



# Jesus in the Talmud

*Peter Schäfer*

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Scattered throughout the Talmud, the founding document of rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity, can be found quite a few references to Jesus--and they're not flattering. In this lucid, richly detailed, and accessible book, Peter Schäfer examines how the rabbis of the Talmud read, understood, and used the New Testament Jesus narrative to assert, ultimately, Judaism's superiority over Christianity.

The Talmudic stories make fun of Jesus' birth from a virgin, fervently contest his claim to be the Messiah and Son of God, and maintain that he was rightfully executed as a blasphemer and idolater. They subvert the Christian idea of Jesus' resurrection and insist he got the punishment he deserved in hell--and that a similar fate awaits his followers.

Schäfer contends that these stories betray a remarkable familiarity with the Gospels--especially Matthew and John--and represent a deliberate and sophisticated anti-Christian polemic that parodies the New Testament narratives. He carefully distinguishes between Babylonian and Palestinian sources, arguing that the rabbis' proud and self-confident countermesssage to that of the evangelists was possible only in the unique historical setting of Persian Babylonia, in a Jewish community that lived in relative freedom. The same could not be said of Roman and Byzantine Palestine, where the Christians aggressively consolidated their political power and the Jews therefore suffered.

A departure from past scholarship, which has played down the stories as unreliable distortions of the historical Jesus, *Jesus in the Talmud* posits a much more deliberate agenda behind these narratives.

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