabbinic tradition in tandem with early Christian sources. Perhaps the most famous member of this group was a Prussian clergyman named Paul Billerbeck, the compiler of a widely used resource for the study of the New Testament, the Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (noted in the body of this study as the Kommentar). The significance of this work for twentieth
century New Testament and rabbinic scholarship is sufficient reason not only to justify a complete analysis of 'Paul Billerbeck as Student of Rabbinic Literature,' but also to present that analysis as an example of how such scholarship should be properly evaluated, and what place it ought to have in the scholarly spectrum.

The major element of this study is a grammatical and textual analysis of Billerbeck's published essays, and of the Kommentar. The former follows a historical approach, tracing Billerbeck's development as a scholar from his first published essay in 1899 through the last of the excursuses contained in the Kommentar (1922). A list of Billerbeck's published works is provided in the bibliography. The latter approaches the Kommentar proper (vols. 1-3) through the study of the body of tradition called Berakhot with the intent of evaluating Billerbeck's ability to interpret halakhic (Jewish legal) discussion. Billerbeck's translations and interpretations are also analyzed in terms of what they reveal of his attitudes towards Judaism, and how he views its relationship to Christianity.

This technical and theological analysis is supplemented by a biographical sketch of Billerbeck together with an attempt to fit his work into the context of his times. This 'contextualization' is presented both generally in terms of the kinds of attitudes towards Jews and Judaism prevalent in his day, and specifically in terms of the attitudes towards Christian study of rabbinic literature manifested in the
scholarly circles of the time. This is done through a description and analysis of the criticisms made of the Kommentar in the many reviews and notices given it in scholarly publications. Special attention is also given to the circle of Christian clergy and scholars surrounding Delitzsch and Strack as the group to which Billerbeck was most closely allied. A discussion of Billerbeck's predecessors in the isolation and study of rabbinic parallels to the New Testament is also provided in the form of an appendix.

Probably the most important conclusion of this study is that while Billerbeck could sometimes show critical and scholarly acumen, he never appears to have developed an independent interpretive methodology. Billerbeck is far more the eclectic than he is the independent critical scholar. Nevertheless, he is a gifted eclectic, knowledgeable in the best secondary literature of his day, and capable of using it effectively for his own purposes.

Billerbeck shows himself increasingly with the years a careful student of rabbinic language, both in terms of structure and of its specialized use within rabbinic sources. While he sometimes makes errors, he is nonetheless capable both of making a polished translation of an aggadic narrative and of understanding the legal argumentation of a halakhic text.

His chief failings are first, an uncritical presupposition of the general applicability of later rabbinic texts
to the interpretation of the New Testament. This does not mean that he was unaware of contemporary critical attempts at establishing the historical provenance of individual rabbinic traditions, or that he did not on occasion apply such research to his own work. What it does mean is that he makes no consistent attempt to do this throughout his research. Second, although over the course of a lifetime he developed an excellent general knowledge of rabbinic Judaism, he remained first and last a conservative German Protestant. As such he often manifests the worst kinds of anti-Jewish prejudices that can accompany such an approach to Christian theology.

It is regrettable that Billerbeck seems to have so separated his scholarly work from his theological convictions that the former was allowed to have little effect on the latter. On the positive side, however, Billerbeck's scholarship, when not affected by anti-Jewish polemic, is often thorough, careful, and worthy of consideration. It is also important to note that anti-Jewish influence seems apparent only where Billerbeck perceived a point of major difference between Judaism and Christianity. At such points he felt the need to defend Christianity. Otherwise Billerbeck the scholar seems firmly in control.

It is on the basis of these findings that this study recommends a renewed and more serious appreciation of Billerbeck. A new select compendium of his work -- based primarily on the bulk of the excursuses in vol. 4, informed
by the results of critical and historical study of rabbinic sources since Billerbeck's time, and undergirded by a new and more positive theological appreciation of Judaism -- could do much to provide a valuable source work for the comparative study of rabbinic and early Christian sources for contemporary New Testament and rabbinic scholars alike.

This study also recommends that future analysis of Christian students of rabbinic literature be based on the kind of approach it itself utilizes. Such analysis should be primarily a careful evaluation of how effectively the scholar in question translates and interprets rabbinic texts. This should be done in connection with how effectively he utilizes the traditional and critical commentaries available to him. How well does he understand the legal or narrative structure of the texts? Does his ability (or lack thereof) to work with rabbinic texts in any way affect his understanding both of his own faith and of Judaism? Second, an attempt should be made to understand the scholar within the context of his own times and his personal experiences. What led him to the study of rabbinic texts? What is his general purpose in studying such texts? How are he and his work perceived by his contemporaries? Is he isolated in his interests, or are other Christian scholars of his time also pursuing such study? Only when Christian rabbinic scholarship is subjected to such thorough analysis, can one begin to evaluate its overall importance for the study of rabbinic texts alone and in connection with early Christian sources.
CHAPTER I

PAUL BILLERBECK: HIS LIFE

Paul Ernst Friedrich Billerbeck was born in the town of Bad Schönfliess in the Neumark section of the old Prussian province of Mark Brandenburg on April 4, 1853, as the son of a furrier, Ernst Friedrich Billerbeck, and his wife, Pauline Emilie nee Plathe. This area lies to the east of the Oder River in what is today Poland. He completed his secondary schooling in Königsberg, Neumark, and studied theology at the Universities of Greifswald and Leipzig in what is today the German Democratic Republic. Ordained to the pastoral ministry on October 7, 1879, he became an assistant to the pastor in Wintershagen in Pomerania (in what is today northwestern Poland), where he met his future wife, Martha, the daughter of the senior pastor, Rudolph Bartholdy. In 1880 he began service in Silesia (today southwestern Poland) serving in the same immediate area for the rest of his active life (Kreis Ost-Sternberg I), first as deacon in Zielenzig, and later, in 1889, becoming pastor in the town of Heinersdorf, where he served until his retirement on January 1, 1915. He then took up residence in Frankfurt an der Oder where he remained until his death on December 23, 1932.¹

Billerbeck never attained to any advanced degrees, nor did he study further at any university. His scholarly work began, according to Joachim Jeremias, as an adjunct to his preaching ministry. The story, as Jeremias tells it, is that as a young pastor Billerbeck had the task of preaching on Matthew 4:17, where Jesus is quoted as proclaiming, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" Billerbeck's question was what Jesus' hearers would have understood by "Kingdom of Heaven." In the course of his studies (which included Josephus and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical materials as well) he became so convinced that the answers and perspective he was seeking were to be found in rabbinic literature that he dedicated most of his leisure time for the rest of his life to a study of these sources. Out of this study came the numerous essays and translations published in the journal, Nathanael, which had been founded and edited by Hermann L. Strack in Berlin, and of which Billerbeck was later to become de facto editor. Billerbeck became a close colleague of Strack's, who encouraged his studies by obtaining the necessary texts for him.


Ibid., Jeremias, Col. 35; TRE, p. 640.
From this fruitful contact came the idea for Billerbeck's major work, the *Kommentar*. Unlike the impression given by the fact that both Strack's and Billerbeck's names appear on the title page, it is clear from the comments of Billerbeck in his introduction to volume 4 that the work is his alone. Joachim Jeremias also documents the fact that Strack, himself, saw only volume 1 and made no material changes in it. A relative unknown (except among the readers of *Nathanael*), Billerbeck became famous overnight as a result of the publication of the *Kommentar*, and was awarded two honorary doctorates, one from his former university in Greifswald, and the other from the University of Königsberg.

The sources available for the study of Billerbeck's life and work, (apart from his published materials) are few. There is the occasional encyclopedia article or

3 Interestingly enough, Strack had first suggested a reworking of the aggadic material along the lines of Weber! *Ibid.*, Jeremias, Col. 35; *TRE*, p. 641.

4 Note that in one of the first notices to appear on vol. 1, it was termed, "Hermann L. Strack's letztes Werk!" [Paul] Fiebig, Review of *Kommentar*, vol. 1, in *Saat auf Hoffnung* 60 (1923): 64.

5 *Kommentar*, vol. 4, pp. v-vi.


7 Jeremias, "Paul Billerbeck in memoriam," col. 33.
obituary together with a brief listing in one of the biographical dictionaries of his time, as well as the records of the pastoral conferences he attended, deposited today in the central archives of the German state churches (Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands and Evangelische Kirche der Union-Bereich Bundesrepublik Deutschland and Berlin-West) in Berlin. Apart from this, it is known that some of Billerbeck's translations of rabbinic material exist in manuscript form in private hands, although I was unable to gain access to these. Inquiries made to the C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung in Munich, the publishers of Billerbeck's Kommentar, established the fact that the entire correspondence between Billerbeck and his publisher, which had been preserved in their archives until World War II, when it was destroyed. Inquiries about the existence of any of Billerbeck's personal papers or records produced only negative results. No evidence of any living relatives could be discovered.8

As a Christian student of rabbinic literature, Billerbeck was taken seriously and given the highest respect in his own time, and although since his time evaluations of his work have been less than positive, his work has continued to be used by both Jewish and non-Jewish students of the origins of Christianity and of the New Testament. For these reasons alone, Billerbeck's work is worthy of a serious study, one designed to probe especially into the underlying motivations for his work, and to carefully analyze his competence with rabbinic texts. This work is an attempt to fill the need for such a study.

Prof. Dr. K. H. Rengstorf, Greifswald, 31 July 1984, Personal Files of Dr. Rengstorf and copy in files of Daniel J. Rettberg.

\(^9\)cf. Chapter III, "Paul Billerbeck Among His Colleagues: The Reception Accorded His Work."
CHAPTER II

PAUL BILLERBECK: HIS TIMES

To understand the life and work of an historical figure, one must be able in some fashion to see that figure in his own historical context. One must have a grasp of both the culture that produced him and of the ideas that influenced him both negatively and positively. Despite the danger of viewing the whole as merely the sum of its parts, a careful analysis of the whole requires a consideration of those parts. While the heart and core of the present study are chapters three and four, the body is more than its heart. Thus, before beginning my analysis of Paul Billerbeck's published work, I have attempted in the present chapter to depict the times that produced him, particularly in terms of how Jews and Christians of that time viewed and interacted with each other. More specifically, I have given special consideration to Jewish and Christian scholars of the time, and how each perceived the first-century origins of Christianity and its relationship to rabbinic Judaism. This phenomenon was most evident in the circle of Protestant pastors and scholars which gathered around Hermann L. Strack and of which Billerbeck was a prominent member. This circle will be examined in some detail through the various articles and notices published in Strack's journal, Nathanael, which
both helped to create the group and served as a disseminating vehicle for its views. The chapter closes with a description of Billerbeck's life and a brief overview of his work with rabbinic texts.

The period in which Billerbeck lived and worked -- the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century -- was one of new beginnings built on old foundations. As the period of the successful unification of Germany under Prussian rule, it was heir to a host of conflicts and difficulties, not the least of which was that of the role of the Jewish people in the new 'Reich.' The Jews had long occupied a unique position in Christian Europe. During the Middle Ages, they were not considered ordinary citizens of the lands in which they lived but rather as being under the direct protection and authority of the Holy Roman Emperor, and after the dissolution of the Empire as under that of the king or prince in whose territory they lived. The 'Jewish Question' therefore was a significant item on the agenda of the new empire, and in fact remained a topic of discussion throughout its existence. Everyone was concerned with the question of the Jews' proper place in the new empire. Opinions ranged from the Zionists and the small, racially anti-Semitic political parties who each for their own reasons felt that ultimately

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Jews did not belong in Germany, to the liberal Protestants and rationalists, who were quite willing to make a place for Jews in the 'new Germany' if only they would give up all traces of Judaism -- both ethnic and religious -- and become simply Germans.

German legislation of July 3, 1869, had removed all civil disabilities resulting from religious affiliation, but reality in the second 'Reich' -- in this regard, at least -- did not correspond to theory. The relationship of religion and national feeling was an important topic of discussion, and all legality aside, the issue of whether Jews should be permitted to serve in high-ranking posts of justice or education, and of whether and in what sense the state ought to be considered uniquely Christian remained hotly debated. Uriel Tal remarks that Bismarck himself referred openly to the essentially Christian nature of the state and to the inappropriateness of Jews serving in such positions. According to Tal, Bismarck is supposed to have said that "if a German were obliged to stand before a Jew who represented the sacred kingdom of Prussia, he would feel humiliated and degraded and unable to serve his fatherland with self-respect, and 'this feeling I share with the lower classes of our people.'" 3

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2 Ibid., p. 290.

3 Ibid., pp. 140-1; p. 141, note 44.
Thus an ambivalent position characterized the Jew of Billerbeck's Germany. Most German Jews of the time were 'liberal' or had to some extent been assimilated into the culture around them. The 'official line' for such Jews was that they were nationally German but religiously Jewish, or as the position was termed, "German citizens of the Mosaic persuasion." As such, they were mistrusted by almost everyone. Apart from the racial anti-Semites, who rejected them from the beginning on ideological grounds, both the conservative defenders of the concept of the 'Christian' state and the liberal nationalists mistrusted liberal Jews because they were viewed as traitors both to their own religion (since they had rejected traditional Judaism) and to their adoptive nation.

Tal makes (but does not develop) the interesting point that, "...this argument was directed not against Orthodox Judaism or Zionist nationalism" -- apparently, that kind of consistency the German conservatives could respect, if not appreciate and understand. The problem with the Liberal Jews in the eyes of the conservatives was that "by abandoning their traditional religion the Liberal Jews in fact denied the very principle on which not only Judaism but the Christian state as well was based, that is, the religious

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4 Ibid., p. 293.

5 Ibid.
principle as the highest authority of law and social order that transcended all rational and historical criteria." 6

On the national question, non-Zionist Jews were regarded by conservative Germans as an "unreliable element," because they were seen as having denied their "national and historical origin" and thus "the principle of national allegiance." 7

The position of the Liberal Protestants with respect to Liberal Jews was more complex. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the two had shared a common vision of the future. They had both emphasized the practical and ethical aspects of religion, as opposed to the dogmatic. They both viewed human nature in a positive light, and made reason the criterion for judging faith and knowledge, and began with the idea that the individual and society should be able to conduct their own educational affairs without outside influence. Liberal Protestants, however, became disillusioned by the apparent inability of their philosophy to achieve the goals they had set for it. The result was a desire to return to the teaching of the Gospels and to enforce their understanding of religion through state-controlled education. They were willing to make room for Jews, provided they became thoroughly 'German' and 'Christian.'

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.
What the Liberal Protestants failed to note was that German Liberal Jews were experiencing the same disappointment with the commonly held philosophy, and were responding to this disappointment by attempting to strengthen their own communal and educational institutions. "That the German Jews decided to remain Jews and that the liberals among them adhered to their ancestral faith was a bitter disappointment to the Liberal Protestants and interpreted by them as a deep betrayal by their closest friends in Germany."  

The German Jews of Billerbeck's times thus found themselves in a dilemma partially of their own making. Desiring both to live as active participants in the modern western society of their day, and to maintain on some level their own identity as Jews, they ended by satisfying no one. Both Liberal Jews and Liberal Protestants began delving more deeply into their own traditional religious sources, and re-evaluating their own ways of looking at themselves and others. A desire on the part of Protestant Liberals to return to the Gospels as the source of Christianity led them to begin to take traditional Christian ways of interpreting history more seriously. They compared the preaching of Jesus in the Gospels with that of the classical Hebrew prophets, and drew the conclusion that Christianity, and not Judaism, was the true heir of the prophets, and that rabbinic religion was a

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8 Ibid., pp. 146 and 296ff.
corruption of the earlier, purer teaching. The Liberal Jews responded with the view that their faith was indeed the legitimate heir to the prophetic message, and that it was so precisely through the mediation of the Jewish teachers after the time of Ezra -- including Jesus, and the "circle of pharisees" to which he belonged.⁹

This may seem like a simple retrenchment along earlier lines, -- and it was partly this -- but it was also something more as well. The nineteenth century had brought a new emphasis upon the 'historical,' and this was used effectively to express the traditional rift between Jews and Christians in new and different terms. Earlier Christian scholars had busied themselves with the Bible, and some with rabbinic sources as well, but primarily for devotional or polemical ends. Now there emerged an attempt to write the history of the centuries between Ezra and the destruction of the Temple, and to write it in such a way that Christianity would be vindicated as possessing the true and correct understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, and of the events preceding, contemporaneous with, and resulting from the birth of the church.¹⁰ Jewish scholars responded in kind, developing an understanding of Jesus and his teaching and of first-century

⁹Ibid., p. 298.

¹⁰George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," HTR 14 (July 1921): 221.
Judaism that was designed to justify their separate existence from the church.\(^{11}\)

This 'historicizing' effort must not be underestimated. Every modern Jewish historian is in some fashion indebted to the pioneer work of the nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars of the "Wissenschaft des Judentums"; each of those scholars, moreover, has his own direct descendants on the contemporary scholarly scene in terms of the interpretation of the person and work of Jesus.\(^{12}\) At the same time, on the Christian side the new 'historical' emphasis of nineteenth-century scholarship produced no less than three standard source works for the understanding of first-century Judaism, two of which are still in use among contemporary scholars.

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\(^{11}\) Tal, p. 298, and cf. also the work of Abraham Geiger, especially his Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der inneren Entwicklung des Judentums, 2nd ed. with and Introduction by Paul Kahle and supplementary material and index by Nahum Czortkowski (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Madda, 1928), and his "Sadduzaer und Pharisäer," Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben 2 (1862): 11-54.

\(^{12}\) Cf. for example Geiger "Sadduzaer und Pharisäer," Ibid., and his twentieth-century followers Asher Finkel and David Flusser in their respective works: Finkel, The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth: A Study of their Background, their Halachic and Midrashic Teachings, the Similarities and Differences, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums, no. 4 (Leiden and Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1964); Flusser, Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus: 1 Teil Das Wesen der Gleichnisse, Judaica et Christiana, 4 (Bern, Frankfurt am Main and Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1981).
They are Ferdinand Weber's *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie* (variously titled *Die Lehren des Talmuds* and *Die Theologie des Judentums* in later printings), Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, and Wilhelm Bousset's *Die Religion des Judentums*. All three of these works have been thoroughly analyzed in terms of their use of rabbinic sources, and the kind of Judaism they describe. The most devastating criticism G. F. Moore makes of these works is that they appear to take over the material of earlier Christian scholars of rabbinic sources (collected for polemical purposes) and then use it to draw an historical picture of first-century Judaism.

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15 Moore: 221.
Moore and Israel Abrahams, unlike E. P. Sanders, do have positive things to say about Schürer at least, although they have nothing good to say about his section, "Das Leben unter dem Gesetz," which purports to be a description of first century Jewish piety yet develops its point in a manner designed to vindicate Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees. 16

Ferdinand Weber is of special interest to this study since he, like H. L. Strack, was a student of Franz Delitzsch and later one of the first teachers at Delitzsch's training institute for missionaries to the Jews in Leipzig. 17 His System (cf., n. 13, above) was also highly favored by Strack's circle of pastors and scholars, as is demonstrated by the continued reference to it in the topics of discussion addressed at the meetings of his Institutum Judaicum. 18 G. F. Moore criticizes Weber specifically for regarding his own circle's interpretation of Christianity as the definitive exposition of the faith and for transmuting rabbinic Judaism

16 And that in the face of better knowledge! cf. here that: Moore: 239-40, and Abrahams: 628-9, both criticize Schürer for leaving this section of his work totally unrevised in the face of thorough criticism.


along the same lines; i.e., into a theological system. The same charge could justifiably be leveled against the Delitzsch-Strack School in general.

The foregoing illustrates a significant fact about the scholarly world of Billerbeck's day: he was not the only Christian student of rabbinic literature in late nineteenth-century Germany; there were in fact more than a few. Not all, of course, were masters of the material. Not all were even competent to work seriously with it. Some even appear to have depended primarily on the inherited body of rabbinic quotation and traditional Christian interpretation that had been passed down from earlier masters. But, regardless of the level of competence evinced, it is important to note that some knowledge of rabbinic sources and rabbinic Judaism was recognized among non-Jewish German scholars as standard equipment for the study of the New Testament and of first-century history. This was not necessarily true of all scholars of the period, nor did all place the same emphasis

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20 Cf. here for example the work of the 13th Century Dominican friar, Raymundus Martini, together with the adaptation of material from Jewish mystical writings to Christian tradition by Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin and the ongoing use of this material by later Christian writers. Moore: 202-11, 21-2.
upon the use of rabbinic sources, but it is a point worth noting.\footnote{21}

During the seventeenth-and much of the eighteenth-centuries competence in Hebrew and Rabbinics was not uncommon among Christian scholars, but for about a century thereafter rabbinic learning fell out of fashion. It was due largely to the influence and efforts of Franz Delitzsch, and of his student, Hermann L. Strack, that there came about a change in attitude on the part of many, if not a return to the same level of knowledge. Delitzsch, himself, (although not Jewish by either descent or choice) became recognized as one of the founders of the "Wissenschaft des Judentums," and his first published work dealt with post-Biblical Hebrew poetry.\footnote{22}

\footnote{21}Cf. here in Chapter III, "Paul Billerbeck Among His Colleagues: The Reception Accorded His Work."


Another proof of the high level of Delitzsch's scholarship is his joint editing and publishing with M. Stein- schneider, the famous nineteenth century Jewish scholar, of what Dr. Leon Nemoy of the Dropsie College faculty informs me
Delitzsch's interest in the Bible and in rabbinic literature began early in life, and seems only to have been nurtured by his involvement in the revival of traditional Christian belief in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, the combination of scholar and traditional German Protestant believer that Delitzsch personified was typical of the entire group of scholars and theologians whose major centers were in Leipzig (Delitzsch) and later in Berlin (Strack). We will later see these two outlooks coinciding in Billerbeck as well.

It may be of interest to note here, as well, that Delitzsch was a part of a larger movement which was a revival of traditional Christian belief in Germany in reaction to the earlier rationalism of the Enlightenment. This rationalism had come closer to a rejection of the Hebrew Bible in its formulation of Christian teaching. We thus find that it was the conservatives among nineteenth-century German theologians who were interested in rabbinic literature and Hebraic

is a very difficult Qaraite manuscript, the א ‎ נ ר י י י י of Aaron ben Elijah of Nikomedia. Delitzsch writes in the foreword to the work that he discovered it while cataloging the Semitic manuscripts in the municipal library of the city of Leipzig. It is clear from his remarks that he was quite familiar with Qaraite texts, and that he and Steinschneider were equal partners in the preparation of the manuscript for publication. Franz Delitzsch, Foreword to א ‎ נ ר י י י י [Ez Haim], Ahron ben Elia's aus Nikomedien des Karäers System der Religions-philosophie...nebst einem dazu gehörigen einleiten- den Tractat des Karäers Kaleb Abba Apendopolo...ed. M. Steinschneider and Franz Delitzsch, Anekdota zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Scholastik unter Juden und Moslemen, ed. Franz Delitzsch (Leipzig: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1841).
thought. The Hebrew Scripture was as full and legitimate a part of Divine Revelation to this group as the New Testament, and the traditional Christian Gospel as much a part of one as of the other. Thus, Hebraic scholarship in close relation to evangelizing of Jews constituted a natural outgrowth of this revival. 23

Delitzsch is the example par excellence of such a theologian. In Delitzsch, the scholar and the believer combined in his efforts on behalf of Jewish learning. He read his first non-Biblical Hebrew text with the help of a Christian missionary (rather than seeking purely academic instruction) and this combination of piety and scholarship remained a constant throughout his life. 24 As a professor in Leipzig, he began regularly meeting with like-minded students and colleagues to foster interest in and concern for Christian mission to Jewish people, together with ongoing study of rabbinic Hebrew, Jewish texts, and Jewish history. This

23 Emil G. Kraeling, The Old Testament Since The Reformation (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 59-88. Note also that Delitzsch dedicated his first scholarly publication to Pastor Martin Stefan of the Dresden Bohemian congregation, the leader of a traditional Lutheran movement that later, following emigration to the United States, was active in the development of strict Lutheranism in this country. (Cf. the dedication page of Delitzsch's work mentioned in note #22 above.)

24 Ibid., "Franz Delitzsch's Selbstbiographie ...": 134.
study group came to be known as the "Institutum Judaicum," after the similar efforts of Johann Heinrich Callenberg in Halle at the beginning of the eighteenth-century. Through another of Delitzsch's students, Wilhelm Faber, this concept was transplanted to other German universities as well. Faber also founded a sort of "support group" composed of former members of the various circles.25

Delitzsch founded a formal 'seminary' or training institute for Christian missionaries as well, which was also called Institutum Judaicum, and which more fully combined scholarly activity with concern for Christian witness. The first teacher at the institute was the previously mentioned Ferdinand Weber, although he did not hold the position long. The school initially became famous under the spiritual leadership of Delitzsch with Jechiel Lichtenstein, a converted Hassidic rebbe who attempted a 'marriage' of Christian theology and Jewish mysticism, and J. J. Kahan, a non-Christian Jewish scholar, as teachers.26 Later Gustaf Dalman


26 Ibid., Geschichte der evang. Judenmission, pp. 172-3; and Hermann L. Strack, "Das Kandidatenseminar...": 123-5.
and Paul Fiebig, famous German Protestant students of Bible and rabbinics and leading members of the Delitzsch-Strack circle, were connected with the institute as well. Most of the other institutes, with the exception of the one in Berlin under Strack, eventually died out.

Delitzsch is famous for his translation of the New Testament into Hebrew, which is still in print today.\(^{27}\) Both institutes (Leipzig and Berlin) also produced many books and studies, some of which show very careful rabbinic scholarship, like Strack's *Jesus, die Haeretiker und die Christen*, a critical edition with translation and commentary of the rabbinic texts dealing with heterodox movements in Judaism, including those traditionally held to refer to Jesus and Christianity.\(^{28}\) Other such studies worth mentioning are Heinrich Laible's work examining the so-called 'Jesus' passages in rabbinic literature, Erich Bischoff's study of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in the light of rabbinic tradition and Dalman's two studies of rabbinic language and


phraseology in the Gospels. Also prominent in this wider circle was another student of Delitzsch, August Wuensche, who worked in collaboration with the Jewish scholar, J. Winter, and produced the first complete German translations of rabbinic texts, as well as a one volume collection of rabbinic 'parallels' to the Gospels published years before Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch.*

The views of this circle were not so monolithic as they at first appear. Wuensche, for instance, is supposed to have changed his position on the missionary issue later in life.

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30 August Wuensche, *Neue Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Evangelien aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht's Verlag, 1878).

Note also the seeming paradox of Lichtenstein and Kahan working together on the faculty of an institute ostensibly dedicated to missionary efforts. Clearly this was a complex and varied circle! Just as clearly, the term 'mission' can mean different things to different people. It would therefore seem of value to examine in more detail the individual views of various members of the Delitzsch-Strack circle with specific reference to Jews and Judaism, both in theological and political terms, as a means of better understanding not only the times, but also the milieu in which Billerbeck the scholar grew and developed. We will begin with Delitzsch and Strack themselves, as the acknowledged spiritual leaders of the movement. Their view -- for they were in agreement -- constituted the unifying force and the majority opinion of the movement, and the views of others, either more favorable or more adverse to Judaism, are defined in comparison with this majority view.

Delitzsch's view of Judaism had two aspects: it was positive and devoid of racial anti-Semitism, yet it was also strongly and traditionally Christian. His desire to share the Christian message with Jews grew out of his love for them, rather than out of a desire to suppress them or remove their influence from society. These two points of view in
Delitzsch were not contradictory, nor were they even complementary. The second in fact evolved out of the first! (This will be made clear later in a detailed examination of Strack's piece, "Die Pflichten des Christen gegen die Juden," published in Strack's journal, Nathanael (30(1914)).

Delitzsch was above all strongly opposed to any form of racial anti-Semitism. This is clear enough from the references to his several publications against anti-Semitism listed by Strack in his extensive article on the subject. Delitzsch himself took his stand unequivocally in a statement

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32 Nathanael, founded by Strack in 1885 and edited by him independently throughout most of its existence, was first published under the aegis of the "Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Juden." But after only five issues were produced, there was a major disagreement on missionary method between Strack (who was serving on the society's governing committee at the time), and the rest of the committee, and he submitted his resignation. The separation seems to have been peaceful, however, as he (with their understanding) continued to edit and produce Nathanael as an independent journal with written contributions from the society from time to time. Later, when the society began producing a journal of its own, Der Messiasbote, the second journal was intentionally directed to a lay audience (Nathanael was intended primarily for pastors and theologians) so as to compliment, and not to conflict with the work of the older journal. Hermann L. Strack, "Gott helfe weiter!" Nathanael 1 (1885): 1-3; Idem, "An die Leser des Nathanael," Nathanael 1 (1885): 161; "Geleitwort," Der Messiasbote: Ein Nachrichtenblatt der Berliner Judenmission 1 (n.d.), 1-9.

made towards the end of his life: "Stärkeren Glauben fordert die Hoffnung, dass der in Fleisch und Blut der Christenheit tief gewurzelte unchristliche Judenhass ausgerottet werden wird."34 His solution to the 'Jewish problem' was also clear, however. He firmly believed that conversion to Christianity was the only effective way for the Jewish people to become a real part of the European society around them. He also believed that this would require them to make a clean break with their religious past.

During Delitzsch's lifetime an indigenous movement arose among Jews in Russia which took various forms, but the center of which was belief in Jesus as Messiah. Delitzsch, as might be expected, was highly interested in this phenomenon and maintained contact with its leaders, among whom was a Jew from Odessa named Joseph Rabinowitsch, whose autobiographical sketch together with a selection of his sermons Delitzsch published in his Institutum Judaicum series.35 In his introduction to this publication Delitzsch described the theological content of these sermons in some detail, and with warm approval. This theology was based on an understanding


of Pentateuchal origins similar to that which was becoming popular at the time in Germany as a result of the work of Julius Wellhausen, although Delitzsch went out of his way to state that to the best of his knowledge Rabinowitsch was totally unaware of these developments.\textsuperscript{36}

Rabinowitsch's theology makes a distinction between 'priestly' and 'prophetic' trends in the Pentateuch, connecting the former with the 'Law' as such, and arguing that it found its logical end in the Pharisees of Jesus' day and in rabbinic tradition, while he sees the logical end of the 'prophetic' trend in Jesus. Delitzsch describes the Talmud according to Rabinowitsch as, "die eigentliche Quelle alles Unglücks seines Volkes bis auf den heutigen Tag," to which Delitzsch adds, "und zwar mit Recht," because the Talmud, he says, removes the distinction between Divine revelation and rabbinic tradition, and declares the Law, "in dieser mosaisch-rabbinischen Mischgestalt," as eternally binding, thereby setting up the national exclusivity of the Jewish people in contradiction to the new age inaugurated by Jesus, who is the goal and end of the Law ("Ziel und Ende des Gesetzes").\textsuperscript{37}

If there is any doubt as to what is meant by, "Ziel und Ende des Gesetzes," Delitzsch makes himself clear when he praises Rabinowitsch's criticism of the strict keeping of the

\textsuperscript{36} Franz Delitzsch, Foreword to \textit{Neue Dokumente...}, p. vii.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. viii.
Sabbath ("Von diesem Standpunkt aus bekämpft er...auch die ceremonialgesetzliche pharisäisch peinliche (my italics) Feier des Sabbats.").

He criticizes him on only one point, that he wants to hold to the Sabbath as the day of worship for Jewish Christians, and to circumcision as a national distinguishing mark ("nationales Abzeichen"). Delitzsch remarks, "Wir hoffen uns nicht zu täuschen, wenn wir annehmen, dass unser Freund bei seiner wesentlich paulinischen Richtung schliesslich auch in betreff des Sabbat und der Beschneidung die paulinischen Consequenzen ziehen wird." 39

It is also clear, however, that it was not Delitzsch's intent that the Jews should disappear as a people. He bases this on the understanding that Christianity was not meant to obliterate national distinctions, and he clearly says that in a secular or national sense the Jewish people have the same right to consider themselves a distinct people as any other nation. His opinion is rather that after Jesus, the Jewish nation has no more preeminence over the other nations. "Die nationale Besonderheit Israels soll erhalten werden und wird auch ohne Beschneidung und mit Sonntag statt Sabbats erhalten bleiben; denn das Christentum wirkt nicht verwischend auf die Volkstümer, und Israel hat auch nachdem die alte göttliche

38 Ibid., p. ix.

39 Ibid.
Bevorzugung und Bevorrechtung sich ausgelebt hat volles Recht, sich als Volk zu behaupten."

Delitzsch's view is summed up more succinctly in a report of the founding assembly of the Verein von Freunden und früheren Mitgliedern der Instituta Judaica published in Nathanael (1(1885)) as, "Das Volk Israel muss als Nation ein Volk christgläubiger Juden werden; denn das Blut Christi und seine Fürbitte können nicht vergeblich sein. Die beispiellose Erhaltung der Selbständigkeit Israels fordert eine Zukunft des Heils. Das ist ein Postulant der Geschichte; das ist die einzige Lösung des Rätsels, das der Sozialpolitik zu schwer ist."

Strack took a different approach to the matter and with different emphases, but arrived at the same conclusion. Throughout his career he placed a greater stress on opposing racial anti-Semitism than on evangelism, but he did emphasize both. His approach as outlined in, "Die Pflichten des Christen gegen die Juden," (cf. above), is just what the title implies. With the exception of a brief introductory paragraph, this essay is an extremely irenic listing of what

40Ibid.


Christians owe (my italics) Jews in their day-to-day contacts with them! The first of these duties he lists is self-respect (Selbstachtung), both as (German) citizens and as Christians. By this he means first the need to recognize and do one's duty as a citizen, thereby setting an example for others. He comments that it is often those non-Jewish citizens who do least in the public realm who complain most loudly that there are too many Jews in positions of power! He also states that Christians should be ready to defend their own beliefs and institutions from criticism in a positive and forthright way.

Secondly, he says, non-Jews should always show personal respect for Jewish people. He writes, "Es ist ungehörig bei Erwähnung eines Verbrechens oder Vergehens den Missetäter als 'jüdischer Religion' zu bezeichnen, wenn nicht regelmässig auch, 'evangelischer Religion', 'römisch-katholischer' oder dergl. hinzugefügt wird." 43 He also castigates the making of uncomplimentary personal references with racial overtones, and quotes the story (T.B. Ber. 10a) of Berurya, the wife of Rabbi Meir, correcting her husband when she notices him praying against evil men who trouble him, counseling that he should avoid sinning against them in return (Sin begets sin!). He argues also that it is the duty of the non-Jew to defend the Jewish religion against slanderous attacks,

43Ibid.: 103.
referring to his own book against the blood libel as an example. He also argues that justice requires the non-Jew to protest against pogroms and persecutions of Jews.

The last duty he mentions is that of love towards Jewish people. Here he emphasizes first the importance of the individual Christian showing personal concern also for the Jewish needy. Here he also includes missionary activity. "Endlich und das ist das Höchste-wir sollen den Juden christliche Nachstenliebe [Strack's italics] betätigen, indem wir ihnen das Höchste und Beste darbieten, was wir haben: den Glauben an Christum Jesum." What this means to him is simply that the individual Christian should conduct himself among his Jewish friends and acquaintances exactly as one would expect a person of conviction and faith to do, namely, to be a friend to others by showing personal concern for their needs, to be willing to discuss and recommend his own faith to others, to be willing to suggest appropriate literature to those interested, to point out as examples those converts who have shown themselves to be great and pious people, etc., and finally to give support to the clergy, especially those active in mission work, and to show concern for serious inquirers and proselytes.

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44 Ibid.


46 Ibid.: 104-5.
This may have been the majority view, but that is not to say that the Delitzsch-Strack circle was not without its dissenters in one direction or another. There were those who moved closer to Judaism, and away from the strictly missionary line (as in the case of Wuensche, mentioned above), or from the strictly 'substitutionary' theology. This trend showed itself in particular in the controversy that arose when some in the Leipzig school began moving in the direction of a Jewish Christianity that would still take the Torah seriously as representing a positive life style for the post-conversion Jew. Gustaf Dalman was so concerned about this trend that he severed his ties with the Leipzig training school for a time.47

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47 The catalyst of this controversy seems to have been a Jew of East European extraction named Chaim Yedidya (or Zeev) Pollak (later also Christian Theophilus Lucky), who via an independent reading of the New Testament came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He differed from other converts, however, in that he also continued to affirm and practice religious Judaism. He was highly critical of professional missionaries, and frustrated those who befriended him by attempting to convince their prospects (usually very assimilated Jews enamored of German culture) to return to religious Judaism. He published several years of a journal written in a highly literary Hebrew style called עירוב נפשות (for a while with the support of the "Berliner Gesellschaft") in which he developed his views in an effort to reestablish first-century Jewish-Christianity. He was successful in influencing some of those involved in the Leipzig Institutum Judaicum to change their approach to Jewish people, and to allow and encourage the type of Jewish-Christianity that he espoused. Dalman followed the majority of the Delitzsch-Strack circle in holding to the traditional "substitutionary" theology, and disassociated himself from the Leipzig group as this trend persisted. The following bibliography, which in no way claims to be complete, will be useful to those wanting further information on this controversy. R. Bieling, Die Juden vornehmlich: Ein geschichtlicher Überblick über die Arbeit der Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums
On the other hand, there were those who moved further away from Judaism, and in the writings of these members of the circle statements with definite anti-Semitic overtones appear from time to time as well. These kinds of attitudes were manifested particularly in the homiletic and more pastoral material produced by the group. In a paper delivered before a pastoral conference on May 26, 1880, J. de le Roi, who later became one of the editors of Nathanael, and who also wrote a history of the European Protestant missionary

efforts among Jews, clearly displayed attitudes that were not merely religiously anti-Jewish, but which verged on the politically anti-Semitic. He openly criticized the Jewish people for having made no efforts among the nations to bring them religious truth, and for having consistently avoided manual labor. He also charged that the Jewish culture in the diaspora has a history of total corruption, and that the only desire of the Jew had been to plunder or to act as a parasite on the host nation. He explicitly stated that for these reasons the nations of Europe and Russia were right in withholding full rights from the Jews in their midst. It is within the context of this varied group that we must attempt to understand Paul Billerbeck and his work.

48 Cf. above note #24.

49 J. de le Roi, Israel sonst, jetzt, und einst (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Evangelischen Buch- und Tractat-Gesellschaft, 1880).
CHAPTER III

PAUL BILLERBECK AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES:
THE RECEPTION ACCORDED HIS WORK

Two assumptions underlie the work of Paul Billerbeck. The first is that there are definite and definable points of contact between rabbinic texts and the New Testament, between Judaism and Christianity as they appear in and evolve through their various classical texts. The second is that numerous specific points of comparison between rabbinic texts and the New Testament can be found, points of comparison that illuminate individual New Testament texts and concepts. The first principle does not appear to be seriously questioned among those who have dealt with Billerbeck's work; the second, however is much debated, and the various reactions to Billerbeck's scholarship reflect varying presuppositions and varying schools of thought, both in Billerbeck's own generation and since his time.

In this chapter, I examine two different groups of scholars. The first of these groups consists of Billerbeck's own contemporaries, specifically those of his contemporaries who wrote and published reviews of his Kommentar. There are only one or two brief references to Billerbeck's score of previously published articles in this literature.¹ The second group is made up almost exclusively of scholars who have lived and worked since his time, some currently active.

¹Note for example Gerhard Kittel, DLZ, (n.s.) 15, July 19, 1924, col. 1225.
They are those scholars who have critiqued the Kommentar in other than book review format. They merit separate consideration from those who published reviews, since their comments are for the most part extensive, since as a group they are far more negative towards Billerbeck's work than the reviewers of his own generation, and since -- unlike the reviewers -- they dwell exclusively on questions of method and underlying presuppositions whereas the reviewers are concerned also with technical matters such as accuracy of translation and format of presentation.

The reviews of the Kommentar fall into several different categories which reflect various approaches or schools of thought in the study of the New Testament. The first school is that which I have named the "Delitzsch-Strack circle." For obvious reasons, the reviews by scholars in this group were generally favorable towards Billerbeck. In this category I include the reviews of Heinrich Laible, Paul Fiebig, and Gustaf Dalman, together with some brief but important comments by George Foot Moore. The second school is the 'hellenistic' school, represented by Walter Bauer, and by E. Jacquier and D. B. Botte. This approach sees the hellenistic world and the extant hellenistic and classical literature as being the major sources for interpreting the New Testament writings. The 'hellenistic' school is also concerned with the historical relationship of religious literatures, and with the history of Judaism and Christianity as they relate to their hellenistic and Roman environment in the first century.
It sees the rabbinic material as being of some importance in terms of individual issues or general background, but tends to be highly suspicious of using it to interpret specific passages because of the comparative lateness of the rabbinic compilations.

Another approach is that of the 'theological,' or 'traditional Christian' school. I distinguish these reviews from those in the first category since they are all by Roman Catholic scholars, and since the issues addressed most in their reviews are the very same issues addressed by those I categorize as later critics of Billerbeck, writing in other than book review format. These scholars are most interested in Billerbeck's theological opinions, in how he formulates them in specific New Testament terms and in how he uses these terms to assess his rabbinic material. Unlike the later critics, these scholars are in thorough agreement with Billerbeck's theology. They disagree with Billerbeck only when they encounter apparent anti-Catholicism in his work.

There are also three reviews that stand in a class by themselves: those by J. Krengel, J. Lebreton, and J. Bon-sirven. They do not appear to represent any particular school of thought, but are careful and objective analyses of Billerbeck's scholarship. Krengel emphasizes primarily Billerbeck's work as a translator and student of rabbinic texts, and his reviews are a close grammatical and textual analysis of selected pages from the first two volumes of the Kommentar. He also addresses the question of Billerbeck's
overall knowledge of rabbinic literature and thought. The reviews by Lebreton and by Bonsirven are less technical than those of Krengel, but nonetheless are independent critiques in their own right. In addition to the above described review literature, there are also several short notices which are significant because they help to fill in the larger picture of the reception given the Kommentar by Billerbeck's contemporaries.

All of the reviewers, regardless of their differences in emphasis and opinion touch on three points -- the Kommentar's nature, i.e., what it is and what it is intended to be; its translation and presentation of material; and its theological presuppositions. George Foot Moore in his survey "Recent Books on Judaism," published in the Harvard Theological Review, in noting all three of these points, provides almost a summary or an outline for the organization of the various criticisms and comments on the Kommentar.

He notes first the totally inadequate nature of all previous attempts in the direction of the Kommentar, and comments on, "the editors, i.e., Strack and Billerbeck having rightly brought together in the first volume all that is relevant to the common matter of the Synoptic Gospels."² More importantly, he notes the (in his opinion) fine quality of the translation, "which is as literal as possible, and on which the reader who is unable to confront the translation

²George Foot Moore, HTR, 16 (1923): 105.
with the original may confidently rely."\(^3\) In doing so, he notes also the peculiar difficulty involved in translating rabbinic texts, "because the midrashic interpretation of Biblical texts often turns on peculiarities of expression or on a different pronunciation or combination of Hebrew words, which cannot be made apparent in another language..."\(^4\) When such problems arise in the *Kommentar*, Moore notes, that "the hermeneutical procedure is generally explained by the translator."\(^5\)

Of Billerbeck's overall competence in rabbinics, Moore makes a comment that sums up the view of the Delitzsch-Strack school, and which the reader is encouraged to bear in mind as the discussion proceeds to the 'second generation' of Billerbeck critics. "A methodical study of even this one volume will yield a knowledge of the normative Judaism in that period which has been wholly inaccessible to most Christian scholars; and even those who have read most extensively in this vast and dispersed literature will find here the fruits of a lifelong occupation with it, assembled and organized."\(^6\) As to Billerbeck's interpretations, Moore

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 106.

\(^4\)Ibid.

\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Ibid.
simply notes that the Kommentar not only presents an ample and classified anthology of the sources, but also discusses their bearing on the interpretation of the New Testament and on the problems of the beginnings of Christianity.\(^7\)

Using Moore's comments as a guide, let us now examine the members of the Delitzsch-Strack circle in terms of how they reacted to the publication of Billerbeck's work. First among these in terms of thoroughness and objectivity is Heinrich Laible, whose reviews appeared consecutively over a number of years in the Theologisches Literaturblatt.\(^8\) Like Moore, he notes the Kommentar's exhaustiveness, which he illustrates by pointing out that where Lightfoot's comments on a given verse (Matt. 10:5) run to only one and one-half pages, Billerbeck's quotes and comments on the same verse take up twenty-two pages. He notes also Billerbeck's wide use of apocryphal material, as well as his concern for historical perspective (seen in his careful dating of passages according to the rabbinic authorities cited). As to Billerbeck's competence as a translator, Laible notes his evident caution and desire for clarity in adding words and phrases from the texts themselves in the original where the rendering may be doubtful.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 107.


\(^9\) Ibid., 44:6, March 16, 1923, col. 84.
Laible shows himself to be a worthy critic of the Kommentar, well schooled in the rabbinic texts. Having pointed out the Kommentar's strengths -- calling it in fact "eine Zierde deutscher Wissenschaft" -- he does not hesitate to point out those areas where he feels the Kommentar is not quite complete, or even weak. For example, while demonstrating that Billerbeck has produced a work on the whole more thorough than that of Lightfoot, Laible can still criticize him for having neglected important topographical material found in Lightfoot. He also complains that while Billerbeck often quotes a word or phrase from the Hebrew or Aramaic text before him, in only one case does he quote an entire document.

Laible openly criticizes Billerbeck for what he considers errors in translation. Laible insists, for instance, on the translation "master" rather than "teacher" for the term "rabbi." More important than this, he notes the questionable translation, "...Vielleicht haben sich jene Irrenden durch jene Worte (die du zu ihnen gesprochen hast) zur Umkehr bewegen lassen," to a line in the Tos. Hullin 2.24 version of the story of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos' being arrested for "Minuth" (אברר תשכיבון על כלות סענים וברכים).

Laible here follows the more probable rendering of

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10 Ibid., 84.
11 Ibid.
J. J. Kahan, "Ist es möglich, dass diese (Gelehrten-) Kreise in die Irre gehen in bezug auf diese Dinge?" 12

Another interesting correction of Laible's is his disagreement with a rendering of Billerbeck's which even more than the above involved not just simple translation or the study of textual variants, but interpretation as well. It involves the one rabbinic passage (Tos. Kelim B.Q. 1.6) quoted by Billerbeck as an interpretive parallel to Jesus' in Matt. 26:25 (or 26:14 as Billerbeck has it). Billerbeck says it should be translated, "du sagst es," meaning, "wie du sagst, so ist es." Laible disagrees with this, however, quoting the Tosefta commentary מְרָאִים (attributed to the "Vilna Gaon"), together with a short article on the subject by Daniel Chwolson. Chwolson says the passage should be understood in the opposite way, i.e., "You say so, (but it isn't true!)." 13

In another case, noting that Billerbeck has provided only partial information, Laible himself quotes the missing passages. In reference to the menorah which stood in the temple, Billerbeck states the following in a note, "Der Leuchter stand auf der sudlichen Seite des Heiligen (dem

12 Ibid., col. 85.

Eintretenden also zur Linken) und zwar, dass die Lampen von Osten nach Westen aufeinander folgten. Die "östlichste Lampe wurde als erste gezählt Men. 86b." Laible points out that this is only one side of a disagreement on the matter. Quoting Rashi in full on B.T. Men. 86b and on B.T. Yoma 39a (the reference in the review is incorrectly given as B.T. Yoma 39b), Laible states that the menorah stood in such a way that the lights were ranged not from the east to west, but from north to south, with the 'western' lamp -- so called because its wick leaned toward the west -- at the center, and the wicks of the other lamps leaning towards the center--most one. 15

Laible commends Billerbeck's knowledge of the scholarly literature in the field, citing Billerbeck's disagreement with the Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, on the interpretation of the term, "Lord," as applied to Jesus. 16 On the issue of sensitivity (or lack thereof) to the rabbinic mind, however, Laible twice notes Billerbeck's consistent use of the term "Jahve" in translating the tetragrammaton in texts contrary to the usual use of circumlocution by the rabbis. Here he comments most forcefully, "Die durch den Kommentar gehende Wiedergabe des Gettesnamens 'י' (יְהֹוָֹה)"

14 Ibid., p. 1,045, 3 in body of text.
15 Laible, 44:6, March 16, 1923, col. 86.
16 Ibid.
mit 'Jahve' in rabbinischen Texten (!) ist ein Verstoss gegen den rabbinischen Geist."¹⁷ [The italics and exclamation mark are Laible's.]

Laible also notes a certain lack of historical sensitivity on the part of Billerbeck, criticizing him for interpreting the rabbinic term קָבָר קֶדֶם as referring to the קָבָר of the Hebrew Bible. Laible regards the former rather as the Hebrew equivalent of the term γαστάρ in the New Testament. Laible quotes Wilhelm Bacher (Terminologie, I 92-93) to the effect that Billerbeck's usage of the term was not known before the Amoraic period.

These are examples of the kinds of criticisms Laible makes of Billerbeck as well as of the thoroughness of his analysis. Nonetheless, as was stated above, all criticisms notwithstanding, his praise of Billerbeck's scholarship is high and his recommendation of the Kommentar without reservation. This is especially evident in his last comment on the third volume, where he disagrees with Billerbeck on the number of curtains (one or two) that hung before the "Most Holy Place" of the Temple. He says simply, "Die Einschaltung meines Aufsatzes über die Frage, ob ein oder zwei Vorhänge vor dem Allerheiligsten, auf S. 733, womit ich des Verf.'s Ausführungen im ersten Band S. 1044 zu berichtigen versuchte, gewährt den Lesern die Möglichkeit

¹⁷Laible, 47:22, October 22, 1926, col. 340.
zwei einander entgegengesetzte Beweisführungen kennen zu
lernen und zu prüfen." 18

Paul Fiebig is the second scholar whose reviews I have
included in the first group of Billerbeck's critics. He is
responsible for two sets of reviews of the Kommentar pub-
lished in the Orientalistische Literaturzeitung, 19 and in
Jeschurun, 20 respectively, and for a shorter review of
volume 1, which appeared in the Literarisches Zentralblatt
für Deutschland. 21 His response 22 to W. Windfuhr's short
discussions of the Kommentar in the Theologische Blätter is
also noteworthy here. Fiebig's main concern, stated re-
peatedly in each of these publications, is that the Kommentar
not be viewed as the final end of all rabbinic research in
connection with the New Testament. He seems at pain to prove

18 Ibid., col. 341.

19 Paul Fiebig, OLZ, 26:7, July, 1923, cols. 329-331;
181-183.

20 Idem, Jeschurun, 10, 1924:1/2, pp. 93-95; 11:9/10,
1925, pp. 471-473.

21 Idem, Literarisches Zentralblatt für Deutschland,
74:41/44, November 15, 1923, cols. 593-595.

22 Idem, Theologische Blätter (Edition B), 3:6, June,
1924, cols. 91-92. The Windfuhr reviews (see Bibliography)
are more short notices than they are reviews and are more
important, in my opinion, for the reaction they evoke in
Fiebig then they are for anything they might contribute to
this discussion.
this, apparently in anticipation of the danger of an uncritical response to the Kommentar based on the massive amount of textual material dealt with therein.

While he was quick to note the importance of Billerbeck's approach, saying that it would indeed be of great help to those with little background in rabbinic texts, Fiebig emphasized consistently, in every review, the need to see the Kommentar as a beginning and not an end. At one point he even proclaimed, "Jetzt beginnt erst die Arbeit... ."23 And this work which was about to begin he saw as contributing to a number of areas, foremost among which to Fiebig was his own specialization, which he termed "form criticism."

Whether this is identical to the development of Biblical hermeneutics -- which is also termed "form criticism" and which was in its infancy in Fiebig's day -- has been questioned.24 It seems more likely, however, that Fiebig had in mind simply a comparison of New Testament phraseology with that found in rabbinic texts and an attempt to shed light on the meaning of such phraseology through linguistic parallels.

Because of his interest in this type of study, Fiebig is very concerned with Billerbeck's occasional "lack of literalness," of which in the longer sets of reviews he

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24 Idem, Theologische Blätter, cols. 92-93.
finds example after example. 25 Thus, in relation to his own area of research, Fiebig does not consider Billerbeck's translations as very helpful, except insofar as they stimulate scholars to more carefully examine the original text. Fiebig is also concerned that this "lack of literalness" will make it more difficult for the typical New Testament exegete to acclimate himself to the essentially Semitic milieu and thought-patterns found in the New Testament. As Fiebig himself puts it:

Billerbeck's Blick ist vorwiegend auf die Sachparallelen gerichtet. Das ist gut. Aber gerade der mit der rabbinischen Literatur nicht vertraute Ausleger des NT.\textsuperscript{s} bedarf dazu noch besonders, dass er auf die Eigenheiten der rabbinischen Ausdrucks- und Denkweise aufmerksam gemacht wird, deren Kenntnis ihn vor vielen exegetischen Irrtümern bewahren kann, zu denen er von seiner griechisch-lateinisch geschulten Ausdrucks- und Denkweise aussteht.\textsuperscript{26}

Fiebig also points out the need for full and complete translations of such works as the Tosefta, the "Derech-Eresh."

\textsuperscript{25} Fiebig notes Jeschurun, 11:9-10, 1925, p. 471, for example, that in Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 571, Keritoth 1:7 is freely translated, "Es trug sich einmal zu, dass..." while he would prefer, "Ein Ereignis, dass," as a more literal rendering of וְנָבָא. To this he says, "Es handelt sich also hier um eins der vielen als נבאה gekennzeichneten Stücke, um eine der Anekdoten, der Paradigmen, Beispielzählungen, die fortgeschichtlich für die Anekdoten der Evangelien besonders wichtig sind. Die Übersetzung bei Strack-Billerbeck lässt das nicht ohne weiteres erfahren."

\textsuperscript{26} Here Fiebig has in mind such things as rabbinic dialectics and style, rabbinic hermeneutical method, the "pithiness" of rabbinic sayings and the use of parallelisms. Paul Fiebig, OLZ, 30:3, March, 1927, col. 176.
literature, the rabbinic collections of sayings, the Mid-rashim, and the Talmud Yerushalmi, as well as the complete study of all the individual traditions by and about the rabbinic teachers reputed to have lived in the first century.27

Fiebig also notes in volume 4 a lack of extended studies on the miracles mentioned in the rabbinic texts, on the nature of the anecdotes about the ancient rabbis, on the nature and history of Midrash, and on the history of rabbinic "Paränese." He also notes a need for studies on the nature and the types of oral tradition, on what he terms the "Mosaikcharakter" of rabbinic literature, and on standard phrases used in rabbinic literature. 28

Gustaf Dalman's essay, "In the Footsteps of John Lightfoot,"29 is not so much a review of part or all of the Kommentar as it is a more general discussion of the current state of rabbinic-New Testament study in his day and a call

27 Idem, OLZ, 32:3, March, 1929, col. 183.


for the same kind of contributions to that field as Fiebig was advocating in his reviews. Dalman, too, considers Billerbeck a beginning and not an end. He calls for complete compendia of the contents of the various aggadic works organized by theme, as well as independent explication of rabbinic tradition for its own sake. He views works such as those of Billerbeck and of his predecessor, John Lightfoot, as means to that end. "If these parallels are well selected and reliable as regards translation and exegesis," writes Dalman, "they mean valuable work, and should be widely used, not as an ass's bridge, but as helps to the acquirement of deeper knowledge."30 Like Fiebig, he also calls for further exploration of the linguistic structure of the Gospels and discovery of comparisons with rabbinic phraseology, citing his own Words of Jesus and Jesus-Jeschua 31 as examples of what can be done in this regard. In addition he notes the need for historical studies of the first century that would take into account both rabbinic and Christian sources. In this connection, he also mentions in a positive light Josef Klausner's Jesus von Nazareth.

30 Ibid., p. 71.


In summing up the criticisms of these close sympathizers of Billerbeck, it can be seen that while they show the highest respect for his work, they resist "overpraising" it. They are realistic enough to see that a work of this nature is of necessity a beginning, a foundation, no matter how thorough and impressive it may appear to the uninitiated. They see it as opening the way for a wider group of scholars to appreciate and to make use of rabbinic material in their own work, not simply in borrowing from it, but in using it as a key to unlock rabbinic literature for themselves and to make their own contributions to the understanding of first-century Jewish history and thought. They are in fact exemplars of the kind of scholar they seek, and if any caveat should be mentioned concerning their approach to Billerbeck or to rabbinic literature as such, it concerns their manifestly Christian motivation for being involved in this work and their consequently narrowed perspective. 33

The reviews of Walter Bauer in the Theologische Literaturzeitung represent a very different approach from that of

33 cf. for example the following quote from Dalman, Expository Times, p. 73, in response to the description of the crucifixion and death of Jesus by J. Klausner and Chapter II of this work: "There is nothing in the above representation of the Crucifixion of Jesus which strikes one as new. But it shows how necessary and how important is the work at whose service Jewish literature should be placed. That Jesus is the Messiah of God not only for Israel, but for all men, and in what way He is so, is what we shall have to show. Even tedious labor; if any earnest labor can be tedious, is a privilege, if undertaken for this end. May John Lightfoot find many followers until the aim is realized."
those reviewers mentioned so far. His is the position of a scholar standing firmly outside the circle of colleagues discussed above. Where they tend to emphasize the uniqueness of the Gospels over against other ancient literature, his is a more critical approach. Where they occupy themselves almost exclusively with rabbinic materials, his is a more eclectic approach, and where they presuppose the early and authentic nature of the rabbinic material, he is more critical and historical.

This is not to deny that he does have many good things to say about the Kommentar. Indeed, about half of Bauer's first review is taken up with describing volume 1 and that in glowing terms, comparing it favorably (as did Laible) with the earlier work of John Lightfoot and that of Christian Schoettgen. In fact, it would be difficult to find more glowing praise than that found at the end of the last of his reviews (that on volumes 3 and 4): "Wenn niemand mehr die theologischen Tagesschriftsteller von heute kennen wird, wird man Billerbeck immer noch mit hohen Ehren und in grosser Dankbarkeit nennen. Sein Werk wird den folgenden Jahrhunderten das, und hoffentlich mehr, bedeuten, als was den vergangenen die Horae hebraicae von J. Lightfoot (1699) und C. Schoettgen (1733) gewesen sind."


All such praise notwithstanding, if Laible is a 'rabbinist,' Bauer is a 'hellenist,' or at the very least a (for his time) more traditional New Testament exegete. This comes out immediately in the first of his reviews. While he recognizes that the Kommentar is and purports to be more an anthology than a commentary, he promptly forgets this in his zeal to criticize its paucity of quotations from nonrabbinic sources. This seeming neglect of hellenistic and classical sources, Bauer fears, will give to the uninitiated the impression that the New Testament can be interpreted exclusively from rabbinic sources, and that where no light can be shed on the New Testament material from rabbinic sources, none is to be had!

Bauer expresses his own view of the New Testament, and specifically of the first gospel when he writes in his review of volume 1 of the Kommentar, "Nun ist dieses Evangelium doch aber ein original griechisches, auf Grund griechischer Quellen gearbeitetes Buch. Für vieles im Evangelium stellt uns demgemäss die griechische Welt Gegenstücke zur Verfügung, die zeitlich und sachlich besser passen, etwa zu der Sternerscheinung oder mancher Wundererzählung."


38 Idem, Theologische Literaturzeitung, 47:19, September 22, 1923, col. 388.
As to Billerbeck's alleged lack of critical method, Bauer writes:

Aber die Zusammenbringung und Anordnung des Stoffes verrät doch eine ganz bestimmte Einstellung. Dass die Verf. auf der äussersten Rechten stehen, sieht man aus dem Fehlen aller sachlichen Kritik am Matth.-evangelium. Sie unterbleibt nicht deshalb, weil sie etwa ausserhalb des Programms läge-oft genug wird in eine Erörterung von Fragen der evangelischen Geschichte eingetreten-, sondern sichtlich darum, weil St. und B. nichts am Neuen Testament auszusetzen finden. 39

A corollary to Bauer's complaint that Billerbeck shows a lack of sensitivity to the hellenistic milieu of the gospels is his continual criticism (particularly in his second review) that there is simply too much irrelevant material in the Kommentar. This is clearly expressed when he writes, "würden sich die Verff. darauf beschränkt haben, vorzutragen, was wirklich dem Verständnis des N.T.'s dient, sie würden auch bei sehr grosser Weitherzigkeit in der Entscheidung dessen, was dazu gehört, mit einem Bande ausgekommen sein." 41

In his third review, Bauer makes it clear that he does not mean to say by this that rabbinic literature is of little value in understanding the New Testament, or that the contribution of rabbinic literature in this regard can be pinned down in a few words. In fact, he specifically states that the Kommentar is only a beginning, a help, an introduction to the understanding of the rabbinic side of the New Testament

39 Ibid., col. 387.
40 Ibid., col. 388.
41 Idem, Theologische Literaturzeitung, 49:25, December 13, 1924, col. 535.
Nonetheless, he also makes it clear that his primary concern is with the ongoing need for a thorough study of the pre-70 C.E. history of Palestinian Judaism and with the dating of rabbinic traditions (an important question in its own right). He is less concerned with appreciating rabbinic Judaism as a whole and its contribution to an understanding of the 'Jewishness' of Jesus and of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, while the Delitzsch-Strack circle emphasized the value of rabbinic tradition as a whole for the study of the New Testament, Bauer is more historically selective, more concerned about the dating of rabbinic traditions, and more concerned about the methodology of New Testament criticism. In general, then, while Laible and his associates are more exclusively concerned with the contribution of rabbinic texts to New Testament study, Bauer emphasizes more the contribution of hellenistic texts.

We find these same emphases in two other reviewers, whose critiques of Billerbeck I also class as being of the 'hellenistic' school, or approach. They are E. Jacquier and D. B. Botte. First, they have many positive things to say about Billerbeck, for instance, Jacquier praises the richness and the variety of information contained in Billerbeck's anthology,\textsuperscript{43} and says, further, that Billerbeck's achievement not only equals but surpasses that of such Christian

\textsuperscript{42}Idem, Theologische Literaturzeitung, 54:7, March 30, 1929, col. 147.

\textsuperscript{43}E. Jacquier, Revue des Sciences Religieuses, 6:2, April 1926, p. 233.
scholars as J. Lightfoot, Wettstein, Delitzsch, and Wünsche, and even that of their Jewish counterparts, Montefiore,_A rahams, and Edersheim. Batte says that the first volume, when it was printed, was "... greeted enthusiastically by critics of every school." He also says that all understand it to be a tool presupposing incomparable labor on Billerbeck's part, and that all are greatly pleased with its quick production.

Nonetheless, Jacquier and Botte, like Bauer, are concerned with the 'historical question,' that is, with the question of to what extent one may legitimately use rabbinic sources for New Testament interpretation, given the disparity in date. Botte, for example, while allowing for the use of first and second-century rabbinic traditions in interpreting the New Testament, frankly questions whether it is appropriate to use those from the third and fourth centuries. He warns against succumbing to the fallacy of the alleged unchangeableness of the East, and urges the recognition that Judaism has in fact been modified over the centuries through external influence and internal evolution.

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44 Ibid.

45 D. B. Botte, Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale, 1:2, July 1929, p. 509.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 510.

48 Ibid.
Botte and Jacquier both recognize, as Billerbeck himself admitted,⁴⁹ that the Kommentar is not intended as a commentary proper, but merely as an anthology of texts designed to illustrate the New Testament material.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, they both criticize him for not providing a more balanced presentation, both in his translation of the New Testament text and in his own brief explanations. They also complain about the conservative nature of Billerbeck's underlying presuppositions concerning the text of the New Testament. Jacquier, for example, is concerned about Billerbeck's attempt, in his essay on the day of Jesus' death, to harmonize the "irreconcilable contradiction"⁵¹ on the date between the synoptic gospels and the Gospel of John. Moreover, on a passage in the Kommentar proper (Matt. 27:37, the inscription on the cross), Jacquier criticizes Billerbeck for quoting a great number of rabbinic texts -- implying thereby that the practice of publishing the reason for the criminal's

⁴⁹Jacquier, p. 231; Botte, p. 509.

⁵⁰"Nicht eine eigentliche Auslegung des Neuen Testaments, sondern das zu seinem Verständnis aus Talmud und Midrasch zu gewinnende Material wollten wir darbieten;..." Kommentar, vol. 1, p. vi.

⁵¹Jacquier, p. 234.
punishment derives only from Jewish law -- while neglecting possible parallels in Roman law.

The next group of reviews to be discussed is what we may term the 'theological' school, by virtue of their concentration on Christian tradition and early Christian history in interpreting the New Testament, and their presumption of a fundamental conflict between Jesus and his Jewish environment.53 Also, all are Roman Catholic theologians, which is manifest in their consistent concern for Billerbeck's (alleged) anti-Catholic bias.54 They do not analyze Billerbeck's translations of the rabbinic texts and do not deal at length with the underlying issues involved in producing such a work as the Kommentar. The one exception to the latter is A. Merk. In his review of the fourth volume of the Kommentar (which volume consists exclusively of Billerbeck's essays on various rabbinic topics), Merk discusses the propriety of attempting to construct a rabbinic theology. He points out that the rabbis quoted by Billerbeck in these

52 Ibid. Botte does the same when he criticizes Billerbeck for "paraphrasing," Matt. 16:18, "... upon this rock," in such a way that, in his view, Billerbeck simply presupposes its Protestant interpretation, making no reference to the dissenting Roman Catholic view. cf. Botte, p. 509.


54 cf. for example Kleinhans, p. 489 and Vandenhoff, Theologische Revue, 1924, col. 302.
essays represent various times and approaches. They did not create a scientific system; rather, each rabbi typically had his own unique interpretation(s), which were not necessarily intended for more general application. There is nonetheless, Merk points out, an overall unifying spirit to rabbinic interpretation, and this can be seen clearly in Billerbeck's work. "Dennoch bleibt das Verdienst Billerbecks bestehen... Aus den ungezählten Belegen ergibt sich sodann unverkennbar der Geist der rabbinischen Gelehrsamkeit."

The next reviews examined here belong in a class by themselves. Although as a group they do not represent any particular school of thought, they are noteworthy both for their objectivity and for their grasp of the historical problems implicit in interpreting the New Testament in the light of rabbinic literature, as well as those involved in interpreting the rabbinic materials themselves. First, I would mention the reviews of the French scholars, J. Bonsirven and J. Lebreton. Both are noteworthy for their careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Billerbeck. Nonetheless, they do have their differences. Bonsirven, while he understands clearly Billerbeck's intent in compiling the Kommentar, is nonetheless disappointed that at least the volume of essays is not more of a

55 Merk, p. 415.

'rabbinic theology,' with a careful criticism of the various data, and an analysis of the various positions of scholars on the respective topics. Nonetheless, he praises it as an extremely valuable contribution which, despite the severity of its methodology, carries its own justification. 57

In the matter of the appropriateness of using third and fourth-century rabbinic documents for the interpretation of the New Testament, Bonsirven points out both the weakness and the strength of such a position. The disadvantage, obviously, is the disparity in time and place of origin of the documents. Concerning the importance of utilizing the later rabbinic material in New Testament study, however, Bonsirven says that an understanding of the New Testament in its original context demands seeing beyond isolated points of contact and similarity between Jewish and Christian documents and capturing the larger "currents of thought" that determine such congruence. 58

Bonsirven also complains of Billerbeck's lack of a critical methodology, as demonstrated by his ready acceptance of traditional dating. In addition, Bonsirven questions the completeness and applicability of Billerbeck's work. Do Billerbeck's quotations, he asks, represent all the traditions

57 Bonsirven, pp. 311-312.

58 Ibid., p. 312.
applicable to the material, and are they well chosen?\textsuperscript{59} Nonetheless, he does praise Billerbeck's desire to emphasize primary sources, stating that his work makes possible classifications and distinctions that are incontestable and new.\textsuperscript{60}

Lebreton, although more positive towards Billerbeck's historical scholarship, is also not without criticism. He notes the importance of the fact that the rabbinic texts are simply silent on many points, and that they represent primarily post-70 C.E. Judaism. He points in particular to the post-70 change in attitude towards the proselyte in Judaism, and to the conflict between the Greek and Hebraic sources on the rabbinic judicial system, especially as it applies to the study of the trial of Jesus.\textsuperscript{61}

Lebreton's overall conclusion on Billerbeck, historically speaking, is that the \textit{Kommentar} both identifies the gaps in our knowledge of the period of the New Testament, and makes available in convenient form a body of primary sources on the social, political, and moral-religious life of the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{62} Lebreton is unique in one major respect:

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p. 314.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p. 312.


\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 333.
his is the only review of which I am aware that clearly states the limitations of an anthology like that of Billerbeck. He warns against trusting any piece of secondary literature, even an anthology, without constantly checking it against the sources themselves. Lebreton does not in this discourage the use of the Kommentar, but only its uncritical use.63 This is important to remember in view of the very negative criticism that Billerbeck's work has received at the hands of more contemporary scholars. Such criticism will be treated later in this chapter.

Without a doubt, the best reviews of Billerbeck known to me are those of J. Krengel in the Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums. Krengel's reviews are carefully written and argued, and indicate both the writer's thorough rabbinic background, and his close reading of the Billerbeck text. His overall opinion of Billerbeck's work is high. He states that Billerbeck's translations are, on the whole, trustworthy, and that both scholar and layman have much to gain from the Kommentar. He praises the Kommentar as reflecting real knowledge of and a thorough grounding in the rabbinic sources, even as he warns of the necessity of checking Billerbeck against his sources, especially when halakhic problems are dealt with.64 The problems


64 J. Krengel, Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums, 32 (n.s.) (1924): p. 68.
Krengel raises fall mainly into one of two categories. They are either theological in nature, involving Billerbeck's overall presuppositions concerning rabbinic texts and the New Testament, or they involve translation problems, often involving Billerbeck's misunderstanding of halakhic texts.

Krengel's overall concern with theology involves Billerbeck's tendency to depict Judaism as negatively as possible in order to make Christianity appear so much the better by comparison.65 Krengel begins with Billerbeck's discussion of the concept "Kingdom of God" in rabbinic literature and in the New Testament. Billerbeck, in Krengel's view, correctly describes the concept Kingdom of God (מלכות ו ConfigurationManager; ממלכת ו(ConfigurationManager) in rabbinic literature being realized everywhere a person consciously places himself in submission to the will of God.66 To this 'rabbinic' concept, however, Billerbeck contrasts Jesus' supposed understanding of the "Kingdom of God" as a gift of God to man (eine Gabe Gottes an den Menschen) and as a messianic possession or inheritance (ein messian. Heilsgut, ja als das Heilsgut schlechthin.)67 (Although Krengel does not mention it, Billerbeck actually goes so far as to contrast the 'rabbinic' concept with Jesus' concept in terms of

65 Krengel does not mention Billerbeck's stated desire to be objective. Kommentar, vol 1, p. vi; Krengel, pp. 68-69.


67 Kommentar, Ibid.; Krengel, Ibid.
'Law and Gospel' [Gesetz und Evangelium].) 68

Billerbeck states that the more eschatological emphases of Jesus are usually connected in rabbinic literature with the term, "the world to come," 69 yet says virtually nothing about this concept. Krengel, however, in contrast to Billerbeck, points out that the overall understanding of rabbinic literature with reference to the relationship of God and man depends on an understanding of both מלחמת שמים and אמה together with another phrase not mentioned by Billerbeck at all in this context: "the days of the Messiah" מושלי . Thus, the rabbinic understanding involves both the age to come as God's gift and man's responsibility with respect to God in this world. Krengel further points out the shallowness of Billerbeck's understanding of man's subjection and obedience to God in rabbinic literature, especially with reference to the rabbinic concept of "the joy in the commandment," i.e., in obeying God's commands ( אמון טובות ). 70

68 Lutherans, when they refer to "Law and Gospel" intend them as a contrast, so that the term "Law" when used in such a fashion refers to that aspect of the Biblical commandments which condemns and threatens all disobedience with punishment. "Gospel" refers to the Christian teaching which understands God's forgiveness as coming finally and fully through faith in Jesus. cf. on this matter Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. V, p. 700, in Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952).

69 Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 181; Krengel, p. 69.

70 Krengel, Ibid., p. 70.
Krengel concludes:

Der Israelit nimmt die Gottesherrschaft auf sich nicht bloss aus Gehorsam, sondern auch weil er in dieser Herrschaft Gottes über sein Inneres, weil er in der Vereinigung mit Gott und seinem Dienste etwas im höchsten Grade Beseligendes sieht. Wie oft ist schon bei den Propheten und insbesondere in den Psalmen, von denen gerade die hier in Betracht kommenden den Rabbinen zeitlich und geistig nahestehen und täglich im Kreise der Frommen gelesen wurden, von der Freude an Gott, an seiner Lehre, an seinem Dienste, an dem Weilen in seinem Hause die Rede!\textsuperscript{71}

Another example Krengel cites of Billerbeck's apparent lack of sensitivity to the rabbinic sources and to the form of Judaism that derives from them is the collection of passages quoted by Billerbeck in connection with Matt. 5:39 ("But I say to you, do not resist the evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn the other to him."). Krengel notes that at the end of a catena of rabbinic passages praising humility and selflessness, Billerbeck quotes the famous prayer of Mar bar Rabina from T.B. Ber. 17a, without mentioning that this prayer forms the conclusion of the Shemone Esre and accordingly is said three times daily by all religious Jews. Billerbeck, however, concludes this section with two passages asserting that one, if attacked, should not allow himself to be killed, but should if necessary kill the attacker first. In so doing, Krengel argues, Billerbeck seems to be attempting to undermine rabbinic Judaism while shoring up his own thesis.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., p. 74.
A third example Krengel offers appears to involve simple misunderstanding of rabbinic style on Billerbeck's part. In interpreting the saying of Jesus in Matt. 5:43 ("You have heard that it had been said, 'You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy'"), Billerbeck states that this was a popular maxim among the common people at the time of Jesus. He attempts to prove this with a reference to II Sam. 19:7 and P.T. Meg. 3:2, 74a. The II Sam. passage refers to the story of the suppression of the revolt by Absalom against his father, King David, the subsequent killing of Absalom, and David's mourning. Joab, David's general reproaches him for his sorrow, and says that he seems to, "...love his enemies and hate his friends (לאהנה את שפואר ולשנה את אחוביר)." The phrase is then taken over into a letter by Rabbi Jeremiah (about 320 C.E.) to the patriarch, Rabbi Judan, apparently in response to a feeling of being "passed over" in favor of another scholar, known to be unfavorable to the patriarch. Rather than being the proof of a maxim commonly known in Jesus' time, Krengel explains this as but one example of a common practice in Hebrew writing, namely the application of Biblical phrases to personal situations. 73

Of the second type of criticism directed against Billerbeck by Krengel -- that he at times mistranslates or simply misunderstands the text, especially when it is discussing halakhic matters -- I would mention four examples in

73 Ibid., pp. 74-75.
particular. The first of the four examples is a simple case of disagreement on how the (unpointed and unpunctuated) Talmud text ought to be read. Billerbeck at one point quotes B.T. Qid. 70b (ר' אביגי דר אמא), and ends the quotation with the phrase "und sie sollen mir zum Volke sein." Krengel correctly points out that this phrase is not the end of the quoted tradition, but the beginning of that which follows. Second, in his own explanation of the mealtimes as witnessed in rabbinic materials, Billerbeck states, "Im allgemeinen wurden bei den Juden im Lauf eines Tages zwei Mahlzeiten eingenommen, nur der Sabbat war durch drei Pflichtmahlzeiten ausgezeichnet..." Krengel corrects the misconception of two meals per day during the week but three on the Sabbath by pointing out that, since the Jewish day always begins with the coming of darkness, any evening's meal is always counted as the first meal of the day, thus making the usual practice

74 Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 69 (middle); Krengel, Monatsschrift, 34 (n.s.) (1926): 419. It appears that Billerbeck is here following August Wuensche, who also ends the tradition in question with, "...und sie werden mir zum Volke sein." It seems clear that both Billerbeck and Wuensche have here erred, and that Krengel's understanding of the phrase in question as a Biblical passage to be commented on by the Gemara is correct. Alfasi ends the tradition with אהבה לאליהם לכל תשועת ישראל, and not with the questioned phrase. Also Lazarus Goldschmidt makes it clear that he believes the controverted phrase is a new Biblical passage to be explained by the following tradition in that he sets it off in italics, and follows it with, "Rabbah bar Rav Huna..." August Wuensche, Der Babylonische Talmud in seinen Haggadische Bestandteilen, 2, (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1887), p. 120; Lazarus Goldschmidt, Der Babylonische Talmud, 6, (Berlin: Juedischer Verlag, 1932), p. 751.

not two but three meals. The difference between weekday and Sabbath in this respect is simply that on the Sabbath the Jew is obligated to eat three fixed meals, while during the rest of the week he is not. In discussing the practice of fasting in Talmudic Judaism, Billerbeck states, "Doch trug man bei der Festsetzung des Jahreskalenders rechtzeitig dafür Sorge, dass jene beiden Tage nicht auf einen Sabbat fielen," referring to Yom Kippur and Tishah-b'Ab. Krengel points out that both days can in fact fall on the Sabbath, but that in the case of Tishah-b'Ab, the fast is kept on the following Sunday.

A more complicated question is that of the correct understanding of the words כל שלא וcsrf in P.T. Qid. I, 7,61a. Billerbeck translates, "Ist das (dass der Vater dem Sohn ein zu nehmen hat) als ein blosses Gebot gemeint oder als ein Hindernis (so dass der Sohn unverheiratet bleiben muss, falls der Vater seiner Pflicht nicht nachkommt)?" Krengel challenges Billerbeck's translation of כל שלא as "ein Hindernis," pointing out the context (a few lines later) in which כל הוא is used in the sense of "forcing" someone to do

76 Krengel, Monatsschrift, 34 (n.s.) (1926): 419.


78 Krengel, Monatsschrift, 34 (n.s.) (1926): 419.

something. The question is whether לְהַשֵּׁיָּא אִשֶּׁה is a miswah presupposing obedience on the part of the father, or not. In the latter case, the court has the power of forcing the father to do his duty (i.e., לְעַבְדָה = לְעַבְדָּתָה). On the one hand we have the context which seems to indicate that Krengel's translation is correct, and this is supported also by the translation and brief comment of Dr. Emanuel Schereschewsky (formerly of the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum-Münster) which reads, "Sind (die in der Mischna genannten Pflichten) Gebote oder Gesetzesvorschriften?" In commenting on the term Gesetzesvorschriften (לְעַבְדָּתָה) in his translation, Dr. Schereschewsky adds, "deren Befolgung selbst durch Zwangmassnahmen erwirkt werden kann." The difficulty involved is that Billerbeck appears to have some support for his understanding as well, in the form of the translation given by J. Levy in his Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch, and by A. Kohut in his edition of the Aruch Completum. Levy defines לְעַבְדָה as "das Verhinden, Abhalten," and Kohut shows the Aruch as defining the term לְעַבְדָה (לעבְדָה is not listed as a separate entry) as an לְעַבְדָּתָה, and adds the German renderings,


81 Emanuel Schereschewsky, Der Jerusalemsiche Talmud Traktat Kidduschin (unpublished ms. in the private possession of Dr. K. H. Rengstorf, formerly director of the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum-Münster), Halakhah VII (numbered in ms. as Halakhah VIII).
The last group of reviews to be mentioned in this chapter are in fact not full reviews at all, but more in the nature of short notices. One of these in particular (Gerhard Kittel's) deserves some discussion and the rest are significant only insofar as they illustrate the wide influence of Billerbeck's work. Kittel's review, in the Deutsche Literaturzeitung, like all the other reviews and notices praises the Kommentar as being the best of its genre, indeed the best of all such collections up to its time. Unlike the other reviewers, however, Kittel mentions several of Billerbeck's predecessors from the 13th century Raymund Martini's Pugio Fidei to the work of Johann Jakob Wettstein in the 18th century (see Appendix). He has much good to say about these earlier efforts, but also points out their inadequate and uncritical methodology together with their sometimes inaccurate quotation. In the case of Wettstein, in particular, he points out his own surprise at "wieviele der rabbinischen Zitate als flüchtig, ungenau oder falsch zitiert und wieviel von ihnen als recht willkürlich zusammengetragen sich mir erwiesen." He points out that unlike many of his predecessors, Billerbeck does not simply pass on this 'tradition' of quotation, but reworks it totally and expands it.

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82 Gerhard Kittel, DLZ 14, (n.s.) 15, July 19, 1924, col. 1222; and cf. also Moore, HTR, 16 (1923): 105.

83 Kittel, Ibid.
Kittel does, however, warn the reader against the temptation to quote Billerbeck uncritically as though his anthology were the texts in question, making of them "an ass's bridge." He says rather, "Das wäre gewiss nicht im Sinne der Herausgeber des Kommentars," and expresses the wish that the Kommentar rather become a tool to help otherwise cautious scholars make a beginning in the study of actual rabbinic texts.\textsuperscript{84} This is an extremely important point, given the nature of the more contemporary criticism of the Kommentar to be discussed below. Kittel is also the only reviewer to speculate on the source of Billerbeck's rabbinic knowledge, saying, "In Rabbinicis ist er, soviel mir bekannt, Autodidakt."\textsuperscript{85} The other notices come from German, French, English, Dutch, and Swedish sources.\textsuperscript{86}

In contrast to the reviews contemporaneous with the appearance of the Kommentar, the later criticism is of a

\textsuperscript{84}Kittel, Ibid., col. 1224; and cf. also Fiebig, OLZ 26:7, July 1923, col. 329; and Dalman, Expository Times, 35 (1923-24): 71.

\textsuperscript{85}Kittel, Ibid., col. 1225.

different nature. Theological presuppositions and methodology are of some concern among the Kommentar's original reviews, but it is with the later critics that these concerns come into their own. Günther Stemberger in his new edition of Strack's *Einleitung in den Talmud und Midrasch*, describes the earlier scholarship as being generally satisfied with the acceptance of the traditional dates of rabbinic sayings together with a consistent elimination of all traditions patently legendary in nature. He also summarizes the contemporary critical attitude towards scholars of the past, who are perceived as having paid insufficient attention to the different times of origin of individual writings and to the differing emphases of various literary genres. His evaluation of the Kommentar is simply to view it as symptomatic of this earlier, but now rejected, approach. \(^{87}\)

With the exception of Stephen Neill, who has only positive things to say about the Kommentar, \(^{88}\) all the later scholars are to some extent critical of Billerbeck; all make a point of discussing Billerbeck's theological views, and some suggest alternate methodologies of their own. The question of the relative strength or weakness of Billerbeck's

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approach will be dealt with more fully in the concluding chapter of this work. Discussion of alternate methodologies to Billerbeck's, and the development of new approaches are beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, the various criticisms of Billerbeck by the later critics will here be enumerated and briefly explained, and mentioned further only in terms of the overall evaluation of the critics of Billerbeck from his time to the present.

The most negatively critical of all appears to be E. P. Sanders in the introductory portions of his book Paul and Palestinian Judaism. His criticism of Billerbeck is both methodological and theological. He contends that Billerbeck does not present all the available evidence, and that he misinterprets what he does present, following the lead of Ferdinand Weber in understanding the whole of rabbinic thought as a sort of systematic theology. Sanders' comments, while they are extensive in nature, all seem to center around these themes, especially his criticism of the 'systematizing' of rabbinic agadic categories into one 'theology'. His main concern here seems to be Billerbeck's apparent presentation of rabbinic Judaism as a religion of "works-righteousness." He sums up the matter by saying, "The passages are understood not as the Rabbis meant them, but

according to preconceived theological categories according to which any nomistic religion must be legalistic in the negative sense. It is this entire interpretive framework which is wrong."\textsuperscript{90}

Sanders' final judgment of Billerbeck is extreme. He sees no value in Billerbeck's work except as "a collection of passages on individual points, with several provisions: that the user be able to look up the passages and read them in context, that he disregard as much as possible Billerbeck's own summaries and syntheses, and that he be able to imagine how to find passages on the topic not cited by Billerbeck."\textsuperscript{91} He then limits the latter point by affirming that only those able to find passages not given by Billerbeck ought to use the \textit{Kommentar}, which means to him that the \textit{Kommentar} ought not to be used by those for whom it was specifically designed.\textsuperscript{92}

Samuel Sandmel's criticisms are similar, though not as extreme. While he admits the value of rabbinic parallels in the study of the New Testament, he criticizes Billerbeck for making no real attempt at a historical appreciation of rabbinic material. He holds that the underlying prejudice of

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 234.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., pp. 234-235.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
the *Kommentar* is that "even where Jesus and the rabbis seem to say identically the same thing, Strack-Billerbeck manage to demonstrate that what Jesus said was finer and better."\(^{93}\)

His second criticism of Billerbeck is that others misuse his *Kommentar* by beginning and ending their study of rabbinic literature with it, and that the form and approach of the *Kommentar* itself encourage this. Such scholars, he says, make value judgments on rabbinic materials based on the quotations and comments in the *Kommentar* alone, and not on the fuller context of the rabbinic passages. They have, according to Sandmel, an acquaintance merely with excerpt instead of with the intent, and the nuances of rabbinic literature.\(^{94}\)

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\(^{94}\) Ibid., p. 300; cf. also that E. E. Urbach makes the same point in note #8 of E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Their Concepts and Beliefs, 2, trans. Israel Abrahams. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1979), p. 694 (Hebrew p. 5). In achieving a balanced picture of the situation it is also important to note that Billerbeck has had his critical readers as well in such scholars as Claude Montefiore, W. D. Davies, Joachim Jeremias, Asher Finkel, and Hans Joachim Schoeps. We see here a balance of Jew and Christian, and of differing views both within and between the two faiths. Especially, I would like to note the following comments of Montefiore:

"... I might fitly add that I do not always begin my cited Rabbinic passages where he [Montefiore's italics, referring to Billerbeck] begins them, or where he ends them. Though, as I have said, where my rabbinic quotations are taken from him, I have almost invariably translated from the original, and not from the German, this does not imply that
Jacob Agus is just as clear as Sanders and Sandmel in his criticisms of Billerbeck, although he is more irenic and positive in tone. In addition, while he is to some extent interested in methodology, in his criticizing the Kommentar for "a literal reading of Talmudic legends," his overall concern is not so much with method and history as with the theological points of contact between rabbinic literature and the New Testament as they are seen "through the eyes" of Billerbeck. Unlike Sanders, for example, who says that Billerbeck's entire understanding of rabbinic thought is distorted, he does not so much criticize Billerbeck's formulations as his apparent underlying presuppositions. He has

his renderings are inexact. On the contrary: they are almost always correct, and this is not only my opinion, but that of Mr. Loewe (a far more competent judge) as well. And the accuracy of his references is remarkable. In the very large number which I have had to verify, I have hardly ever found the slightest error."


A more conservative opinion among these users of Billerbeck, but still one who see value in the Kommentar is that of Asher Finkel in a personal letter to the author, "The 'Kommentar' should be revised if it can be used properly. However, generations of German theologians have grown on its analysis. I personally used it for reference but with great [Finkel's italics] caution. It is still very useful for its collected material, but needs a critical eye for evaluation. Refer to works of Urbach, Flusser, Werblowski and others who have used it." Dr. Asher Finkel, Dept. of Judaeo-Christian Studies, Seton Hall University, S. Orange, New Jersey, to Daniel J. Rettberg, 12 February, 1984, Personal Files of Daniel J. Rettberg, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

no complaint about Judaism being characterized as a "self-redeeming religion," for example, provided this is meant only to point to the "Jewish belief in free will and the rejection by the sages of the doctrine of 'original sin,' in its extreme form." His disagreement with Billerbeck begins when, in his opinion, an overall picture begins to emerge of a "soulless worship of the letter of the law" on the part of Judaism. Here he touches again on the methodological when he concludes that the authors were able to arrive at such conclusions because, "they picked and chose some passages as truly expressive of the Jewish soul, while they rejected other passages as unrepresentative or purely 'ornamental.'"

Of all of these later critics, the one who appears to show the most concern for the "historical" question is Geza Vermes. He sums up his view of the problem by saying:

"On page 1 vol. I of Strack-Billerbeck, citations are borrowed from R. Eleazar (c. A.D. 270), Rav Yehudah (died 299), Samuel (died 254) and R. Pinhas bar Hama (c. 360). But not a word is said by way of explaining whether or how these

96 Ibid., p. 307.

97 Ibid., p. 308.

third and fourth century traditions are relevant to the exegesis of Mt. 1:1, which no doubt dates to the end of the first century. Nowhere is there any sign of awareness that rabbinic ideas themselves evolved. In fact, quite frequently the more developed form of a tradition is preferred to another closer in time to the New Testament!" 99

In evaluating the types of criticism directed at the work of Paul Billerbeck in the form of the Kommentar, it is now possible to see that while the concerns and emphases of the majority have shifted, there is (with the possible exception of E. P. Sanders) no new perspective on Billerbeck. Among the earlier critics there was a strong contingent of scholars, capable of working with rabbinic literature, who represented differing approaches, but who praised the Kommentar as an important contribution to the better understanding of the New Testament and its place within Judaism. They were certainly not unaware of the problems of history and theology; indeed they seriously discussed these issues as well, at times criticizing Billerbeck for lack of historical perspective.

On the other hand, we find the later critics, although more negative, also having within their ranks both Christian and Jew, and broadly speaking representing both rabbinic and New Testament scholarship. What is interesting on the part of the later critics is their apparent lack of concern to

take seriously Billerbeck and the kind of rabbinic analysis of him seen in a Krengel or a Laible. Perhaps it is only that they presuppose that this groundwork has been done, and that they can now simply generalize on the basis of it.

Of the later critics, the two that interest me most in terms of their points of agreement and disagreement with each other are Sanders and Agus. Both are disturbed at what they view as Billerbeck's innate prejudice against Judaism and what they feel is a lack of desire on his part to try to positively appreciate rabbinic Judaism for what it is and what it attempts to do. Sanders, however, goes beyond that, plainly stating that he believes Billerbeck has completely misinterpreted Judaism, and writing his book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, as a rebuttal of the kind of view of and approach to Judaism found in Billerbeck. Agus, on the other hand, appears to have no essential quarrel with Billerbeck's formulations, but only with his presuppositions and to some extent with the way he employs his findings.

There is also the criticism of Sandmel, that Billerbeck is at least to some extent to blame for the misuse of his work by later writers, together with Sandmel's own desire to develop an approach that -- like Walter Bauer among the

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100 Sanders, pp. 12-23.
earlier critics -- would more readily take the hellenistic side of Judaism into account in understanding the New Testament. It is interesting to note that the most thorough and favorable of the early reviews all attempted to warn against such a misuse of the Kommentar, and went beyond that to encourage scholars unable to themselves study rabbinic texts to view the Kommentar as a help to that end.

In short, it is my contention and the basic presupposition of this work that all this must be taken in account in making a serious evaluation of Billerbeck and his contribution to the study of the Jewish nature of the New Testament. The historical and theological questions must be asked of Billerbeck, but he cannot be simply set aside as presenting an inaccurate and uncritical picture of Judaism. The analysis of Krengel and Laible must be taken seriously and expanded upon before the place of Billerbeck in the comparative study of Jewish and Christian sources can clearly be established. His work must also be judged on the basis of his own stated intention in compiling the Kommentar, namely, not as 'commentary' in the proper sense, but rather as an anthology of texts designed simply to help illuminate the Jewish or rabbinic side of the New Testament, leaving the use of and approach to those texts in the hands of the reader.

101 This is not to say that Sandmel is "Bauer redidivus." That would be fair to neither scholar. Each has his own distinctive approach. My only intent is to say that Sandmel's is perhaps a more wholistic approach, wishing to take into account all possible influences on the New Testament, and not overemphasize any one. cf. for example Sandmel, pp. 296-297.
CHAPTER IV

PAUL BILLERBECK AS CRITICAL SCHOLAR

Paul Billerbeck is certainly one of the more interesting and complex personalities to have arisen within the context of the study of classical Jewish and Christian sources in nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Germany. He served a full and active career within the ranks of the Prussian Protestant clergy. He also made himself perhaps the leading non-Jewish student of rabbinic literature for his time.

This presents us with a problem. Here we have two apparently contradictory sets of concerns both on a practical and on a spiritual level. Exactly how were two such diverging concerns able to coexist within one person? We have already seen evidence in Chapters I and II that this divergence struck at the heart of the mental and spiritual makeup of Billerbeck's closest colleagues. It is the contention of this and the next chapter that Billerbeck did not escape this divergence of thinking, but that his published works clearly witness to its existence within him as well. We will see in one person, Paul Billerbeck, both the pious Protestant minister judging everything according to the touchstone of traditional Christian theology, and the lively scholar, fascinated with a religion and a people spiritually so akin to him and his congregants, and yet at the same time so very different.
The material to be examined in the present chapter comprises the scholarly excursuses and papers published by Billerbeck between the years 1899 and 1928. This material logically divides into two categories:

1. Those papers and excursuses published by Billerbeck in the journal *Nathanael* between the years 1899 and 1918.

2. All those excursuses written by Billerbeck sometime between 1906 and 1922 and destined for inclusion in the *Kommentar*.\(^1\)

The *Nathanael* essays will be treated first, and then the *Kommentar* excursuses.

**Billerbeck's Early Scholarship**

When one studies Billerbeck in the chronological manner, his development as a student of rabbinic literature comes into focus. As was (and still is) common among Christian scholars of Billerbeck's type (i.e., traditional German Protestant with a heavy emphasis on theology) he begins with an aggadic theme, "Abrahams Leben und Bedeutung fur das Reich Gottes nach Auffassung der älteren Haggada" (*Nathanael* 15

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\(^1\) The majority of these excursuses are those comprising vol. 4; the remaining few are scattered throughout vols. 1-3. Billerbeck contracted to write the *Kommentar* in 1906 and had completed all four volumes by 1922, when vol. 1 appeared. The evidence, however, is not clear as to the order in which the volumes -- and the various excursuses -- were completed. Yet, from the facility with rabbinic texts, the grasp of their halakhic structure, and the historical comprehension displayed by Billerbeck in these essays -- which, on the whole, equals or excels that displayed in the latest of his *Nathanael* essays -- it seems reasonable to regard the *Kommentar* excursuses as a unit and as having been produced, or at least reedited, towards the end of Billerbeck's career. cf., Chapter I for documentation and further information.
His goals here are modest, and he fulfills them adequately. His sole interest in this essay is to reconstruct the portrait of Abraham as presented in the earliest aggadic sources, following the order of Abraham's life as given in Genesis. Already at this early point in his career, however, Billerbeck begins to show historical and critical concern, specifically by limiting himself to the earliest aggadic texts, which he does both because of the size of the aggadic material on Abraham, and because he suspects that the later midrashim are in all probability influenced by Arabic sources. 2

The major questions for the reader at this early period are: "What is the source of Billerbeck's information," and, "How closely does he follow it?" Is he in fact working directly from the midrash Gen. Rab. and the Targums (which Billerbeck cites in the footnotes of this first article as his major sources) or is he using some other secondary source either as an aid to or in place of dealing with the primary sources themselves? Is there any indication, for example, that he is dependent upon the German translation of Gen. Rab. by August Wuensche, which was available at the time of writing? 3


3 August Wuensche, Der Midrasch Bereschit Rabba, das ist die haggadische Auslegung der Genesis zum ersten Male ins Deutsche übertragen. (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1881).
Billerbeck, himself, sheds some light on these questions when he states, in his first footnote, "...bei der Überarbeitung konnte B. Beer, Leben Abrahams nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage, Leipz. 1859, berücksichtigt werden." \(^4\) Unfortunately, it cannot be determined exactly how Billerbeck used Beer, or more generally what his major source for this essay was. It is reasonable to assume that Beer is the basis of his work, though it is obvious when one compares the footnotes in Beer with the quoted materials in Billerbeck's article that he did not limit himself to Beer's sources. While Beer's footnotes are usually more extensive than Billerbeck's, Billerbeck does at times quote material not found in Beer. \(^5\) Another interesting fact is that Billerbeck's presentation follows Beer's table of contents almost point for point. This could be explained by the fact that both seem to quote Gen. Rab. more extensively than any other primary source, and that therefore both are following the order of Gen. Rab.'s (i.e., the Bible's) presentation. Another possibility is that Billerbeck is following Rashi, and using Beer as a guide to additional primary sources. This, however, does not seem likely since Billerbeck on at

\(^4\) Billerbeck, "Abrahams Leben und Bedeutung...", 43.

\(^5\) Ibid., 45.
least one occasion includes extensive material not found in Rashi. 6

Something else that must be taken into account in the analysis of this early article is that it contains far more paraphrase (i.e., simple retelling of the aggadic stories) than actual translation. Therefore a simple comparison of Billerbeck's text with the original of Gen. Rab. and with the Wünsche translation sheds little light on the issue of Billerbeck's sources. It is reasonable to assume that Billerbeck had some facility with original texts at this time, since the translations that would have been available to him were limited, 7 and since he does use material not found either in Beer or Gen. Rab. the extent of that facility, however, is not possible to determine from the available evidence.

Billerbeck continues his retelling of the story of Abraham from midrashic sources the following year with, "Abrahams Bedeutung für das Reich Gottes nach Auffassung der älteren Haggada" (Nathanael 16 (1900): 33-57 and 65-80).

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6This is the material on the "Covenant of the Pieces," Gen. 15:6-9.

7The only translations known to me that could have been available to Billerbeck are those of August Wünsche, most of which were available by 1900. For more information cf. Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Wünsche, August Karl," by Yerucham Tolkes, and The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Wünsche, August," by Joseph Jacobs.
Here Billerbeck makes one significant change in his approach to the material. Rather than simply relating the contents of his sources, he begins to take a critical position with respect to what he understands as the underlying message of the text. The 1899 article revealed Billerbeck the scholar; here, however, Billerbeck as pastor and believer comes to the fore. In this article he takes certain positions with reference to the midrashic versus the traditional Christian understanding of God and man which remain fundamental for him throughout his career. The permanence of these positions can be clearly seen in that they appear again unchanged, if more carefully worded, in his series of articles on Rabbi Aqiba published in the last years of Nathanael (ca. 1918). For this reason, consideration of this article will be postponed until the end of the chapter, where it can be discussed in connection with the later material.

In his next series of papers (Nathanael 19, 1903, pp. 97-125; 21, 1905, pp. 91-150), Billerbeck attempts a more ambitious project, requiring some historical and critical acumen, and addressing a specifically theological question: "Did the old synagogue know a preexistent Messiah?" Contrary to his Hellenistically oriented critics (cf., Chapter III), and contrary to the impression often conveyed in the Kommentar itself, Billerbeck here proves himself a careful student of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical sources. All of the first part of this series, and most of the second, are in fact devoted to the study of this topic in the apocrypha and
pseudepigrapha, which he considered to be the earliest witnesses to those 'aggadic' traditions that pertain to the question of a preexistent Messiah.

Billerbeck does not consider the possibility that the Greek sources may represent a different type of Judaism than the rabbinic (Hebrew-Aramaic) sources. His approach appears similar to that of the more contemporary Samuel Sandmel, and of those Jewish scholars of Billerbeck's time who attempted to date rabbinic traditions by comparisons with Josephus or Philo. Billerbeck is concerned with proving the antiquity of certain types of interpretation and examining more specifically what kinds of views about the Messiah were current in the pre-70 C.E. period, rather than with relating those traditions to historically identifiable groups or trends.

Two points of special interest to this study should be noted here. Both involve Billerbeck's adoption of positions that one simply would not expect of one of his background and professional position. Given the popularity among Billerbeck's associates (cf. Chapter II on the Delitzsch-Strack

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circle), of such standard works as Weber's *Jüdische Theologie*, Gfrorer's *Das Jahrhundert des Heils* (Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 329), and Cremer's *Biblisch-Theol. Wörterbuch* (Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 330), one would expect Billerbeck to follow suit in holding that the term "Memra', Jahwes" refers to a "hypostasis of God" similar to the concept of the Λόγος Θεοῦ in the Gospel of John. The accepted opinion of Billerbeck's day seems to have been that such an idea was conceived to make it possible for the Jewish people to have personal contact with an otherwise exalted and impersonal Godhead. 10

Contrary to this popular belief, however, Billerbeck argues forcefully for the view that this term is simply another circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton itself, to be read "Memra', Adonai" or "Memra', HaShem." 11

Elsewhere Billerbeck refers to Christian Schöttgen, F. Nork and Alfred Edersheim (earlier collectors of rabbinic parallels to the New Testament), who, together with Gfrorer, held, on the basis of a midrashic interpretation by R. Shimon ben Laqish, that the ʿה .putExtra mentioned in Genesis 1:2 should be identified in a literal sense with the Messiah. This, in their view, would show that rabbinic literature knows of a


11 Ibid., p. 333.
preexistent -- and therefore divine -- Messiah. Billerbeck, however, shows that this is both a misinterpretation of Shimon and contrary to the spirit of rabbinic literature as a whole, which no matter what great acts it may attribute to the Messiah, never conceives of him as anything more than a normal human being. 12

Billerbeck the Translator

Individual Traditions

At this point an important transition should be noted. Billerbeck's rabbinic work up to this point has been characterized by the use of quotations and paraphrases of rabbinic materials rather than making his own translations. With the publication of his "Altjüdische Religionsgespräche" (Nathanael 25 (1909): 13-30, 33-50, 66-86), however, he begins a period of intensive work as a translator of rabbinic texts. This is not an article with a thesis, but simply a long series of aggadic stories illustrating contacts between Jews and non-Jews, strung together with organizing titles and bits of commentary. The translations are often footnoted, the notes commenting both on technical points of translation and on problems of interpretation. Billerbeck's style is free, but accurate. He keeps the content and vocabulary of his texts, even as he is transforming the short simple sentences of his Hebrew and Aramaic

originals into the more complex constructions required in good German style. As he has from the beginning, he continues to use the best texts available to him, although there is little or no evidence up to this point that he has access to or is using manuscripts.

One thing is quite clear. Billerbeck is an independent translator. If one compares, for example, his translations of the famous stories of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos being arrested for heresy (נוהג), and of Rabban Gamliel and his sister, Imma Shalom, and the Gentile judge (דוקס), with their renderings in Heinrich Laible's, Jesus Christus im Talmud, one finds consistent differences in style, in the translation of individual words, and in grammatical constructions. Comparison of Billerbeck's renderings with those of

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14 Note for example that in his translation of B.T. Aboda Zara 16b and 17a, the story of Rabbi Eliezer's being arrested for heresy, he quotes the complete reference to Deut. 23:19, while the printed text does not. Is he following the Munich Ms. here, or is he simply filling out the verse from the Biblical text? Paul Billerbeck, "Altjüdische Religionsgespräche," Nathanael 25 (1909): 69; Hermann L. Strack, Jesus, die Häretiker, und die Christen nach den ältesten jüdischen Ausgaben (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1910), Texts, pp. 4-5, §4b, note p.

Wuensche yields the same results. Moreover, there seems to be no internal connection between Billerbeck's translations, and those of H. L. Strack in his *Jesus, die Haretiker und die Christen*, which appeared a year later than Billerbeck's article. Billerbeck also includes many texts not included in Strack's work. Indeed, the parameters of his study are much wider. His interest, generally speaking, is in texts showing contacts between Jew and non-Jew, while Strack, like Laible before him, limits himself to those texts which up to his time were, among Christians, considered references to Jesus or to Christianity.

Again, there is evidence that 'Billerbeck the believer' is not keeping pace with 'Billerbeck the scholar' in his perceptions of things Jewish. While it is clear from his interpretative comments about the rabbinic passages referring to הָרִיבָה that he is aware that the term does not always refer to the same group or belief every time it appears, there does seem to be a tendency to interpret as many of these passages as possible with reference to Christianity, even where they clearly could refer to other groups. At one point, he quotes from the Talmud *Yerushalmi* a catena of questions supposedly asked of R. Simlai by heretics (מימי), and simply states without proof that these מימי are Christians. The questions all have to do
with the unity of the God head, and could just as well have been asked by the followers of a non-Christian dualistic group. 16

A telling example of this lack of development is seen in a story recorded in T.B. Bekh. 8b.

"They (סכניך ופנק אנשי) say to him, Tell us (some) figurative words (a parable). He replied, 'There was once a she-ass who gave birth, and a tablet was hung on him upon which was written that he should collect a hundred thousand Zuzim from his father's estate.' They replied (to him), 'And can a she-ass give birth?' He said to them, 'These are figurative words.—Salt, if it go bad, with what can they salt it? He answered, With the afterbirth of a she-ass.' 'And does a she-ass have an afterbirth?' 'Can salt go bad?'

Billerbeck comments on this story, "Die Bezugnahme auf Mt. 5,13 tritt so deutlich hervor, dass man in der ganzen Stelle eine zynische Verhöhnung Marias und Jesu wird sehen müssen: Das nie dumm werdende Salz Israels bedarf der Auffrischung nicht, am allerwenigstens durch einen Mann, wie Jesus!" 17

Although on first glance, this interpretation could be seen as correct because both T.B. Bekh. 8b and Matt. 5:13 contain a reference to salt losing its saltiness, the context of the story in the Talmud passage makes this interpretation

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17 Ibid., 68.
doubtful. The opponents of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya are clearly pagan philosophers and not Christians. The interpretation of Rabbi Samuel Edels on this passage seems more sensible. He applies the parables in question to gentiles in general, and to the gentile opponents of R. Yehoshua in particular. Only, apparently, after establishing this does Edels go on to apply it to the gentiles of his own day and time, who were Christians, when he refers to the ת安全保障, or New Covenant. The point in either case (gentiles in general or Gentile-Christians in particular) is the same. The "she-ass" is a bastard. It has no legitimate father (being the result of the union of a horse and a donkey), and cannot have offspring of its own. As such, it is כלא, according to the Torah. This means that it cannot take the obligation of a debt upon itself because it by


19 Rabbi Samuel Eliezer ben Judah Ha-Levi Edels 1555-1631. He was born in Cracow and moved to Posen in his youth. He served as rabbi in Chelm (1605-13), in Lublin (1614-24), and in Ostrog (1625-31). Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Edels, Samuel Eliezer ben Judah Ha-Levi," by Shmuel Ashkenazi.
definition cannot have offspring who would be in a position to pay the creditor should it die. The gentiles, as Edels explains the parable, are just like this. They have no legitimate father (i.e., God) who can testify or plead for them as God does for Israel, and they can have no legitimate offspring, and thus are not in any position to take the obligation of the (New) Covenant upon themselves. Salt by definition cannot lose its savor (the covenant with Israel is a covenant of salt and thus is, by definition, without end), and it is just as ridiculous to conceive of salt losing its savor as it is of a "she-ass" having an afterbirth.

A Complete Text

The next piece to be examined gives a good view of Billerbeck's translatative abilities. It is his rendering of which he entitles, "Eine jüdische Petruslegende" (Nathanael 23 (1907): 19-22). It presents a picture of the Apostle Peter as he is understood in medieval Jewish legend. The story comes at the end of the Toledoth Yeshu, the medieval Jewish versions of the Jewish story. Billerbeck explains that the text he is translating is one of four versions known to Adolph Jellinek, from whose Bet ha-Midrasch he draws it, and that in Jellinek's opinion it is the earliest of the four.20

Billerbeck the scholar here comes to the fore, although it is possible to find a bit of "Tendenz" in the way he relates the contents of the story. "Der Apostel Petrus erscheint in ihr als ein verkappter Rabbi, der nur zum Schein Christ wird, um nach seinem Übertritt durch seine Autorität die Christen von Judenverfolgungen zurückzuhalten; in Wirklichkeit bleibt der Apostel ein Jude, der nur über die Thora Israels nachsinnt und im geheimen jüdische Psalmen dichtet, die nach ihrer Approbation durch den Sanhedrin sogar Bestandteile der synagogalen Liturgie werden."

One should note especially the terms "verkappter Rabbi," and "Schein Christ" used to describe the Peter of this story.

In contrast to the above, Jellinek says of the story, "Wer alle diese vier Bearbeitungen ohne Vorurtheil liest, muss sich sagen, dass die Haupttendenz derselben nicht darin besteht das Christentum zu schmähen, sondern die Juden gegen die im Namen Jesu veranlassten Bedrückungen der Kirche in Schutz zu nehmen...Die bedrängten Juden appellirten an die schönen, liebevollen Aussprüche des Evangeliums gegen die Christen selbst und wollten den Päpsten zeigen, wie sie den Spuren des Apostels folgen können."

In examining Billerbeck's version, I refer exclusively to the text he himself says he is translating, namely Jellinek's

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21 Billerbeck, Ibid.

22 Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrasch, Part 6, pp. x-xi.
Version B, which Jellinek considers to be the earliest of the four versions. Upon examination of two of the other versions, Jellinek's Version C and that in Wagenseil's Tela Ignea Satanae, it can be seen that the various versions of the story differ so radically that the use of the other versions as an additional check on Billerbeck's translation would be fruitless. In more general matters of interpretation, however, they are of help.

Billerbeck's translation is on the whole accurate without being woodenly literal. There are here and there points worth noting, which can aid in clarifying both the nature of Billerbeck's translation abilities, and his general level of understanding of rabbinic Judaism. According to Billerbeck's text, the story runs as follows. The Christian leaders become more and more aware of R. Shimon Cepha's gifts and abilities, and they begin to fear that his influence over the general populace may turn into opposition to their own views. Because of this, they decide to present R. Shimon with an ultimatum, albeit in 'honey-coated' words. They try to flatter him through praise of his great wisdom and piety, and state that it is unseemly for a man of his ability and position to have anything to do with the Jewish people. They offer to make him absolute head of the Church if he will join

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them. If not, they will kill him, and all other Jews as well. R. Shimon politely refuses their offer, stating simply that he does not wish to leave his faith, and that as to their threat, he trusts in God's ultimate control of the situation.

When in response to this the Gentiles begin killing the Jews, the Jewish community appeals to R. Shimon, who reconsiders the situation, and decides to convert. This he does with the understanding of his own people that he is not in fact forsaking them or the Jewish faith, but is doing it only to protect them. He then converts on condition that a tower be built where he will live alone. Once a year he appears with new teachings for the Church. In this way, he is able to live privately as a Jew, and with his new authority he enacts Church laws which brings about new and more humane treatment of the Jewish people. In private, he also composes piyyutim which are accepted into the Jewish order of prayers.

In this story, especially, it is evident that Billerbeck's facility with rabbinic Hebrew was good at the time (1907). Of all the points chosen from the story for discussion below, only two involve what I consider to be actual errors of translation. The others fall into the category of interpretation of texts, the literal sense of which it is clear Billerbeck understood. The first of these two translation problems involves a point of interpretation as well. Having just appealed to R. Shimon's vanity, the Christian leaders in the story go on to try to persuade him to convert
by telling of the teaching authority he will have. "לא תים
עומר ותקרא נconciliation ותקרא רוח הקודש טויבים.
Billerbeck translates this as, "Sondern komm zu uns, dass du uns gute Gebote und
Satzungen lehrest." Here Billerbeck has made a small trans-
lation error. His text should read, ". . . dass du uns Gebote
und gute Satzungen lehrest," or, "dass du uns gute Satzungen
und Gebote lehrest." The masculine adjective besteht goes with
the masculine noun חיות, but not with the feminine noun
mithut. Billerbeck translates as though the adjective were
meant to go with both nouns. In general the adjective besteht is used regularly in the Hebrew Bible in connection with the
idea that God's commandments (whether they be termed_Commande, חוץ, תשובה, or סימנים) were given to Israel for their
good. In one place in particular the term besteht is connected
with the term חוסה, and in phraseology similar to that in
the Peter story. In Ezekiel 20:25 the prophet gives God's
judgment over His people who, although they were given good
statutes and commandments, did not recognize them as such
and turned to idolatrous practices. God, in response to
this, punished them by letting them have their way, and
suffer the results of disobedience. "... הנעיך את תחותך אשר בך
החוב על פעמים רבים ומסים לא חזרה בך.
Is the language in the Peter story perhaps an echo of this phraseology with the

24 Billerbeck, "Eine jüdische Petruslegende," 19; Jellinek,
Bet ha-Midrasch, pt. 6, p. 9.

25 cf. for example Deut. 10:12-13; 30:15-16, 19-20; Ps.
119:39, 72; and Micah 6:8.
implication that previously the Christians had had poor instruction, and now R. Shimon would have the opportunity to better it?

The other translation error could simply involve the inadvertent dropping of a word by either author or printer. On page 10 of the Jellinek text we read, "'וַיַּהֲנָה אֶבְרִי מֶעֲשָׂה לְכָּם \(\text{שָׁבַעְתָּםּ} \text{מָאָבָל} \text{בּוּזֵה} \)," "And behold, I command you that you should build (to build) me a high tower," while Billerbeck translates simply, "Und siehe! ich befehle euch einen Turm zu bauen..." leaving out any reference to the adjective, \(\text{גְּבָה} \), "high."\(^{26}\) The insignificance of these errors for the overall understanding of the text is in its own way indicative of Billerebck's abilities with rabbinic Hebrew. Another problem rendering of Billerbeck's is his translation of the story's summing up of R. Shimon's position among the Christians, "'וַדַּוְּה הָזָּה הַפּּוּפְּסָה אֶתַּה, \(\text{שֶׁהוּא בְּעָלָם} \)," Billerbeck translates, "Und das war der Papst, der einzige der in der Welt war," "And that was the pope, the only (unique) one in the world." A better rendering would be, "And that (one) was the first pope in the world (that there was)."\(^{27}\)

An indication of how closely Billerbeck did in fact read the texts he translates can be seen in that although the Christian leaders in their approach to R. Shimon at the

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\(^{27}\) Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrasch, pt. 6, p. 10; Ibid., 22.
beginning of the story twice refer to Christianity as a "religion," when R. Shimon at first refuses to convert, and says, "אינני רואת מעשה זאת," "I don't want to forsake my faith," they promptly respond, "... אם אני מתה למחנה," "If you do not join our party, our sect...." Billerbeck notices this change, and renders זה as "Partei," while he previously translated זה as "Religion." 28 Another point of interpretation is Billerbeck's comment on the statement in the text which shows part of the response of the non-Jews to R. Shimon's refusal, "וה neger הוריק ונותרוהו התורות מדרכין את השם קדושנו, א'- этом יתועדريم עבד ג'- מקדשנו." Commenting on this, Billerbeck says, "Wohl Textverdebnis; man sollte erwarten: sie verkauften die Juden für Geld, und zwar Einen Juden um 30 Geldstücke, denn so ward Jesus verkauft." 29 This emendation is intriguing, but perhaps unnecessary. The text could simply be an echoing of the phraseology ...II Kings 6:25, "And there was a great famine in Samaria, ..., until an ass's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver (כסף כסף), and the fourth part of a kab (וונט וכף) of dove's dung for five shekels of silver (כסף כסף)," and in II Kings 7:1, "... A measure of fine meal shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel,..."

28 Is this a slip on the part of a copyist, or is it a reference in the text to two different views of Christianity, the Christian leaders holding to the view that Christianity is not a new faith at all, but Judaism fulfilled (זו), with R. Shimon holding it is a separate religion (זה)?

29 Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrasch, pt. 6, p. 9; Billerbeck, "Eine judische Petruslegende," 20, note 4.
A difficult passage in the Jellinek text is R. Shimon's advising the Christian leaders on how they should treat the Jews, at the end of which admonition he says, "חטאים מתוקחים," which Billerbeck translates, "so werden sie verlassen werden," thus making "Jews" the subject. Billerbeck says nothing about Jellinek's suggested emendation whereby he would add לא יועשו, "abominations," as the subject of text. 30

At another place in the Jellinek manuscript, R. Shimon sums up his advice to the Christian leaders on how to attract Jews to their faith by saying that if they follow his advice, then, "Und es wird ihnen nicht, "You will bring them to an awareness that your faith is not good," which is how Billerbeck renders it in his text. He then notes, "Offenbar Textverderbnis; es muss heissen: dass eure Religion gut, oder dass ihre Religion nicht gut ist." 31 There is, however, another possibility, namely, that this is not a textual corruption at all, but simply a circumlocution similar to the standard term, שנאיםtsyא, haters of Israel, referring in fact to the Jews themselves. Here it would be designed to keep R. Shimon from saying that Christianity is good for Jews.

The First Appearance of Halakhic Texts

The next major development in Billerbeck's study of rabbinic literature comes with his series on the prophet

30 Jellinek, Ibid., p. 10; Billerbeck, Ibid., 21.

Elijah (Nathanael 30 (1914): 43-63, 93-96, 112-114; 31 (1915): 18-29; 32 (1916): 33-50). This series is ostensibly a collection and translation of rabbinic material centered around a single theme, namely, the activity of Elijah following his removal from earth, but there is also something more in this series. Here, for the first time, halakhic texts begin to appear, a very significant development considering Billerbeck's non-Jewish upbringing. It is important to note that Billerbeck, in dealing with these texts, is not specifically addressing halakhic issues themselves. He quote these texts only as illustrations of the eschatological activity of Elijah. Perhaps this explains the fact that while his translation abilities are good, he is not always sensitive to technical terms or potential textual problems with bearing on halakha. For this reason, I have chosen to examine in detail two examples of such problems.

The first of these is from Talmud Yerushalmi (P.T. Ter. 8.10, 46b). It is an aggadic story asking a halakhic question: Can a Jew be turned over to his pursuers if thereby many other people are saved? R. Yehoshua ben Levi answers yes, while Elijah says no. The problem arises, according to the story, because a certain Ulla ben Qosheb, sought by the authorities, has fled to R. Yehoshua in Lydda. They have followed Ulla to his place of sanctuary, surrounded the city, and threatened its destruction if Ben Qosheb is not turned over to them. R. Yehoshua persuades Ulla to give himself up, on the principle that the safety of the community takes
precedence over that of the individual. Elijah, however, reprimands R. Yehoshua for this. The problem here is Billerbeck's translation of the opening phrase, מִלֶּךָ וְרָאשׁ תְעֵיתָו מִלֶּכֶת, as "Dem Ulla ben Qosheb (?) machte die Königin unsittliche Anträge..." He did not read the text carefully enough. The subject of the sentence is not מִלֶּכֶת, "Queen," but מִלֶּךָ, "kingdom," or, "government."

What is more, it is clear that here Billerbeck not only has misread the text, but has also misread the secondary sources he was using, and thus was misled in his understanding of the text. In a note to the word, "Königin," Billerbeck states, "Grätz, Gesch. d. Juden IV 2, 299 denkt an die Kaiserin Zenobia 267-273 n. Chr.; Bacher, Pal. Amor. I. 128 1, bemerkt dazu dass es zweifelhaft sei, ob R. Yehoschua b. Levi, zu dem Ulla ben Qosheb nach obiger Stelle floh, damals noch am Leben war." An independent reading of Graetz and Bacher, however, shows that they correctly understood this passage. Graetz says simply that in his view this story took place during the reign of Queen Zenobia, but he never states that the text should be translated as Billerbeck does. Bacher only describes Ulla ben Qosheb as a, "von der Regierung [my italics] verfolgten Glaubensgenossen," and uses the story as an example of R. Yehoshua's being recognized as an advocate of his community with the secular authorities.

32 Billerbeck, "Der Prophet Elias...," 62.

33 Ibid., note 25.
It is also clear that Billerbeck was not aware of Schwab's rendering of the phrase in the third volume of his *Le Talmud de Jerusalem*, which reads, "Ainsi, Ulla, fils de Qoscheb, fuit recherché par le gouvernement [my italics]." 34

The second of these passages is B.T. Qidd. 72b, a halakhic discussion between R. Meir and R. Yose over whether Elijah, at his coming, would purify the *coheinim* and so as to make them legitimate Israelites. R. Meir says no; R. Yose yes. The halakha, according to a *baraita*, follows R. Yose. At this point R. Yosef inserts the personal remark that if Yehuda in the name of Schmuel had not said that the halakha follows the opinion of R. Yose, then Elijah at his coming could easily remove whole groups of people in the Babylonia of his time from legitimate membership in Israel (הוה אתי אלהים משכן רומני לרודני רודני הקהלין). The underlying problem here is how to render the phrase רודני רודני הקהלין. Already by Rashi's time there were those who had problems with this passage, and perhaps there were variant manuscript readings in existence. Rashi seems to have had only the two words רודני רודני before him, which he explains as הרודני הרודני. He then says that another

version reads 'كلير', and defines with a reference to B.T. Yeb. 122a (כְּלֵיָּר שֶׁכָּנָיו אֵאֵז), at which reference he also defines כְּלֵיָּר as בָּשִׂיר.

These renderings are supported by more modern lexica as well. Billerbeck follows this evidence only in his actual rendering of the terms. He, however, takes no notice of Rashi's explanation of כְּלֵיָּר (כְּלֵיָּר), but rather attempts to translate the printed text as it stands. In doing so, Billerbeck ignores the absence of a waw between the second כְּלֵיָּר and כְּלֵיָּר, and simply renders the phrase as "Haufen und Verbindungen (von illegitimen Familien)." Rashi's comment, however, would seem to point rather to two separate manuscript traditions, one which read כְּלֵיָּר כְּלֵיָּר, and the other כְּלֵיָּר כְּלֵיָּר. On the principle of lectio difficilior,


the original reading of the tradition was probably with having been added as a marginal explanation. Later copyists, mistaking the explanation for a part of the text, simply incorporated it after .

Another First: Rabbinic-New Testament Comparison

In 1917 Billerbeck, for the first time, published a piece in Nathanael specifically on a New Testament passage (Jesus' parable of the "Pharisee and the Publican" in Luke 18) rather than on an important Biblical personage such as Abraham or Elijah or on a theme such as Jewish/non-Jewish contacts. In this article, Billerbeck assembles a great deal of material (most by rabbinic) which he feels illuminates the parable, and presents it systematically verse-by-verse. Here he simply assumes the validity of such an approach without establishing clear reasons for doing so. This does not mean, however, that his approach is without any historical or critical method. Where he is able, he quotes earlier datable material (here apocryphal and pseudepigraphal material) -- for example, in showing the antiquity of private voluntary fasts. In addition, he is sensitive to the difference in age of Tannaitic and Amoraic traditions relying frequently on the

Krauss and Sperber, Ibid., show קדש to be a Greek loan word. As such it could be of potential difficulty to a later rabbinic copyist.

Paul Billerbeck, "Das Gleichnis vom Pharisäer und Söldner (Luk. 18), erläutert aus der rabbinischen Literatur," Nathanael 33 (1917), 30.
former as the earlier in making historical judgments.\textsuperscript{39}

Far less satisfactory is his approach to the message of the parable, and his use of rabbinic material in illuminating its characters. Billerbeck does not state this explicity, but it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that he sees the Pharisee in this parable as typifying rabbinic Judaism as a whole. This is most clearly seen when he opens the article by quoting a prayer from the Talmudim in comparison with the Pharisee's prayer and concludes, "Das dem Pharisäer Lk. 18, 11f. in den Mund gelegte Dankgebet ist mithin nicht frei oder gar tendenziös erfunden, sondern durchaus der Wirklichkeit abgelauscht."\textsuperscript{40} While this may be true with respect to form, it certainly is not with respect to the spirit behind the prayer. Jesus' pharisee is being criticized not for his practice, nor for the form of his prayer, but for the attitude of his heart, which is too self-assured and does not humble itself before God.

R. Nechunya ben ha-Qana's prayer (quoted from both P.T. Ber. 4.2, 7d and from T.B. Ber. 28b) at first appears to have the same tone to it, but that is only because Billerbeck does not quote the entire story in which it is found. Had Billerbeck done so, it would be seen that R. Nechunya is depicted as a very humble man. In the first part of the story R. Nechunya's colleagues ask him what it is he prays

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
upon entering and leaving the house of study. He answers by saying that upon entering he prays that no stumbling block or offense will be laid through his actions, and that upon leaving he gives thanks for his lot. Billerbeck quotes only the latter (the prayer upon leaving) because of its obvious resemblance to the prayer of Jesus' pharisee. But the superficiality of this resemblance also becomes obvious as soon as the same rabbi's "prayer upon entering" is taken into account. This prayer only reinforces the impression of a man who is just as concerned about his colleagues' reputations as he is about his own, and even more concerned that someone else may be led to sin by his or his colleagues falsely declaring something pure which is in fact impure, or permitted which is forbidden. He also is reluctant to lay requirements upon others that the Torah does not demand when he prays that they be kept from declaring that which is permitted forbidden, or that which is pure impure. What needs to be made clear in any such comparison (between Jesus' words and those of the sages) is that one can lead a religiously Jewish life without violating the spirit of Jesus' parable, as Jesus himself emphasizes by the very fact that he is not criticizing the Pharisee's actions but rather his attitudes.

In commenting upon the publican in Jesus' parable, Billerbeck again constructs an artificial distinction between Jesus and the sages. At the very least, he oversimplifies the matter. He refers to Jesus' statement at the close of the parable that the publican returned to his house
"justified" (Luke 18:14), i.e., forgiven, and states that the sages would have seriously questioned Jesus' conclusion. He supports this with references to statements in the Mishnah to the effect that restitution of stolen property to the wronged person is required as well. Interestingly enough he says nothing about Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:23-24 that if one is making an offering (εἴδωλον) in the temple, and there remembers that another has something against him, he should leave his offering there, and seek first to be reconciled to the other person. Only then should he return and complete his offering.

In dealing with this problem, Billerbeck is totally inconsistent. He begins by accusing the sages of overlooking the untenable situation of the tax collector (who could never possibly remember all those he had defrauded): "Man verkannte nicht, dass unter solchen Umständen denen, die sich an fremden Gut vergriffen hatten, die wirksame Busse ungemein erschwert oder geradezu unmöglich gemacht werde." He then goes on to disprove his own statement by quoting the sources showing exactly how such a situation was mercifully dealt with, and then ends by criticizing the rabbinic decisions because they are too lenient, and perhaps fulfill the letter, but not the spirit of Lev. 5:20ff. which

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41 Ibid., 38-39.

42 Ibid., 39.
demands full restitution! 43

In all fairness to Billerbeck, he does show his critical and scholarly ability in this study as well when, in discussing fasting practices at the time of Jesus, he rejects less well-informed (Christian) New Testament expositions which invent practices unknown to the sources. He refers specifically to the conclusion on the part of some commentators that because pharisaic practice may have involved a twice-a-week fast, most people fasted only once-a-week. He also rejects the idea that most Pharisees were in fact obligated to fast twice-a-week. His own position is that such fasting was entirely voluntary. 44

The Rabbi Aqiba Materials

In the last three years of the existence of the journal Nathanael, Billerbeck published a series of articles that, from their length and from the depth in which their subject is treated, could constitute a small book. The subject treated in these articles is the life and work of Rabbi Aqiba (Nathanael 32 (1916): 81-94; 97-122; 33 (1917): 81-143; 34 (1918): 3-61). On the whole Billerbeck's capabilities with rabbinic material are evident throughout this work. Previously his approach was topical, concentrating particularly on aggadic material. Here, however, he has chosen an historical theme. The three parts of this book-length series can

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 34.
be more or less summarized under three separate headings: Aqiba's contributions to halakha, Aqiba's life, and Aqiba's underlying theological opinions. The first part, Aqiba's contributions to the development of the halakha, is the best.

Here, in particular, the hermeneutic attributed to Aqiba, which he is supposed to have received from his teacher, Nahum of Gimzo, is discussed. Billerbeck does a fine job of summarizing a key point in the development of a basis for halakha, namely the use of specific hermeneutic principles which make it possible to show the harmony of all traditional halakhot with the written Torah. He begins his discussion with the seven hermeneutical rules attributed to Hillel, and discusses the entire subject with little apparent bias. The underlying presupposition throughout this work, which for his time was perhaps more usual than it is today, was that all these traditions and the way they describe Aqiba's contributions should be taken more or less at face value.

This can be seen more readily in Billerbeck's discussion of Aqiba's life from the beginning of his student days through his ascent to a position of leadership among the Jewish people of his time, and finally to his martyrdom. Almost all these stories are accepted as they stand.45

45 This is just the opposite of the approach in a more contemporary work, where the "biographical" material is set aside altogether, and only the halakhoth which attribute specific positions to Aqiba are taken as the basis of study,
Billerbeck's approach, nonetheless, is not totally uncritical. Specifically in terms of Rabbi Aqiba's age and the number of years he studied, Billerbeck explicitly says that these numbers are not to be taken literally, but only as meaning "a long time." He also, at one point, notes a tendency in the sources to glorify Israel by presenting famous gentile leaders as proselytes. At another point, though it is not clear what is his basis for doing so, he also questions the traditional attribution of the section of the prayers after eating as having been added by the sages of Yavneh in thanksgiving for permission to bury the dead of Bethar. His purely technical ability to work with the text has grown as well, in that here we see him quoting simpler tosafot as well as traditional commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi.


47 Ibid., 83.
Billerbeck's critical abilities are "mixed" for another reason as well, the fact that, even at their best, they are profoundly influenced by his conception of what a religion is and of what its function is in the life of man. This influence is clearly evident in his entitling an entire section of his work, "Aqibas soteriologisches System." In the next part of this chapter, when we examine Billerbeck's excursuses in the Kommentar, we will see another side of Billerbeck altogether, namely, his fascination with halakhic material for its own sake, including all its various nuances as expressed through various rabbis at various times. Here we see none of that. Billerbeck's underlying purpose in this section seems to be simply to prove German evangelical Christianity correct at all costs.

Perhaps the best approach at this point is to simply permit Billerbeck to speak for himself. He says such things as:

Diese beiden Beispiele [T.B. Erub. 21b Rabbi Aqiba in prison, having only enough water to wash his hands before bread or to drink, drinks and does not eat; Sem. 8 (16c) R. Aqiba refuses to leave his Torah study to go to the deathbed of his son] aus denen wir den Eifer Aqibas in der Beobachtung der rabbinischen Satzungen kennen lernen, haben für unser evangelisches Empfinden etwas Abstossendes. Lieber will er freiwillig Hungers sterben, also sein eigner Mörder werden, und lieber bleibt er herzlos von dem Sterbelager eines Sohnes fern, an das ihn doch die natürliche Pflicht ruft, als dass er sich gegen Worte verfehlt, die nicht etwa ein Gottesgebot, sondern

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50 Billerbeck, "Rabbi Aqiba: Leben und Wirken...," 89.
He goes on to explain that the evangelical Christian begins with the assurance that through Christ he has peace with God and can trust in Him, and that as a result he has a "Trieb in seinem Innern" to thank and to praise God in all that He does. The rabbinic Jew ("Der Bekenner des alten Judentums"), on the other hand, began with works ("stellte an die Spitze die Werke, die Gebotserfüllungen") whether they came from the Torah proper or from the later rabbis. As a result of fulfilling these precepts, peace with God and a trusting relationship with Him is attained ("Wer diese Gebote erfüllt, handelt religiös; denn Religiösität ist nichts anderes als Beobachten der Thora... . Also erst Werke, ohne die es keine Religiösität gibt, dann als deren Folge und Lohn das göttliche Wohlgefallen."). 52

Here we see the very same understanding of religious Judaism that is found already in the second part of the


52 Ibid., 11.
first Nathanael essay, "Abrahams Bedeutung für das Reich Gottes nach Auffassung der älteren Haggada," (Nathanael 16, 1900, pp. 33-57, 65-80). This article is designed as an indictment against the aggada because its emphasis is upon Abraham as the "Jew par excellence" in his life, instead of upon "Abraham the Believer" as in Christian theology. He sums up his entire argument in the last part of this essay when he says, "Der Abraham der Synagoge (Billerbeck's italics) ist zum Mann der Gesetzesgerechtigkeit und damit zum Prototyp des pharisäischen Judentums gemacht. . . ." 53

We will later see a Billerbeck who has some grasp of the structure of the halakha and of its real meaning for the life of the individual religious Jew, but here, where he is addressing the historical differences between Judaism and Christianity (as he sees them), he seems to lose his perspective and his objectivity entirely. By now it should be obvious that Billerbeck's ability to read and understand rabbinic texts was very good considering his lack of Jewish background. Was this same Billerbeck not also capable of placing R. Aqiba's views within the context of the entire halakhic structure? Perhaps he did not have the sensitivity to approach the two aggadic stories illustrating Aqiba's zeal for Torah as examples (perhaps extreme) of שמחת של מצוות, taking delight in obeying God's Commandments. Was he not at

least able to note that the halakha did not follow Aqiba in these matters? There is of course no reason why one cannot study the Halakhot or the stories about one rabbi in particular as an individual unit, but is one justified in understanding them in a spirit totally alien to that of religious Judaism as a whole and then making them primary for the entire structure (whether or not the halakha itself does)?

A very telling example of how Billerbeck's own personal religious position marred his ability to empathize with rabbinic texts is his description of R. Aqiba's position in the matter of what constitutes grounds for a man divorcing his wife (M. Gittin 9:10). The School of Shammai says that he may divorce her only if she is guilty of immorality. The School of Hillel says he may do so even if she so much as ruins his dinner, and R. Aqiba holds that he may divorce her if he simply finds another woman more beautiful than she. Rabbi Obadiah Bertinoro and Maimonides explain these three opinions as rooted in different ways of interpreting the relevant verse in the Torah (Deut. 24:1), "וְאָסַר לְאַשֶּׁר תַּשָּׁמֵר הָעֵרָה בְּעַרְוָה" The School of Shammai strictly holds that only immorality (עֵרָה הָעָרָה ) constitutes allowable grounds. The School of Hillel takes a more lenient position, that also other reasons can be allowed, not strictly limited.

Interestingly enough Billerbeck, himself, later refers to the post-Aqiba decision on keeping the commandments in time of persecution in Billerbeck, "Rabbi Aqiba als religiössittliche Personlichkeit," 53, although he never seems to refer to the concept of visiting the sick (חִיקוֹר הָעָלִים).
to immoral action (דָּרָךְ עָרוּת). R. Aqiba, on the other hand, according to Bertinoro in particular, while allowing for immorality as grounds, interpreted the word בָּשָׁם as meaning מַעֲנִי and thus that this too could be a reason for divorce. He derives this interpretation from the Biblical phrase, בְּעֵינָיו, meaning "in his eyes." Maimonides objects to what R. Aqiba appears to be saying. He asserts that this is not the halakha, but explains R. Aqiba's view as emanating from his unique hermeneutic. Both commentators conclude by saying that the halakha follows the School of Hillel.

Billerbeck, on the other hand although he was clearly capable of doing so, apparently made no effort to discover just what meaning religious Judaism has traditionally attached to this mishnah. He simply quotes the passage, and then concludes, "trotz aller schönen Worte, mit der Aqiba die brave Ehefrau verherrlicht hat, hat er sich nie von der jüdischen Anschauung von der Inferiorität der Frau losgemacht; darum bleibt er in jener materialistischen Auffassung stecken, nach der die Ehe nichts anderes als die Fortpflanzung des Menschengeschlechts bezweckt. Wie weit steht diese doch hinter der zurück, die der Apostel Paulus Ephes. 5,22ff. vertritt!" It is certainly his privilege to disagree with the traditional commentators if he so chooses, but let him also give an interpretation of the

55Ibid., 17; Note also that Paul's views are not quite as simple as Billerbeck presents them. One ought to read I Cor. 7:1-11 as well as Eph. 5.22ff. to which Billerbeck refers.
passage that shows he has made some effort to understand it within its context, both the nearer as well as the further context of R. Aqiba's hermeneutic and halakhot and of the halakha in general! Let him not draw conclusions about religious Judaism itself without at least taking into account how it has itself understood such passages.56

The Kommentar Essays

This leads us to a consideration of one final group of materials: the essays which constitute volume four of the Kommentar. Here we see Billerbeck again both at his best and at his worst. On the one hand, his knowledge of and ability to work with halakhic traditions is more developed here than anywhere else in his published works. On the other hand, he displays a total lack of genuine sympathy for religious Judaism as a whole.

The essays in vol. 4 of the Kommentar treat not only aggadic and halakhic themes, but also topics of inherent interest to the traditional student of the New Testament, as well as subjects which, while perhaps not directly related to the New Testament, are nonetheless important for the understanding of certain New Testament passages or of religious

56 It is significant, contrary to Billerbeck's generalizations about religious Judaism on the basis of his understanding of M. Gittin 9:10, that the later rabbis chose to conclude the Gemara sugya on this Mishnah with Rabbi Elazar's tradition on the basis of Mal. 3:13-14 that even the altar in Jerusalem weeps when a man divorces the "wife of his youth," (T.B. Gittin 90b).
Judaism in general. Among the most significant in the "theological/aggadic" category are essays dealing with such broad topics as the Sermon on the Mount, Psalm 110 in early rabbinic literature, the coming of the Messiah, and one analyzing the specific terms, Sheol, Gehinnom, and Gan Eden. From this volume, one also can get a good general understanding of Jewish prayer from the series of essays describing the organization of the synagogue and its worship, the Shema, Shemone Esre, tefillin, and zitzit. Of interest also to student's of early Christianity are his essays on the Passover Seder, on the conduct of a Sabbath or festival meal, on tithing, on slaves, and on lepers and leprosy. The essay on the Passover Seder and another on Pharisees and Sadducees are also valuable for their historical insights.

This leads us to a crucial question: Is Billerbeck presenting this predominantly rabbinic material uncritically as being uniformly representative of the time of Jesus, or does he recognize historical development in his sources. If the latter is the case, what is his purpose in including all of this material in a Kommentar zum Neuen Testament? In this section of this chapter I will show that Billerbeck does indeed recognize historical development in his sources, and that his interest in Judaism -- while topically limited by the needs of a Protestant pastor and New Testament student -- ranged beyond those boundaries.

On the matter of historical awareness, the first point
to note is Billerbeck's continued use of datable Greek-language sources side by side with rabbinic materials. In his discussion of the antiquity of the divisions of the Biblical canon, for example, he begins by quoting the prologue to Ben Sira, 2 Maccabees, the Gospel of Luke, and Josephus, and only then goes on to consider rabbinic sources.\(^57\) Another interesting example of Billerbeck's use of early datable non-rabbinic sources in these essays is his quoting of the Assumption of Moses and 4 Ezra in order to show the antiquity of the kind of messianic speculation embodied in Matt. 1:17 and Ex. Rab. 15.\(^58\)

These essays also give clear testimony that Billerbeck was aware of development both in the content of halakha, and in the form in which rabbinic traditions are presented. In discussing the antiquity of the term רגע in rabbinic literature, he says the following of a Ber. Rabbah tradition (65), featuring the early authority Jose ben Joezer: "Wenn die Wortlaut in Gn.R. 65 (42a, 52) authentisch wäre, würde unter den rabbinischen Gelehrten der erste, der sich dieser Bezeichnung bedient hat, der um 150v.Chr. lebende Jose b. Joezer aus Cereda gewesen sein; er würde sich dann auch als erster zum Unsterblichkeitsglauben bekannt haben. Allein der wortlaut der ihm in den Mund gelegten Ausserung ist sicher nicht authentisch. Die spätere Zeit hat den Jose b. Joezer


\(^{58}\)Ibid., pt. 2, pp. 994-996.
As to development in the content of halakha, Billerbeck says, "Dass die Halakha Wandlungen, grosse Wandlungen durchgemacht hat, weiss jeder Kenner der Mischna u. Gemara."\textsuperscript{60} As practical application of this awareness, we see his use of such phrases as "Die spätere Halakha" and "Die Halakha hat sich für letzteres entscheiden."\textsuperscript{61} Another example is Billerbeck's explanation of the term \textit{עריסות התמה} and its use from the earliest sources on.\textsuperscript{62} Further is his awareness of the opinion of a Jewish scholar of his day that the later supplement to Megillath Taanith was added from the medieval Babylonian collection, Halachoth Gedoloth,\textsuperscript{63} and his statement in his description of the prayers after eating, "Ob die Birkath ha-Zimmun schon in Jesu Tagen üblich war, wissen wir nicht."\textsuperscript{64} In the openly halakhic essays, however (for example, that on circumcision) there does not seem to be any attempt at

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., pp. 1130-1; Note also that on p. 1058 of the same volume and part Billerbeck distinguishes between redactor and text of Aboth de Rabbi Nathan.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p. 818.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., pt. 1, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., pt. 2, pp. 815-821.

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., pt. 1, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., pt. 2, p. 628.
historical organization at all. His concern seems to be rather to describe the topic or practice in detail, more or less according to later religious usage. At other points, for example in his description of the Passover Seder, he relies almost exclusively on Tannaitic sources, and specifically the Mishnah in an attempt to make his presentation on the basis of the earliest rabbinic sources possible. He in fact says at one point, "Es darf angenommen werden, dass die Passahfeier in Jesu Tagen im grossen und ganzen so verlaufen ist, wie sie oben nach der Mischna geschildert ist."\(^{65}\)

Some of this apparent inconsistency can be explained by the fact that these essays represent various concerns, for some of which historical sensitivity is more important, for others less. In the purely halakhic essays, for instance, historical perspective may not be quite as important as attaining a general grasp of the topic discussed. As can be seen from the above quotations, Billerbeck knew what he was about in writing these essays. He was clearly aware that not all the material he discussed could be dated to Jesus' time. His goal, apparently, was not to show the development of halakha, but to show what later became accepted practice. What his interest in those subjects was, specifically, and how he related them to the New Testament passages or themes to which their titles refer is, however, not clear.

\(^{65}\)Ibid., pt. 1, p. 74.
One thing is clear. Apart from small misunderstandings he had an excellent grasp of halakha, at least on those topics mentioned in the New Testament or necessary for a clearer understanding of early Christianity. One of the most telling examples of his perception in this area is his continued reference in the halakhic essays to important technical terms necessary for the understanding of halakhic problems and the structure of rabbinic passages dealing with those problems. These technical terms he gives in the original Hebrew within his German versions of the individual

66 cf. for example Kommentar, vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 264, where Billerbeck is concerned to show that the putting on of the ritual prayer objects, Tefillin, was not common apart from the learned classes. This appears to be directly contradicted by T. B. Gittin 37b, quoted by Billerbeck himself three pages later (p. 267), which shows that Tefillin were worn by many of the common soldiers of Bar Kochba. At another point (Kommentar, vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 236) Billerbeck seems unaware that at least from a later date the Habdalalah, a blessing traditionally said at the close of the Sabbath, was employed both as a separate rite and as a part of the Shemone Esre. He treats them as separate practices. Interestingly enough he recognizes the fluidity of the formulation of this benediction (Shemone Esre) in earlier times (similar to the approach to such questions in Joseph Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud, Forms and Patterns, (revised version of תפילת בחקוף תפלות התנאיאים ואמאי הגיעו, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2nd ed. 1966), Studia Judaica, Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums, 9 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977); while Ismar Elbogen, Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung, Schriften her. von der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums, Grundriss der Gesamtwissenschaft des Judentums (Leipzig: Buchhandlung Gustav Fock, G.m.b.H., 1913, pp. 240, 244 simply accepts the traditional attribution of this practice to the "Men of the Great Synagogue."
passages. In discussing circumcision, for example, both in his own discussion and in his translation, he gives in Hebrew the terms סירעש, and ציריעס with explanation.\(^{67}\) In his discussion of tithing, the terms תימות, חסורים, וכורות are given in Hebrew in text and translation.\(^{68}\) He also quotes (though infrequently) the Shulhan Arukh as a source for basic explanation of halakha.\(^{69}\) Another interesting aspect of Billerbeck's understanding of halakha and halakhic texts is his awareness of the fact that one cannot always be sure in certain cases which traditions represent actual practice at a given time, and which are purely theoretical. He says, for example, in the course of his describing the laws dealing with slaves and slavery, "Gewiss wird manches davon rein theoretischer Art sein; aber darum ist es doch nicht angängig, dem gesamten einschlägigen Quellenmaterial lediglich akademischen Wert beizulegen."\(^{70}\)

These late essays show Billerbeck a careful, thorough, and knowledgeable student of rabbinic literature from its beginnings through the late middle ages. Interestingly, they also reveal a contradictoriness emerging from his views

\(^{67}\) These are the technical terms for individual steps in the circumcision process. Billerbeck, Kommentar, vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 28-29.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., pt. 2, pp. 640, 646.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., pt. 1, pp. 28, 254.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., pt. 2, p. 698.
on 'theological' questions. There is clear evidence that Billerbeck's facility and experience with rabbinic literature were beginning to influence his theological thinking. In his essay on the topic of resurrection, for instance, he concludes, "So sind die Meinungen über eine allgemeine oder nur teilweise Auferstehung der Toten in der eigentlichen rabbinschen Zeit in allen möglichen nuancierungen unvermittelt nebeneinander hergegangen; zu einer einheitlichen Stellungnahme in unserer Frage hat es die alte Synagoge nie gebracht." Contrary to the way he treats Judaism in the Rabbi Aqiba articles discussed previously, he does not attempt to make a system out of Judaism, at least not on this point. From his thorough examination of the sources, he realizes that such systematization is simply not possible, that there was allowance for differences of opinion among the early rabbis.

It is also clear that, at this late period in his career, Billerbeck well understood the crucial role of halakha -- as opposed to theology or philosophy -- in rabbinic Judaism. This is evident from the way he defends his thesis in the essay, "Der Todestag Jesu:"

Dem typischen Deutungsverfahren des damaligen Judentums kann nicht mehr u. nicht weniger als alles gerade auf das Übereinstimmen der Außere- lichkeiten, auch von Tag u. Stunde an. Keinen

71 Ibid., p. 1174.

We see from the above that Billerbeck held, even in his most mature period, both developing awareness of the true nature of rabbinic Judaism, and a rigid view of Judaism as essentially a "works -- righteousness" oriented system. This contradiction we have already seen in the above in the Rabbi Aqiba material (p. 116). This fundamental misconception of Judaism has been thoroughly analyzed by E. P. Sanders in his Paul and Palestinian Judaism.73 It suffices here to note that Billerbeck persisted in this misapprehension, as is evident especially in his essay on the "Sermon on Mount" and in that on Jesus' parable of the "Workers in the Vineyard" (This parable, which appears to say that God in some way rewards man's service, particularly interested Billerbeck.)

72 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 840-841.

Naturally, treatment of these — and other\(^{74}\) — New Testament passages along these lines proved problematical for Billerbeck, as it has for other scholars who have attempted to uphold the facile distinction that the New Testament always places 'grace' first and 'works' second, while rabbinic literature places 'works' first and 'grace' second. Traditional Protestant theologians have attempted to solve this problem by inventing a category called "reward of grace" (in German, "Gnadenlohn"). This approach treats the New Testament in a fashion similar to the way E. P. Sanders treats rabbinic literature. It makes all those passages which see grace as primary most basic in its body of theology, and then attempts to fit in those passages which use the term reward (\(\mu\omega\nu\\omega\xi\)) with reference to God's dealing with man as applying only after one is a Christian. This is Billerbeck's approach, and he well summarizes it in his article.\(^{75}\)

The reason I now mention this teaching is that it seems to explain, at least partially, how a man of Billerbeck's accomplishments in rabbinic literature could so radically misinterpret its basic form and nature. To the end of his life, Billerbeck's mind set appears to have been that of the


\(^{75}\) Billerbeck, Ibid., p. 486, note 1.
conservative Western Christian -- and specifically Protestant -- theologian. His primary tendency is to be abstract and systematic and to interpret other religious literatures the way he is accustomed to interpreting the New Testament. Theoretically he can recognize that rabbinic literature is often very concrete, down-to-earth and, at least by Western theological standards, very unsystematic. Practically, however, he seems incapable of applying these perceptions. Ultimately his perception of Judaism is controlled not by what he finds in the texts per se, but by the Western (and, perhaps, specifically German) Protestant presuppositions he brings to the texts. As is evident from his presentation of the 'Gnadenlohn' material, Billerbeck viewed Christianity as a system designed to reconcile God and man. Such being the case, Billerbeck was, from the outset, incapable of sympathizing with a religious approach which might be summed up as saying that the basic purpose of religion is to teach man how to live in a God-pleasing fashion, or to teach man how to live in community, whether that approach was to be found either in rabbinic literature or in the New Testament. Given the evidence that towards the end of Billerbeck's career his thorough knowledge of rabbinic literature was beginning in a small way to influence his perception of Judaism and Christianity as a whole, it is to be regretted that he was not able to achieve a more positive view of Judaism and of its relationship to Christianity.
CHAPTER V

PAUL BILLERBECK AS STUDENT OF HALAKHA

The previous chapter dealt with Billerbeck's growth and development as historian and critical scholar. This chapter will examine Billerbeck as Talmudist and specifically Billerbeck as student of halakha. The material basis of the last chapter was the corpus of Billerbeck's published essays including vol. 4 of the Kommentar; in this chapter it will be the first three volumes of the Kommentar.

Looking at Billerbeck's use of the Talmud Babli, in particular, raises some interesting facts that at first glance appear to contradict the evidence of the previous chapter as to Billerbeck's halakhic concerns. Through an examination of the Rabbinischer Index to the Kommentar, and using Berakhot as a point of comparison -- both because of its size (among the longest tractates in the Munich Ms.) and because Billerbeck uses it very often (about three columns of references in the index) -- I have established that in addition to Berakhot, the tractates of the Talmud Babli most often quoted in the Kommentar are Shabbat,

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Peschim, Rosh Hashanah, Moed Qatan, Sanhedrin, and Aboda Zara. This is not say that he does not work in other sections of the Gemara; the index clearly shows that he does. Almost every tractate is somewhere quoted, and many extensively, though none with the frequency of those mentioned above. In terms of halakhic concern, conspicuous by their absence are Baba Qama, Baba Mezia, and Baba Bathra, which together are given only a little more attention in the index (three and a half columns of quotations) than Berakhot alone! How is this to be reconciled with the halakhic concern evident in the last chapter? A closer look at the materials Billerbeck quotes shows that the picture is more complex than it at first appears. Shabbat, for example, is a long and at times very complex halakhic tractate. Berakhot, for all of its reputation as a 'simpler' tractate, contains some very complex halakhic material (specifically in chapter 4 (prayer times), chapter 6 (the blessings before eating), and chapter 7 (the blessings after meals)).

For these reasons, I have decided to take one section of rabbinic law and follow Billerbeck's treatment of it through his use of the major sources (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud Babli, and Talmud Yerushalmi) as he quotes them in the three volumes of the Kommentar. The basic question to be addressed is: Was Billerbeck able to master an entire section of rabbinic law, and to appreciate it as a unit? More particularly, can we take an entire chapter of the Mishnah or of the Gemara, and follow Billerbeck through his bits and
In the previous chapter we demonstrated that Billerbeck's interests went beyond simply illuminating the New Testament and of Christianity. We saw him quoting from the entire range of rabbinic materials including even such later sources as the Tosafot and Shulhan Arukh. What did the rabbinic material as a unit mean to him? Is there any evidence that such a unitary approach (evident in the halachic essays in vol. 4 of the Kommentar) influenced his perception of rabbinic Judaism and of rabbinic law?

In order to answer these questions, I have chosen to test them against the body of tradition entitled Berakhot in the rabbinic sources. Berakhot lends itself especially to such analysis. As noted above, it is among the tractates of the rabbinic law.

In other words, was Billerbeck simply translating individual selections, or did he gain an impression of the whole? In other words, was Billerbeck simply translating individual selections, or did he understand how they fit together within a wider literary and/or social context?
Talmud Babli most often quoted in the Kommentar. It discusses many topics of interest to the New Testament student (for example blessings before and after meals, times of public prayer, connection between prayer and sacrifice, conduct of a ritual meal. It also contains famous aggadic stories about the ancient rabbis, such as the deposition of Rabban Gamliel as president of the Sanhedrin and Rabbi Aqiba's martyrdom). Although in the Talmud Babli, at least, this tractate is certainly more aggadic than other sections of rabbinic law, it also contains some heavily halakhic sections (as noted above), which are often used by Billerbeck, and which do lend themselves to complex halakhic discussion.

The results of this study are intriguing, and in their own way expand upon the trends already seen in the last chapter. They show Billerbeck first, as one might expect, as a scholar, the parameters of whose study are those set by the concerns of the New Testament interpreter. The halakhic questions he asks are not many, and they are those which arise in the New Testament itself. Often he quotes a halakhic passage, but with concerns far different than those of the rabbis whose positions he describes or of the editors who assembled the texts. Usually Billerbeck's concerns are linguistic (he gives many Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents of important New Testament terms), or they are cultural or historical in nature.\(^4\) In terms of his relationship to and

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\(^4\) Note for example vol. 1, p. 474 (the ref. to the Greek loan word ἀξιοῦν (ξ¼λος) in comparison with the use of ξ¼λος in the New Testament text; his long discussion on the term
interest in rabbinic literature, Billerbeck could be aptly described as a Christian Samuel Krauss.\(^5\)

This is not, however, the end of the matter. When Billerbeck does take up a halakhic question, his discussion is usually thorough and given on the basis of a careful study of the sources. Sometimes also, while he does not discuss a halakhic issue in any great detail in his own comments in large print, one can learn much about his understanding of an issue by the way he translates and interprets individual passages in the fine-print sections. His concerns here can and sometimes do go beyond what one would expect of the traditional New Testament scholar, although usually they do not go beyond the end of the Talmudical period -- indeed never in material to be dealt with in this chapter. In his Kommentar essays, Billerbeck also occasionally quotes an interpretation from the Tosafot or from the medieval Jewish

\(\text{יִפּוֹחַ כָּנָּא} \) as equivalent to the heavenly voice at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17) in vol. 1, p. 129; the long list of examples of \(\text{יִפּוֹחַ כָּנָּא} \) as a circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton in connection with the phrase \(\text{ἐξ οὐρανοῦ} \) in Matt. 21:25 (vol. 1, pp. 862-865); the phrase \(\text{יִפּוֹחַ כָּנָּא} \) with reference to the Shema T. B. Ber. 5a in comparison with the Greek τοπωτέρος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δύστομων as applied to the "Word of God" in Hebrews 4:12 (vol. 3, p. 688); the reference to the idea of taking someone by the hand and "raising them up" as equivalent to healing in both rabbinic sources and the New Testament (vol. 2, p. 2), etc.

\(^5\) Krauss (1866-1943) was a rabbinic scholar of Hungarian Jewish background and a student of Wilhelm Bacher, David Kaufmann, and Alexander Kohut, famous turn of the century European Jewish scholars. While his interests covered many aspects of Jewish and rabbinic studies, his chief works were in the area of rabbinic language, and specifically Greek and Latin loan words in rabbinic literature (Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum
legal authority, Rabbenu Asher (Asher ben Jehiel, 1250-1328), but usually for linguistic purposes. Except for those few instances in which Billerbeck dealt with texts from two or more sources concurrently, here the materials will be discussed on a text-by-text basis (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi), following the order of each collection.

Billerbeck's interpretations of the Mishnah Berakhot present us with little important material in comparison with his exposition of the other texts. This is partly, of course, because the Mishnah's own presentation of the material is much more limited, but also because for Billerbeck -- as for the Talmuds -- the Mishnah is often simply the beginning of a problem. He gradually goes into more and more detail as he discusses how the other sources expand upon a given Mishnah. In this sense his presentation is very traditional. What Mishnaic material is of interest for this study is predominately either linguistic/cultural or theological in nature.  

(2 vols., 1898-99; repr. 1964), and in rabbinic realia (Talmudische Archäologie (3 vols. 1910-12; rep. 1966)). It is these two emphases (the linguistic and the cultural) which, in addition to his theological emphases, seem to constitute the primary scholarly interests reflected in Billerbeck's work. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Krauss, Samuel."

Theology here will be discussed solely in terms of how it affects his attitude towards and his use of halakha.
The first Mishnah passage to be considered (and indeed one of the two most important for our purposes) is also the very first Mishnah, M. Ber. 1:1. It is quoted in whole or in part in at least four different places in the Kommentar, three of which will be considered together as a unit at this point; the fourth will be discussed below with reference to a halakhic problem in connection with a Talmud Babli passage.7

The first time Billerbeck quotes this passage only in part, from onward, in connection with a long discussion on the conduct of a Jewish marriage, occasioned by Jesus' referring to himself and his disciples in the imagery of bridegroom and "sons of the bridechamber," (Matt. 9:14-15; Kommentar, vol. 1, 517). Billerbeck presupposes (along with Dalman and Levy)8 that the feast (_Product ) referred to in the Mishnah is a wedding feast (Maimonides on the passage says simply _םלתאא), and that R. Gamliel's sons were what Billerbeck calls "Brautführer,"9 who were obligated to

7Cf. below p. 11.


9Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 506.
remain with the couple late into the night during the first week of marriage ( الخميس zobaczyć) in order to help them celebrate. He says nothing about the reason for this story being found in this particular Mishnah, namely, because of its connection to the discussion of the terminus ad quem for the recital of the evening Shema. The latter is naturally the major concern of the traditional commentators, who, with the exception of Maimonides (see reference no. 9), do not even mention the story for its own sake.

The second instance in which Billerbeck quotes this Mishnah is in illustration of the phrase τὴν παράδοσην τῶν προεομετέχων in Matt. 15:2, in which scene Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem ask Jesus why his disciples do not live according to the "tradition of the elders" (Kommentar, vol. 1, page 693). Here he translates the entire Mishnah accurately, and shows his understanding of the reason for the sages restricting the terminus ad quem to midnight when he comments at the end of the translation (page 694),

10 By this I mean those commentaries which, singly or together, have been published along with the Mishnah text from the appearance of the first printed editions, namely those of Maimonides (1135-1204), of Obadiah of Bertinoro (1450-1516), and the Tosafot Yom Tov of Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579-1654), together with the Tiferet Israel (1st ed., Hannover, 1830) of Israel ben Gedaliah Lipschutz (1782-1860). Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Bertinoro, Obadiah ben Abraham Yare," by Abraham David; "Heller, Yom Tov Lipmann ben Nathan ha-Levi," by Josef Horovitz; "Lipschutz, Israel ben Gedaliah," by Abraham David; "Maimonides, Moses (Biography)," by Louis Isaac Rabinowitz; Bernard Friedberg, [Bet Eked Sepharim] (Antwerp: n.p., 1928-31, s.v. 2227), pp. 422-23.
"Die strengere Vorschrift der Gelehrten soll die Versäumung des letzten zulässigen Terms unmöglich machen u. so ein schützender Zaun für diesen sein." Here Billerbeck gives over three pages of material showing the importance of legal tradition for religious Judaism, and on the whole it seems fairly presented.\(^\text{11}\)

Billerbeck's third reference to M. Ber. 1:1 is quoted in connection with Matt. 23, Jesus' condemnation of "Pharisees and scribes," and especially of what he sees as examples of the "heavy burdens" mentioned in verse 4. Here (Kommentar, vol. 1, 912) Billerbeck again quotes the Mishnah in full, this time adding parenthetically several elucidative phrases. With these he explains that the priests in question were those who had contracted ritual impurity ("unrein gewesen"), and that they were going to the sanctuary ("in das Heiligum") to eat their Terumah. In doing so, he follows Rashi's commentary on the Mishnah, not noting that other rabbinic authorities understand the passage differently. These authorities believe that before the destruction of the second Temple

\(^\text{11}\) cf. note #1, however (vol. 1, p. 693), where Billerbeck says, "; nach Git. 57a, wo obige Auslegung des Rab Acha b. U. wiederholt wird, ist siedender Kot Strafe Jesu in der Hölle [as punishment for laughing at the words of the sages]. He neglects in addition to note the positive statement Jesus there makes about the Jewish people (ש başת רוחות אחרים על והואות נלעoğlu והועדה הנ scalpę ה יי). Hermann L. Strack, Jesus die Häretiker und die Christen nach den ältesten jüdischen Angaben, Texte, Übersetzung, und Erläuterung, Schriften des Institutum Judaicum in Berlin, 37 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1910), Texte, p. 17, § 11, "Jesus in locis infernis Bab. Gittin 56b.57a."
it was customary for all priests to immerse themselves previous to eating their tithes in the evening, independent of whether or not they had contracted ritual impurity. He also gives the explanation, "d.h. von Erscheinen der Sterne an [T. B. Ber. 2b], "For the terminus a quo of the saying of the evening Shema and, "... etwa abends 10 Uhr," for terminus ad quem according to Rabbi Elieser.

Up to this point Billerbeck displays a good understanding of his materials, but an understanding that is purely academic. It does not issue in an overall appreciation of the materials for their own sake. His purpose in quoting this Mishnah in connection with Matt. 23 is to show that in his view Jesus' criticism applies to rabbinic religion as a whole. He writes in explanation of Matt. 23:4 ("They bind heavy burdens, and lay them on the shoulders of men"): "Bei diesen drückenden Lasten wird man in erster Linie an die peinlich genau en halakhischen Bestimmungen zu denken haben, mit denen die rabbinische Auslegung die einzelnen, in das Leben des Volkes tief eingreifenden Gebote


13 Note that Billerbeck clearly understands the implications of saying Shema as well when he says in commenting on M. Ber. 2:2 (vol. 1, p. 177), "Hier wird unter der Gottesherrschaft in erster Linie das Bekenntnis zu dem Einen Gott verstanden, wie es Dt. 6,4 zum Ausdruck vorkommt."
belastet hatte, wie zB die Gebote über Reinheit und Unreinheit, über Zehnten und Heiliges, über Fasten u. Beten, über Heiligung der Sabbat- u. Feiertage u. dgl.; sodann aber auch an die sog. ניקודים, Verhütungsvorschriften, mit denen man die biblischen Gebote wie mit einem Zaun umgeben hatte, um sie so vor Übertretung zu sichern.\textsuperscript{14}

He does list (without comment) a large number of rabbinic quotes (pages 913-14) under Matt. 23:4 ("but they don't want to touch them with their (own) finger"), showing that, according to rabbinic religion, he who is strict with others but lenient with himself, or he who follows the lenient views of different schools (i.e., the Schools of Shammai and Hillel) but the strictures of none, is to be condemned. He fails to note, however, that no matter who Jesus' specific opponents may have been, in this case rabbinic religion and Jesus are in agreement! Both condemn the person who is strict with others but lenient with himself.\textsuperscript{15}

The sixth chapter of Berakhot in the Mishnah has two

\textsuperscript{14}Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 911.

\textsuperscript{15}Note in this context also that as seldom as Billerbeck actually quotes a traditional rabbinic commentary in the Kommentar, that what does at one point capture his interest is a statement of Bertinoro (\textsuperscript{14}Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 489), on M. Ber. 3:1. "Denn alle wollen durch das Gebot (der Totenbestattung) Verdienst erwerben vor Gott (vol. 1, p. 489), on M. Ber. 3:1." The implications for Billerbeck's understanding of rabbinic Judaism are obvious, but cf. chapter 4, pp. 33-35, on the matter of רעע (\u05ec\u05d5\u05b3), and E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 187-189. The matter is clearly not as simple as it appears.
passages of special interest to us. The first is M. Ber. 6:3, quoted with reference to Matt. 3:4 (Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 98-99), where John the Baptist is said to have eaten locusts. Billerbeck informs us that one type of locust is permitted as food by the Torah, and he quotes our Mishnah to show the appropriate blessing to say before eating them. He also translates this blessing in full.\textsuperscript{16}

The second of these two passages, M. Ber. 6:7, is quoted in connection with the story of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, John 6:1-15 and parallels, (Kommentar, vol. 1, pages 683-4). Billerbeck here treats only linguistic and cultural concerns, giving only the various terms used for bread in rabbinic literature and quoting several different references showing the importance of fish in the diet of the Jew of the Talmudical period, together with details about how

\textsuperscript{16}Note that although this is a clearly historical question, he makes no attempt to defend his presupposition that the practice of the Mishnah was in use at the time of John the Baptist, Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 99; Interestingly enough, Billerbeck quotes the sentence which lists milk, cheese, and eggs as part of the Mishnah without noting that the traditional text places it in parentheses indicating that not all manuscripts read thus, but then Albeck takes no notice of this either. The sentence is placed in a marginal note in the Talmud Babli and is not included at all in the MSS Codex Kauffmann or Codex Parma. cf. Albeck, and Chanoch Yalon, eds. \textit{הוש הירוד הוש} [The six orders of the Mishnah] (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute and Dvir Co., 1957), p. 24; Georg Beer, ed. Faksimile-Ausgabe des Mischnacodex Kaufmann A50, Veröffentlichungen der Alexander Kohut-Gedächtnisstiftung mit Genehmigung der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Budapest (Berlin: Albert Frisch, 1929; reprint ed. Jerusalem: n.p., 1968); Mishnah Codex Parma (De Rossi 138), An Early Vocalized Manuscript of the Complete Mishnah Text (Jerusalem: Kedem Publishing, 1970).
fish was sometimes served. While he does explain that the reason this Mishnah leaves the bread unblessed is that it is considered attendant to the fish, he nowhere here explains the centrality of bread, halakhically, in a meal and its relationship to other foods in the meal. (He does explain this, however, in the excursus, "Ein altjüdisches Sastmahl" (Kommentar, vol. 4, page 621).)

The first part of M. Ber. 7:1 deals with problem foods and conditions under which they do not disqualify someone from being included in a Jewish meal-quorum (מועם), as well as categories of people who may be included in such a quorum even though they could be considered problematical from a halakhic standpoint. This Mishnah is translated in full and explained in connection with Billerbeck's presentation on the Samaritans (Kommentar, vol. 1 pages 538-60), since Samaritans according to this Mishnah are included in a מועם. Although Billerbeck says nothing more about the passage, his translation itself clearly indicates that he followed the interpretation of Rashi's Commentary and the Gemara. Billerbeck explains the term דמיון as "Früchte, deren Ordnungsmäßige Verzehnung zweifelhaft ist," corresponding to Rashi's explanation (T. B. Ber. 47a s.v. דמיון).

The phrase ראשותו של חלקה והפריס בمائة תורמת מעשה וללא התפריס ממנה תורמת גורלו Billerbeck translates and explains "ersten Zehnt, von welchem die Zehnthebe, (aber nicht die grosse Hebe) abgesondert ist," following the Gemara's שחקדhim בלשנינו והפריס ממנה תורמת מעשה וללא התפריס ממנה תורמת גורלו (T. B. Ber. 47a). Finally, the phrase
he translates as "oder zweiten Zehnt u. Geheiligtges, die ausgelöst sind," further explaining the term heiliges as "ohne dass das Zuschlagsfünftel gezahlt ist," which corresponds to the Gemara's, "(T.B. Ber. 47b)." Billerbeck clearly understands also that it is the eating of the doubtful items that is forbidden, ("Wenn man Zweifelhaftes... gegessen hat was streng genommen unstatthaft ist,...) making it look like (Rashi = דרמות lượngורה) a person who eats these things ought not to be permitted to be part of a מיזוג since one might think that such eating involves fulfilling a commandment through a sinful act (See Rabbi Obadiah Bertinoro ad loc. s.v. דמי). 

Billerbeck quotes M. Ber. 8:7 -- the controversy between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel over what a person should do who remembers that he has eaten but forgot to say the blessings after the meal -- in the course of a very fine section on blessings before and after eating in connection with his treatment of the story of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14). Here Billerbeck presents the Jewish custom of pre- and post-meal blessings in a very positive light -- presumably because of its analogy to Christian practice: "Es war eine schöne Sitte im jüdischen Volk, dass man keine Speise ass, ohne vor u. nach ihrem Genuss Gott dafür zu danken." He then explains briefly how the blessings

18 Ibid., p. 685.
made, with a reference for further information to his "Ein altjüdisches Gastmahl" (in vol. 4 of the Kommentar), and then thoroughly explains the blessings after eating. His only comment on M. Ber. 8:7 in particular is, "Wie streng man schon in frühester Zeit auf die Speisebenedictionen gehalten hat, zeigt die Kontroverse der Schule Schammais und Hillels über die Frage, was man zu tun habe, falls man sie vergess." 19

Billerbeck cites an interesting linguistic parallel to the phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας of the traditional doxology to the Lord's Prayer in his quoting of M. Ber. 9:5 which deals with the changing of the phraseαὐτῷ τῷ Θεῷ in a doxology of the Temple liturgy to σάρκα καὶ σώματα. What Billerbeck doesn't mention is that, of those New Testament manuscripts which contain the doxology, some have only εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας (which corresponds to the αὐτῷ τῷ of the older Temple practice) whereas others have εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων (which seems more like the later version), while several ancient authorities including the Peshitta to the Gospels and the Didache omit the ἀνήν at the end of the prayer, which could indicate the antiquity of an accepted halakhic usage of the term. 20

The Tosefta offers some particularly interesting glimpses into Billerbeck's approach to his work. In a fine

19 Ibid, p. 687.

discussion of prayer times (Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 696-702),
Billerbeck translates Tos. Ber. 1:2 (עד שיא הכמה) 21 following the Zuckermandel (MS Erfurt edition)
as "(Es ist Vorschrift, das Morgen-Schema zu rezitieren)" zugleich mit dem Aufstrahlen der Sonne, damit Geulla sich eng mit dem Gebet (=Achtzehngeget) verbinde u. man bei Tage bete. Diese Stelle wird zitiert p.Berakh 1,3a, 63. Berakh 26a. 22
Here it is obvious from the way in which he correctly "fills out" the discussion Billerbeck is not simply translating this as an isolated passage, but is familiar with the topic and the wider context.

In his explanation of Tos.Ber. 2:8 -- which says that workers in an olive or a fig tree may say the Shemone ʾEsre without climbing down (whereas workers in all other trees are required to do so -- it is clear that Billerbeck has chosen one traditional interpretation (the older) over another. Following the Talmud Yerushalmi, he says, "u. p. Berakh 2,5a, 47; an letzterer Stelle mit dem Zusatz, dass nach R. Abba


(um 290) u. R. Shimon (um 280) das Herabsteigen von Oliven und Feigenbäumen, wegen der grossen Mühe ["مصلى شمرموت ومربعي" ] nicht gefordert werde," and omits any reference to Rashi on the Baraita in the Talmud Babli (T. B. Ber. 16a), who gives a different reason altogether.²³

A passage which Billerbeck interprets by means of parallels rather than commentary is Tos. Ber. 3:4, which he renders as, "Der Betende muss sein Herz zur Andacht richten. Abba Shaul (um 150) hat gesagt: Ein Merkmal für das Gebet (u. seine Erhörung) ist Ps. 10,17: Richtest du (O Gott) ihr Herz zur Andacht (durch das Beten), dann lassesst du aufmerken dein Ohr (um das Gebet zu erhören)." He then cites and comments on the parallels as follows: "So der Midr. Dasselbe als Bar. Berakh 31a; mit Änderungen DtR 2 (197a); Tanch Anf. (28b); PesiqR 195b - Die selbe Deutung des Psalm­verses im Munde des R. Schmuel b. Nachman (um 260) p. Berakh 5,9d,25; MidrPs 108 1 (232a).²⁴ A comparison of Billerbeck's era of parallels here with that of Saul Liebermann will

²³ Rashi says that the olive and fig trees are of such a size that one can stand in their branches without fear of falling.

illustrate Billerbeck's thorough knowledge of rabbinic parallels.25

A passage which Billerbeck seems to have gone beyond the available evidence to interpret is Tos. Ber. 3:5. This passage, in which R. Judan ben Ilai tells of R. Aqiba's intense of his body in prayer, Billerbeck quotes in connection with other passages to illustrate the wide variety of prayer positions possible under various circumstances when reciting the Shemone Esre. Billerbeck, however, says of R. Aqiba's devotions that they are, "Gebetsexerzitien, die den Betenden in Ekstase versetzen sollen."26 This seems very farfetched, however. Ecstasy may have been an important part of R. Aqiba's devotion, but it cannot be shown from this passage. That R. Aqiba in his private prayers reportedly engaged in much bodily movement is clear; that the purpose of this movement was to put him into a trance-like state so as to give him 'visions of the Divine' is not. This passage does, however, give us a clear example of the frame of mind in which Billerbeck approaches a rabbinic text. Billerbeck is a scholar capable of reading the text with which he deals in the original. He is not, however, able to project himself into the world which produced these texts and which still utilizes them.

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Rather, here, he seems to be reading something into them. One can see this clearly by a comparison of Billerbeck's concerns with those of other commentators who either lived in that world or at least understood it.

An example of the former is Rabbi Samuel ben Avigdor ben Abraham in the Minhat Bikkurim portion of his Tosefta commentary Ta'anah Tosfācāh (first edition Vilna: 1841, s.vv. and ועשׁה עַמָּה וַתְּחִבְּל), traditionally published with the Tosefta in the printed editions of the Talmud Babli and of the Sefer ha-Halakhot (Halakhot Rabbati) of R. Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi (1013-1103). His concern is not with how R. Aqiba conducted himself, but with when and why. He says that R. Aqiba did it in his private devotion when he was offering his personal portions after finishing the Shemone Ėsre, and not during the beginning or ending petitions of the Shemone Ėsre, itself, or during the Modim portion of the prayer. The practice at R. Samuel's time was evidently to bow at these points, and so it was natural for him to ask whether R. Aqiba's excessive bowing perhaps took place at these times.

The 'why' comes in terms of why R. Aqiba engaged in so much bowing only when he was praying privately, and not also when he was praying with the congregation. R. Samuel answers that he did not wish to trouble the congregation, meaning that they should not have to wait while he completed his devotions. The pious man thinks of others and conforms his practice to the majority. We see a similar approach in Saul Liebermann, a scholar who, unlike Billerbeck, knew the
religious Jewish world personally and intimately. He examines the readings of the various manuscripts, and then offers the interpretation that R. Akiba in fact completed his prayers before the congregation did, thus using the tools of the scholar to answer a very traditional and practical question. The problem here is not that Billerbeck asks of the religious Jewish text different questions than have traditionally been asked; it is simply that he shows no sensitivity to the immediate concerns of those texts.

The first of the passages from the Talmud Babli to be discussed involves a halakhic question actually taken up by Billerbeck in the Kommentar (vol. 1, pages 688-91) and traced through Mishnah, Tosefta, Babli, and Yerushalmi. The two major poles upon which his discussion turns are a passage from the Babli and one from the Yerushalmi. For this reason the Babli passage (together with its Mishnah, which serves to introduce the topic for Billerbeck) will be discussed here, while the remainder of the material centering around the Yerushalmi passage will be left for the last major part of this chapter. The question addressed in both passages, however, is whether Rabbi Eliezer divided the night into three or four watches, and the discussion of this question are adopted by Billerbeck as the principle rabbinic source material for his explanation of the division of the night in the ancient world, and specifically in the Near East at the

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time of Jesus. The question arises because of the use of the term "fourth watch" (τετάρτης ἡ ἀποκλαμμή τῆς νυκτὸς) in Matt. 14:25.

Billerbeck begins his presentation with a translation from M. Ber. 1:1 (pages 4-6) of Rabbi Eliezer's position on the terminus a quo and terminus ad quern for the saying of the evening Shema. The point to note here is that the phrase which sums up R. Eliezer's halakha on the matter (על סוף תקצירוeee) is given by Billerbeck not only in translation, but also in Hebrew, indicating some intuitive grasp of the halakhic question to be discussed. He then goes on to present a translation of the sugya in the Talmud Babli (T. B. Ber. 3a) which addresses the question of what exactly R. Eliezer means by the "first watch," i.e., what time did it end (at 10 P.M., given the ideal beginning of the first watch at 6:00 P.M., i.e., three watches), or at 9:00 P.M. (four watches)? Billerbeck presents this sugya in a very skillful manner, and it is immediately clear that he understands the problem at hand. He translates, "Was hat Rabbi Eliezer gemeint? Wenn er gemeint hat: Drei Nachtwachen (Sing. Nachtwache) hat die Nacht, so hätte er sagen sollen: Bis 4 Uhr (d.h. bis 10 Uhr abends liest man das Schema); u.

28 cf. Chapter 2, p. 34.

29 A chain of Talmudic traditions linked in such a way as to examine a particular halakhic problem, sometimes resulting in an answer to the problem.
wenn er gemeint hat: Vier N. hat die Nacht, so hätte er sagen sollen: Bis 3 Uhr (d.h. bis 9 Uhr abends liest man das Schema)." 30

When the sugya goes on to present a baraita stating that R. Eliezer holds to three night watches on the basis of Jer. 25:30 (ה' سورות שלש ... שאם الإمام עי-נתור), Billerbeck translates the passage as given in the sugya, and then goes on to explain R. Eliezer's reasoning by saying, "Das dreimalige Brüllen entspricht den drei N.," 31 following Rashi who explains the text as follows: "ד' שאם الإمام שלש耳机 ג'." Billerbeck also skillfully excises from his translations the center section of the sugya, which discusses the question of how one knows the beginning and ending time of the watches, on the grounds that this section is of no importance to him, and goes on to the end of the sugya where the answer of three watches is repeated with the same proof.

The discussion in Billerbeck and in the Gemara follows the same course to the same conclusion, but with distinctly different purposes. The Gemara's interest in this question, of course, is to understand R. Eliezer's halakha correctly, and to understand how it relates ultimately to the halakha of the beginning and ending of the time period in which one

30. Kommentar, vol. 1, pp. 689-690; At only one point would I attempt to better this translation. Instead of "Bis 4 Uhr" and "Bis 3 Uhr," I believe the meaning could have been better expressed with "Bis die 4te Stunde (der Nacht)," and, "Bis die dritte Stunde (der Nacht), (עד שלוש שעות, עד ארבעת שעות.)"

31. Ibid.
is obligated to say the evening Shema. Billerbeck's interest, however, is purely historical and exegetical. He wants to know what system of time reckoning was current among the Jewish people in Jesus' day, and how that will help him to understand the time reckoning of the New Testament. As such he begins with the Hebrew Bible, first alone, and then as understood in the Targums and the earlier rabbinic sources. He finds three watches in the Hebrew Bible, which he gives as the ancient practice, to which R. Eliezer gives independent testimony and contrasts this to the Roman practice of dividing the night into four watches, which he shows both in the New Testament and in Josephus. This position (four watches) is also found in the rabbinic sources, and will be a part of the material to be discussed later in this chapter in dealing with Billerbeck's treatment of the Yerushalmi passage. 32

Billerbeck presents a short but rather difficult baraita from T. B. Ber. 26b in connection with a thorough discussion of ancient Jewish prayer times, for which he also uses apocryphal materials, Josephus, and early Christian sources outside the New Testament. This lengthy presentation

(vol. 2, pages 696-702) is made in connection with Acts 10:9, in which Peter goes to the roof of the house where he is staying, "at about the sixth hour" (περὶ έσαυ έκην),\(^{33}\) to pray. The baraita in question is the one supporting R. Joshua ben Levi's position that the three daily prayer times were decreed by the sages as corresponding to the times when the sacrifices were brought. It is clear from Billerbeck's translation that he interprets this baraita from Rashi's perspective, and that he has no difficulty in understanding both text and commentary. He translates only the section dealing with the afternoon prayer service ( çünkü), his interest here, and drops the beginning and ending material dealing with the morning, evening and supplementary prayers. He then translates the later section providing the necessary terminology to understand the earlier material, carefully explaining the meaning of the terms in context, as for example, "Bis zur Hälfte des (kleinen) Nachmittags [�� קנה יף] (d.h. bis 4 3/4 Uhr)."\(^{34}\) The purpose of the Gemara is of course ultimately to determine the correct times for prayer. Billerbeck's purpose is to do this (if possible in terms of the norm in the first century) and then to determine whether Peter's practice corresponds to that norm or not.

\(^{33}\) A few mss. actually read ένάτην! Novum Testamentum Graece 26th ed., p. 349; Cp. R. Judah (פשתה לשב ידע), Ber. 26b. Did some copyist feel the majority reading was too early (before beginning of יסוד הנופה)\(?)\?

\(^{34}\)Kommentar, vol. 1, p. 701.
In connection with Matt. 5:47 ("And if you only greet your own brothers") Billerbeck offers a discussion of greetings in rabbinic sources, among which he quotes a baraita at the top of T. B. Ber. 27b, consciously and explicitly following Rashi in his translation. "Wer seinem Lehrer den Friedensgruss entbietet (wie jedem andren Menschen mit den Worten שלום עליכם u. nicht sagt: שלום עליך Raschi), wer seinem Lehrer den Gruss erwidert (wiederum ohne den Zusatz: 'mein Lehrer')... ." He then quotes a parallel concept from another rabbinic source, to which he comments, "Zum richtigen Verständnis dient die obige Erläuterung Raschis." 35

A translation which may indicate too much linguistic and not enough immediate contextual concern is that of T. B. Ber. 29b on the prayer to be said before beginning a journey (vol. 1, pages 410-11). Billerbeck renders Abaye's comment as, "Immer soll sich der Mensch (in seinen Gebeten) mit der Gesamtheit zus. schliessen." He might better have chosen the word "Gemeinschaft," or "Gemeinde," to render Gemeinschaft, instead of "Gesamtheit." Literally his translation is correct, but it is clear that the Gemara means not a "totality," or any group of people generally, but rather, specifically the whole "congregation of Israel" and, by extension, each local congregation. In this connection, he also quotes Rashi's explanation that one should pray in plural, rather than in

singular, "denn dadurch wird sein Gebet erhört (Ber. 30a)."\textsuperscript{36}

Up to this point the materials quoted have all shown Billerbeck in a positive light in terms of his halakhic understanding and his ability to master a Gemara text in the traditional rabbinic fashion. On one halakhic problem, in particular, within the Berakhot corpus, however, he seems to have erred. On T. B. Ber. 29b there is a sugya commenting on R. Eliezer's opinion in the Mishnah (תענית פלחה קבצ איר טפלתא). The sugya asks the question \textit{מסאי קבע (What is meant by קבע in R. Eliezer's halakha?)} and gives several answers thereto. Among them is one -- \textit{כל שאנו מastered על דרור應用} -- which Billerbeck interprets, "Wer nicht zugleich mit der Dämmerung [this he correctly understands as "morgens u. abends," as given in commentary to the first passage on the subject] betet (der macht seine Gebet zu etwas feststehendem, während es freier Herzenserguss sein soll.)"\textsuperscript{37} The problem here is not with Billerbeck's translation of the halakha, but with his interpretation of it. "Freier Herzenserguss" is simply not an adequate understanding of what the opposite of \textit{קבע seems to be for Abaye bar Abin and R. Hanina bar Abin. It is in fact far closer to a majority rabbinic opinion (the halakha), which says, "that the person who makes his prayer \textit{is the one who does not offer it in the form of a plea for mercy.}\)"  

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., pp. 410-1.\

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., vol. 2, p. 701.
It is clear from the discussion of עס דרוממי תמה which follows this opinion in the sugya, as well as from the explanation of עס דרוממי תמה given by Rashi (which is clearly based on this discussion), that the issue here is purely one of time. Rashi informs us that the person who neglects to say his morning or evening prayers at dawn or sunset respectively (陟 דרוממי תמה) treats the command to pray the Shemone Esre daily as a fixed and burdensome obligation (.setContent("Content-Set") must be present/used if this entity is to have an XML representation."). As a result he simply doesn't care enough to note that he is dealing with a commandment which has a specific time limit connected with it, and to make an effort to do it at the proper time (Content-Set) . Nonetheless, to do Billerbeck justice in this matter, there is evidence that he did follow Rashi's line of reasoning throughout the sugya; further along as part of the same presentation he translates the end of the sugya together with his own comments, "Im Abendländ (Palästina) verwünschte man den, der mit eintritt der (Abend-) Dämmerung (das Minchagebet) betete. Weshalb? Es könnte ihm vielleicht die Stunde entrissen werden (die Gebetszeit könnte infolge eines unvorhergesehenen Zufalls verstreichen, bevor er gebetet)." 38

The next discussion is the crystalization of two different sections of the Kommentar, the first (vol. 1, p. 403-6) which deals with how long one ought to pray, and the second (vol. 2, p. 238), with how often. The first gives

38 Ibid., p. 702.
various positions and, on the whole, a balanced presentation of its subject. The problem arises with the second, which is given in connection with Jesus' parable of the "Unjust Judge" (Luke 18:1ff.). The writer sums up the parable by saying that it is required of a person to continually pray without remission. On this Billerbeck says, "Diese Mahnung entsprach nicht [Billerbeck's italics] der jüdischen Anschauung und Sitte;" at which point he quotes several passages giving the three traditional Jewish prayer (Shemone Esre) times. He goes on to say, "abweichende, der Mahnung Jesu entsprechende Stimmen lassen sich äusserst selten vernehem," at which point he quotes P. T. Ber. 1.1,2a (with parallels), "R. Jochanan (†279) hat gesagt: O, dass der Mensch doch den ganzen Tag hindurch beten könnte! Weshalb? Weil das Gebet keinen Verlust bringt (שביעי תשיעי ישמש על כל יומנוまとめ), together with T. B. Ber. 32b, "R. Chama bar Chanina (um 260) hat gesagt: Wenn ein Mensch sieht, dass er betet, ohne erhört zu werden, so bete er immer aufs neue," which also appears as a part of the first presentation (vol. 1, page 405). This makes about as much sense as it would to argue that Christian practice violates Jesus' principle because it keeps certain canonical hours, or holds worship at a specific time every Sunday. Jesus is not criticizing having set prayer times; he is admonishing his hearers not to give up praying after a short time if they don't seem to see results.

My point here is that Billerbeck has wrongly quoted the
rabbinic material he cites in connection with the Lucan parable because he has misunderstood how that material is used within its original context. His purpose in quoting the later rabbinic material on prayer is to contrast it to this earlier New Testament tradition to the discredit of rabbinic Judaism. He wants to show that early Christianity constitutes an improvement over the Judaism of its time because it encourages free prayer and intimate contact with God whereas in Billerbeck's view the Judaism of that day was rigid and cold, valuing form at the expense of content and religious experience.

Billerbeck can be criticized on another level as well, namely these rabbinic passages as representative of the Judaism of Jesus' time. Baruch M. Bokser in a recent article (JQR, n.s., 83 (1983):349-74), in contrast to Billerbeck's approach, interprets rabbinic traditions dealing with communal prayer and petitions arising from extraordinary events (special communal or individual needs, catastrophies, etc.) in a more critical fashion. He explains them on the basis of how close in time they are to the destruction of the second Temple, and therefore how keenly or remotely this loss was felt within the individual tradition. One might thus argue that since these prayers show no such concern that they are more representative of the times of the later rabbis quoted in them than they are of the earlier New Testament period.
This does not totally invalidate Billerbeck's approach, however. Bokser, too, refers to clear pre-70 material (from Qumran) in comparison with the later rabbinic material (p. 361), citing it as "exceptions that prove the rule." He explains that the people of Qumran "believed that the Jerusalem Temple was polluted and that their community made up the Temple and the place of the divine presence. They provide us with a model of prayer's increased importance once people deemed the Jerusalem Temple unavailable." While Jesus and his disciples did not forsake the Temple (Luke 5:14 and parallels; Luke 17:14, and 24:53), there is some evidence of a de-emphasis of it within the Gospel tradition in favor of the person of Jesus (Matt. 12:6). Perhaps what Bokser says about the beliefs of the Qumran sect concerning the Temple could therefore also be true of early Christian attitudes towards prayer. They are "exceptions that prove the rule." One could thus still find a legitimate reason for comparison of attitudes about prayer in the New Testament and in rabbinic sources. Thus, comparing and contrasting traditions dealing with similar concepts, even though they may come from different historical periods, cannot be ruled out as illegitimate.

Billerbeck must himself have realized that within Jewish and Christian tradition there is no essential contradiction between fixed prayer times and spontaneous expression, since in connection with his presentation on Jewish prayer times which he brings under Acts 10:9, where Peter is said to pray
at about the sixth hour, he writes, "Der älteste Beleg für das täglich dreimalige Beten in der jungen Christengemeinde ist Didache 8:3; hier wird das dreimalige Beten des Vaterunsers genau so gefordert, wie das dreimalige Beten des Achtzehngebets in der Synagoge. --Das früheste Zeugnis für die 3., 6. u. 9. Stunde als kirchliche Gebetsstunden findet sich erst bei Tertullian, u. zwar mit dem Bemerken, dass ausserdem die vor schriftsmässigen Gebete beim Anbruch des Tages u. der Nacht ingressu lucis et noctis zu beten seien... (i.e. וב теперь)."³⁹

More serious than that, for our purposes is that Billerbeck does not seem to be aware that there is an important subsurface halakhic problem here. R. Joḥanan's opinion, both in the Yerushalmi and Babli, is quoted within the context of what a person ought to do if he later (past the appropriate time or after he has left the appropriate place) remembers that he has forgotten to say the blessings after eating, or recite the Shemone Ėsre or the Shema. The Yerushalmi is, of course, not as full as the Babli, and gives little indication as to why in the first case it says that he should say it (the order of blessings after eating), in the second that he should not, and in the third that he should. The Babli (T. B. Ber. 21a) makes it clear that in its view, at least, the underlying criterion is whether or not the blessing in question is a Biblical (i.e. Pentateuchal) commandment

³⁹Ibid., p. 699.
or an enactment of the sages. That is to say, if the prayer in question is רואיתא, he should make it up; if not, he doesn't need to do so. With reference to the Shemone Ėsre, according to majority opinion (the ליל) in the Babli, one need not make it up, since Shemone Ėsre is ליל, but according to Rabbi Johanan one should make it up ("O that a man would pray all day long") because, as the Yerushalmi puts it, "praying ליל doesn't hurt" (שאヴר ישות). The controversy thus has nothing to do with whether or not one ought to 'storm heaven' with his prayers, nor is rabbinic Judaism necessarily against spontaneous prayer simply because it holds to specific prayer times!

The next passage to be dealt with (P. T. Ber., 1.1,2d) in this last part of our chapter is the second part of the discussion on three or four night watches begun in the material on the Talmud Babli. It shows clearly that also in dealing with Yerushalmi Billerbeck was capable of interpreting a sugya accurately (from a rabbinic standpoint) and in the context of its Babli parallel, and that here too he could mould the material properly to his own needs. The sugya (beginning with ... רבד אומן אברע אשמר) is actually about twice as long as it appears in the Kommentar (vol. 1, page 690.) Billerbeck is, however, only interested in the controversy between Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and Rabbi Nathan over whether the night is to be divided into three or four

watches. As such he skillfully removes all extraneous material, making the German translation easier to grasp for his potential readers. We may legitimately infer that he was capable of understanding the portions he excised because of the fact that the first of those sections he translates in full in a totally different context. 41

He also clearly explains the 'point and counterpoint' of rabbinic discussion in this sugya. Of the two Bible verses under discussion (Judges 7:19 and Ps. 119:62 [together with verse 148]), he understands that Rabbi Judah takes them as explaining each other and thus concludes that the Psalm is an explanation of the Judges passage (according to the Yerushalmi; the MT reads ), i.e., that the middle part of the night has two watches (" schliesst als Plural mindestens zwei N. in sich; diese decken sich mit der Vers 62 genannten Zeit, um Mitternacht; sind aber um Mitternacht zwei N. vergangen, so besteht eine ganze Nacht aus vier N."), and that Rabbi Nathan explains them separately as applying to different situations. Billerbeck understands the sugya as deciding in favor of Rabbi Judah's opinion, and explaining the singular as applying to the third watch (counted as the second) because people are not as yet asleep during the first. It only

looks like three, because there are in fact only three watches during which people sleep.42

Several things should be clear from the above presentation. The first is that, as a scholar, Billerbeck took a very traditional Jewish approach to rabbinic texts. The Mishnah (at least in terms of halakhic issues) is usually for him not a text to be studied in its own right, but a "jumping-off point" for the further exposition of Talmud Babli or Yerushalmi. His understanding can also be seen as very traditional in that he consciously and readily turns to traditional sources (usually parallels in different context or Rashi's Commentary) to help him in understanding the sometimes complex argumentation of a halakhic sugya. This does not mean that he was uncritical in his approach to these materials, for on at least one occasion (cf., above, page 9, note 20), we see him deliberately choosing the explanation of a Tosefta (baraita) given in the Yerushalmi over one later given by Rashi. (Although he never mentions Rashi here, it can be inferred that Billerbeck knew his interpretation from the fact that he so often in other places consistently follows him.) Throughout, as we saw in the previous chapter with reference to his essays, Paul Billerbeck was a master of rabbinic language and expression, as well as a careful scholar with a concern for the internal consistency of his materials (i.e., how they fit together). He is definitely not simply translating individual passages for his own purposes. He does have a far-reaching understanding of

42 Ibid., vol. 1, p.690.
these materials as worthy of study in their own right.

It is equally clear, however, that his purpose in studying rabbinic texts diverges from that of the traditional Jewish student of rabbinic literature. His goal is not to know what the halakha is so that he can carry it out in his own life (he is, after all, not Jewish) but rather to elucidate his understanding of the New Testament and more generally, the history of the first century in Judaism and Christianity. This orientation is self-evident throughout the three volumes of the Kommentar proper, where the majority of the comments and quotations given involve either linguistic or conceptual parallels. This also seems to be the reason for his predominant use of the tractates mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In terms of halakha, this consideration influenced Billerbeck's choice of topics. This can be seen from a comparison of the subjects discussed in the present chapter (also limited of course by the choice of Berakhot as the framework for study), and more especially by looking at the subjects of the halakhic essays in volume 4 of the Kommentar.

Billerbeck has in a certain sense the beginnings of a 'Rav Alfasi' for Christians in the fourth volume of the

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43 cf. above p. 149. Alfasi's Sefer ha-Halakhot was the most important code of Jewish law prior to the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides. It is an epitome of the Talmud Babli, including only those portions of the Talmud still operative in the Judaism of his time. It simplifies the legal argumentation, and sometimes supplies a legal decision where the Talmud does not provide one. As such it operates both as a code
Kommentar, together with the extended halakhic presentations in the Kommentar itself, and one oriented not to personal practice, but to understanding the halakhic themes that appear in the New Testament and are important for understanding the beginnings of Christian history and ongoing Jewish-Christian contacts. He is indeed a Christian 'Samuel Krauss,' but he goes beyond Krauss in that, more than simply describing what he finds in the texts, he skillfully presents the texts themselves in such a way that with some guidance a New Testament student with some knowledge of Hebrew could begin to study and understand the sources himself. (Cf., here especially Billerbeck's continued presentation of important halakhic terminology in the original as noted above, page 11, and chapter IV, page 34).

This is the positive side of Billerbeck's work. The negative side is that in limiting himself to those aspects of halakha that he regarded as important for New Testament interpretation, Billerbeck also seems to have limited his own development in the appreciation of halakha for its own sake. Theology must come into consideration here as well. Billerbeck's problem is not that he determined that halakha does not have a positive function in Christianity, but that it cannot! We see this clearly in such statements as the one proper, and as a guide for the study of the larger work. Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Alfasi, Isaac ben Jacob," by Simha Assaf and Israel Moses Ta-Shma.
quoted above (page 6) on the "heavy burdens" of the halakha. We see it more subtly expressed in the kinds of errors Billerbeck made. They are usually not errors in translation or in purely abstract knowledge about Judaism. Billerbeck must be acknowledged as a master of rabbinic language and thought insofar as his purposes brought him to study it. His errors are errors in judgment, errors showing to some extent a lack of real appreciation of Judaism and how it is understood by those who practice it on a daily basis.

It was a conclusion of the previous chapter that to the end of his life Billerbeck continued to judge Judaism on the basis of German Protestant -- rather than Jewish -- standards (chapter IV, pages 32-35). That conclusion is only reinforced by the way we have seen him interpret and apply halakhic passages in this chapter. It is not the purpose of this work to argue that Billerbeck should have been Jewish. Had he recognized, however, that his basic philosophy and approach (valuable as it may have been on its own ground, and valuable as it may have been in urging him on to ask the kinds of questions he did) were a liability in understanding rabbinic texts as the rabbinic authorities themselves understood and understand them, he would probably not have written many of the things he did, nor would he have made the errors he did. Let us not forget that Billerbeck does on at least one occasions have something positive to say about the halakha (vol. 1, page 685), but it is extremely interesting
to note that the practice in question (blessings before and after eating) is something common to Christianity as well!

This lack of appreciation of halakha for its own sake even appears to have led Billerbeck into a rather strange contradiction at one point. In vol. 2, in connection with the New Testament statement that Peter stayed with a tanner (Acts 9:43), he says, "Das Gerberhandwerk wurde zu den verächtlichen Berufen gerechnet. Dass Petrus bei einem Gerber als Gast einkehrt, bezeugt seine innere Freiheit von den pharisäischen Satzungen." Four pages later, however, he is at pains to prove Peter's prayer practice in line with the halakha! If Peter felt an "innere Freiheit von den pharisäischen Satzungen" in terms of staying with a tanner, it also stands to reason he would have felt the same "innere Freiheit" in terms of his prayer practice! This contradiction is only symbolic of the deep rift between Billerbeck 'the scholar' and Billerbeck 'the believer.'

All of this is not meant to detract in any way from Billerbeck's excellent knowledge of rabbinic language and literature, but it must be acknowledged that the contrast between his successes -- and his failures -- in the study of rabbinic texts is vast indeed, and that both sides of him must be taken into account in any serious use or study of his work.


CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Paul Billerbeck was a complex personality living in equally complex times. Putting together all of the details of his life and work in such a way that we begin to see a more complete picture of him is the problem and indeed the purpose of this study. Few scholars have attempted to deal with the material, and even the more thorough among these have at best addressed only part of it; too often, moreover, their analysis has been superficial, and their conclusions correspondingly sketchy and repetitive of what others have said before them.

In this work, I attempt to approach the problem from a number of different directions. I begin with a brief survey of Billerbeck's life and work in Chapter I. The historical and religious background is then dealt with in Chapter II, which reconstructs Billerbeck's milieu both generally (in terms of the then prevailing attitudes towards Jews and Judaism) and specifically (in terms of how those attitudes were manifested in scholarly circles, and how they influenced the work produced). Special attention is given in that chapter to the circle of clergy and scholars centering around Franz Delitzsch and Hermann L. Strack, as to that group to which Billerbeck was most closely aligned.

Chapter III examines the scholarly attitudes of the period towards the academic study and use of rabbinic
literature in New Testament interpretation by focusing on the body of review literature that greeted the appearance of Billerbeck's **Kommentar**. Here several schools of thought are isolated, the most important of which are that of Strack and his followers and the so-called 'Hellenistic School.' These two 'schools' represent two trends of thought that are still influential today and still in conflict over the relative importance of Hebraic vis-a-vis Hellenistic thought and texts in the interpretation of the New Testament. This conflict revolves around three issues: (1) how accurately a scholar can date the individual rabbinic traditions with respect to the time of the New Testament; (2) the perspective from which he views the New Testament; and (3) what he sees as the dominant train of thought in the New Testament.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the developments of Billerbeck's rabbinic scholarship as revealed in his published essays, while Chapter V is an examination of the **Kommentar** itself through a study of Billerbeck's treatment of the most important **halakhic** material from the corpus of tradition entitled **Berakhot**.

Two sides of Billerbeck's personality -- Billerbeck the man of faith, and Billerbeck the critical and historical scholar -- have been manifested repeatedly throughout this study. Both need to be taken seriously for an accurate assessment and appreciation of Billerbeck's work and its contribution to the understanding of the Jewish aspect of early Christianity.
The two opening chapters focus on the 'man of faith' aspect. Chapter I does this in a biographical format. Chapter II examines this phenomenon as common to the members of the Delitzsch-Strack circle generally. Billerbeck was a part of a larger group within German church circles that tended to be conservative in its theology and in favor of evangelizing Jews. It is this dual emphasis that underlies the great stress placed upon the scholarly study of rabbinic literature among the members of this group; it is also the driving force of Billerbeck's own work.¹

Being conservative and 'pro-conversion' in Billerbeck's day did not necessarily mean that one was anti-Semitic. The anti-Semitic parties which emerged and gained momentum towards the end of the nineteenth century in Germany were racially anti-Semitic: they held that Jews, as a people, were essentially corrupt and unchangeable, even by baptism. Thus, for a movement to make Jewish evangelism one of its prime purposes was, in Billerbeck's time and place, tantamount to declaring itself pro-Semitic! It implied that Jews are neither more nor less corrupt than any other people,

¹ [Paul] Fiebig, Review of the Kommentar, vol. 1, in Saat auf Hoffnung, Zeitschrift für die Mission der Kirche an Israel 60 (1923): 64. Fiebig says, "Das Werk ist zu wissen­schaftlichem Verständnis des N.T.'s völlig unentbehrlich. Es zeigt sich, wie tief gerade die Evangelien im Judentum verankert sind, anderseits, wie deutlich sich Jesus Christus selbst und das Christentum vom Judentum abhebt. So ist durch dies Werk auch der Judenmission ein besonders wichtiger Dienst geleistet." This statement succinctly summarizes the two main emphases of Billerbeck and his colleagues of the Delitzsch-Strack circle, together with the theological trend that undergirded both.
since all people were seen as under the curse of original sin and as capable of being saved only through Christ. In this view, the Jew also is redeemable, and, therefore, capable of making a positive contribution to the new Germany.

This point needs to be fully grasped in order to properly understand Billerbeck and evaluate his work. Some present-day observers may be inclined to judge Billerbeck and his colleagues on the basis of more contemporary knowledge or experience with missionary groups as religiously anti-Jewish, even if it be conceded that they were not racially anti-Semitic. I contend, however, that even this is neither a fair nor an accurate picture of the circle. I refer the reader to Chapter II, where the various opinions concerning Jews and Judaism current within this group are set forth. It is true that not only anti-Jewish, but racially anti-Semitic trends were to be found among them. At the same time, however, no less a figure than Wilhelm Wuensche was accused in print by a member of his own circle (de le Roi) of having given up the conviction of the Jews' need for conversion, and attempting to rehabilitate the Pharisees as well (see infra, p. xx). I see Billerbeck as a centrist of this group.

Note also the varied political views within the Strack-Delitzsch group. Some militantly held that non-Christians should not be given full citizenship. Others were not so emphatic on this point. It is also important to remember Delitzsch's own irenic and positive views, which insisted on
a legitimate and unique position for the Jews as a people, even after their anticipated mass conversion.

Billerbeck and his colleagues, then, represented a trend that was pro-Semitic according to the understanding of their day, and which wanted to find room both for the serious study of rabbinic literature by Christians for other than polemical ends, and for the Jew as a citizen within the new society growing up in Germany.

This certainly does not justify an uncritical acceptance in our own day of Billerbeck's theological understanding of Judaism and its relationship to the New Testament. The harshest of Billerbeck's critics are correct in accusing him of often showing a total misunderstanding of the true nature of rabbinic Judaism. Nonetheless, an awareness of the spectrum of opinion within the Delitzsch-Strack circle ought to make us more cautious in our judgment of the works of one of its most gifted and prolific members.

This should be the first realization to arise from this study. We cannot reject Billerbeck's work out of hand purely on the basis of his theological views. Chapters IV and V are designed to show just how careful a student of rabbinic literature Billerbeck was, and how much he grew over the years in his knowledge and appreciation of it. Naturally, much has happened within the scholarly world since Billerbeck's time. His work cannot simply be accepted and used as though no progress had been made within the field. Nonetheless, Billerbeck's edifice stands, and once one learns to
recognize its defects, it can still provide much help to those interested in understanding early Christian literature within its Jewish context.

Chapter III emphasizes more the critical and historical side of Billerbeck's work, how it was received during his lifetime, and what its place in the overall scholarly picture was. Billerbeck belonged to a circle which gave primary place to the study of rabbinic literature for a correct understanding of early Christianity, in contrast to other circles whose chief point of reference was the Graeco-Roman world, or later Christian tradition. Chapter III shows that Billerbeck's work was highly respected by representatives of these other trends, even where they disagreed with him most. Not only did they have respect for his work, but Billerbeck also understood the value of working with nonrabbinic sources, as can be seen from his frequent use of Hellenistic and early Christian material from outside the New Testament.

Later scholars, however, in building upon the work of their predecessors, have not read Billerbeck as carefully or taken him as seriously as his contemporaries did. The best of his earlier critics considered and carefully examined his translations and interpretations of individual rabbinic texts, something that his later critics have not done, at least not in print. They seem to presuppose a faultiness about his work and attack him on theological and
methodological grounds, something which the first generation of critics also did, but with more respect.²

In our day, the zeitgeist has turned away from the

²A classic example of this type of analysis is a footnote in a recent JQR article (note #2, n.s., 74 (1983): 159) where Samuel Tobias Lachs writes of Billerbeck's Kommentar, "Billerbeck performed a monumental task in collecting rabbinic material. Unfortunately most of it is totally irrelevant to the study of the New Testament. The reader is lost in a maze of these irrelevancies. Furthermore, the analysis of the sources is poor and the commentary, highly biased, can for the most part be ignored." It should be clear from this study that on both counts he has seriously erred. While it would be foolish to defend the aptness of every reference in a work like the Kommentar, the size of the material helps to set the New Testament into a certain context, and can give the reader a particular appreciation of an important side of the New Testament. In addition, even with the types of errors examined in this work, Billerbeck's analysis is quite good, and the commentary is biased and can be ignored only when it touches on issues of a polemical nature between Judaism and Christianity.

Another factor involved here may simply be that external event influences even the scholar's perception more than he would like. In 1923, a "Bezirksrabbiner" Dr. Beermann published a short review of the first volume of the Kommentar in the C. V. Zeitung which he entitled, "Ein Meisterwerk christlicher Talmudgelehramkeit." In it he praises the Kommentar as a massive vindication of the essentially Semitic nature of Christianity over against the racial anti-Semites of the time, who attempted to make Christianity Indo-Germanic and Jesus an Aryan. Beermann is able to find point after point in the Kommentar to support this view. Later scholars, however, working after the demise of German National Socialism and its consequences in the Holocaust would see Billerbeck as the extreme anti-Semite in comparison to a much changed climate of thought. This very contrast of perception on the part of two different generations of scholars in dealing with the same material may be an indication of the enduring value of Billerbeck's work. It retains its worth in spite of the theology of its compiler, and its choice of passages is not always as one-sided as some would have us believe! Beermann, "Ein Meisterwerk christlicher Talmudgelehramkeit," C. V. Zeitung, Blätter für Deutschtum und Judentum: Organ des Central-Vereins deutscher Staatsburger jüdischen Glaubens e.V. 2 (18 October 1923): 324.
ready use of rabbinic texts in interpreting the New Testament, and now endorses a skeptical approach to the use of parallels. If it cannot be absolutely proven that a tradition comes from the first century, and even more restrictively from the period before the Temple's destruction in 70, it may not be considered a legitimate parallel to a New Testament passage.\(^3\) While this view has matured in the intervening years and the number of its adherents has grown, in essence it is not new -- many of Billerbeck's earlier critics likewise challenged him on historical grounds; today it is simply more widespread. Despite this shift in attitude, however, Billerbeck's work continues to be used -- critically, yet positively -- by some of the most respected scholars dealing with the New Testament in rabbinic context.

Even on the 'parallel' issue, not all authorities agree on the exclusively historical emphasis mentioned above, and there are those who, well aware of the historical problem, still make cautious use of later parallels in the interpretation of the New Testament.

This problem is not limited to questions of New Testament interpretation, but also has a bearing on the nature of the relationship between the later rabbinic materials written exclusively in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, and the

earlier Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period, which was written primarily in Greek. A case in point is the ongoing discussion of the relationship between the legal traditions preserved by Philo and those of the rabbinic period. Two important studies of the Philonic material, representing two very different viewpoints, illustrate the problem. They are Erwin R. Goodenough's 1929 work, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt*, and Samuel Belkin's *Philo and the Oral Law*, which appeared in 1940.⁴

The review literature on these works is quite revealing. Goodenough comes from a strongly Hellenistic background, and is thus anxious to establish the place of Philo and of the Egyptian Jewish courts of his time in relationship to the contemporary Greek and Roman jurisprudence. Belkin, on the other hand, comes from a strictly rabbinic background, and thus is interested in showing Philo's dependence on rabbinic tradition, and thus by implication the antiquity of same. Of the several reviews examined, the majority hold both of these two opinions to be extremes, and in the case of the Goodenough work, tend to defend the pre-Goodenough literature of a more rabbinic mind against his charges of one-sidedness.

One review important because of its suggestions as to

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what principles may be followed in determining the applicability of parallels on a case by case basis, is David Daube's discussion of Belkin. He proposes as four tests, whether or not the parallel in question may be explained on the basis of Hellenistic or Roman influence, whether or not it may be explained on the basis of a simple "evolution of ideas" apart from any external influence, whether the tradition in question might involve something, "...familiar to any Jew anywhere," or whether it may be explained by what Daube refers to as a "...naive interpretation of Scripture." 5

The first of these suggested tests is important, as it is clear that all possible external evidence must be taken into account before attempting to draw any conclusions on the basis of such parallels. The others, however, given Daube's explanation of them and the examples he gives, seems to beg the question. What Daube terms an "evolution of ideas," and a "naive interpretation of Scripture" are adequate descriptions of what actually took place within the rabbinic hermeneutic process, while in the case of what might be "familiar to any Jew anywhere," at least in matters of religious practice this might be seen as legitimate reason to hold the decision itself to be an early one and coming from a commonly recognized source. Why else would it be so universally known?

The generally agreed upon conclusions of the review literature, which seem applicable to rabbinic-New Testament parallels, are best set out by M. San Nicolo in his review of Goodenough. He writes:

Gewiss hat Goodenough die praktische Ziele, die Philo mit seiner Schrift verfolgte, treffender charakterisiert als seine Vorgänger, aber ich glaube trotzdem, dass wir nur dann zu einem einigermaßen richtig eingestellten Bild über den darin verarbeiteten Rechtsstoff gelangen können, wenn wir auch die Fortentwicklung des biblischen Gesetzes in der Tradition außerhalb des ägyptischen Diaspora, wie sie etwa ein Jahrhundert später in der Mischna niedergelegt worden ist, weiter heranziehen, so dass man auch gegenüber der Darstellung des Verfassers [Goodenough] die anders orientierten früheren Würdigungen nicht wird entbehren dürfen. So wie diese auf der einen Seite die Selbstständigkeit der jüdisch-hellenistischen Rechtstradition in Alexandrien zu stark zugunsten der Fortbildung aus dem Mutterlande herabdrücken, so geht anderseits Goodenough wohl allzu freigebig mit der Annahme griechischer und selbst römischer Einwirkungen vor... 6

The point is that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and that all external evidence whether it be Hellenistic or rabbinic, must be taken into account in the evaluation of parallels. While all may not agree on the relative value of the material on a case by case study, one must first gather all the available material, and it is here that works of Billerbeck's sort can be helpful.7


7 Note the similar conclusion on the part of David Goldenberg with reference to parallels between Josephus and rabbinic literature, David M. Goldenberg, "AJ 4.277 and 288 Compared With Early Rabbinic Law," Josephan Studies, ed.
Nevertheless, it must also be noted that while Billerbeck was not unaware of the literary-critical approaches being developed for the study of rabbinic texts already at his own time, such awareness comes late in his career, and only in terms of isolated quotations. For critical and historical evaluation of the material Billerbeck has gathered, the reader will turn to other and more contemporary sources.

As important as the establishing of historical parity is, one must not become too pedantic in insisting on such parity as a presupposition for any legitimate use of parallels in the interpretation of a given document. First, as J. Bonsirven has pointed out, being able to trace the later development of a tradition is sometimes helpful also for the understanding of it in its earlier forms. ⁸


⁸ J. Bonsirven, Review of the Kommentar, vol. 4, p. 312. Note also the proposed method of G. Vermes (JJS 33 (1982: 361-76), where he includes the New Testament documents as a part of Jewish tradition together with the Jewish Hellenistic materials, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Targums, and rabbinic literature, and proposes the writing of the history of that tradition on the basis of all together. As to the specific relationship of the New Testament to the rabbinic material he writes, "If the latter [the N.T.] is envisaged, not as standing apart from Judaism and above it, but as organically bound up with it, the stages of religious thought preceding and following it are not merely relevant but essential to an historical understanding and evaluation of its message, including its originality and peculiarity."
Second, even where the antiquity of a tradition cannot be conclusively proven, the legitimacy of the use of parallels in studying specific literary, theological, or cultural motifs must also be recognized. George Wesley Buchanan, immediately following a rigidly historical discussion of the use of rabbinic-New Testament parallels goes on to say:

There are ways, however, in which this literature is important for New Testament research which do not require a knowledge of the date of composition, either for rabbinic or the New Testament texts involved. These are useful because both Christianity and later rabbinic Judaism developed from earlier types of Judaism, of which both preserve some of the same traditions. When this is true, the meaning of an expression, custom, practice, or belief found in one body of literature can sometimes be clarified by the use of the same one in another body of literature. This increases our knowledge of the background held in common.

Of course, the commonly held traditions have developed differently within the two religious contexts, and one must take those differing perspectives into consideration. Nevertheless, it is also in this type of an approach that a use of Billerbeck can come into its own. As many scholars both

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9 George Wesley Buchanan, "The Use of Rabbinic Literature..." 7 (1977): 115. At one point, however, Buchanan does violate his own rigid historical approach so carefully set out in the first part of his article. In his eagerness to justify the above position he quotes a composition of the medieval poet, Judah Halevy, in which the poet refers to Ps. 102 in its entirety by simply incorporating some of its phraseology into his work. Buchanan does this in order to show the existence of the same practice in the New Testament.
of his time and later have agreed, he did amass a great deal
of material important for understanding not only the New
Testament but also the origin and development of early Chris-
tianity. This is especially true of the fourth volume of the
Kommmentar, and specifically of the halakhic essays in it.10

These essays constitute some of the most important mate-
rial in the Kommmentar. Together with the extended discus-
sions on halakhic questions within the three volumes of the
Kommmentar, proper, they could, if updated, form the core of a
rabbinic handbook to specific questions of a Jewish nature
which arise in the course of New Testament interpretation.
A compendium of all the major passages in extenso from the
erlier rabbinic sources on halakhic topics relevant to the
interpretation of the New Testament together with some ex-
planatory comment, could be of immense help, especially to
students of the New Testament without a background in Jewish
studies.

10Here I disagree with Vermes when he writes (JJS 33
(1982):374), "But what happens to the complex of New Testa-
ment interpretation? How does the new perspective affect the
scholarly approach to it? Negatively, one outcome is that
there is no longer any call for works in which the New
Testament occupies the center of the stage. There is no need
for a Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch
... There is no need either for rabbinic theologies where
insufficient attention is paid to pre-rabbinic sources,
including the New Testament." This conclusion is illegiti-
mately drawn from the principles he has set out. Given the
validity of seeing the New Testament as a part of rabbinic
tradition, why cannot one take special interest in the New
Testament as such, provided one takes into account its Jewish
context, even as other scholars may take special interest in
Pesiqta Rabbati or in the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael? Has a
slight bias crept in even where the author is obviously
trying to avoid it when he appears to allow for rabbinic
theologies which take into account pre-rabbinic sources, but
not for someone placing the New Testament into the center of
his own personal stage?
Even for those with a strong rabbinic background it could, properly done, provide some guidance in developing a critical approach to rabbinic-New Testament parallels. It could also give the broader perspective, showing how later practice developed, and what the experience of living a Torah life-style means to a religious Jew. The production of totally new translations based on the best available manuscripts and critical editions together with text-critical and grammatical notes, could also encourage New Testament scholars with no rabbinic background to themselves make an attempt at dealing with the original texts.

This leads us to another question of import. What is Billerbeck's place within the history of the scholarly study of rabbinic literature? The answer to this question is that Billerbeck made no significant contribution to the study of the texts, themselves. He was indeed a fine and careful student of the texts and of the best secondary literature of his time. Chapters III and IV of this study are designed to show the extent of his development as a rabbinic scholar. Even though he was in all likelihood self-taught in matters rabbinic, his was a perceptive and scholarly mind which, in the understanding and interpretation of rabbinic texts, progressed dramatically over a lifetime. Nonetheless, Billerbeck was far more the eclectic, gathering materials and approaches from others, rather than the creative thinker forging his own approach to these materials. As such, any critical or textual comment he does make can often be ignored
without loss, and at the very least should be judged on a
case by case basis. There is no approach uniquely Billerbeck's that unites them.

This may also be the problem with much of his theological perception of rabbinic Judaism. It appears to be an
uncritical presupposition of his work drawn more from Weber
and his environment than from any independent study of his
own. Significantly, wherever he departs from it, his theological opinions are quite sound, and are recognized as
such even by Jewish scholars.\footnote{Note for example Felix Aber's praise of Billerbeck's interpretation of the term memra' in the Targums in Felix Aber, "Memra und Schechinah," in Festschrift zum 75 jährigen Bestehen des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars Fraenkel'scher Stiftung, vol. 2 (Breslau: Verlag M. & H. Marcus, 1929), pp. 3-5.} Most of this theological material will need to be simply ignored by anyone working
with Billerbeck, or thinking of producing the type of work
described above. Supplementation is not enough. It must be
replaced by a new approach based on a careful study of other
works produced during and since his time.

Finally, one of my chief concerns in producing this
study was that it should be a model for similar studies
analyzing the work of other Christian students of rabbinic
literature. So often one hears remarks to the effect
that the lack of traditional Jewish background on the part
of such scholars, together with the inherent prejudice
which is often discerned in their works, makes them beneath

consideration by any serious student. Certainly some literature produced by non-Jews on this subject can be safely ignored, but that cannot be said of the work of Paul Billerbeck, or that of not a few others like him. They too have made their contribution to the ongoing study of the relationship of the New Testament to the wider context of Jewish tradition. Even more, their theological prejudices notwithstanding, they are important in that they have made material accessible to those who lack a thorough rabbinic background. Believing in Christianity seriously enough to feel the obligation and the need to share it with everyone else does not necessarily make one a poor scholar, nor does it even mean that the work produced directly for that purpose cannot show scholarly merit. As such, they also deserve the kind of treatment given Billerbeck in this study, a treatment which would place them within their historical context and take them seriously enough to judge them and their own approaches to Jewish texts on the basis of the texts themselves.
APPENDIX

PREDECESSORS OF BILLERBECK

The practice of illustrating New Testament passages with rabbinic parallels was not new when Paul Billerbeck produced his Kommentar. His work was in fact the culmination of a literary movement that had begun in the seventeenth-century. For a good description of much of this literature, I recommend the article, "Christian Writers on Judaism," by George Foot Moore (HTR 14 (1921): 197-254, and specifically 216-21). I have personally examined each of the works he there discusses, from Christopher Cartwright's Mellificium Judaicum through Johann Jakob Wettstein's Novum Testamentum Graecum, and found his descriptions thorough and accurate.¹

I would, nonetheless, like to supplement his material with a discussion of three nineteenth century works not mentioned in his article, but which complete the chain of development of 'rabbinic parallel' literature up to Billerbeck's own time. Following these descriptions, I will comment on the position and importance of Billerbeck's work relative to that of his predecessors.

The first of these works is F. Nork's Rabbinische Quellen und Parallelen zu neutestamentlichen Schriftstellen mit Benutzung der Schriften von Lightfoot, Wettstein,

¹Special thanks are due to the librarians of the Dropsie College and of the Union Theological Seminary, New York, for their readiness to permit access to these volumes contained in their rare book collections.
Meuschen, Schöttgen, Danz u.A. (Leipzig: Verlag von Ludwig Schumann, 1839). Nork says in the introduction to his work that it is a one-volume compendium of materials collected primarily from the scholars named in the title (see Moore for a description of these works). He says that his contribution consists chiefly in correcting quotations and references (pp. i-vi). This is quite apparent from the table of contents and especially from the first half of the book, which seems to be a summarizing of Christian Schoettgen's attempt at proving the antiquity and authenticity of Christian teaching through cabalistic material (Cf., especially, Schoettgen's *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae in Theologiam Judaeorum...de Messia...* (Dresden and Leipzig: apud Fridericum Hekel, Bibliop. reg.:1742). The second part of Nork's work, containing parallels listed according to New Testament chapter and verse, also appears to draw heavily from the Jewish mystical writings via Schoettgen.

Also worth noting is Franz Delitzsch's article, "Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Ergänzungen zu Lightfoot und Schöttgen," *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 37 (1876):401-09, 593-606. As is stated in the title, this article is intended not as a selection of, but as a supplement to the earlier material. Delitzsch's notes seem almost exclusively concerned with the reconstruction of the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek New Testament words and phrases as an aid to interpretation. This is also
an important concern of Billerbeck's although in comparing the two works verse by verse, I found very little common material.

The third of these works is August Wünsche's *Neue Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Evangelien aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht's [sic] Verlag, 1878). Wünsche, as noted already in Chapter II (p. 10) was a student of Franz Delitzsch. As one would expect from a pupil of Delitzsch, this is an independent work, and not simply a repetition of earlier material (p. vii). It is different from the *Kommentar* both in size and in the tone of its presentation. Though Wünsche has very little good to say about halakha in his introduction, this attitude does not seem to color either his actual presentation or his attitude towards the Jewish scholarship of his time. In contrast, he has only complimentary comments on the aggadic material, and in addition calls for cooperation between Jewish and Christian scholars, knowledgeable both in their own tradition and that of their colleagues, in an objective study and interpretation of the New Testament (p. vii).

Wünsche follows his teacher, Delitzsch, in taking a special interest in the establishing of the correct text of the New Testament, and especially in the use of Hebrew language parallels and rabbinic tradition to that end. As an example of the latter in his work, note especially his comment on Matt. 1:21, where he questions the authenticity of the phrase ἀπὸ τῶν ἀναστάσεων αὐτῶν on the basis of the
absence of any connection of the concept of saving someone from his sins with the term ἄφες in rabbinic literature. Wuensche's treatment of topics on which traditionally one would expect pejorative comments on the part of Christians is quite positive and objective as well (in sharp contrast to Billerbeck). In his discussion of the term, 'scribes,' for example, he does not automatically assume them to have been an exclusive class, and summarily condemn them all (p. 121 on Matt. 9:3). Also on the topics of the Messiah and of the Sabbath, he simply outlines the facts of rabbinic belief and practice without passing negative judgment on them (pp. 143 and 148). He also attempts to give a plausible reason for the Pharisees' questioning Jesus' permitting his disciples to reap grain from the fields on the Sabbath (p. 149, Intro. to Chapter XII).

A selective comparison of the Kommentar with each of these earlier works establishes clearly that neither Billerbeck nor his reviewers were exaggerating when they claimed his scholarly independence from them (N.B. the Intro. to the Kommentar, vol. 1, p. v). His material is far more extensive than any of the others, and few common references were found between them.
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