

The following passages illustrate a negative portrait of first century Judaism that is deeply embedded throughout “The Bronze Bow”. Based largely on the Gospels and the author’s own religious background they are often at odds with modern scholarship as well as Jewish tradition.

I. JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY FOR JESUS’ DEATH

The most troubling passages are those accusing Jews and Jewish leaders of wanting to kill Jesus. This accusation is the historical basis for two thousand years of anti-Semitism, and was widely used in the Middle Ages as a rallying cry for the mass murder of entire communities. It still persists today and simply does not belong in a public school.

While it is generally assumed that Jesus incurred the wrath of both the Jewish high priests and the Romans after entering Jerusalem on Passover, the suggestion here of a prior conspiracy against him because of his teachings is widely disputed. These passages reinforce the prejudicial idea that responsibility for his death lies with the Jews and not the Romans where it squarely belongs. Even the implication that his teachings were deeply at odds with Jewish practice at the time is controversial today, as is the historical likelihood of the incident at Nazareth.

THE JEWS WANT TO KILL JESUS	
p. 45	“[T]his carpenter came back to preach in his own synagogue.” “A town like Nazareth must have boasted --” “They did not boast. They tried to kill him.”
p. 48	“Why did they try to kill him in Nazareth?” “They said he blasphemed. Some of said he had set himself up as God’s anointed, a common carpenter’s son. They were beside themselves....They dragged him up the hill to a cliff and they meant to push him over. But just at the edge of the cliff they fell back...”
p. 219	“The rabbis and the scribes, they can’t understand him. They’re furious at the things he says and does. He is too free with the Law. They say he is trying to destroy all the authority of the Temple. Some of them even say he is in league with the devil....Some of them hate him so much -- I think they would kill him if they could.” <i>The concept of the “devil” didn’t even exist in mainstream Jewish thought at the time.</i>
p. 223	“I came to warn you....Joel says you are in danger. He says they have turned against you in the synagogue. He’s afraid they will try to kill you.”

II. JEWISH LAW SUPERSEDED / REPLACED BY CHRISTIANITY

Judaism in this book is obsessed by “Law” which is often denigrated, depicted as onerous to the poor, and which Jesus’ teachings replace. There is no hint that in

Judaism these commandments (a better term) were seen as opportunities for uniting with spiritual impulses and were widely followed. At the time they provided many of the first laws in history protecting the poor and their interpretation was always argued over and in constant flux. They continue to be very deep teachings and have survived thousands of years, mostly nurtured by poverty.

DENIGRATING JEWISH LAW	
p. 88	But the Law was for the wealthy, for the scholars, not for the poor. By now he had broken so many points of the Law that he was beyond all redemption. What matter if he broke one more?
p. 63	Through the prolonged hand-washing Daniel fidgeted....Curse their finicky rules, have they never felt the gnawing of a hungry stomach" <i>This refers to traditional Jewish rituals before dinner many of which are still followed. "Curse their rules"! is extremely offensive to Jewish ears</i>
p. 105	"How can he call those people children of God?" he questioned. "They have never heard of the Law. They are unclean from the moment they are born." <i>(Judaism never taught that any group of people should be classified as unclean from birth. This is an offensive fabrication especially coming from Joel the rabbi's son. Jews did not believe in original Sin either)</i>
p. 68	"Mark my words boy. Israel has one great strength, mightier than all the power of Rome. It is the Law, given to Moses and our fathers. When the last Roman emperor has vanished from the earth, the Law will still endure. It is to the Law that our loyalty must be devoted." <i>This is a distortion of Jewish tradition probably based on a mistranslation of the word "Torah", that again implies a religion of hard legalism devoid of love and mercy. You could write a book about what's wrong with this passage.</i>
p. 177	[H]e remembered...the ancient law that forbade a man and woman to wear each other's garments. "Are you worried about the Law?" he asked... "Oh -- the Law!" she replied. "Joel and I have broken so many laws lately that one more wouldn't matter." <i>Now even the Rabbi's children no longer care about breaking commandments and the reader is their accomplice in demeaning Jewish tradition.</i>
p. 99	"Teacher", a man said, "no one has provided for us to wash our hands. In this house do you not observe the Law?"... "In this house the food has been given us with love," [Jesus] said slowly. "Let us make sure that our hearts rather than our hands are worthy to receive this gift." <i>Hand washing is repeatedly portrayed as an onerous law for the poor that Jesus doesn't require them to follow. Historically however common people were not required to wash before eating, only religious leaders. The implication is that traditional law only cares about surface issues, while Jesus cares about what really matters)</i>
p. 105	"This man is not a true rabbi. He practically said it was all right to eat without washing our hands."

III. Jewish characters are shown abandoning their outmoded beliefs, and even an explicit statement that Jesus' approach is "beyond" Judaism are all used to indicate Jesus' superiority.

CHRISTIANITY SUPERIOR TO JUDAISM	
p. 144	[Jesus] "has explained several points of the Law that have always puzzled me....Some of his ideas are the same as [the rabbi's], only he seems to go beyond somehow. He has a way of making something very clear and -- uncomplicated -- so that you wonder why you never thought of it that way before." <i>(Jesus surpasses Judaism -- why didn't Jews ever think of his way before?)</i>
p. 177	Jesus has made me see that we don't need to wait for God to care for us. He does that now." <i>(Implying erroneously that God does not care for people in Jewish teaching.)</i>
p. 220	"Perhaps we made a mistake. Maybe Jesus is really the leader we're waiting for."
p. 244	"[W]ith a God like that I am safe....Jesus...is the hope of Israel...We are forced to choose...I have chosen Jesus." <i>(i.e., the Jews made the wrong choice)</i>

IV. PETTY RABBIS AND PHARISEES

These Jewish leaders are painted as hypocrites, obsessed with legalisms and purity. Historically the Pharisees are the ancestors of modern Judaism and were an extremely diverse movement. Many were poor themselves, made a point of democratizing the religion, were popular among the masses, and promulgated the "golden rule" as the essence of the teaching. While purity issues were excessively important to some, the issue was widely debated and this book's portrayal is one-sided.

In the Gospels, Pharisees are depicted as obsessed with legalisms trying to trick Jesus with petty questions – a portrait echoed here. Some historians however have suggested that Jesus may have been a Pharisee himself.

RABBIS, PHARISEES AND SCRIBES	
p. 55	He saw four elders of the Pharisees, the phylacteries bound to their proud foreheads, walking with great care that their tasseled robes did not brush the passers-by, lest the merest touch might make them unclean. <i>(Phylacteries are containers holding prayers still used by orthodox jews. The tasseled robes are the "Tallit" (white shawls) worn today in the synagogue. This is a deeply offensive passage.)</i>
p. 60	Daniel flushed, remembering that a common man who visited a Pharisee must leave his cloak at the door lest he make the household unclean.
p. 64	Sold into slavery for a term of six years... Had the rabbis protested then, or a single soul in the village lifted a finger to help him? <i>(Jewish law actually said that indentured servants with abusive masters must be</i>

	<i>freed)</i>
p. 65	The rabbi had deliberately put [Daniel] at a disadvantage with every question.
p. 138	Daniel suspected that he argued habitually and enjoyed it, like the Scribes who debated the fine points of the Law.
p. 219	“I mean the elders of the synagogue. The rabbis and the scribes. They can’t understand him. They’re furious at the things he says and does. He is too free with the Law. They say he is trying to destroy all the authority of the Temple.”
p. 221	“These priests from Judea -- they haven’t given [Jesus] a moment’s peace for three days. They pretend to be so respectful, and they’re only trying to trap him into saying something they can prove is blasphemy.”

V. Jesus is portrayed in literally glowing images, as befits a religious instructional book or movie, not a historical novel for public school. The final scene is a religious conversion.

DEPICTIONS OF JESUS	
p. 47	[W]hen [the man] turned and stood before the congregation, Daniel was startled. All at once nothing in the room was distinct to him but this man’s face....A vital, radiant face, lighted from within by a burning intensity of spirit.
p. 47	A shock ran through Daniel at the first words. A gentle voice, barely raised, it carried to every corner of the room, warm, vibrant, with a promise of unlimited power. It was as though only a fraction of that voice were being used, as though if the full force of it were unstopped it would roll like thunder.
p. 57	Out here in the sun [Jesus] did not look solemn as in the synagogue. He looked vigorous and confident and happy....How strong he is, [Daniel] thought....The impression of strength came from an extraordinary vitality that seemed to pulse in the very air around him. Once more..., Daniel felt a spark leap up in his own body. Looking about him he could see the same spark reflected in the eyes of the men and women....
p. 98	[Jesus’] eyes, looking straight into his, blocked out every other thought. Filled with light and warmth, those eyes, welcoming him with friendship, yet searching too, disturbing, demanding.
p. 103	For the third time, something in Daniel leaped to answer that voice....This time its gentleness rested on the suffering people like a comforting touch. But strength still poured through its calm tones, and utter sureness.
p. 242	“What sort of a man is he, anyway?” Simon looked back at him. In the darkness his eyes suddenly blazed. “I believe he is the Messiah, sent from God,” he said.... “[Jesus] is the hope of Israel.”
p. 251	Framed in [the doorway], against the sunlight, stood Jesus in his white robe....He saw only that luminous figure. Jesus had come!
p. 252	He struggled to believe....He wanted to cry out to him, to go down on his

	<p>knees....Suddenly, with a longing that was more than he could bear, he wanted to stop fighting against this man. He knew that he would give everything he possessed in life to follow Jesus....</p> <p>He sat trembling, glimpsing a new way that he would never see clearly or understand...</p> <p>To know Jesus would be enough.</p> <p>Almost with the thought the terrible weight was gone. In its place a strength and sureness, and a peace he had never imagined, flowed around him and into his mind and heart.</p> <p><i>Moments later Jesus apparently raises Daniel’s sister from death as all his problems are suddenly resolved.</i></p>
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VI. JEWISH CLASS INEQUITIES / CHRISTIAN EQUALITY

Jewish society is shown as riven with class injustice, and these divisions are equated with piousness and “the Law”.

JEWISH CLASS ISSUES	
p. 62	<p>[Rabbi Hezron] bowed with a cool courtesy.... [and] gazed with distaste at Daniel’s unlawful garment. A camel would be as welcome, Daniel thought. The man will have to purify his whole house when I leave!</p> <p><i>(Well-educated, pious, upper-class Jews thinking of less-educated, less-religious, poor Jews as “unclean” are shown several times in the book. See also section on Christian equality below.)</i></p>
p. 139	<p>It was exactly as though [the scholar] had pulled his cloak tighter to avoid contamination. Peasant! his tone said unmistakably.</p>
p. 162	<p>“[Jesus] told us a story about a traveler who fell among thieves who beat him and left him half dead beside the road. And a priest and a Levite came by and saw him and passed by on the other side, but a cursed Samaritan stopped and bound up his wounds and took care of him. I wish the story had been about a Jew instead. If Jesus means that Jews and Samaritans should treat each other like neighbors, that is foolish. It could never happen.”</p> <p><i>The good Samaritan story is noble in its context as self-criticism - a Jew talking to another Jew. In the context of this book though it becomes yet another criticism of the Jewish clergy</i></p>
p. 227	<p>Pious Jews moved with dignity toward the synagogue, looking with disdain on the frivolous folk who took the occasion for an idle holiday. Voices and laughter sounded across the rooftops.</p> <p><i>This is the author’s demeaning depiction of Yom Kippur the holiest and most solemn day of the Jewish year when Jews fast and look deep into their souls for meaning. It could have been a perfect occasion for Daniel to look inward, but is instead almost mocked by the author who again implies that the ordinary folk have no interest in the Jewish religion.</i></p>
p. 228	<p>He saw at once that he did not belong here. Even in his best cloak he</p>

	stood out plainly for just what he was, a peasant and a smith. He dared not even approach too near to these elegant youths...
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In contrast Jesus and his followers treat all people equally, even children. (These passages are probably accurate depictions of Jesus’ teachings and would be laudable in any context except one in which they are relentlessly compared to their Jewish “opposite”)

CHRISTIAN EQUALITY	
p. 104	“I have little need for money just now. Take what you need.”
p. 111	Rosh looked at a man and saw a thing to be used, like a tool or a weapon. Jesus looked and saw a child of God.
p. 157	Daniel thought now of the one meal he had shared with Simon’s comrades....A closeness had seemed to draw them all together. <i>This refers to Jesus’s followers</i>
p. 161	“Jesus stands on the shore and talks to them all,” he told Leah. His friends to start with, and people like me. And then there are the beggars and cripples...”
p. 169	“[Jesus] won’t even let them send the children away when they’re a nuisance. He insists on talking to them, and finding out their names, and listening to their foolishness. It makes some of the men furious. -- as though he thought children were important.”
p. 186	“When [Jesus] comes,...you must ask him to come to your house with you. He often goes with people, you know.” ”To the centurion’s house, or to some rich man’s.” ”Do you really think that would make the slightest difference to Jesus?”

VII. JUDAISM = HUNGER / JESUS = FOOD

Food and hunger are used repeatedly as metaphors. Jewish peasants, mostly farmers and herders, go hungry and fight over food. Only the rich, thieving, and the clergy have plenty.

POOR JEWS ARE HUNGRY AND FIGHT OVER FOOD	
p. 39	There was certainly little to bless God for, a watery stew made of lentils, some coarse barley bread.
p. 41	Already he yearned to be away from this place. Hunger gnawed at him.
p. 63	Had they ever felt the gnawing of an empty stomach?
p. 83	There wasn’t enough to eat, and [my grandmother] sold me...
p. 101	Hands snatched the food as it passed, cramming it into mouths, spilling it in frantic greed....There would never be enough to satisfy this starving horde...who had dragged themselves to this place in the hope of a morsel of bread.
p. 157	Would some child in the village be hungry because of tonight’s [stolen] feast?
p. 163	[A]t night...the hungry, who had not eaten all day, came to be fed....Daniel

	was disgusted at the way they jostled each other and tore at the food, and snatched bread from the helpless...
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Jesus is portrayed as food for the soul. Unlike the farmers and herders, the fishermen that follow him have plenty of food and share it freely.

JESUS IS FOOD FOR THE SOUL / CHRISTIANS SHARE FOOD	
p. 56	“Hungry, boy?”....A smiling young woman...was holding out a small fish on a palm leaf... ”I have no money,” he muttered. ”Who said anything about money? You can see there’s plenty. Take it.”
p. 103	They listened as though his words were food and they could never get enough.
p. 157	Daniel thought now of the one meal he had shared with Simon’s comrades. He remembered the silence as Jesus had stood to bless the meager feast, and how each one had taken less than he needed so that those outside could be fed.
p. 162	“[T]he beggars and cripples....drag themselves down to the shore, partly to hear Jesus and partly because Simon and Andrew and the women always give them some fish.”
p. 240	“It’s the Messiah....Blessed be He that cometh!” ”[W]hat did he say?” “Say? He did better than say. He fed us. Don’t you see the bread? Pick some up for yourself. There’s plenty....Praise be! Salvation is come!” Bread? For all these people? People all over the hillside? There must be thousands.