

## A Glutton and a Drunkard – Was Jesus Viewed as a Rebel?

By Ross K. Nichols

Deuteronomy chapter twenty-one contains a passage that could shed some light on our understanding of the events that led to the execution of Jesus of Nazareth. Within this passage is a charge that was made against Jesus by some of his religious rivals, and recorded in the canonical Gospels – though it has gone unnoticed by most students of the life of Jesus.

*RSV Deuteronomy 21:18 "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they chastise him, will not give heed to them, 19 then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, 20 and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard (**zolel v'soveh**).' 21 Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.*

This law is considered in the Talmud<sup>1</sup>. There it is stated that the “law of the ‘rebellious son’ has never occurred, and never will occur...”. In the rabbinical discussion mentioned above, the rabbis conclude that this passage in the Torah pertains to the partaking of a meal by the offender; a meal they called the meal of the rebellious son.<sup>2</sup> It is doubtful whether the exact legislative discussion, defined in Jewish literature was well known in the first century, but the text of Deuteronomy certainly was. The Temple Scroll, found among the Dead Sea

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<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin 71a

<sup>2</sup> The meal had to be witnessed by two witnesses besides the parents (Yad, Mamrim 7:7). The Jewish literature also records that the following circumstances must be met in order to fit the sentence described in Deuteronomy 21:18-21;

- (1) The son stole money from his father.
- (2) The son purchased 50 dinar of meat, eating it rare outside his father’s property- and in bad company.
- (3) The son had to drink ½ log (approx. 5 oz.) of wine with the meal. (Yad, Mamrim 7:2; Sanh. 70a)

Scrolls, contains this very passage.<sup>3</sup> We also know from the canonical gospels that this charge of being a rebellious son was made by some against Jesus. We do not possess evidence from the gospels that his mother or father ever brought him before the elders of 'his city' with this claim. We do however meet from time to time with family confrontations in the gospels, most of which are explained as examples of hyper dedication on the part of Jesus to perform 'his father's business'.<sup>4</sup> This dedication to religion over family obligations is also spoken of in the scrolls.<sup>5</sup>

At any rate, Jesus says himself that this charge was being laid against him by some unidentified source.

RSV Matthew 11:19 the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

This text is also found in the Q source (7:34). The Hebrew text of Shem Tob's Matthew, as well as the Du Tillet Hebrew Matthew<sup>6</sup> both read **zolel v'soveh** in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:20. It is preserved in such a way that it hardly remains noticeable as a direct link to the charge indicated in the Torah. First, we are inclined to take the charge of the unidentified 'some' as a scornful reference to Jesus' eating habits.<sup>7</sup> While the eating habits of Jesus were unlike those of his

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<sup>3</sup> 11Q19-20, column 64

<sup>4</sup> Luke records how Jesus remained in Jerusalem while his parents were returning home. This apparently caused some dispute with the young lad, who retorted, "Don't you know that I am about my Father's business?" One could also include various accounts scattered throughout the texts that show some disparity between Jesus and his close kin. Examples would include Mark 3:30-35 and similar texts; John 2:4 etc.

<sup>5</sup> 4Q175 "...who said of his father and mother, 'I knew them not'; he ignored his kin, and did not acknowledge his children. For he observed your word, and kept your covenant."

<sup>6</sup> Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew is published in Hebrew and English with a critical apparatus by Dr. George Howard of University of Georgia in, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Mercer Press, 1995. The 'Hebrew/Aramaic New Testament Research Institute', founded by James Scott Trimm, publishes the Du Tillet text.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 23:20-21 speak of being a 'glutton and a drunkard' and even associates the true path as being obedient to parents (v. 22).

ascetic cousin John, the text in Matthew 11:19 is more likely referring to the prevalent view of the religious leaders of Jesus' day that he was a rebel.

Perhaps there are other sayings preserved within the New Testament corpus that are yet to be uncovered that will shed new light on the views of the religious authorities that led to the execution of Jesus. While blasphemy is normally understood to be the motivator of several attempted 'stonings' of Jesus (*Mark 16:64; Matthew 26:65-66; John 19:7; John 8:59; 10:31-33*) perhaps there were other factors such as rebellion against parental and religious authority that led the Jews to a negative appraisal of his self-proclaimed task.