

## CHAPTER 1

### CHARTING A MAP

#### 1.1 Introduction

Current research detects similarities in the Jesus tradition between Jesus and the classical prophets. However, does this research take into account all that needs to be considered in this respect?

I shall peruse three models of research, all reaching the conclusion that Jesus was a prophet, all working from different angles and using different methodologies, to try and determine whether they may have left any research gaps that need to be filled.

##### 1.1.1 N T Wright

The first model we shall scrutinize, is that of N T Wright. Wright attempts through his research to determine the thought processes of the average Galilean contemporaries of Jesus as they watched him walking through the villages, extolling the virtues of the kingdom of the god of Israel and celebrating this said kingdom in meals thrown welcomingly open to all and sundry. He further attempts, to the best of his ability, a retrojection into the worldview and mindset of Jesus. His endeavours lead him to the conclusion that Jesus' Galilean contemporaries, in watching him and listening to him, would have experienced a flood of memories in which the picture of Jesus would have merged with that of the prophets of old. All evidence, according to Wright (1996:150), points to the probability that Jesus was seen as and saw himself as a prophet and typifies the praxis and worldview of Jesus as that of a prophet bearing an urgent eschatological, or, to be more specific, apocalyptic, message for Israel.

His mighty works are believed by Wright (1996:196) to have been perceived as constituent of the inauguration of the redefined kingdom of Israel's god, with its backbone of welcome and warning. Moreover, he considers them, together with

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the parables typical of Jesus' oral ministry and his other signature actions, to be an integral part of Jesus' ministry in its entirety, bringing him on par with or maybe even enabling him to surpass the likes of Elijah and Elisha in the prophetic hierarchy. That he saw himself as prophet called to announce the word of Israel's god to his recalcitrant people and assemble them around him as the true people of YHWH is a probability, but Wright (1996:196) finds himself open to the further possibility that he saw himself as the prophet of Deuteronomy, the prophet to end all prophecies, the prophet through whose work the history of Israel would reach its climax.

For a first-century Jew, and in particular for a Jew who believed himself to be a prophet, his interpretation of what his god and the god of his people is doing at a given moment in history, would be of paramount importance. Wright (1996:462) believes that Jesus was convinced of the necessity, as part of his role, to engage in battle with the satan. This entailed challenging Israel's idolatrous nationalism under the guise of allegiance to the reign of YHWH, as protagonist of the kingdom of Israel's god over against the antagonists, in particular the Pharisees and the chief priests. Against their resistance, opposition and overt rejection of his message and its validity, Jesus had to fulfil his vocation. His prophetic role was in no way made easier by the ambiguity of his disciples, the co-protagonists, nor by the tenacity of the resistance of the antagonists, which was all the greater because submission to the summons of Jesus would mean relinquishing their dominion over some cherished, god-given national and cultural symbols.

### **1.1.2 R A Horsley**

Horsley (1999:1) unambiguously states his reasons for choosing Q as the fount of his information on Jesus:

- The alternative route with which Q provides the scholar of modern scientifically oriented mind, enables him to bypass all the miracle accounts in the gospels and penetrate to the teachings of the "great prophet" (Horsley 1999:1) in all its profundity.

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- The Gospel of Mark, always assumed to have been the oldest gospel account, has its own theological propensity, and is therefore, according to Horsley (1999:1) not to be used as a historical source for a construction of the life of Jesus. In this void “Q seemed like a godsend of a whole collection of seemingly reliable sayings readily available as source materials in the quest for the historical Jesus” (Horsley 1999:1).

Repetition being the mother of learning, repeated oral enactment of Q had ensured its transmission and preserved a Jesus with vital signs intact, firmly embedded within his Jewish culture, as well as a Mosaic covenantal tradition with a renewal of the social order pulsating in its jugular.

When interpreting the information yielded by Q as source, Horsley stresses the importance of employing a realistic historical sociology and warns against depoliticising Jesus and his mission. This allows the scholar to find a resemblance between Jesus and the political prophets Elijah and Elisha in whose offices the borders between politics and religion shifted, allowing these spheres to merge.

Horsley himself has found in Q a Jesus declaring himself the prophet who, through his mission, is fulfilling the longings of his people as they had been so eloquently expressed by prophets of prior generations. This Jesus enacted the role of a prophet like Moses, a prophet who had been privileged to enjoy intimate communication with God, who had led his people to deliverance and who had established Israel as their god’s covenantal people. In the discourses in Q which Horsley finds strongly reminiscent of covenant renewal (Q 6:20-49), he discovers as focus of the mission of Jesus an urgency in terms of the renewal of the covenant. When Jesus commissions envoys to ensure the continuation of this covenantal renewal, Horsley envisions him donning the mantle of Elijah who similarly sought to renew the covenant.

The kingdom announced by the prophetic Jesus of Q is not the cataclysmic termination of the world and universe as we know it, but a political metaphor; a symbolic realignment of society according to the principles of the covenant.

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Horsley motivates convincingly his argument that, in the search for an understanding of Q and Jesus, the books of the Hebrew prophets, rather than The Gospel of Thomas, prove elucidatory.

### **1.1.3 J D G Dunn**

Dunn (2003:657) confidently strides where others have trodden with caution towards the conclusion reached by a myriad of scholars, namely that Jesus had been regarded as prophet, when he writes: “Little doubt need be entertained that Jesus was seen in the role of a prophet during his mission. The testimony of the Jesus tradition is both quite widespread and consistent across its breadth.”

Dunn (2003:662, 663) displays as evidence texts indicating Jesus as standing in a line of rejected prophets, Jesus ostensibly drawing on texts in Isaiah to inform his own mission, Jesus speaking with an awareness of prophetic commissioning, as well as Jesus possibly self-consciously shaping his mission in the mould of the classic prophets.

Regarding the so-called “prophetic actions” attributed to Jesus, Dunn (2003:664) mentions as examples the following: Jesus’ choice of the twelve, his partaking of meals in the company of tax-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, his entry into Jerusalem, his symbolic Temple-action and the last supper. He is convinced that Jesus repeatedly conducted himself in a manner strongly reminiscent of the great prophets of the past and memories seem to abound (see Dunn 2003:664) of his prophetic insight and foresight.

Dunn (2003:666) believes, however, that all of this is true not only in the accustomed sense of the word, but in the superlative sense of prophetic significance. In his opinion the scholar can assume with relative certainty that Jesus had perceived himself as standing in the tradition of the prophets; moreover that he had “claimed a(n eschatological) significance for his mission (and thus himself) which transcended the older prophetic categories” (Dunn 2003:666).

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It is of interest to note that Dunn (2003:667) deems it necessary to view the miraculous aspect of the mission of Jesus under a separate heading from that of prophecy.

#### 1.1.4 Prophecy

After following the above-mentioned scholars down their various paths purported to lead to a true image of Jesus, I devote a chapter to the phenomenon of prophecy to determine whether the qualities and characteristics of Jesus and his ministry as remarked on and typified by Wright, Horsley and Dunn indeed qualify him as prophet.

The prophet discovered by Wright is indeed at home among the prophets of old, as examined in Chapter Five:

- Apocalyptic and eschatology seem to be a major constituent element of the prophetic message.
- His mighty works and distinctive oratorical style of employing parables serve the prophetic message in all its urgency, strongly reminiscent of bygone eras of prophecy, the double-edged sword of his words is similarly characteristic of the true prophetic message of welcome and warning.
- His calling of disciples, and in particular the symbolic number of twelve, fits the prophetic bill.
- Last, but by no means least, the opposition he encountered from the antagonists attempting to bar his way as he wages war on the forces of evil, as well as its consequences, particularly the loss of the prophet's life, places Wright's prophetic figure - the final figure – as one in a long line of prophets encountering similar opposition and encountering similar fates as Israel reaches its long-awaited final destination.

Right at home among prior generations of prophets is also the Jesus discovered by Horsley in Q:

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- The prophet operating in a milieu where the religious and political spheres merge in the topical urgency and immediacy of their message and mission corresponds without fail to all prophetic predecessors.
- The social consciousness of his prophetic message is similarly typical.
- The Mosaic intimacy of the prophet's communication with God is sine qua non for the transsubstantial quality at the essence of the great prophetic ministries.
- A realignment of the people of God with the principles of the covenant has been the impassioned chorus of prophets as far as memory and tradition may reach back and it is in this aspect of the ministry of Jesus that Horsley finds a metaphor for the political and characteristic eschatological element of prophetic intervention.
- What Wright terms "disciples", Horsley calls "prophetic envoys" and it is a well-established memory that followers were commissioned and deployed by prophets in history.

Dunn's prophetic Jesus is no exception to this rule:

- The awareness of divine commissioning which surrounded the prophet and sometimes lay heavily on his shoulders is detected in Jesus by Dunn.
- The symbolic actions which Dunn lists in the mission of Jesus is reminiscent of the typical symbolic actions which many a prophet enlisted or was instructed to enlist in service of the successful conveyance of his message.
- Like Wright and Horsley, Dunn comments on Jesus' calling of disciples.
- Also similar to Wright and Horsley is the eschatological element in Dunn's Jesus who seems to claim an eschatological significance for his person and mission.

One is, however left with the sense that, if they had embedded their research more firmly in prophetic research, their conclusions could have been explored more extensively and with greater nuance, a suitable example for this statement

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being the fact that Dunn chose to examine the miraculous acts of Jesus under a heading separate to that of prophecy.

I shall, in my own examination of the routes taken by them, as well as of the larger picture of the phenomenon of prophecy be open to the possibility that the last can shed more light on the chosen routes than it has been allowed to do thus far.

We shall also stop briefly to explore some other questions which arise along the way, for example:

- What do scholars mean exactly when they refer to “apocalyptic” and “eschatology”?
- Do they differentiate between the historical Jesus on the one hand and the kerygmatic Christ on the other?
- Recently the question has also been posed whether Jesus may have been illiterate on the grounds of recent studies of the social context of the first century Mediterranean world where a mere three to seven percent of the population appear to have been literate. If his illiteracy can be determined, research will have to reconsider the interpretation of New Testament scholars that he was a rabbi, a title which has always been seen to presuppose reading skills. Was this done in the three models in question?

In this study an examination of the similarities between Jesus, John the Baptist and the classical prophets will also be done and to enable us to do this we shall have to examine the phenomenon of prophecy critically. Two issues are at stake:

- Did Jesus perceive himself to be a classical prophet?
- Did his contemporaries perceive him to be a prophet?

## 1.2 Scriptural Passages with Prophetic Overtones

The following passages contain more or less direct references to Jesus as prophet:

In **Q 9:57-10:16** we read of the commissioning for prophetic envoys:

And someone said to him: "I will follow you wherever you go."  
 And Jesus said to him: "The foxes have lairs and the birds of the sky nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay the head." And another said to him: Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But he said: "Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead." And yet another said: "I will follow you, Lord, but first allow me to say farewell to those at my home." But Jesus said: "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Ask then the lord of the harvest to send out workers to his harvest. Look, I send you like lambs amidst wolves. Do not carry a copper coin or a purse or sandals and greet no one.

If then, you go into a house, and if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. In this house remain eating and drinking what they offer, for the worker is worthy of his wage. Into whichever town you enter, should they receive you graciously, heal the sick in it and say to them: The kingdom of God has dawned upon you. Into whichever town you enter, should they not receive you graciously, depart from that town shaking the dust from your feet. I tell you, for the people of Sodom it will be better on that day than for that town.

Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida, for if the miracles that occurred in you, had occurred in Tyre and Sidon, they would already have repented in sackcloth and ashes.



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Moreover, for Tyre and Sidon it will be more tolerable in the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, may you be lifted up to heaven? To Hades will you descend! Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.

In the canonical gospels we find allusions to both John and Jesus in the prophetic role, such as that of Elijah, for example: Luke 1:17: John the Baptist “will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...”; Mark 9:11-12/Matthew 17:10-11: “His disciples asked him: ‘Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ And he answered and said: It is true, Elijah comes and will restore all things”; Matthew 11:14: And if you will accept it: He is Elijah who was to come.”

The following are more direct references from the gospels (and one from Acts) which may be interpreted as indicators of Jesus’ prophetic role:

**Mark 6:4:** And Jesus said to them: “A prophet is not dishonoured if not in his homeland or among his family or in his home.”

**Matthew 13:57:** And they took umbrage at him. But Jesus said to them: “A prophet is not dishonoured if not in his homeland or his house.”

**Luke 4:24:** And he said: “Verily I say to you that no prophet is accepted in his homeland.”

On who the people believed he was:

**Mark 8:28:** And they answered him saying: “John the Baptist, and others Elijah and others still, one of the prophets.

**Matthew 16:14:** And they said: “Some John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others still Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

**Luke 9:19:** And they answered and said: “John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others still that one of the prophets of old had arisen.”

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**Matthew 10:41:** He who receives a prophet for the reason that he is a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a just man for the reason that he is a just man, will receive the reward of a just man.

**Matthew 21:11:** And the crowds said: "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

**Matthew 21:46:** And they attempted to seize him, but they were afraid of the crowds who maintained that he was a prophet.

**Mark 6:14-15:** And when King Herod heard – for his name had become a well-known one – he said that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and therefore these powers are at work in him. Others said that he is Elijah and others still that he is a prophet like the first of the prophets.

**Matthew 14:1-2:** At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus and he said to his men: This is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead and therefore these powers are at work in him.

**Luke 9:7-8:** Herod the tetrarch heard of all these happenings and he was perplexed about the rumours among some that John had been raised from the dead and among others that Elijah had appeared and among others still that one of the prophets of old had arisen.

**Luke 7:16:** And fear took hold of them all, and they praised God saying: "A great prophet has appeared among us" and "God has visited his people."

**Luke 7:39-50:**

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself: If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what manner of a woman the one is who is touching him; that she is a sinner. And Jesus answered and said to him: Simon, I have something to tell you. And he said: Teacher, tell me. A certain money-lender had two debtors; one owed him five hundred dinarii, the other fifty and because they had nothing

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with which to pay him back, he wrote off the debts of both. Which of them then, would love him more? Simon answered and said: I assume the one for whom he has written off the most. He answered him: You have judged correctly. And turning to the woman he said to Simon: Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me water for my feet. She drenched my feet with her tears and with her hair wiped dry my feet. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman has, since she came in, not stopped kissing my feet. You have not anointed my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. Therefore, I tell you, her sins which are many, are forgiven because she loved much. But he who has been exonerated from little, loves little. And he said to her: Your sins are forgiven. Those who were reclining together at the table began talking among themselves, saying: Who is this man who even forgives sins? He said to the woman: Your faith has saved you, go in peace.

**Luke 13:33:** But today and tomorrow and the day after, I have to go further, for it is not possible that a prophet should die outside Jerusalem.

**John 4:19:** The woman said to him: “Lord, I can see that you are a prophet.”

**John 7:40:** Some of the crowd, when they heard these words, said: This man is truly the prophet.

**John 7:52:** They answered and said to him: Aren't you also from Galilee? Investigate and see that a prophet does not originate from Galilee.

**John 9:17:** Again they said to the blind man: What do you say about him, seeing that he opened your eyes. And he answered: He is a prophet.

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**Mark 14:65:** And some started spitting at him, covering his face, beating him with their fists and saying to him: “Prophecy!” And the servants grabbed hold of him and slapped him in the face.

**Matthew 26:68:** And they said: “Prophecy for us, Christ. Who is it that hit you?”

**Luke 22:64:** And they blindfolded him and questioned him saying: “Prophecy! Who is it that hit you?”

**Luke 24:19:** And he said to them: “What things?” And they said to him: “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who became a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”

**Acts 7:37:** This is the Moses who said to the children of Israel: God will send you a prophet like me from among your brothers.

### 1.3 A pathfinding mission

Epiphanius (see University Microforms International, 1976:499-500) wrote at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE in his *Panarion*:

- “Jesus...was called an archangel, not messiah, and was recognized as the true prophet”,
- and on the beliefs held sacred by the Ebionites (the “syncretistic-gnostic” group which “was characterized by the combination of Jewish monotheism with Gentile elements ...”): “Jesus was venerated as a naturally procreated man upon whom the Holy Spirit descended at baptism, which gave him the status of prophet” (see University Microforms International, 1976:42).

Johannes Weiss ([1892] 1971) wrote that Jesus was “a misguided eschatological prophet who lived in expectation of the imminent, apocalyptic end of the world.”

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It seems as though, from north, west, east and south and through time immemorial, on routes as different as the German Autobahn and a shepherd's trail in the Highlands, scholars have approached the sources - and even attempted to reach a destination beyond them - for a clear view of the Jesus of history. A significant number of them have reached the same conclusion: that one facet of the view of Jesus was that of a prophet. Is that indeed the case or have they been deceived by the nebulous effect of subjective presuppositions and post-Easter retrojection, which could so easily obscure the view even on a sunny day?

We shall join three different scholars for a brief interlude on the various routes they are travelling and enjoy the views they have to offer. When choosing a route to go in search of the clearest view of the historical Jesus, it is wise to heed the warning of Albert Schweitzer about generations of scholarship past which had the same mission in mind.

Schweitzer (2000:478-479) wrote:

The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it found him it could bring him straight into our time as a teacher and saviour....But he did not stay; he passed by our time and returned to his own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that...it...had to let him go.

And the scholar congratulating himself upon having found in the deep well of New Testament texts what he wanted to find, namely the perfect view of Jesus, may want to ascertain, according to George Tyrrell (1909:49), whether it isn't maybe his own countenance instead of that of Jesus staring back at him.

Let us begin again, like so many in the past, with Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) who wrote a text so controversial that he refrained from having it published for fear of the consequences. After his death his daughter gave

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this text to Gotthold Lessing, who published fragments of it under the pretext that they were anonymous fragments found in the Wolfenbüttel Library. These fragments, and especially the seventh and final fragment, “*On the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples*”, caused shockwaves throughout the scholarly world of the New Testament which are still felt today. For Reimarus had drawn the attention to the sharp dichotomy which existed between the Jesus of history and the portrait of Christ painted in the four gospels. He reminded us that Jesus himself wrote nothing and that we are entirely dependent upon these gospels for all we know about his teachings and actions. His critical conclusion sounded a death knoll to any naïve acceptance at face value of gospel material by future generations of scholars engaged in serious research. Talbert (1970:64) describes Reimarus’ findings as follows: “I find great cause to separate completely what the apostles say in their own writings from what Jesus himself actually said and taught, for the apostles were themselves teachers and consequently present their own views.” Reimarus left, in his general approach, several pointers and directions which have proven useful to scholars striving to navigate a route for locating the historical Jesus and one of these is the great divide that separates the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith.

Described by Baird (1992:246) as “the most revolutionary religious document written since Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses” it was the work of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), entitled “*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*” (1872), which gave a radically escalated sense of intensity to the critical approach in the study of the gospels. Whereas previous rationalistic accounts of the life of Jesus had taken as starting point the general reliability of the gospel renditions, Strauss effectively eradicated in his own theory any reliability in these accounts. No one can, after all, seriously consider as historical, sources in which tales of the supernatural and irreconcilable contradictions abound. He defined gospels as “myth”, that is mythological figments with Jesus directly or indirectly as subject, woven by his followers into narratives not necessarily factual.

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Just like the work of Reimarus, Strauss's theories impacted forcibly on the scholarly world. His emphasis on the nature of the oral gospel tradition with its inherent mythmaking process became the blueprint for twentieth century form-critical studies. He deliberately conducted his historical research, using philosophical and theological premises, and discovered that the traditional Christian belief that one personal transcendent God worked through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ does not hold water for him. He finally arrived at the view of a Jesus who is totally devoid of any significance or relevance. In his own words: "...we shall not be desirous to choose him as the guide for our life. He will be sure to mislead us, if we do not subject his influence to the control of our reason" (Strauss 1874:92). And later: "...if we would speak as honest, upright men, we must acknowledge we are no longer Christians" (Strauss 1874:107).

We join the journey again at the point where source criticism was gaining momentum en route to the two-source hypothesis with K Lachmann (1835) arguing that Mark represents the oldest gospel tradition and G C Wilke (1838) and C H Weisse (1838) that it had moreover been the source for both Matthew and Luke. H J Holtzmann (1863) brought the hypothesis to its fruition and J Weiss (1890) coined the proper noun "Q", abbreviating "Quelle" for the sayings source.

In the early twentieth century liberal scholars such as Ritschl, Harnack, Troeltsch and Rauschenbusch accepted features from the Gospel of Mark as historical base. However, they rejected the divinity of Jesus as portrayed by New Testament writers, as well as any supernatural features of his ministry. They believed that the only way of making Jesus relevant for faith in the modern age would be to free him from his mythological trappings. Ritschl (1992:285) reads in Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God that he proposed to inaugurate on earth the fruition of actions driven by love – ethical behaviour – which would be extended further by his disciples.

In 1892 J Weiss (1971) had, like Strauss, begun to question the likelihood of finding behind the gospel portrayals a historical Jesus of any relevance

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whatsoever. They saw in him a *misguided eschatological prophet* who lived in expectation of the imminent, apocalyptic end of the world, a man of no relevance to anybody who does not share his apocalyptic worldview. According to Weiss, the kingdom announced by Jesus was other-worldly, brought about solely by God without any human contribution, a continuation of the intertestamental Jewish apocalypses with a sharp dichotomy between the present age and the age to come, not ethical but eschatological in the sense that it brings the present order to an end. This kingdom is of the future, a time to come, not yet and not through the actions of the disciples. Weiss (1971:114) puts it as follows: “As Jesus conceived it, the Kingdom of God is a radically superworldly entity which stands in diametric opposition to this world....there can be no talk of an innerworldly development of the Kingdom of God in the mind of Jesus!”

Initially impacting little on the scholarly world in general, Weiss’s work came to be noted when it was later played through the megaphone of Schweitzer’s work. Schweitzer expanded upon his views in his well-known work, *“The Quest of the Historical Jesus”* (1968), which in the opinion of many signalled the finishing line for the “Old Quest”. His theories pulsed to one heartbeat: the eschatological question. He saw Jesus as a man obsessed with eschatology, fanatically believing that the Kingdom was at hand, the end of the world as we know it imminent. The now famous passage written by Schweitzer (in Dunn 2003:47) and quoted by almost every scholar perusing his work (but omitted in the second edition of his work), sums it up eloquently in terms reminiscent of the Middle-Eastern suicide bombers of current times:

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of



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bringing in the eschatological conditions He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.

Schweitzer searched in vain for the ethical teacher of morality favoured by his scholarly predecessors, concluding that the scholar with historical-critical integrity would admit that

[t]he Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and died to give his work its final consecration, never existed. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in a historical garb.

(Schweitzer 2000:478)

Dunn (2003:47) is doubtful whether the work of Schweitzer really dealt the Liberal quest a mortal blow, seeing in his work much of the Liberal mode, especially in his “critical use of the Gospel sources and his willingness to speak of Jesus’ messianic self-consciousness....” He remarks, however, that the view of Jesus as cited by Weiss and Schweitzer at the end of their investigative routes, is understandably unappealing to nineteenth-century sensibilities, for who would want to follow in the footsteps of a *failed eschatological prophet* or an apocalyptic fanatic?

Schweitzer (2000:478) singled out Weiss as the sole scholar with the courage to follow through the evidence regarding the eschatology of Jesus, the apocalyptic preacher with a worldview so alien to our own, that he “...will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.”

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While the two-source hypothesis remained unchanged under the treatment of Schweitzer, the reliability of Mark's gospel as a source did not. He poses the question: "Is the sequence of events that this Gospel gives us old and in any way authentic?" (Schweitzer 2000:462). He insists that Jesus should be seen within his first-century Jewish context. The context that mattered, however, was one of apocalyptic and not revolution. By placing Jesus within the context of apocalyptic Judaism, Schweitzer is able to envision far greater continuity between Jesus, the early church and the gospels, "while allowing of course for importantly different historical settings in each case" (Wright 1996:21). According to Schweitzer (2000:xxxv), "[c]ritical study cannot remain blind to the late-Jewish eschatological material found in the utterances of Jesus according to the two oldest Gospels. It must agree to recognize at least some of it." In the introduction to Schweitzer's *The mystery of the Kingdom of God*, Walter Lowrie (1950:33) writes: "Schweitzer rehabilitates the credit of S. Mark's Gospel simply by showing that no important parts of it need be discarded on the ground that they are inconsistent with the sketch which he draws of the history of Jesus." And on the "positive and comforting element" in Schweitzer's conclusions on the synoptic problem Lowrie comments:

Schweitzer's view, as he himself says in the Preface, greatly simplifies and clarifies the Synoptic problem. It is no longer necessary to attribute so much to "the editor's hand." The Sermon on the Mount, the Charge to the Twelve, and the Eulogy over the Baptist are not collections of scattered sayings, but were the main delivered as they have come down to us. Especially important is the recognition that even for constructing the history of Jesus Mark by itself does not suffice: the discourses in Matthew are invaluable indications.

(in Schweitzer 1950:34)

William Wrede in his influential work on Mark, entitled *The messianic secret*, argues that in Mark, precisely as in the other gospels, non-

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historical concerns hold sway. Theological and dogmatic motifs are the actual moulds in which this gospel was cast and therefore it amounts to nothing more than theologically motivated fiction conceived within an early church which had already altered course away from the direction taken by Jesus. Wrede (1971:131) writes: “It therefore remains true to say that as a whole the Gospel no longer offers a historical *view* of the real life of Jesus. Only pale residues of such a view have passed over into what is a suprahistorical view for faith. In this sense the Gospel of Mark belongs to the history of dogma”. All that remains for us to know for certain from Mark’s “document of faith” is that Jesus was a Galilean teacher or prophet whose words and actions struck chords with his audience and who was in the end executed.<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer (2000:xxxvii) comments upon the theories of Wrede:

[H]e expresses the view that even in Mark, which he regards as the oldest Gospel, we do not have a really historical account of the appearance and preaching of Jesus. Mark is historical only in so far as it deals with a Jesus who appears as a teacher, gathers disciples, gains a following among the people, and adopts a free attitude towards the Law, which brings upon him the hostility of the Pharisees and chief priests and leads to his condemnation to death in Jerusalem. ...thus it is Mark who attributes to Jesus the conviction that he is the Messiah.

In an important passage for the motivation of his own views over against the views of Wrede and those in agreement with him, on the reliability of Mark as a source (2000:xxxviii), Schweitzer writes:

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<sup>1</sup> The collapse of belief in the reliability of Mark as a source was a major causative factor in the demise of the Old Quest, as was the rise of form criticism with exponents such as Strauss and Wrede heralding it in and K L Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann expanding upon their work. In its search for the *Sitz im Leben*, it presupposes certain conceptions of the oral transmission process, the belief that the oral traditions concerning Jesus had amalgamated historical remembrances with early-Christian creativity in a freedom of interpretation, interpretation and transformation (see Ellis 1991:38), and the denial of any possibility for miraculous activity in its naturalistic worldview.

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Those who take the opposite view have to cut large sections out of the two oldest Gospels as later additions, leaving only a thoroughly mutilated text of which nothing can be made. Those, on the other hand, who allow Jesus to think along eschatological lines can accept the text as it stands. The trustworthiness of Matthew and Mark forces itself upon them all the time, being confirmed in a way hitherto inconceivable by the new light thrown by eschatology on their problems and meaning.

His own views clash strongly with those of Wrede when seeking to determine what gave the preaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels their specific content: Wrede and his consort detect a dogmatic influence which they conclude to be the result of later Christian theologising, thus proclaiming dogma to be unhistorical. Schweitzer (2000:346) favours the possibility of it having been the result of Jesus' own thinking process, and in so doing proclaiming dogma to be historical. He calls Wrede's method "thoroughgoing scepticism" and his own "thoroughgoing eschatology" (Schweitzer 2000:296-303). I quote his criticism of Wrede's theories:

It is quite inexplicable that the eschatological school, with its clear perception of the eschatological element in the preaching of the kingdom of God, did not also hit upon the thought of the "dogmatic" element in the history of Jesus. Eschatology is simply "dogmatic history," which breaks in upon the natural course of history and abrogates it. Is it not even a priori the only conceivable view that the one who expected his messianic parousia in the near future should be determined, not by the natural course of events, but by that expectation? The chaotic confusion in the narratives ought to have suggested that the events had been thrown into this confusion by the volcanic force of an unfathomable self-awareness, not by some kind of carelessness or freak of the tradition.

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The evangelist is supposed to have been compelled by “community theology” to represent Jesus as thinking dogmatically and actively “making history”: if the poor evangelist can make him do it on paper, why should not Jesus have been quite capable of doing it himself?

(Schweitzer 2000:315)

But Wrede, travelling in relative solitude upon his Strasse, must be lauded for pointing out the necessity of searching behind Mark for sources, no matter how problematic such an effort may seem. He can likewise be credited for opening our eyes to the danger that what we have in Mark may already be theology. His legacy can be seen in the work of Rudolf Bultmann which also carries in it some echoes of David Strauss.

Bultmann, like K L Schmidt and Martin Dibelius, used form criticism as compass in navigating his way to Jesus. But the way he chose is fraught with hazard and methodologically impassable and stops short of discovering any kind of theologically legitimate view of Jesus. He wrote: “I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources do not exist” (Bultmann 1958:8). What one can truly know about Jesus is nothing more than the fact that he existed and was executed by crucifixion. However, Bultmann believed that the brevity of this excursion on the road of historical information is sufficient to be instrumental in the hand of God who calls upon us to live with integrity and that this is all that is required for Christian faith. He discarded as useless the apocalyptic ambience formerly read into the teaching of Jesus as wishful thinking about a world to come, choosing instead the existentialist call for decision as the eschatological slant in the preaching of Jesus (Bultmann 1958:52). Both Bultmann and Karl Barth turned their interest, not to the pursuit of a view of the historical Jesus, but to the portrait of Christ as seen through the eyes of and painted

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by faith. What matters is not what Jesus taught, but what was taught by the church.

Directly contrapunctual to this view has been the path chosen by Crossan (1991:427-429) on which he is guided by no less than fifty-two maps – sources for traditions on Jesus over and above the canonical gospels – although the actual information they deliver is sometimes somewhat sketchy. Of the greatest importance to him are the three sources he believes date from thirty to sixty CE, namely the Gospel of Thomas, Q (stratified into 1Q, a sapiential layer, 2Q, an apocalyptic layer, and 3Q, an introductory layer), and the “Cross Gospel” (a narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, abstracted by Crossan from the Gospel of Peter (dated mid second century CE and believed by him to be the source for the canonical passion narratives)).<sup>2</sup>

In his flight from dogma, Robert Funk and his colleagues at the Westar Institute “...are mounting a frontal assault on a pervasive religious illiteracy that blinds and intimidates, even those, or perhaps especially those, in positions of authority in the church and in our society” (Funk 1996:6,7). He is, however, adamant that a flight from history is a dangerous one: “...the truths of religion and the truths of science are divorced only at grave risk. Similarly, we segregate the truths of history from the truths of religion only at our peril” (Funk 1996:2,3). Jesus, more poet than second person of the Trinity, has to be liberated from not only the idolised Christ of Orthodoxy, the Christ of the Creeds, but also from the Jesus of the Gospels. He quotes Schweitzer who said that both this Christ and Jesus should be made to “...yield to the facts, which...are sometimes the most radical critics of all” (Funk 1996:20). And further on the liberation of Jesus as the aim of the quest:

Its purpose is to liberate Jesus from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him.

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<sup>2</sup> See also Crossan, JD 1988. *The cross that spoke: The origins of the passion narrative*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

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What would happen if “the dangerous and subversive memories” of that solitary figure were really stripped of their interpretive overlay? Were that to happen, the gospel of Jesus would be liberated from the Jesus of the gospels and allowed to speak for itself. The creedal formulations of the second, third, and fourth centuries would be de-dogmatized and Jesus would be permitted to emerge as a robust, real, larger-than-life figure in his own right.

(Funk 1996:300)

Another scholar who has consistently avoided the heavy traffic in the lane of “thoroughgoing eschatology” on the “Schweitzerbahn” is Marcus Borg. He argues that the destruction of Israel was the only catastrophe imminent and that the Son of Man sayings betrayed the evolving views and convictions of the early Christians more than a conviction on the part of Jesus that the end of history was drawing nigh (1984:201-227). Tom Wright joins him in steering clear of this congested “Autobahn” (his own term), taking a strong stance against Schweitzer’s view of what “apocalyptic” entails, proposing instead that apocalyptic language be understood metaphorically: “[A]pocalyptic’ was for him, and for the ninety years since he wrote, almost synonymous with the end of the space-time universe, but it is now clear that this is a bizarre literalistic reading of what the first century knew to be thoroughly metaphorical” (Wright 1996:81).

It was Wright (1996:20,21) who coined the phrases “Wredestrasse” and “Schweitzerstrasse”, thereby indicating the different routes taken by both, guided or not by the Markan and Matthean map, with the following they had gained along their separate ways. To accommodate current scholarship he widens his analogy to an “Autobahn” carrying heavy traffic in lots of different lanes. In order to choose which of the two routes to follow, the scholar needs to ask himself: “Do we know rather little about Jesus, with the gospels offering us a largely misleading portrait (Wrede)? Or was Jesus an apocalyptic Jewish prophet, with the gospels reflecting, within their own

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contexts, a good deal about his proclamation of the kingdom (Schweitzer)?" (1996:21).

For the scholar hesitant to choose either of these "Strassen" turned "Autobahnen", maybe fearing that they represent rather radical ways of opposing thinking, the relative quiet of the *Dunn-meander* might offer the route of the happy medium. Because Schweitzer chose the easier way out, one could call his route the "Schweitzerbahn" and because Wrede chose the road less travelled his way may be called the "Wredestrasse". But despite the huge and obvious differences between these two motorways, both Schweitzerbahn and Wredestrasse seem to lead the scholar to a cul-de-sac through the detours created by early-Christian creativity and distortion evident in the Gospels. Neither brings us any closer to the true unembellished view we are targeting. *The Dunn-meander* on the other hand, while still following the important directions left by previous generations of scholarship, leads to a breathtakingly new, yet familiar view, one of much greater clarity and simplicity than has sometimes been achieved in the past.

Our own travelling companions and navigators as we search for a clear, uncluttered view of the Jesus that really was, are to be N T Wright (1996), R A Horsley (1999) and J D G Dunn (2003).

## **1.4 What they set out to do:**

### **1.4.1 N T Wright**

- When choosing a method, one has to avoid the pitfalls of both over- and under-exegesis. Wright (1996:xvii) explains that historical exegesis is not simply a matter of laying out the lexicographical meanings of words and sentences. It also involves exploring the resonances those words and sentences would have had in their contexts. He likens the process to that of anthropologists learning a language and culture simultaneously



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and says that similarly we have to be prepared to hear more in a word or phrase than could be caught in a dictionary equivalent.

- He aims to arrange the material by themes, with each chapter like a transparent layer laid over a basic map or picture.
- He seeks to understand how the entire life of Jesus, and not just his death on the cross, is “gospel”.
- He wears the mantle of the “Third Quest”, a name he invented “...to denote one particular type of contemporary Jesus-research, namely, that which regards Jesus as an eschatological prophet announcing the long-awaited kingdom, and which undertakes serious historiography around that point” (Wright 1996:xiv).
- He comes to this route as “practising historian” and “practising Christian” and in his experience the worlds of faith and history need not feel “compromised by intimate association with the other” (Wright 1996:xiv).

#### **1.4.2 R A Horsley**

What would happen if one were to strip away Christian theological concepts and assumptions about, as well as pictures of, the historical context that do not apply to the speeches of Jesus in the Q source? This he intends to do choosing the oral transmission process and cultural tradition as his guiding stars. By “cultural tradition” he means not the great Jerusalem based Israelite tradition cultivated in scribal and ruling circles, but the little tradition cultivated “orally and almost certainly with certain regional variation among the villagers who comprised the vast majority of the people” (Horsley 1999:11). Finally he aims to reach a point where he can say about each Q discourse what the performers wanted to convey “in relation to Jesus, for whom they speak, and to the communities, to whom they speak” (Horsley 1999:12).

### **1.4.3 J D G Dunn**

He aims to give an integrated description and analysis on theological as well as historical level, of the first 120 odd years of Christianity, focusing “inevitably” on Jesus in this, the first volume of his intended work, examining the so-called “quest of the Historical Jesus” along the way. He writes about the fruits of his research: “It will argue that the Gospel traditions provide a clear portrayal of the remembered Jesus since they still display with sufficient clarity for present purposes the impact which Jesus made on his first followers” (Dunn 2003:6). His cloud column is similarly (to that of Horsley) the oral tradition and its importance in the mission of Jesus, which have left vestiges and legacies of far greater stability and continuity in the Jesus tradition than has previously been thought.

### **1.4.4 My own north star**

If a multitude of scholars find a prophet at the end of their road, it is important to know as much as possible about the prophetic phenomenon, so that one may recognize this aspect in the view of Jesus once you attain it. After examining the work and insights of these three scholars, “prophecy” will come under the spotlight.

In order to prevent being sidetracked by the multitude of issues that arise along the way, I shall stop at the beginning of chapters 2, 3 and 4 to check my positioning in accordance with my north star; to ascertain whether I am still heading for the goal I set out to achieve and whether all of the issues examined shed light on the common goal.