

Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration

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CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page ix
<i>Abbreviations and citation conventions</i>	xi
<i>Note on texts used</i>	xv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Issues and questions	1
1.2 Method	6
Excursus: Jesus and the end of exile	12
2 Jesus and signs of national restoration	21
2.1 Jesus' assertions of obvious but unrecognized fulfilment	21
2.2 Factors leading to Jewish belief that restoration had arrived	23
2.3 The request of a sign from Jesus	34
2.4 The sign expected by Jesus: the sign of Jonah	41
2.5 Conclusion	45
3 Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel	46
3.1 Prophetic criticism in the parables	46
3.2 'This generation'	81
3.3 Conclusion	86
4 Jesus and the restoration traditions of Israel	88
4.1 Elijah's restoration	88
4.2 Jesus and the eschatological remnant	111
4.3 Conclusion	128
5 Jesus and the purity of Israel	130
5.1 Purity, society and Israel	130

5.2	Jesus and the purity code	156
5.3	Conclusion	187
6	Jesus and the eschatological Temple	189
6.1	The eschatological Temple in Jewish thought	189
6.2	The Temple action	206
6.3	Jesus and the Temple tax	225
6.4	The Temple not made with hands	229
6.5	Conclusion	235
7	Conclusion	236
7.1	Summary	236
7.2	Implications for the study of the historical Jesus	242
	<i>Bibliography</i>	246
	<i>Index of passages</i>	265
	<i>Index of subjects</i>	276

1

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

¹The seminal works are B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979); and E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

²To 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: Scribner'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.³ 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.⁴ 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.'⁵ 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*)'.⁶

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

³See e.g. J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991). M. J. Borg also argues for a non-eschatological Jesus, though not in a Cynic framework, 'A Temperate Case for a Non-Eschatological Jesus', *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PN: Trinity Press International, 1994), pp. 47–68.

⁴Exceptions include R. H. Hiery, *Jesus and the Future* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); and E. Gräßer, *Die Naherwartung Jesu* (SBS; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1973).

⁵H. Merklein, *Die Gottesherrschaft als Handlungsprinzip: Untersuchung zur Ethik Jesu* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981), p. 165, cited in G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Matthew 6:33: The Kingdom of God and the Ethic of Jesus', in *Neues Testament und Ethik* (ed. H. Merklein; Freiburg: Herder, 1989), p. 93.

⁶Beasley-Murray, 'Matthew 6:33', p. 93.

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.⁷ 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.⁸ Thus, it is commonplace for scholars to see Jesus pronouncing judgement against the Jewish leaders

⁷E. P. Sanders, *Jesus*, pp. 61–90.

⁸M. 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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?', *Crux* 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'.

¹¹N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 182–6, 326–36.

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.¹² 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

¹³M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 416–17.

¹⁵See below, chapter 5, and D. Mendels, *The Land of Israel as a Political Concept in Hasmonean Literature: Recourse to History in Second Century B. C. Claims to the Holy Land* (TSAJ; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), pp. 104–5, 113–16.

¹⁶J. A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 46–69; J. A. Sanders, 'The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet Parable', *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 106–20. A recent article by C. Evans and B. Chilton ('Jesus and Israel's Scriptures', *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; NTTs; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 314) highlights Sanders' 'prophetic criticism' as a potentially fruitful line of inquiry into the aims of Jesus.

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 *tradio* (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.¹⁷ 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

¹⁷See R. P. Carroll, 'Ancient Israelite Prophecy and Dissonance Theory', in *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (ed. R. P. Gordon; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 377–91.

of the ways,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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

¹⁸See J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

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-).

²¹C. A. Evans, 'Recent Developments in Jesus Research: Presuppositions, Criteria, and Sources', *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 13-15.

²²G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 116-18.

²³G. Theissen and D. Winter, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (NTOA; Freiburg: Universität Verlag, 1997), p. 194.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 176-83. ²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 183.

of coherence and embarrassment in slightly modified forms which are vulnerable to the criticisms noted above. The second is still more problematic: it presupposes that we know in advance what the unique profile of Jesus is.²⁶

But whatever weaknesses the ‘historical coherence’ of Evans and the ‘historical plausibility’ of Theissen may have *as criteria*, they have the advantage of making explicit what had previously functioned as an unstated (sometimes unconscious) assumption: that our judgements about the authenticity of particular traditions are inevitably affected by our antecedent understanding of Judaism, early Christianity and even Jesus. It is awareness of this that has led D. Allison and N. T. Wright to acknowledge up front that they apply the various criteria within the framework of a prior paradigm.²⁷ This is not to make their reconstructions of Jesus non-falsifiable, nor their conclusions predetermined, but only to admit that no history proceeds as an objective build-up of recovered data, innocent of any and all presuppositions. In other words, all history necessarily moves from hypothesis to verification or modification.

One further observation is necessary. Our approach to the traditions of Jesus must necessarily be at least moderately conservative. The reasons are two. First, the various criteria are unreliable as negative tests. It is quite conceivable that a particular tradition fail every test and yet still be authentic.²⁸ We may hesitate to base a reconstruction of Jesus on such material, but it should be worrying if very little of the material which is not demonstrably authentic agrees with our reconstruction. Second, and more important, D. Allison has recently pointed out that as we move along a continuum from the hypothetical authenticity of every tradition to the authenticity of only, say, six sayings, there is a point at which the quest for Jesus suffers a methodological meltdown. If Jesus is, in fact, the source of only six sayings, it is impossible to say which six. ‘In order to solve a criminal case one must have some decent witnesses.’ In other words, our sources must be generally reliable about Jesus if we are to have any idea which material does not stem from Jesus. Thus Allison points out that if we felt constrained to excise all the eschatological materials from the Jesus

²⁶Cf. T. Holmén, ‘Doubts About Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the Main Criterion of Jesus-of-History Research’, in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; NTS; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 73–4 n. 106.

²⁷D. C. Allison, Jr, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); N. T. Wright, *Jesus*.

²⁸Similarly M. de Jonge, *God’s Final Envoy: Early Christology and Jesus’ Own View of His Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 5, affirming L. E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 32–3.

tradition, we would have to conclude that our sources are so misleading that they cannot be trusted to tell us anything.²⁹ I am not here attempting to resurrect the burden-of-proof debate. I am suggesting that either our sources exclude some prior paradigms out of hand or they are useless; paradigms which require the dismissal of vast amounts of the tradition are inherently unlikely. Thus, the reconstruction likely to be most accurate is that which accounts for the most material for which authenticity can be demonstrated and at the same time requires the rejection of the least amount of material for which authenticity cannot be demonstrated.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the paradigm with which I begin takes Jesus to be a prophet of restoration and judgement. It is within this paradigm that I now turn to an investigation of the questions posed above.

Excursus: Jesus and the end of exile

The scholar whose overall hypothesis about Jesus is perhaps most similar to that proposed here is N. T. Wright. Though disagreements at a number of points will become plain in the course of this study, one important aspect of Wright's reconstruction which differs significantly from this study must be mentioned at the outset. I refer to Wright's proposal that within Second Temple Judaism there was a broad perception that the exile was ongoing.³⁰ The examples Wright adduces certainly indicate an awareness that many Jews continued to live outside the Land and reflect a hope that restoration would bring about their return. But what do such texts tell us about the world-view of first-century Jews living in the Land under Roman rule? Was continuing exile simply assumed as an unquestioned part of the national psyche, as Wright suggests?

The significance of the term 'exile' for Wright does not lie primarily in the fact that many first-century Jews lived outside the Land; Wright can speak of Jews being in exile while 'in their own land'. For Wright, the term does not have the sense that its OT equivalents bear which involve literally being away from one's land (e.g. Amos 7.11, 18). Rather, Wright uses the term as a shorthand for Israel's plight and suggests that most first-century Jews who lived in the Land did so as well. It is at least ironic that he has chosen a term which connotes removal from the Land to describe the situation of Jews living in the Land.

²⁹Allison, *Jesus*, pp. 33–5.

³⁰The idea is found throughout his works, but see especially *The New Testament and the People of God* (New Testament; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 268–72.

Wright's choice of this metaphor is predicated on the well-substantiated fact that many first-century Jews believed themselves to be in bondage and longed for the fulfilment of prophetic promises of restoration. Within the biblical narratives, captivity to foreign powers and the hope of restoration are both closely tied to exile. Exile serves as the climax of Israel's enslavement to other nations, and the promises of restoration are firmly associated by the biblical prophets with the return of the exiles from Babylon in the sixth century BCE. These associations lead Wright to infer that Israelites generally believed themselves to be still in exile.

Inasmuch as Wright uses 'exile' to sum up this sense of bondage and hope of restoration, he often means by it little more than 'non-restoration'. Used in this way, K. Snodgrass is correct to point out that whether Jews actually believed themselves to be in exile is irrelevant: the realities to which Wright refers with the term are clearly attested.³¹ That many Jews believed themselves to be in bondage and longed for Israel's restoration are not new observations. Thus, the fact that Wright sets forth his paradigm of ongoing exile as a central and innovative part of his reconstructions of Second Temple Judaism and of Jesus indicates that more is at stake. Indeed, Wright's exegesis of a number of texts explicitly depends on a specific awareness of ongoing exile in the minds of first-century Jews. His paradigmatic exegesis of the parable of the prodigal son is a case in point. Wright supposes that the text's reference to the prodigal son going into a far country would have been readily understood as a reference to the nation going into exile.³² However, such a meaning would only be detected if Israel's literal sixth-century-BCE departure from the Land had become a metaphor in terms of which first-century Jews in the Land understood their circumstances.

If Second Temple Jews *understood* their situation as one of ongoing exile, it is clear that they did not often *describe* their situation in such terms. As I have said, Wright's case is largely an inference, for texts in which exile language occurs are rare. This is not to deny that many Second Temple texts lament the fact that many Jews continued to live outside the Land and that the regathering of these Jews was an anticipated part of restoration. But can such texts tell us anything of the way Jews in the Land thought about themselves and their circumstances? Wright cites a number of texts which refer to Jews scattered among the Gentiles – these are the

³¹K. R. Snodgrass, 'Reading and Overreading the Parables in *Jesus and the Victory of God*', *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* (ed. C. C. Newman; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), p. 62.

³²N. T. Wright, *Jesus*, pp. 125–31.

only texts in which exile language sometimes does occur (Tobit 14.5–7, Baruch 3.6–8) – but does not note that they refer to the literal situation of Jews living outside the Land rather than to the way in which Jews living in the Land perceived themselves. The fact that many Jews were living ‘in a kind of exile from the Land’ in no way indicates that those who were not thought of themselves as being ‘in exile’. Nor is it clear that even Jews of the Diaspora regularly thought of themselves as being in exile. No doubt some did. However, prior to the Bar Kochba revolt, R. Aqiba reached the conclusion that the ten tribes would not return (*m. Sanh.* 10.3), perhaps, as Klausner suggests, because he found among Jews of distant lands little enthusiasm to return.³³

Much of the evidence for Wright’s view stems from texts in which there is an awareness that Israel was in bondage. C. A. Evans, in particular, has marshalled the evidence of this widespread sense of bondage.³⁴ At first glance, the effort expended to prove this seems odd, since scholars have long accepted this perception as commonplace. However, unlike most scholars, Wright’s and Evans’ unstated equation of bondage to exile lead them to regard this evidence as manifest support for Wright’s view. Three observations, however, count against the inference that such texts imply a sense of ongoing exile.

First, there were ample precedents for speaking about Israel’s captivity to foreign nations while in its own Land without reference to exile. Such situations had often occurred within Israel’s history and were rectified not with an end of exile but with the liberation of the people and the Land from foreign domination. I shall argue in the following chapter that despite the frequent association of the so-called ‘sign prophets’ of the first century with the Exodus, the promised signs which can be identified are those which relate most properly to the Conquest. In other words, some first-century Jews seem to have regarded their circumstances not so much as analogous to or an extension of the Babylonian exile but rather as comparable to the time immediately preceding the Conquest.

Second, Wright’s equation of bondage to exile reflects his strong emphasis on the storyline of Israel reflected in much of the Old Testament which follows a straight-line trajectory from exile to restoration. That is why prophetic hopes for restoration are framed as hopes for the end of exile. *But that is only how Israel’s story should have turned out, not how it did turn out.* The ensuing history was considerably more complex.

³³J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (based on Hebrew 3rd edn; trans. W. F. Stinespring; London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1956), p. 474.

³⁴C. A. Evans, ‘Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel’, in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* (ed. C. C. Newman; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), pp. 78–87.

And, without invalidating the promises of restoration, the sources often acknowledge this complexity, as is clear even from post-exilic biblical works like Zechariah and Haggai. Evans cites Josephus' statement in *Jewish War* 5.395–6 regarding Israel's enslavement to Rome as proof that Jews regarded themselves as 'still in exile',³⁵ but Josephus is explicit that he regards the beginning of Jewish slavery as having occurred because of the Jewish civil strife leading to Pompey's entrance and the subjugation of those 'who were unworthy of liberty'. Inasmuch as Josephus regards the enslavement that began under Pompey as the end of a preceding period of liberty, it is difficult to see how or why he would have connected this new situation of bondage with exile.

That Josephus regards the period preceding the entrance of Pompey as a time of liberty reflects a positive remembrance of the Hasmonean dynasty. Though, as we shall see, it was possible to regard the time between the exile and the Maccabean revolt as uniformly negative, it is difficult to imagine that in the heady days of Hasmonean success, people still widely perceived themselves to be in exile. Foreign domination had been shrugged off and national borders were expanding, so even if there was still a longing for the fulfilment of certain restoration promises such as a glorified Temple and a gathered Diaspora, Hasmonean hegemony could scarcely have *felt* like or been understood as continuing exile. Of course, this does not mean that the period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans could not have later been reinterpreted negatively as another manifestation of Israel's unbroken exile. Yet many Jews continued to look back on the early Hasmonean success as days of glory marked by the blessing of God, and in so far as they did, they would not have considered the centuries since the exile as an uninterrupted period of punishment.

A similar acknowledgement of the complex history following the return from exile is apparent in *Testament of Naphtali* 4 where restoration from exile is followed by a return to sin and yet another exile. Similarly, the vision recorded in *2 Baruch*, in which history is cast as twelve waters alternately dark and bright, implies that the time of the exile was simply another period of darkness to be followed by further periods of both dark and light (*2 Bar.* 53–74): the exile is the eleventh flood of dark waters followed by the twelfth period of bright waters marked by the rebuilding of Zion, the restoration of the sacrifices and priestly ministry, and the coming of the nations to honour Zion, though 'not as fully as before' (*2 Bar.* 68). This twelfth period of bright waters stands for the Hasmonean ascendancy. It brings the dark period begun by the exile to

³⁵Ibid., p. 86.

an end, yet it is not the fulfilment of prophetic hopes. Indeed, after this twelfth period comes a further final cycle of dark and bright waters: the intensely dark Roman distress followed by the eschaton. This indicates that the author does not perceive the entire Second Temple period as a time of unremitting exile which continues through to the present. Rather, the period was characterized by the same oscillations in national fortune and covenant faithfulness as had marked out Israel's preceding history.³⁶ This does not mean that each experience of bondage might not have been understood as a metaphorical exile, but such a conclusion cannot be supported by positing a universally accepted homogenized view of Israel's post-exilic history.³⁷

Third, the failure of the promises of restoration to materialize after the return of the exiles from Babylon produced a monumental theological difficulty, which could not be and was not explained as simply a continuation of the exile. The complex history which followed the return from Babylon was matched by a similarly complex theological response. One response is seen in texts, frequently cited by Wright, which stem from the period immediately following the return of the captives from Babylon and lament the fact that, despite the return from exile, the people remain slaves in their own land (Ezra 9.8–9; Neh. 9.36).³⁸ But recent scholarship on Ezra–Nehemiah has brought into focus the importance of seeing the way a partially realized eschatology is at work in the books. J. G. McConville, building on the work of K. Koch, has highlighted a number of echoes in Ezra and Nehemiah of prophetic restoration texts; such echoes reveal that *the return was viewed as part of the restoration* and regarded as the awaited new Exodus from Babylon. However, the restoration is viewed not as a once-and-for-all act of God but as an ongoing process in which the repentance and covenant faithfulness of the people play a part.³⁹ In other words, the problem of Ezra–Nehemiah is not so much one of continuing exile but of incomplete restoration; for the author(s) of Ezra–Nehemiah, to equate the two, as Wright does, would have been to deny a key moment in the outworking of God's eschatological purposes.

³⁶There is no reason to think that the events of 66–70 CE substantially shaped that perception.

³⁷As we shall see, some texts do assess the period from the exile to the rise of the Hasmoneans in a uniformly negative way. But even this assessment is not without exception. As J. D. G. Dunn notes, 'the one who penned the great paean in praise of the high priest, Simon son of Onias [who held office from 219–196 BCE] (Sir. 50), certainly did not think of Israel as still in exile'; 'Review of *Jesus and the Victory of God*', *JTS* 49 (1998), 730.

³⁸N. T. Wright, *New Testament*, p. 269.

³⁹J. G. McConville, 'Ezra–Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy', *VT* 36 (1986), 205–24.

If one common response to the failure of restoration to accompany the return to exile was to attribute the aborted restoration and recurrent bondage to inadequate repentance on the part of the people, a number of texts also deal with the problem by flattening the significance of the seventy-year exile and the subsequent return. Such texts sustain the hope of imminent restoration not by positing an extension of exile but by dissociating restoration from exile. This phenomenon is witnessed in a wide range of texts.

In the historical survey of the Animal Apocalypse, the exile is in no way distinguished from Israel's subsequent history. At some point prior to the destruction of Solomon's Temple – either with the Assyrian or with the Babylonian onslaught – Israel is placed under the dominion of seventy shepherds. The installation of these angelic over-lords serves to explain why the affliction of Israel during this period exceeded its proper measure. This outcome, however, is merely an intensification of God's punishment of Israel through captivity to foreign powers which had characterized the whole sweep of Israel's history. A scattering of the sheep is mentioned in *1 Enoch* 89.75 after the description of the rebuilding of the Temple, but it is a scattering that occurs throughout the period. Though the author anticipates the regathering of the scattered sheep, that event is ancillary to the restoration of sight to the blinded sheep and of freedom under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus. Thus, in the Animal Apocalypse, it is not so much that Israel's experience of captivity has been subsumed under the rubric of exile as the other way round.

The texts in *Jubilees* which several scholars have taken to reflect the perception that exile was ongoing⁴⁰ in fact evince a reading of the Deuteronomic curses in which exile is simply one of the curses. In *Jubilees* 23, the curses for covenant unfaithfulness reflect the experience of Israel from the exile right down to the author's own day in the mid second century BCE. One obvious way of reading the curses of Deuteronomy 32 is to see exile as the ultimate punishment invoked only when the other curses had at last failed to bring Israel out of its recurrent recalcitrance. But in *Jubilees* 23 the significance of the exile has been reduced: the 'evil generation' in view experiences all the curses without apparent differentiation; captivity is simply one of a litany of curses (23.13; cf. 23.22) meted out over an extended period by a plurality of nations (23.23).⁴¹

⁴⁰J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 60; M. A. Knibb, *Jubilees and the Origins of the Qumran Community* (an Inaugural Lecture at King's College London; King's College London, 1989), pp. 7–11; G. L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees* (SPB; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), p. 46.

⁴¹Cf. 4Q504 3.7–14.

This downgrading of the exile seems to have been the author's way of dealing with the fact that the expected restoration had not accompanied the sixth-century return.

Similarly, in the eschatologically oriented review of the nation's history in *Jubilees* 1, the exile as such is not mentioned. Instead the author speaks of the nation's experience of divine punishment throughout its history,⁴² manifest chiefly in God's subjection of the people 'to the control of the nations for captivity' (1.13); dispersion from the Land is simply part of this recurrent punishment. Israel's restoration is not portrayed as the end of the Babylonian exile as it appeared in the prophets. Rather, as in much Jewish literature, the hope is for the gathering of the tribes of Israel from all the nations to which they had been scattered.⁴³ The author shared the common belief that the Diaspora would return when Israel was restored, but to those living in Palestine the continued absence of many Jews from the Land did not so much create a pervasive sense of ongoing exile as indicate that the time was not yet.

Similar comments can be made about Daniel 9 and CD 1. Both texts – the latter in dependence on the former – turn on a reinterpretation of Jeremiah's prescribed seventy years of exile as seventy weeks of years.⁴⁴ Wright reads these texts as straightforward extensions of the time prescribed for the exile. But in neither text is the exile as such continued, rather, the seventy-year exile is presented as simply part of a much longer 'age of wrath'. Daniel 9 explicitly and positively recalls Jeremiah's prediction of seventy years, suggesting that the author regarded Jeremiah's prophecy not as incorrect but as incomplete. Similarly, CD 1 does not view the extended age of wrath as the time during which Israel experienced the climactic covenant curse – exile – but as the time in which all of the curses of the covenant remained on Israel (CD 1.17). These texts do indicate the belief that much longer than seventy years was needed 'to finish transgression', but there is no indication that the whole of this period is simply regarded as a continuation of the exile in either a literal or

⁴²The broad sweep of history is suggested most immediately by reference in 1.10 to the people's abandonment of both tabernacle and temple.

⁴³See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus*, pp. 95–7.

⁴⁴It seems likely that the 390 years of CD 1.5–11 is drawn in the first instance from Ezek. 4.4, although the author seems to have related this figure to Daniel's 490 years: 390 years from the captivity to the emergence of the remnant + the 20 years of groping in the wilderness until the rise of the Teacher of Righteousness (CD 1.10) + the 40 years estimated duration of the Teacher's ministry + the predicted 40 years between the Teacher's death and the beginning of the new age (CD 20.13–15). So e.g. D. C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 10.

a metaphorical sense. Indeed, both of these texts respond to the problem created by the close association of exile with restoration by reducing the significance of the exile, subsuming it within a much longer period of divine punishment on Israel.

The conclusion to be drawn from these texts which reflect on Israel's state of bondage appears, then, to be exactly the opposite of that reached by Wright and Evans: not an expansion of exile to allow its use in an extended sense, but a reduction of the exile's significance in order to ameliorate the difficulty created by the prophets' close association of exile and redemption.

Finally, we have seen that because exile and restoration are inseparable for Wright, much of the evidence for his case is drawn from texts which indicate a widespread hope of restoration. Because of the connection of exile and restoration, a continued sense of exile is inferred from a continued hope of restoration. There is evidence, however, that at least some Jews did not believe that the delay in the fulfilment of restoration promises was an indication of God's continued disapprobation, whether under the rubric of exile or otherwise. One of the primary ways in which Jewish writers dealt with the problem of delay was to attribute the time of the End to the sovereign mystery of the divine counsel: the End will come at the appointed time. Such a view was not fully compatible with the belief that the End was contingent on Israel's repentance, though repentance could itself be regarded as a divinely ordained precursor to restoration.⁴⁵ But at various times, some came to believe that Israel had repented. For these, suffering was no longer simply God's chastisement of the rebellious nation but rather the unjust affliction of the righteous, and the delay of restoration was ascribed to God's inscrutable decree. So, for instance, writing as part of the penitent, yet still-afflicted community of the new covenant, the author of 1QpHab 7.6–13 asserts that 'the final age shall be prolonged, and shall exceed all that the Prophets have said; for the mysteries of God are astounding. . . . For all the ages of God reach their appointed end as he determines for them in the mysteries of his wisdom.' Of course, the experience of foreign bondage or other calamities could be simultaneously perceived as both the just punishment of the wicked as well as the unjust affliction of the righteous. Nevertheless, to the extent that a group came to regard itself as true Israel, there would have been a correspondingly decreased sense that Israel was experiencing divine punishment. The length of the delay might still be explained as an

⁴⁵On these themes, see the examples and discussion of R. J. Bauckham, 'The Delay of the Parousia', *TynBul* 31 (1980), 3–31.

expression of God's patience in allowing others to join in the repentance,⁴⁶ but the delay of the promises of restoration did not therefore generate a self-awareness by the penitent righteous that they were yet experiencing the judgement of God.

We see an example of this complex set of ideas in the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch. In the consignment of the sheep to the seventy shepherds there is a strong sense that the time of Israel's punishment is under divine control. The suffering of the sheep under the shepherds is just punishment for their waywardness. At the same time, the shepherds are held accountable for ravaging the sheep beyond the measure ordered by God (89.59–66). Thus, when some of the sheep open their eyes and begin to see prior to the end of the appointed time, their afflictions are anything but just, as the response of the Lord of the sheep indicates. Rather, their distress reflects the particularly excessive brutality of the final twelve shepherds (*1 Enoch* 90.17).

This way of viewing things suggests the likelihood that those who regarded the emergence of righteous Israel as having occurred prior to the end of the appointed evil age did not always view their continued suffering as punishment from God. Rather, they explained their continued affliction in different categories. Thus, at Qumran, the community's afflictions were understood, for instance, as part of the eschatological distress (1QH 3.7–10)⁴⁷ or as atonement for the defiled Land which they looked to inherit (1QS 8.3–10). Inasmuch as those who perceived themselves as the penitent righteous adopted such alternative explanations for their suffering, it is illegitimate to infer from their continued hope of restoration the belief that they were still in exile. Admittedly, this tells us very little about whether such groups regarded Israel's experience prior to their formation in terms of exile, but it does indicate the possibility that restoration hopes could be cherished without an awareness of still being in exile.

The exile, then, should not be thought an invariable aspect of Israel's ongoing self-awareness. Wright is certainly correct to perceive a widespread awareness of bondage and belief that the promises of restoration had not yet been fulfilled, but to extrapolate from this a corresponding belief that exile was ongoing serves only to distort the complex history of Israel and its interpretation within Second Temple Judaism, as well as key elements of the Jesus tradition.

⁴⁶See below, chapter 4, for examples.

⁴⁷Allison, *End of the Ages*, pp. 8–10.