

## QUESTION:

It is in my understanding that it is of common scholarly opinion that the Gospel writers (at least Matthew, Luke, and John) were rather anti-Semitic in nature. Correct? How would you respond to that claim? After reading “The Origin of Satan” by Elaine Pagels, it is a subject that deeply interests me, and I would love to hear your professional opinion on the matter.

## RESPONSE:

This question actually ties into some of the things I’ve been thinking about with respect to the stories of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and so it seems appropriate to answer it now rather than in a separate blog. I won’t deal with the question on the very broadest level, but will consider one feature of the Gospels that shows that with the passing of time they become more and more anti-Jewish.

I should say at the outset that I do not think that the Gospel writers, or anyone else in their time, was “anti-Semitic.” The idea and reality of anti-Semitism are modern, and are based on modern sense of “race” as these were developed by the anthropologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea that there was a Semitic “race” has been used for all sorts of hateful purposes in the modern period. As just one example, throughout the Middle Ages – before the modern period – and on into the nineteenth century, “Jews” were understood to be people who subscribed to and followed the Jewish religion – but not that they had racial characteristics. There were indeed persecutions of Jews, since the conversion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. For Jews to escape persecution, they needed to stop being Jews and convert to become Christians. It was that way up through the Enlightenment.

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