One of the principal foils used for the interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth and the early Church in recent decades has been Zealot messianism. This is true of the Brandons, who find certain affinities between Jesus and the Zealots. It is even more pronounced among scholars who use the Zealots as freedom fighters over against whom Jesus is made to appear as the sober prophet of a more spiritualized salvation and individual non-resistance. Hengel is one who states the case rather starkly: “In Zealotism and early Christianity are two eschatological-messianic movements which, despite external parallels, stand in an irreconcilable opposition: the expectation of Jesus as the coming Son of Man and world-judge must have stood in strict contradiction to all Zealot hopes, which focused on a warlike messianic pretender…”

This contrast, of course, depends upon the assumption that messianism was indigenous to the Zealot movement. Again, whether one compares or contrasts Jesus and the Zealots, it is claimed that “Zealotism was closely linked with Messianic expectation,” such that “the Zealots were hoping for the appearance of a Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom.”

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4 Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 112.
5 Merkel, *IDB Suppl*, 980.
In turn, the principal basis for the claim of messianism among the Zealots is the case of Menahem in 66 AD. To quote Hengel again: "that a dynasty of leaders proceeded from Judas (of Galilee), among whom messianic pretensions became evident at least in one, Menahem, allows one to surmise that the "Fourth Sect" (which Hengel virtually identifies with the Zealots) had a messianic foundation already in its founder."  

Menahem functions not only as the basis of the hypothesized Zealot messianism, however. He is viewed, as well, as the head of the Zealot movement at the crucial turning point, the outbreak of the rebellion against Rome for which the Zealots had been agitating since their supposed founding by Judas of Galilee. Thus, when Menahem was struck down by the resentful priestly faction led by the Temple Captain Eleazar, the Zealot movement splintered and the revolt was doomed even as it started. The Zealot "messiah" Menahem has thus become an important figure both for a decisive moment in ancient Jewish history and for recent interpretation of Jesus and early Christianity.

In both respects, however, such interpretation of Menahem is a misreading of the evidence, which consists primarily of fragments in Josephus' histories. The principal problem with such interpretation is that the Zealots, as Hengel, Brandon and others imagine them, i.e., as an organized movement struggling for Jewish liberation from Roman rule in the first century AD, is a synthetic modern scholarly construct. Kirsopp Lake explained this some time ago, Zeitlin pointed it out again in a review of Hengel's *tour de force*, and Morton Smith sharply criticized the whole synthetic hypothesis. Far from originating with Judas of Galilee in 6 CE, a group called "the Zealots" did not emerge until the middle of the revolt against Rome (*J. W.* 4.3, 2-9, §§ 134-161). There was indeed an organized resistance against Jewish collaborators with Roman rule carried out by a group called the Sicarii, whose predecessor may have been the "Fourth Philosophy" started by Judas. But, prior to the outbreak

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