



Manfred Bauer

JESUS

IN A NEW LIGHT

**Including a comprehensive Chapter
about the Shroud of Turin**

About the author

Manfred Bauer was born in Sudetenland (a region that is now part of the Czech Republic) in 1944 and grew up in Bavaria (southern Germany). He has been married for 45 years and lives in western Germany.

As a practicing, though not dogmatic Catholic, he has always been deeply interested in finding an answer to people's fundamental questions about the existence of God and the meaning of life. In his attempt to do so, he has been delving into religion, science, philosophy, and esotericism since his youth. During these researches, he has consistently given central importance to the person of Jesus and his teachings.

Regular yoga exercises and meditation have been conducive to broadening his worldview not only in theory, but also in practice.

He spent his entire professional career in the German income tax administration and worked for many years in the field as an auditor, tax investigator, and head of department. As such, he was in a position to look behind the scenes of our society day in, day out. Over time, this has led him to develop a critical attitude to the statements issued by any type of authority.

About this book

Biblical statements and beliefs that were shaped by the ancient mindset have been mindlessly repeated for way too long. In the process, some of these ideas were eventually dogmatized. By investigating the historical origin of such dogmas, the author carries out an in-depth analysis of the contents of established Christian doctrines without bothering about political correctness. He is outspoken, but is careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. This book is therefore especially aimed at people with an interest in theology who are no longer satisfied with the usual clichés.

During his research, the author put expert opinions to the test and found out quite frequently that they leave much to be desired. He realized that many a Bible scholar makes his or her point on the basis of a limited and incomplete view of the world that is shaped, as the case may be, by his or her own faith or atheism.

As a result of the globalization that has occurred over the past few decades and the greater insight it has afforded us into other religions and worldviews, our perspective on the nature and abilities of spiritual masters such as Jesus has broadened considerably. Since such discoveries have been taken into account only rarely in “biographies” of Jesus, it has been the author’s intention to illustrate parallels between the teachings and actions of Jesus and those of spiritual masters from other religions.

This book also asks the questions:

- What message does the Shroud kept in Turin Cathedral convey to us?
- Did Jesus really lie in it?
- Does the Shroud make it possible for us to see Jesus’ face some 2000 years after his death?

With forensic meticulousness, the author provides proof that not everything went by the book during the 1988 radiocarbon dating that “exposed” the Shroud as a medieval fake. The role of the Catholic Church leadership comes thereby under intense scrutiny.

Hence, the aim of this unconventional book is to invite the reader to accompany the author as he tries, with the help of Jesus’ example, to acquire a better understanding of the meaning and purpose of human existence and to show what consequences such a better understanding might have for the way we conduct our lives.

**So our lives glide on: the river
ends we don't know where, and
the sea begins, and then there
is no more jumping ashore.**

George Eliot,
Felix Holt, the Radical

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Prologue

“I can’t die yet! There are still so many things I need to find out about Jesus!”

Vladimir Kramarevsky, a neighbor of mine when I was a teenager, was on a brief visit to us when he made that witty remark. A Russian immigrant, Vladimir was a sprightly old man in his 80s back then, i.e. in the 1960s. Having served as an officer in the White Army during the Russian Civil War, he had fled via China to Paris after the victory of the Red Army, i.e. around 1920. In 1945, for fear the French might commit acts of revenge because his wife was a German, he had immigrated with her to Germany. Eventually, he settled down in a two-room shack next to our house.

Even though he did not belong to any denomination, he was passionately interested in anything connected with spirituality. At the time, I showed precious little understanding for his enthusiasm and thought to myself, “What brand new things does he expect to find out about Jesus? For 2000 years, the smartest minds have been making conjectures about him. You would think that, by now, they must have unearthed everything that can be discovered. Moreover, the church is constantly telling us about him. And if the church authorities are not in the know, who else could be?”



Fast-forward twenty years or so. It is my fortieth birthday, and I am about to be given a special kind of present.

On my way back home from work I have just picked up a colleague with whom I have been ride-sharing. At a very busy junction we need to cross in order to get to the expressway, I realize the traffic light is switching to amber, so I step on the gas in order to get through. As we come level with the traffic signal, my colleague shouts, "Watch out! Watch out!"

At that point, my sensory perceptions undergo a sudden change: I see something white drifting toward us as if in slow motion and I hear a siren wailing as if in the far distance. I have a feeling this could be the end. In a moment reminiscent of accounts of near-death experiences, I get the impression that I might hover above the scene of the accident. The following thought occurs to me: "Unless you do more with your life, you are no longer needed here!" This brief and calm message is quite authoritative. There is no doubt about it: it is a kick in the pants.

The banging and crashing noise of the impact jerks me back to the ordinary, real-time unfolding of events: my car is rammed against the guardrail; it jolts to a halt; a sudden silence ensues; my colleague and I are now trapped in a totaled car.

An ambulance has just crashed into the fender on the driver's side, causing the legroom on my side to shrink by two-thirds. Splinters of the shattered windshield and side window have lodged in my face.

My colleague and I look at each other and, in turn, ask, "Are you OK?" Feeling fine, I answer, "Yes". Finding that the front doors are jammed, we climb over the seat backs and get out through the rear ones.

Only once outside does my bruised left lower leg begin to hurt. It makes me feel faint. Blood is running from the cuts

in my face.

Some time later, a replacement ambulance took me to a hospital from which I was discharged after my wounds had been stitched. My colleague went home by train. Luckily, he had suffered only a few bruises. For a while, I felt guilty at having crossed the path of an ambulance, but it turned out that it was its driver who was to blame for the crash: he had crossed the junction on a red light without having first made sure that the path was clear.

During the three weeks I spent on sick leave, I kept thinking about the inner voice that had asked of me more than I had given thus far. It dawned on me that I had lived a spiritual life only in theory, i.e. had been satisfied with reading spiritual books, and that it was now time to get practical. This was a disturbing thought, though. It meant that I would have to change my life: for me as for most people, a difficult decision to make.

As luck would have it, I had just finished reading *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a book in which an Indian yoga master named Paramahansa Yogananda shows his readers how to achieve spiritual progress through meditation. Having been deeply impressed by examples from his own life, I began to practice meditation on a regular basis with the help of the service readings published by the Self-Realization Fellowship, an organization set up by Yogananda himself.



You may wonder why I have chosen to describe the above personal experience in such detail and what all this has to do with Jesus.

After the aforementioned chat with our Russian neighbor, I had first started to study Jesus from a Christian viewpoint. Then, little by little, I began to consider him from the perspective of the Eastern philosophy of religion. This offered me completely new insights and enabled me to find quite a few parallels to many of Jesus' mysterious sayings and actions.

I realized that there is no Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim truth (to name but a few of the world religions), but that the wise men and women of all religions, including Jesus, were and are still following different paths to the same truth.

Little by little, I gained a wider view of the founder of Christianity, a view I invite you to discover in this book.

What the Christian Churches' doctrines tell us about him is based on ancient Scriptures that are suffused with legends and steeped in the beliefs that prevailed at the time they were written.

Although religious scholars have spared no effort in order to extract the truth from the Scriptures and have been discussing that issue for over a century, the church has apprehensively avoided any mention of their findings in its proclamation of faith.

However, I must hasten to add that the said scholars are anything but in agreement about the founder of Christianity. The truth is that everyone views him from his own perspective and judges him according to the rules of his field of expertise. But, to be fair, I must also admit that it is really difficult if not impossible to describe a spiritual master such as Jesus. All the more so because the following reservation applies to just about every quotation of Jesus in

the Gospels: we cannot be sure that it faithfully reflects what Jesus actually said.

The Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo once said:

Nobody except myself can write my life—because it has not been on the surface for man to see.¹

The same goes for Jesus, of course.

We could say, “Let’s keep it that way! It does not make any sense to write about Jesus because we will never be able to get the whole picture anyway.”

However, before you close this book and put it aside, please consider this: What if nobody had written about Jesus? What if there weren’t any Gospels at all? No matter how deficient all writings about him are—the same goes for this book—they are pieces of a jigsaw that merely convey a rough, incomplete image of Jesus.

For generations, they have presented the image of a man who did not use his abilities to strive for worldly power, fame, and wealth. His aim went beyond all that: he wanted to give people an understanding of the spiritual world—despite all the mistakes that even he was liable to make. His teachings were mainly about the concept of a God based on his own experience—a God he knew as a loving father. For all that, he never digressed into spiritual discourse nor forgot about his contemporaries’ material hardships and the world’s injustices. He did not just talk the talk; he also walked the walk, i.e. stuck to his conviction to the last.

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to get a clear image of Jesus. That is not only because the Evangelists were born too late to be personally acquainted with him, but also because they interpolated passages expressing their own views in the accounts of his life that had already assumed legendary characteristics by the time they wrote them down.

For these reasons, any description of Jesus' life is guesswork to a great extent. This book is therefore just another *attempt* to get as close to the truth as possible. While trying to do so, the gaps and discrepancies in the Gospel narratives cannot be complemented by *facts*, but only by *possibilities*.

When he was still in office, Pope Benedict XVI expressed the following opinion about how one should approach the Gospels:

Naturally this will require of us a readiness not only to form a "critical" assessment of the New Testament, but also to learn from it and to let ourselves be led by it: not to dismantle the texts according to our preconceived ideas, but to let our own ideas be purified and deepened by his word.²

Could it be that Pope Benedict XVI suffered from a lack of self-confidence?

Once we have carefully analyzed the texts of the New Testament, why on earth shouldn't we have the right not only to give credence to what sounds convincing, but also to dismiss what seems dubious either as a misconception or as a view dating from a bygone era?

Not everything is "his word", after all.

As a saying goes, "Today's truth is tomorrow's lie!" What used to be considered as the truth at a given time often turns out to have been a misconception or a legend later on. Similarly, what used to be regarded as reality in former times need not be accepted as a signpost written in stone. Human conceptions and customs keep evolving.

We could also turn the aforementioned saying on its head: "Today's lie is tomorrow's truth!" In other words: the narrative elements that the Evangelists made up in order to make Jesus attractive to their contemporaries were later

adopted as “dogmatic *truth*”. To be fair, I should add that it would be wrong to refer to such elements as lies because that is how history used to be written at the time.

Still: does the church really expect us to bring our worldview into line with conceptions that date back 2000 years and were not undisputed, but hotly debated even back then?

As you will realize in the course of reading this book, it is absolutely not my intention to qualify every biblical statement and dismiss it as sheer myth. Rather, I am aiming at a *differentiated* approach that is free of ideological blinders.

Fortunately, we no longer live in a time when a group of *uncritical believers* could still impose their views on *critical believers*. Today, we can even contradict the theological statements of a pope without running any risks.

Unfortunately, that still isn't true of all religions.

My former neighbor Vladimir Kramarevsky epitomizes the inquisitive researcher whose *open-minded* worldview keeps evolving as new information comes to light. Mind you, such inquisitive researchers are the exception rather than the rule. Otherwise, the fact that so many serious misconceptions have crept into established religious belief systems and have endured for so long— mainly through dogmatization (i.e. the laying down of Christian doctrines)— would never have been possible.

My aim as a writer— and thus your aim as well, dear reader, if you accept my invitation to accompany me on my quest—is to try to get as close as possible to Jesus as a person by using all the means we have at our disposal.

In order to do so, we can take advantage of globalization because it is a process that has not stopped short of anything, not even the spiritual field. As

I explained above, we can e.g. do so by taking into account knowledge that is peculiar to the Eastern philosophy of religion.

We can draw parallels between ...

- the teachings and extraordinary events that are recorded in the Gospels
- and accounts of the lives of former outstanding spiritual figures, no matter which religion they belonged to.

This approach will allow us to see Jesus in the context of what should be—according to God’s plans—man’s overall spiritual development.

As far as I know, such a comparative method has not yet been used in conventional Bible science. I think this may be one of the reasons why scholarly views of the Jewish itinerant preacher and miracle worker that Jesus was are often very one-sided and narrow.

As a consequence of the method I have used in my research, this book is more than just a description of Jesus’ life. It intends to point out spiritual connections that can give us an insight not only into man’s enormous God-given potential and endless possibilities, but also into the meaning of our lives.

Let me conclude this introduction with a brief overview of the contents of this book:

- I have considered it necessary to begin by making my readers familiar with the existing biblical texts and with the views prevailing among Bible scholars.
- Before we study and discuss Jesus himself, it is also indispensable, in order to be able to understand his motives, to delve into the history of his people, i.e. Israel. That is why I have devoted much space to this topic in [Chapter 2](#).

- As you will notice, there are three chapters in which I have related Jesus' public ministry in a narrative form. Each of these narrative chapters is followed by a justificatory chapter in which I present arguments supporting the plausibility of each narrative I wrote.
- Did Jesus leave behind his image on the Turin Shroud? The comprehensive chapter addressing this question ([Chapter 11](#)) may have a few surprises in store for you.
- The final part of this book deals with the time after Jesus and includes chapters about St. Paul, the early church, and Marian devotions and apparitions.

I have tried to use easily comprehensible language and have avoided theological and scientific terms as far as possible. In my experience, specialist terminology waters down the message and makes it less clear and convincing.

I hope that I have found in you, dear reader, a discerning, but unbiased and open-minded critic.

With this in mind, I wish you interesting hours of reading during which you may hopefully gain new insights that will broaden your view of the world.

Chapter 1

Biblical texts

Is the Bible the word of God?

After reading out a passage from the Old Testament or from the Pauline Epistles during a Catholic Mass or during a Protestant or Anglican service, the lector standing at the altar usually says, “The word of the Lord¹”, and the members of the congregation dutifully reply, “Thanks be to God!”

Whenever that happens, I feel the need to apologize to the Almighty, “Dear God, please don’t take it personally that such texts are attributed to you! The lector is not to blame, he has to comply with the order of service and has to stick to that wording.”

I really cannot understand how anyone who has studied the Scriptures could ever hit on the idea of referring to the aforementioned texts as “the word of the Lord”. They are an inextricable mixture of ancient conceptions based on ...

- facts;
- legends;
- errors;
- later insertions or omissions;
- and contradictory statements.

The Jewish religious scholar Pinchas Lapide puts it in a nutshell:

Basically, there are only two ways to deal with the Bible: you can take it literally, or you take it seriously. These two

approaches are hardly reconcilable.²

If, as the church teaches us, the New Testament owes its inspiration to the Holy Spirit, he must have suffered from Alzheimer's disease because every Evangelist and Epistle writer has written a more or less different version of Jesus' teachings and actions.

The Bible covers a vast field, both temporally and ideologically.

- Deuteronomy, for instance, mentions a piece of over 3000-year-old legislation in which YHWH *orders* the Israelites who are taking part in campaigns of conquest in the Holy Land to slay all the male inhabitants of the conquered cities that do not surrender voluntarily and are located within the planned settlement area. In all the conquered cities within that area, women and children are to be killed as well (cf. Deut. 20:10-17). In [Chapter 2](#) (*History of Judaism*), I shall address the question to what extent that extermination strategy was realistic or just wishful thinking.
- On the other hand, Jesus on the cross forgives his executioners:
[...] *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* [...]
(Luke 23:34)

The Bible also spans a great variety of texts: from psalms praising God to angry outbursts by St. Paul against his opponents.

According to our current perception of God, it is no longer conceivable that he could ever have chosen a specific people, preferred them to all others, and not just allowed, but even ordered them to exterminate other peoples. According to self-centered conceptions dating from before antiquity however, tribal deities were responsible only for their own people.

As we will discover later (cf. *Biblical studies, exegesis*), it was the priests and secular leaders of the people who saw to it that various texts (i.e. not only pieces of legislation such as the aforementioned one, but also instructions and stories) were inserted in the Scriptures. When St. Paul gives vent to his anger against the conservative Jewish Christians, who wanted the Gentile Christians to undergo Jewish circumcision, by expressing the wish that the former be simply emasculated (cf. Gal. 5:12), his statement is nothing but *his* anger and *his* words.

Just as this book you are reading now, the Bible—no matter whether it is the Old Testament or the New Testament—was written by humans from beginning to end.

- Who was it then who concocted the texts of the Bible?
- What are they about?
- And for what purpose was the Bible written?

Let us first turn our attention to the Jewish Scriptures.

The Old Testament

The Jewish Scriptures (hence the Old Testament as well) are based on the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). The Tanakh includes ...

- the Torah (Hebrew for *instruction, law*, that law being mainly spelled out in five books attributed to Moses);
- books about prophets;
- and other texts such as psalms or the Song of Solomon or the Book of Proverbs.

Legends of a few scattered tribes dating back to pre-antiquity were passed on by word of mouth and later recorded and amalgamated into a salvation history under the tribal God YHWH. Apart from the Creation story, the Tanakh covers a period of about 1300 years.

Some of the “Divine Commands” that it contains (such as the aforementioned rule concerning the procedure after taking a city by storm or the legal relationship between a slave and his master) refer to the living conditions of a bygone era, i.e. pre-antiquity. Such statements are difficult to understand today and have to be considered in the light of the circumstances obtaining at the time.

As we will see in the next section (cf. *Biblical studies, exegesis*), the Tanakh was repeatedly revised by various authors over the centuries and, each time, it was adapted to the new circumstances.

The relationship between Israel and their God YHWH is the major thread running through the Jewish Scriptures. Some historians assume that YHWH was originally a volcanic or thunder-and-lightning deity of the Midianites, a people who lived on the Arabian peninsula. The Israelites adopted their cult. The nomads regarded the volcanoes that were active in the area across which they wandered as the seat of their god.

During the immigration of various nomadic tribes to the ancient civilized land of Canaan (present-day Palestine), every tribe took along their own tribal god. These gods were blended first with each other, then with the religious beliefs of the Hebrews who came from Egypt. Some of the gods, however, were also worshipped alongside the deities of the Canaanites. The Canaanite god of creation, El, for instance, could easily be equated with YHWH. For a while, the people also worshipped fertility and astral deities such as Baal, Astarte, and Marduk. The priests and prophets, however, prevented such practices with drastic measures, which included the death penalty.

Nevertheless, monotheism gained acceptance only gradually in Israel.

In 597BC, following the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylon, a many of its Jewish

inhabitants—members of the upper class in particular—were deported to Babylon and resettled there. Only in 539BC, i.e. after the Persians conquered Babylon, were the Jewish captives allowed to go back home. Jewish Scriptures that date from after their return from the Babylonian exile are the first documents to refer to YHWH as the *creator of heaven and earth*. But even though this made him the God of all mankind, his exclusive covenant with Israel was given prime importance.

In those days, uttering God's name was tabooed out of respect for his holiness, a circumstance that was probably partly influenced by the fact that anyone who uttered God's name in a negative manner by accident ran the risk of being punished.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.

(Exod. 20:7)

In extreme cases, blasphemers could be sentenced to death. From then on, God's name existed only in writing, i.e. as YHWH. And, because of the absence of vowels in written Hebrew, the knowledge of the original pronunciation gradually slid into obscurity. It may have been [jahwe], [jabe], or [jauwe].

Henceforth, paraphrases were used whenever people talked about God or to God: for instance, *Adonai*, a very respectful way of saying "my Lord". *Ja* or *HaShem*, which means "the name", were common terms as well.

The Hebrew Scriptures provided important impulses that have influenced the life of the people beyond Judaism all over the world up to the present day, for example the notion that man is made in the image of God.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

(Gen. 1:27)

This is where the principle found in all modern constitutions that all men are basically equal stems from.

The Ten Commandments are norms that are easy to understand and still of importance to the social coexistence of people. The division of the week into seven days as well as the Jewish Sabbath and our Sunday are all derived from the notion that God rested on the seventh day after creating the world.

Incidentally, the word *Jew* comes from the expression *Jehuda*, which means “I want to praise God”.

But how did the Jewish Scriptures come into being?

In order to find out, let us look Bible scholars over the shoulder.

Biblical studies, exegesis

The method employed by Bible scholars is called *exegesis*. This Greek word is used to refer to the interpretation of the texts of the Old and New Testament. Exegesis is the attempt to make the statements and meanings of the Bible as well as the historical and textual connections of biblical texts comprehensible to both professionally qualified and unqualified readers. For that reason, the challenge for the scientists is to find out *by whom*, *when* and *where* the texts were written.

Right up into the 18th century, Bible scholarship was dominated by the dogmatic teachings of the Christian Churches. The Old and the New Testament were divine revelations. Doubting their origin used to be a grievous sin that deserved to be punished by hellfire. In the Middle Ages, such skeptics were still tortured for their own good in order to make them retract. Sometimes, when all attempts had been in vain, they were even burned at the stake to save them from *everlasting* fire. As you can see, back then,

people were deeply concerned about the salvation of their poor erring contemporaries.

Later, it was only the skeptics' books that were burned, or they were silenced by other methods, such as the revocation of their teaching license, excommunication, or verbal attacks by opportunistic, sycophantic fellow scholars who ridiculed their way of thinking. Only in the 19th century did some form of critical Bible scholarship emerge, mainly within the Protestant Churches.

The Catholic Church took its time and eventually cleared the way for freer research in 1943, when Pope Pius XII released his encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* [Inspired by the Holy Spirit]:

Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed.³

Pope Pius XII, however, still stuck to his opinion that the Holy Spirit had spoken through the biblical authors and that it had not been his intention to enlighten man about processes in the physical world. Pope Pius clearly did not expect the Holy Spirit's knowledge to extend beyond the usual boundaries of his time.

The expression *The LORD/God said* occurs many times in the Old Testament and implies that YHWH talked to his people or to his prophet in person.

➤ But where does it come from?

By way of example, let me quote the passage in which Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham": and he said, "Behold,

here I am."

And he said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and get you into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you of."

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and split the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him.

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said to his young men, "Abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, "My father": and he said, "Here am I, my son." And he said, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering": so they went both of them together.

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on the wood.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the LORD called to him out of heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham": and he said, "Here am I."

And he said, "Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do you any thing to him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me."

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

(Gen. 22:1-13)

In the lifetime of Abraham, the mythical progenitor of the Jews and Arabs, people traditionally offered human sacrifices (even their own children, their firstborn son in particular) to the gods. In order to justify such a practice, in pre-antiquity the Jews imputed it to YHWH:

[...] the firstborn of your sons shall you give to me.

(Exod. 22:29)

✓ But perhaps there came a time when the priestly caste felt that such sacrifices were inhuman and no longer appropriate. What could they do? Since the custom was YHWH's express wish, they could not simply forbid it. That would explain why a new story was circulated: the one about Abraham and Isaac, in which YHWH refrained from demanding human sacrifices.

Nevertheless, in the hope of obtaining God's help, children were still sacrificed now and then. Judge Jephtha, for example, sacrificed his only daughter because God had helped him to victory in the war against the Ammonites (cf. Judg. 11:30-40).

Something similar is recorded about the king of the Moabites:

And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even to the king of Edom: but they could not.

Then he took his oldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

(2 Kgs. 3:26–27)

- So, if it was not God who provided the Jewish Scriptures, who else did?

Let's take the origin of the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) as an example.

As is always the case with Jewish or Middle Eastern history, the task is rather complicated because every group did its own thing. They pursued their own interests with lots of fantasy and swagger. Let's begin with the kingdom of David.

About 1000BC, David created a kingdom that reached from the border to Egypt in the south to Phoenicia in the north, including the areas of Edom, Moab, and Ammon on the other side of the River Jordan. This event is recorded in the Second Book of Samuel (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2–10).

But that passage is clearly an idealized account that was added by its author!

According to the latest research, David was originally a gang leader who became king of a few of the Jewish tribes in what was later known as Judaea. Due to his victory over King Saul, who ruled over the other tribes in the north, he could establish a Jewish kingdom. It was divided into the southern kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital and the northern kingdom of Israel with Shechem as its central city. The latter kingdom roughly covered the territory of what later became known as Samaria and Galilee.

The territory of these two kingdoms was inhabited by about 55,000 people. Hence, it was much too weak to attack the cities of the Philistines on the Mediterranean or the areas on the other side of the Jordan.

Contrary to David, who paid attention that both kingdoms enjoyed equal rights, his son Solomon—who was not as wise as he is portrayed—discriminated against the northern