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INTRODUCTION

This book is an attempt to make sense of Jesus as one whose intentions were decisively shaped not only by Jewish restoration eschatology but also by his own creative reworking of restorationist expectations. This tack is neither new nor unguided by presuppositions. The attempt to relate Jesus in some way to Israel’s hope of national restoration has been a key feature of much recent work on Jesus.\(^1\) Foremost among the guiding principles of this approach to Jesus are the convictions (1) that Jesus must be understood within first-century Palestinian Judaism and (2) that Jesus’ intentions are substantially accessible. Though they run counter to much Jesus-related scholarship of the twentieth century, these convictions have become foundational to the so-called ‘Third Quest’ for the historical Jesus and form the basis of the present study.\(^2\)

1.1 Issues and questions

1.1.1 Present and future

All studies of history are historically positioned. This applies not least to the study of Jesus as a figure of history. The present study was initiated at the end of a century which began with the work of J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer, whose studies have served as either guide or foil for much of what has followed. Weiss’ and Schweitzer’s portrayal of Jesus as a prophet of the end of the world attracts few adherents today, but the perception of Jesus within the milieu of Jewish eschatological expectation


\(^2\)To be sure, dissenting voices remain. Not all will agree that the reasons for Bultmann’s scepticism that we can know ‘almost nothing’ about Jesus have been overturned; R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Scriber’s, 1934), p. 14. Also a small but vocal minority, mainly associated with the Jesus Seminar in North America, continue to produce portraits of an essentially non-Jewish Jesus.
continues to command broad adherence. Of course there are exceptions. Proponents of a Cynic Jesus tend, not unexpectedly, to conclude that Jesus was also non-eschatological. But agreement that Jesus must be understood within the framework of Jewish eschatology leaves much undecided. Granted that Jesus’ ministry and message were decisively shaped by eschatology, the question remains: in what way?

One of the central questions of twentieth-century scholarship on Jesus was whether, and the degree to which, Jesus could be said to have held a realized eschatology. Few today would want to follow C. H. Dodd in seeing Jesus’ eschatology as fully realized. In fact, if the way Jesus’ eschatology is understood changed substantially over the course of the last century, the perception that Jesus expected an imminent end of some sort seems very much the same. To be sure, most would acknowledge a certain realized dimension to Jesus’ eschatology. But for many scholars the realized aspect of Jesus’ eschatology in no way occupies the centre of his thought. Rather it is often made subservient to his imminent expectation: Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that was so near that he could sometimes speak as if it were already present. As H. Merklein puts it, ‘die Gottesherrschaft primär eine futurische, d.h. noch ausstehende Größe ist, und...die Aussagen über ihre Gegenwart sich von ihrer Zukunft her bestimmen und nicht umgekehrt.’ For this reason, G. Beasley-Murray speaks of the common tendency to subordinate the presence of the kingdom to its futurity, ‘evident when, for example, the work of Jesus is regarded only as a “sign” of the coming kingdom, or an “adumbration” of it, or the “dawning” of the kingdom (an ambiguous term, apparently intended to exclude the “light of day”).’

Much of the discussion of Jesus’ eschatology has naturally turned on the meaning of Jesus’ proclamation of the ‘kingdom’. Unfortunately, the term is far from unambiguous and fierce debates continue about the meaning and authenticity of not a few of the sayings in which it occurs. But even if one concludes that there are authentic sayings which indicate a view of


the kingdom as both present and future, it is not clear what this means in concrete terms. The fact that the term ‘kingdom’ is understood primarily as an abstraction contributes to the ambiguity; to say that through Jesus ‘the reign of God’ was already at work in the world is not to say very much in view of the realia of Jewish eschatological expectation. Perhaps one of the reasons that most of the emphasis has fallen on the futurity of Jesus’ eschatology is that so few of the concrete expectations which characterize Jewish expectations for the eschaton seem to have come into existence through Jesus’ ministry.

It is here that the exploration of specific features of the eschaton within Jewish restorationism offers a way to advance the discussion of the extent of realization in Jesus’ eschatology. The harbinger of such an approach may perhaps be seen in Sanders’ attempt to make the restorationist expectation of a new Temple central to his understanding of Jesus’ aims. But the question needs to be posed more clearly: what were Jesus’ intentions in relation to key constitutional features of the eschaton as anticipated by Jewish restorationism?

1.1.2 National judgement and final judgement

Part of the century-long emphasis on imminence within Jesus’ eschatology has been the insistence that Jesus proclaimed the imminence of final judgement, a grand assize at the beginning of the eschaton in which individuals would be called to account, not least for their response to Jesus’ message. Consequently, a common assumption has been that texts which speak of judgement relate to Jesus’ expectation of an imminent final judgement of individuals. Through much of the twentieth century, it was not possible to think of any other sort of judgement. The existentialist Jesus of Bultmann, like the end-of-the-world Jesus of Schweitzer, confronted individuals with a crisis of decision in the face of an imminent judgement of individuals; such a Jesus harboured no intentions toward the nation. Such conceptions of Jesus and final judgement remain remarkably strong. Though there is now more awareness that Jesus’ aims were profoundly oriented toward the nation, Jesus’ words of judgement are often construed not as an announcement of approaching national judgement but as a warning that those within the nation who refuse to respond would not escape the final judgement of individuals. Thus, it is commonplace for scholars to see Jesus pronouncing judgement against the Jewish leaders

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7 E. P. Sanders, Jesus, pp. 61–90.
8 M. Reiser (Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context (trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), e.g. p. 312), for example, believes that
or against unresponsive individuals within the nation but not against the nation as such. For some scholars, Jesus’ warning that some Jews will be judged in no way alters Jesus’ full participation in expectations that ‘all Israel’ would be restored. For others, Jesus’ announcement of judgement is national only in that Jews are declared to be as lost as Gentiles in the face of the imminent final judgement of individuals. The assumption seems to be that if Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the final events, including Israel’s restoration and final judgement, there simply was no time for another iteration of national judgement. But however much this assumption may seem to follow necessarily from Jesus’ imminent eschatology, is it correct?

In the recent work of N. T. Wright this assumption has been turned on its head. For Wright, final judgement has receded almost completely from view. Jesus announced Israel’s restoration as the end of exilic national judgement but warned those who failed to heed his message of imminent national judgement. Wright seems to invest this national judgement with climactic significance – he does not portray it as a return to exile – but it is decidedly not final judgement to which Jesus refers. Rather, Wright is concerned to show that Jesus’ message of judgement corresponds to the nationally oriented message of the prophets. However, he does not grapple with the profound difference between the prophets’ understanding of Jesus’ message of judgement is directed toward the nation as well as the individual, but this merely means that Jesus (and John) differed from their contemporaries in their belief that not all Israelites would have a share in the new age. But would any Jew have believed that every Israelite would be included? J. Gnilka (Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History (trans. S. S. Schatzmann; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 73, 150–8, 192–8) similarly acknowledges that ‘the explicit statements focusing on Israel as a totality are utterances of judgment’ but this is simply because Jesus’ proclamation is directed toward Israel.

9E.g. E. P. Sanders, Jesus, pp. 95–119, who, more than most, sees the significance of the fact that within Jewish restorationism generally there was little expectation of a further punishment of the nation: a belief in the imminent restoration of ‘all Israel’ would have been seen as incompatible with an expectation of national judgement. Thus, when Sanders allows that Jesus believed in the judgement of Israel, he simply means that Jesus shared the common belief that some Jews would be excluded from Israel’s restoration. Sanders’ generalization that few expected another round of national judgement prior to restoration still stands, even when qualified by the evidence assembled by C. A. Evans (‘Predictions of the Destruction of the Herodian Temple in the Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Related Texts’, JSP 10 (1992), 89–147; and M. N. A. Bockmuehl (‘Why Did Jesus Predict the Destruction of the Temple?’, Cris 25 (1989), 11–18) that some Second Temple Jews expected God’s judgement on the Temple establishment.

10J. Becker Jesus of Nazareth (trans. J. E. Crouch; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 73–4); for instance, believes that Jesus’ comparisons of Israel to the Gentile world in contexts of judgement is driven by the conviction that Israel has ‘used up its election’.

the relationship of national judgement to restoration and that he posits for Jesus. The prophets had anticipated restoration as the end of national judgement, not as the precursor to another round of national judgement. Further, Wright does not directly address the question of how Jesus’ message of national judgement impinged upon the nature of the restoration which he was proclaiming. The nature of the restoration which Wright’s Jesus announces differs substantially from that of his contemporaries. However, Wright does not seem to attribute these differences to Jesus’ message of national judgement. Rather, national judgement is the consequence of refusing to accept Jesus’ understanding of restoration at which he arrived in some other, unspecified way. Here is a problem: Jesus pronounces national judgement on his contemporaries for holding on to a hope of restoration which in many of its particulars – the defeat of Israel’s oppressors, the re-establishment of a purified Israel in the Land focused on a renewed and glorious Temple – sounds for all the world like traditions stemming from the prophets.

If certain difficulties attend Wright’s assimilation of the judgement sayings of Jesus to national judgement, his intuition about a number of them is correct: if located within the OT prophetic corpus, many of Jesus’ sayings would be read without hesitation as declarations of coming judgement on Israel. It is possible that those texts in which Jesus directs a message of impending judgement toward his Jewish contemporaries simply refer to particular individuals within the nation. Even the most ardent first-century proponent of Jewish restorationism would not have thought that every Jew would escape the day of judgement. But can we merely assume that Jesus could not have spoken of national judgement? Of course, if Jesus did speak of national judgement, it would raise the question of the temporal relationship between this national judgement and final judgement. Still, that is essentially a separate and subsequent question.  

Here I limit my focus to the question of whether Jesus did in fact announce coming judgement on the nation. What I propose is to examine specific points of contact between judgement in Jesus’ message and expectations related to the hope of Israel’s restoration.

12S. McKnight (A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 9–13, 138–49) has recently argued that Jesus viewed national judgement as a constituent part of final judgement. He asserts that Jesus, like the prophets, looked ahead to national judgement as if it were final judgement. However, while it is true that prophetic perception of the future was not finely differentiated, the judgement of Israel was generally distinguished from the judgement of the nations: Israel’s judgement ends (and its restoration begins) with the judgement of the nations.
1.1.3 National judgement and national restoration

The prophets had never struggled to hold together the expectations of national judgement and national restoration. Israel would be judged, but after judgement the nation would be restored. However, if Jesus expected national judgement, the matter is not so simple. The problem is not merely the temporal one noted above, namely, how does one squeeze in another iteration of national judgement if national restoration is imminent? Rather, the more acute difficulty presents itself if Jesus’ eschatology is partially realized: how can the announcement of national judgement be reconciled with the belief that Israel’s restoration had already begun?

To anticipate the argument, it is my belief that Jesus did pronounce judgement over the nation as had many of the prophets before him. It need hardly be said that such an expectation had little place in the restorationism of Jesus’ contemporaries. But it is also true that many of the themes and actions of Jesus’ ministry seemed deliberately chosen for their power to evoke hopes of restoration: the choice of twelve disciples, the proclamation of the kingdom, the ‘triumphal’ entry. If Jesus participated in Jewish restorationism, how was his understanding of Israel’s restoration affected by his proclamation of national judgement?

It is my intention to argue that Jesus’ use of traditions of national judgement, often in terms drawn from the restorationism of his contemporaries, forced a reconception of national restoration. His revisionist understanding of Israel’s restoration will be seen in his use of traditions related to certain constitutional features of the eschaton – the shape of Israel, purity, Land, and Temple – which are often merely assumed to have remained unaltered in Jesus’ eschatology. What will emerge is an understanding of restoration which did not view Roman rule as the primary problem to which restoration was the answer. Though Jesus did not deny that restoration would ultimately entail the demise of Roman rule, his reformulation of restoration allowed for its realization under the conditions of Roman rule and thus made central Israel’s condition and constitution in the present.

1.2 Method

1.2.1 Approach: Jesus’ use of tradition

Israel’s sacred traditions had never stood still. Even within the Old Testament, earlier traditions were frequently taken up and reapplied to new situations. Perhaps the most thorough investigation of this
phenomenon is that of M. Fishbane. Fishbane distinguishes between the *traditum* and the *traditio*, by which he refers to the original content of tradition and the process by which that tradition is passed on.13 Fishbane’s particular concern is to trace the dynamic between *traditum* and *traditio* in the development of inner-biblical exegesis. Such exegesis ‘starts with the received Scripture and moves forward to the interpretations based on it’ with a concern not ‘to reproduce the *traditum*, but to reactualize it in a new setting and a new way. [The] aim is not to present the *traditum*, but rather to re[-]present it – and this is *traditio*.14

The shift to a new historical context, however, is not straightforward. In the first place, there may be competing claims regarding how a tradition should be interpreted within the new situation, that is, how the *traditum* should be re-presented. For example, in the second century BCE, Theodotus and the *Testament of Levi* re-presented the story of the rape of Dinah in exactly opposite ways: in the latter, the rewritten story is unwashed anti-Samaritan propaganda; for Theodotus, the narrative is told in a way that both wards off such propaganda and legitimates Samaritan counter-claims.15 Second, with the build-up of a body of tradition, there may be competing claims as to which part of the tradition is relevant to the new situation. J. A. Sanders has turned his attention to this latter issue in his perceptive investigation of what he calls ‘prophetic criticism’. Sanders notes in particular the way in which the prophets challenged accepted use of sacred tradition, not only by setting forth alternative interpretations of the traditions held to be central by those they opposed but also by bringing alternative traditions to bear on the present moment. By thus setting forth a competing reappropriation of sacred tradition, the prophets called into question the way their contemporaries used Scripture to support a theological or ethical status quo which the prophets deemed unacceptable.16

Following the lead of Fishbane and Sanders, I propose to examine the questions posed above by looking at the competing claims regarding Israel’s sacred traditions that are evident within the Gospels. Of course, Jesus’ claim to be the authoritative interpreter of Israel’s legal traditions is widely acknowledged as a source of conflict. But what was Jesus’ perception of the widely accepted re-presentation of restorationist traditions? Did he fully participate in this re-presentation of the traditions, as E. P. Sanders and others seem to suppose? Or are there indications that he reinterpreted the traditions at key points and brought alternative traditions to bear in ways which generated a quite different understanding of the promised restoration?

Approaching the Jesus materials in this way is not without complication, for it is immediately evident that we are not dealing merely with Jesus’ use of *traditum* but also of *traditio* (reverting to Fishbane’s distinction). The prophetic promises of national restoration had generated substantial reflection on the way in which restoration would take place, not least because of the ‘cognitive dissonance’ introduced by the failure of restoration hopes to materialize immediately after the return from exile as well as in subsequent generations which had reappropriated the traditions. Recent scholarship has become increasingly aware of the diversity of Second Temple eschatological expectations. Perhaps there has been less awareness of the way in which the non-fulfilment of prophetic promises played a central role in the generation of quite diverse eschatological views regarding the concomitants of the eventual fulfilment. Once the promises had been removed from the framework of the historical return from exile, they had to be placed in another historical context. Scripture itself provided no clear-cut model for this relocation, but Scripture nevertheless continued to serve as the basis for such a relocation. Consequently Israel’s traditions of restoration underwent substantial development in the intertestamental period and any attempt to evaluate competing claims regarding these traditions must take into account not only the traditions themselves but their continuing development, development to which both Jesus and his contemporaries were heirs.

1.2.2 Criteria of authenticity

The great undisputed fact of the first century is the emergence of Christianity from within Judaism. If the parting of the ways, or indeed partings...  

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of the ways, originated with Jesus, the value of the much maligned criterion of double dissimilarity must in some sense be reaffirmed. Unlike Christianity, Jesus stayed within Judaism. On the other hand, how many Jews were handed over to the Romans to be crucified under the titulus 'king of the Jews'?

But if double dissimilarity remains useful for its ability to indicate the discontinuities between Jesus and both Judaism and Christianity, it is singularly unhelpful in explaining why Jesus, whatever his own intentions, came to be a transitional figure between Judaism and Christianity. It may be anachronistic to think of Jesus as the ‘founder of Christianity’, but Christianity must in some sense be seen as part of his effective history.

The crucial question, then, is how to understand Jesus as one who operated within the ‘constraints’ of Judaism and yet generated a movement which soon could no longer be accommodated within Judaism.

From this it should be clear that I regard double dissimilarity as being of very little use in the evaluation of individual sayings and traditions. To the extent that it remains useful, it is to act as a check on constructions which dissolve Jesus wholly into either Judaism or Christianity. But what criteria would enable us to demonstrate the authenticity of particular traditions? Here I have adopted an ad hoc approach, making use of the various criteria when relevant. However, there is a growing awareness that the traditional criteria – chiefly dissimilarity, multiple attestation, consistency, embarrassment – cannot be applied in a vacuum, as if the isolation of authentic Jesus material were a purely objective and positivistic enterprise. Judgements about what is dissimilar, consistent or embarrassing depend on prior hypotheses about Jesus, Judaism and early Christianity; multiple attestation presupposes prior judgements regarding the dates and interdependence of our sources.

Of the two sorts of judgements which lie behind the various criteria, those presupposed by the criterion of multiple attestation are perhaps least significant. This is not to say they are unimportant. The energy expended on the synoptic problem suggests otherwise. I am reasonably convinced that the two-source hypothesis is correct and occasionally appeal to multiple attestation on that basis. But relatively little of the Jesus material is multiply attested, and even where multiple attestation can be shown, it only demonstrates that the tradition in question is earlier than the earliest

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19On this point, the quite different works of Harvey and Riches may be usefully compared: A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982); J. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980).
of the sources in which it is found. Its applicability and value are therefore limited, suggesting that even when it applies, it does not demonstrate but merely raises the likelihood of authenticity.

Much more important are prior hypotheses about Jesus, Judaism and early Christianity. It is at this point that scholars have been much less candid about their presuppositions. Though it continues to be the underlying premise of the most comprehensive of the recent works on Jesus,20 it must be questioned whether it is really possible to build up a portrait of Jesus in a strictly inductive way by sifting the traditions through an ostensibly objective application of the criteria. As a result, several scholars have acknowledged the need to place Jesus research on a broader footing.

An initial move in this direction is evident in the work of G. Theissen and C. Evans who have recently articulated a criterion of ‘historical coherence’21 or ‘historical plausibility’.22 For Evans, the criterion means that material which displays a coherence with Jesus’ historical circumstances and the general features of his life is likely to be authentic. This corresponds quite closely with a specific feature of Theissen’s criterion of historical plausibility, namely, Kontextplausibilität: ‘Je besser eine Überlieferung in den konkreten jüdischen Kontext paßt, um so mehr hat sie Anspruch auf Authentizität.’ Of course, it may be objected that Jesus’ followers were just as Jewish as Jesus and could have easily created traditions with a plausible Jewish context. Theissen, at least, anticipates the problem and integrates two other elements into his criterion of historischer Gesamtplausibilität. First, authentic traditions must have a ‘sinnvollen wirkungsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang mit der Entstehung des urchristlichen, vom Judentum sich lösenden Glaubens’.23 Theissen regards the Christian sources as part of the Wirkungsgeschichte Jesu and so the historical influence of a tradition is plausible either if it corresponds with the content of other independent traditions or if it runs counter to the Tendenz of its source.24 Second, whatever evinces a unique profile for Jesus within the Jewish context is likely to be authentic.25 The first of these appears simply to be Theissen’s way of reintroducing the criteria

20J. P. Meier, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994–).
24Ibid., pp. 176–83.
25Ibid., p. 183.