

# JESUS AND ISAIAH

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## Abstract

The Jesus Seminar assigns the OT quotations attributed to Jesus in the Gospels as the work of the early church (Funk, 1993). More recently, Geza Vermes ends his study on *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (2003) by concluding that Scripture did not play an important role in Jesus' teaching. Now while it is correct that formidable difficulties stand in the way of reconstructing *how* Jesus used Scripture (not least because the Gospels are written in Greek), I will argue in this paper that such blanket scepticism is unwarranted. By examining eight examples of Jesus' possible use of the book of Isaiah (5:1-7; 6:9-10; 29:13; 53:1-12; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1-2), I will conclude that at least half of them can be regarded as going back to Jesus in some form. While this is some way from Kimble's (1994) claim that the Gospel tradition presents an accurate picture of Jesus' use of Scripture, it does allow us to draw some conclusions. Not only was Jesus a teacher and healer, he was also an interpreter of Scripture.

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Jesus as interpreter of Scripture*

If the Gospels portray Jesus as a healer and teacher of wisdom, they also portray him as an interpreter of Scripture. The four Gospels record Jesus quoting about fifty different passages of Scripture, along with at least twice that number of allusions and echoes.<sup>2</sup> Of course, we know from the rest of the New Testament that Scripture interpretation was important to the early church and so we must reckon with the possibility that some of their exegesis has been read back into the life of Jesus. We cannot, therefore,

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2 E.g. references to biblical characters such as Abel, Abraham, Noah, Lot, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah.

agree with Kimball's assumption that the "Jesus tradition as it is preserved in the canonical Gospels is historically reliable, and consequently also that Jesus was an expositor of the OT as the Gospels depict him" (Kimball, 1994, 43-44). But neither should we adopt an unduly sceptical approach and assume that "citations of scripture are usually a sign of the interpretive voice of the evangelist or the early Christian community" (Funk, 1993, 98). In fact, less than 20% of the quotations attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are quoted elsewhere in the New Testament, suggesting that far too much weight has been placed on this argument. As John Meier says, "Jesus would have been a very strange Jewish teacher in 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestine if he had never quoted, commented on, or argued about the meaning of the Jewish Scriptures" (Meier, 1994, 141).<sup>3</sup>

### *1.2 Historical difficulties*

Having said that, we should not disguise the fact that formidable difficulties stand in the way of reconstructing *how* Jesus used Scripture. For a start, the Gospels are written in Greek, whereas Jesus' quotations and allusions would have been in Aramaic or Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> This makes it very difficult to determine whether agreements or disagreements with known manuscripts are evidence for how Jesus used Scripture or the translating and editing processes that led to the written Gospels (and their transmission). Not surprisingly, the majority of studies in this field have been redactional studies of how the Gospel writers used Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

Second, though the early church may have preserved the memory that Jesus used particular texts, differences between the Gospels show that they

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3 For this reason, while we regard the primary criteria for authenticity as (1) Plausibility in a first-century Jewish context; and (2) Dissimilarity with later church usage, we agree with Wright and others that the second criterion is strengthened when traditions are not identical with later church usage but offer a plausible explanation for them. See Wright (1996, 125-144); Theissen & Winter (2002).

4 It is quite possible that a τέκτων like Jesus had a working knowledge of Greek and Porter (2000) argues that Jesus probably used it when conversing with Pilate, the centurion and the Syrophenician woman. However, despite a sustained attempt to use this to develop a new criterion for authenticity, only two OT texts appear in the index of his book (Lev 16:12-21; Ps 22:1). Jesus may have used some Greek in conversation but it is unlikely that he based his teaching on the LXX.

5 E.g., Menken (2004); Beaton (2002).

have not always preserved the *context* in which the words were spoken.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes we might be able to offer a plausible reconstruction of the context and make deductions based on that. But on other occasions, we simply have to admit our ignorance. In these cases, it will be difficult to say much more than Jesus wished to make some sort of point using this particular text.

Third, though we do not accept the argument that quotations and allusions are *necessarily* secondary if they are also used by the early church, there is nevertheless evidence that the Evangelists (or their sources) were *sometimes* willing to place quotations on the lips of Jesus. For example, very few scholars would defend the authenticity of the scriptural exchange between Jesus and the devil in Matt 4:1-11/Luke 4:1-13 but absent from Mark. Though it can never be a hard and fast rule, quotations and allusions that seem more at home in the life of the early church than in the life of Jesus are rightly regarded with suspicion (though not impossible).<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Summary

It is important to clarify the implication of these three points. Vermes analyses forty-one examples of Jesus' use of Scripture and concludes that the "Old Testament did not play an important role in the preaching of Jesus" (Vermes 2003, 212). But if the tradition is as unreliable as this, it would be safer to conclude that Jesus probably did use Scripture, since this is characteristic of Jewish teachers, but our sources do not allow us to say very much more than that. In other words, if the sources are so poor, why opt for a reconstruction that makes Jesus such a singular figure among Jewish teachers? If the Gospels were silent on this matter, we would probably hypothesise that a Jewish teacher like Jesus is likely to have used Scripture, but the Gentile-dominated church (from which the Gospels emerged) had little interest in it. It is surely a methodological error to think that this view

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6 A good example is the double command to love God and neighbour. If we only had Mark's account (12:28-34), we might conclude that this was an original and creative use of Scripture by Jesus. But according to Luke's account (10:25-37), it is the lawyer who cites the double command, suggesting perhaps that it was a commonplace.

7 Quotations that agree with the LXX against the Hebrew/Aramaic are also regarded with suspicion, though it should be noted that one would expect an author writing in Greek to 'convert' such quotations to the LXX. It is not proof that the quotation has been invented.

is somehow weakened because the Gospels *do* in fact present Jesus as an interpreter of Scripture.

In what follows, we will discuss Jesus' possible use of vineyard traditions (Isa 5:1-7), the blindness saying (Isa 6:9-10), the hypocrisy saying (Isa 29:13), the so-called "suffering servant" passage (Isa 53), the saying in John's "bread of life" discourse (Isa 54:13), the "house of prayer" saying (Isa 56:7) and the anointed prophet of Isa 61. After discussions of authenticity and textual form, we will then try and make some deductions about Jesus' use of Isaiah.

## **2. Jesus and Vineyard Traditions (Isa 5:1-7)**

### *2.1 Introduction*

According to the Gospels, Jesus was fond of telling parables about vineyards. In Matt 20:1-16, we have the parable of the workers in the vineyard, almost universally regarded as authentic (red).<sup>8</sup> The introduction ("For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard") invites comparison with Isa 5:1-7 (God seeking fruit from his vineyard), though it should be noted that the parable makes quite a different point. In Luke 13:6-9, we have the parable of the barren fig tree, though we are particularly told in the introduction (13:6) that it was planted in a vineyard. The majority of scholars also regard this as authentic (pink) and the threat of judgement for not bearing fruit strongly suggests that Isa 5:1-7 is in mind, though the point is not judgement but "one last chance". The overtly allegorical elements in Mark's version of the parable of the wicked tenants (e.g., sent his "beloved son") are rightly regarded with suspicion but the version of the parable found in *Gos. Thom.* 65 is largely regarded as authentic (pink). However, there is debate as to whether the earliest recoverable form of the parable contains any allusions to Isa 5:1-7. Finally, Matt 21:28-32 records a parable of two sons sent to work in their father's vineyard. The Jesus Seminar regards this as doubtful (grey), though we are told that 58% of the fellows voted red or pink. The critical question for our study is this: Would these parables have evoked

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8 The colours in parenthesis refer to the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar as printed in Funk and Hoover (1993). Red and pink stand for virtually certain and very probable, grey and black refer to unlikely and virtually impossible.

Israel's vineyard traditions (based on Isa 5:1-7) or the social unrest caused by absentee landowners?

Bryan (2002) joins a long list of commentators who regard it as certain that any story about a vineyard not producing fruit would automatically suggest to a Jewish audience the allegory of Isa 5.<sup>9</sup> He accepts that the early church has made this more explicit but denies that this undermines the hypothesis. In fact, it is evidence that such associations would be "obvious" to any Jewish hearer/reader. On the other hand, Kloppenborg (2006) argues that there is nothing in the version of the parable of the tenants found in *Gos. Thom.* 65 that suggests that Isa 5 is in mind or that the landowner is God. Indeed, it follows the parables of the rich fool (#63) and the invitations to a banquet (#64), suggesting that its point is about the follies of the rich. He accepts Dehandschutter's suggestion (1974) that the lacuna in the Coptic text should be restored as, "A userer owned a vineyard", and argues that the parable alludes to the common resentment towards absentee landowners and not to Isa 5.<sup>10</sup>

We will consider Kloppenborg's reconstruction of the parable of the tenants below but here we offer three points that weaken his conclusion that Jesus could not have had Isa 5 in mind. First, it is by no means certain that the parable of the banquet (#64) is aimed at the folly of the rich person who issued the invitations. It is just as likely that it is aimed at those who will miss out because of their worldly entanglements. That being the case, it does not follow that we should adopt Dehandschutter's conjecture that the Coptic text referred to the landowner as a "userer".<sup>11</sup> Jesus would hardly have condoned the behaviour of the tenants in beating the slaves and killing the son just to expose the folly of a money-lender. Thus even if the earliest recoverable form of the parable has no explicit links with Isa 5, there is nothing that prevents such an association in general terms (e.g., God has the right to expect fruit from his vineyard).

Second, an appeal to the context of the parable in *Gospel of Thomas* is no more convincing than an appeal to the context in the synoptic Gospels. If it does have a "materialist" rather than a "scriptural" emphasis, then we should

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9 Bryan (2002, 46-49); Dunn (2003, 722); Weren (1998, 1-26).

10 In order to reinforce this, he includes an Appendix (358-549) of leasing contracts, some of which indicate unrest.

11 The main alternative is 'a good man', accepted by Crossan (1985) and Valantasis (1997).

note that this coincides with the interests of the author and should equally be regarded with suspicion.

Third, Kloppenborg seeks to refute Schoedel's view (1972) that *Gospel of Thomas* has systematically removed the allusions to Isa 5 because of its (gnostic) aversion to Scripture. Kloppenborg's arguments are largely convincing but it is interesting that one of them is that the parable is immediately followed by an explicit quotation of Ps 118:22 (#66), showing that the document does not have an aversion to Scripture. This is interesting because if *Gospel of Thomas* pictures Jesus as a teacher who sometimes quoted Scripture, then Bryan's point (that it is unlikely that associations with Isa 5 would not have occurred to a Jewish teacher like Jesus) seems correct. We will thus proceed on the basis that it is quite likely that Isa 5 lies in the background of the vineyard parables, while acknowledging that the early church is most likely responsible for making such connections more explicit.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Parable of the barren fig tree

In the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), a story is told about a landowner who returns to his vineyard three times in the hope of finding fruit from a particular fig tree, but finds none. He thus tells the vinekeeper to destroy the offending fig tree. The vinekeeper responds by urging one last attempt to make it fruitful. The repeated visits by the landowner and the plea by the vinekeeper could well echo the pathos of Isa 5:4 ("What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"). The novel element in Jesus' parable is the introduction of the fig tree, an image often used for Israel's fruitfulness (blessing) or barrenness (curse).<sup>13</sup> Some regard this as an insuperable difficulty for linking the parable with Isa 5,<sup>14</sup> but this is only true if we deny Jesus the freedom to take the allegory in new directions. Thus according to Bryan, the reason Jesus introduces the fig tree is because it concentrates the divine judgment in one single act. Isa 5 describes the

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12 For reasons of space, only the two parables (fig tree, tenants) where the associations with Isa 5 are greatest will be discussed.

13 Funk et al (1993, 345) says: 'References in both Hebrew scriptures and rabbinic literature to the fruitful fig tree as a sign of blessing and to the barren fig tree as a sign of curse or judgement are numerous'.

14 So Snodgrass (1983). For a critique, see Brooke (1995).

destruction of the vineyard in a series of actions: hedge removed; wall broken; trampled underfoot; laid waste; unpruned; overgrown; parched. But cutting down a fig tree is swift and decisive (cf. John the Baptist: “Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees”). He concludes that the message of the parable is that Israel, now symbolised as a fig tree, is on the verge of being cut off, though it has been given one final chance. Thus the fig tree does not stand for something/someone *within* Israel but Israel itself (Bryan 2002, 49, 75).<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the parable does not say whether this is likely to happen or offer any positive consequences (for others) if it does, a point in favour of its authenticity.

### 2.3 *Parable of the wicked tenants*

In its synoptic form, the parable of the tenants is an allegory and asserts that God’s judgement will come upon the ungrateful tenants and the vineyard will be given to others. It is easy to read the allegory: the “tenants” are Israel’s leadership; the “slaves” who are sent by the owner are the prophets;<sup>16</sup> the “others” who will inherit the vineyard are the recipients of the Gentile mission. But who is the “son”, mentioned even in the *Gospel of Thomas*? It is clearly a figure of some importance, uniquely related to the landowner and able to act on his behalf. If we understand the landowner as God, as the associations with Isa 5 would imply, then Jesus’ custom of addressing God as Father<sup>17</sup> suggests that he is referring to himself (even if Mark’s “beloved son” is an embellishment). Thus Lee (2005, 165) asserts that, “when we consider that the parable is told by someone who, in the light of other passages, showed a self-consciousness of being uniquely related to God as his father and of coming from God, it is entirely legitimate to interpret the christological significance attached to the parable in the whole context of his self-consciousness”.

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15 Bryan accepts the location of the parable in Luke and uses this to heighten the sense of impending doom: ‘It is not the possibility of sudden and unexpected death for some but the prospect of a sudden and impending judgement for all which underscores the urgency of repentance’ (75).

16 ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!’ (Matt 23:37/Luke 13:34). As Dunn (2003, 792) notes, it is hard to imagine the early church inventing a prediction of Jesus’ death that talks about stoning.

17 The one word printed in red by the Jesus Seminar in the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2).

All four traditions state that the son was killed, though only the synoptic accounts speak of the subsequent transfer of the vineyard “to others”, which looks like the hand of the early church. Bryan defends it, noting that Isa 27 had already prophesied a restored vineyard which will “fill the whole world with fruit”. Thus it is by no means impossible that Jesus could have depicted “simultaneously both Israel’s destruction (through the fate of the tenants) as well as the preservation of all that it meant to be Israel (through the giving of the vineyard to others)” (Bryan 2002, 56).

All four traditions also follow the parable with a quotation from Ps 118:22 (“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”), which equates the fate of the son with the chosen and rejected stone. There are three main arguments for its authenticity. First, although it occurs in *Gospel of Thomas* as a separate saying (#66), it is noteworthy that it is placed directly after the parable, indicating some awareness that it is appropriate there. Second, the Targum of Ps 118:22 has changed the “rejected stone” to the “boy which the builders abandoned was among the sons of Jesse and he is worthy to be appointed king and ruler”. There is thus a precedent for Jesus introducing a rejected (royal) son into the parable. Third, the connection between the parable and the quotation appears to be a wordplay on “son” and “stone”, which works in Hebrew (בן / אבן) but not in Greek (υἱός / λίθος).<sup>18</sup>

However, as we noted above, Kloppenborg has put forward convincing reasons for why very little of this can be said to go back to Jesus. He notes that Ps 118:22 is a popular proof-text in the early church (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7) and its connection with the parable (despite the wordplay) remains obscure. Indeed, the inclusion of Ps 118:23 (“this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes”) in Matthew and Mark has the effect of condoning the violence of the tenants. He also notes that the wordplay on “son” and “stone” does not work in Aramaic (drawing on Hultgren 2000, 363) and since the synoptic quotation follows the LXX exactly, it is unlikely to go back to Jesus. But more fundamentally, he has made a convincing case that the *explicit* allusions to Isa 5 are all secondary. Though he does not

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18 Black (1971, 12). The parallel can be found in such texts as 1 Kgs 18:31 (‘Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob’) and Isa 54:11-13 (‘I will set your stones in antinomy... all your sons shall be taught by the Lord’ (RSV). Alternatively, the connection might be between ‘builders’ and ‘built a tower’ at the beginning of the parable.



claim to have recovered the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, he thinks the earliest recoverable form of the parable went something like this (2006, 272):

A man had a vineyard and leased it to tenant farmers and departed. At harvest time he sent a slave to the tenant farmers to receive from them some of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent to them another slave and they beat him too. [...] Then he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But the tenants said, "This is the heir," and they seized him and killed him.

Where I differ from him is that I think there is still a case for saying that this parable has a relationship with Isa 5. It is not explicit but as already noted, it is inconceivable that a Jewish teacher like Jesus, who even *Gospel of Thomas* acknowledges as quoting Scripture, would not have been aware of this. If this is the case, then he has introduced two elements; the sending of the slaves and the death of the son. This does not justify the extravagant christological claims made by Lee (above) but it does show that Jesus was able to draw on Israel's vineyard traditions and take them in new directions. And that is perhaps all we can safely claim.

### **3. Jesus and the Blindness Saying (Isa 6:9-10)**

Since there is a verbatim quotation of Isa 6:9-10 LXX in Matt 13:12-13 and Acts 28:26-27, there is considerable doubt as to whether this text can be traced back to Jesus. However, the quotation in Mark 4:12 (aimed at those outside the kingdom) and the possible allusion in Mark 8:17b-18 (aimed at the disciples) are more promising.

Isa 6:9-10 (Göttingen)	Mark 4:12 (NA <sup>27</sup> )	Mark 8:18 (NA <sup>27</sup> )
καὶ βλέποντες βλέπετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν μήποτε ἴδωσι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσι καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσι καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσι καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.	ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν  καὶ ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν καὶ μὴ συνιῶσιν  μήποτε  ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἀφεθῆ ἑαυτοῖς.	ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε  καὶ ὅτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε;

Unlike the MT, LXX and the quotations in Matt 13:12-13 and Acts 28:26-7, both Mark 4:12 and *Tg. Isa.* 6:9-10 speak of “forgiving” (first person) rather than “healing” (third person) and use third person statements for the “hearing” and “seeing” clauses rather than direct address (Manson 1931).<sup>19</sup> Manson went on to speculate that the problematic ἵνα in Mark (“in order that... they may not turn again and be forgiven”) can then be explained as a mistranslation of the Aramaic relative  $\tau$  (“that”). However, in the light of Mark 9:12, this explanation is unnecessary<sup>20</sup> and the various differences between Mark and the Targum show that it is more a summarising allusion than a direct quotation. Whether it was originally linked to the parables is difficult to determine. The problems it has caused for interpretation could count in its favour but the more usual explanation is that Mark or the tradition before him is responsible for the erroneous link with the parables. Perhaps all we can say with confidence is that at some point in Jesus’ ministry, he compared the lack of responsiveness to his teaching with the commission given to Isaiah.

19 So also Chilton (1984) and Evans (1989). This connection has been strenuously denied by Goulder (1991) but see the critique of his article by Chilton & Evans (1994, 300-304).

20 As Chilton & Evans (1994, 301) note, the ἵνα in Mark 9:12 clearly means that the ‘Scriptures speak to the effect that the son of man should suffer, but surely not with the express intention or purpose of making him suffer’.

It is interesting that this lack of responsiveness is later aimed at the disciples in Mark 8:17b-18. After misunderstanding Jesus' saying about "leaven", he asks them: "Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?" The words are closest to Jer 5:21 ("Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears but do not hear") but the references to a lack of understanding and hardened hearts almost certainly looks back to the earlier use of Isa 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12. The reference is lacking in the Matthean parallel (16:9) and most scholars explain this as part of Matthew's softening of Jesus' critique of the disciples (e.g., Gundry 1994, 326). Thus it would appear that Jesus understood the lack of responsiveness to his message, both from "outsiders" and the disciples, in terms of Isaiah's call-vision.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Jesus and the Hypocrisy Saying of Isa 29:13

The LXX is reasonably close to the Hebrew for the first half of Isa 29:13 ("This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me") but has a different emphasis in the second part. The Hebrew is criticising Israel's worship by comparing it to a "human commandment learned by rote" (מצות אנשים מלמדה). However, the LXX has two clauses, the first stating that their worship is done "in vain" (μάτην); the second giving the reason, namely, that they teach human doctrines and teachings (διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας). Mark sides with the LXX and this then coincides with Jesus' accusation that they "abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition" (Mark 8:8). The text is not quoted elsewhere in the New Testament, though it is alluded to in Col 2:22 (ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων) and neighbouring verses are quoted by Paul (v.10 in Rom 11:8; v.14 in 1 Cor 1:19; v.16 in Rom 9:20). Booth (1986, 90-94) concludes that it was created by the early church in its polemic with the synagogue and does not go back to Jesus. France (2002, 284) disagrees, rightly noting that its LXX form is not in itself proof that it does not go back to Jesus. It could be that Jesus is quoting a form of Hebrew

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21 It should be noted that since most scholars regard the obduracy of the disciples as a key theme in Mark's Gospel, it is not impossible that Mark has added the allusion rather than Matthew omitting it. However, if this was the case, one might have expected the links to Isa 6:9-10 to be more explicit.

text that differs from the MT or that Mark has simply substituted the LXX text for the benefit of his readers, while also seeing the potential of its reading for the point Jesus is making. Nevertheless, it cannot be said with confidence that it goes back to Jesus and we will exclude it from our analysis.

## 5. Jesus and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

The debate as to whether Jesus ever alluded to this passage has been frequently summarised and need not be repeated here.<sup>22</sup> The three main contenders are Mark 10:45/14:24 and Luke 22:37. The linguistic evidence is interesting. Luke 22:37 (καὶ μετὰ ἀνόμων ἐλογίσθη) is similar to the LXX of Isa 53:12 (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη) and the introductory formula (“this scripture must be fulfilled”) identifies it as a quotation. However, λογίζομαι is not the usual rendering of מָנָה. Furthermore, the formula reflects characteristic Lukan language and appears to disrupt the flow from vv. 36, 38. Dunn (2003, 812) concludes that a “tradition-historical analysis cannot trace it back to Jesus with any confidence”.

As for the other two sayings, there are no close parallels with the LXX,<sup>23</sup> so that any argument must depend on thematic similarities. For those like Wright, who see Deutero-Isaiah as an overarching “metanarrative” for understanding Jesus’ mission, this is not a problem. It is assumed that the passage was well known, so that the faintest of echoes (“handed over”, “poured out”, “the many”) would be enough to evoke the controlling story (Wright 1996, 602-604).<sup>24</sup> As a general theory, this is quite possible but for our purposes, its strength is also its weakness. If a few phrases are sufficient to evoke the *general* story, it is difficult to deduce anything *specific* about Jesus’ use of that story. In particular, one should not use such a general theory to argue for something as specific as vicarious atonement, especially as that aspect of the text was not the focus of Jewish interpretation.<sup>25</sup> It is

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22 See Bellinger & Farmer (1998). It is its occurrence in Acts 8:32-33 and 1 Pet 2:22-25 that raises doubt about attributing it to Jesus.

23 The nub of Hooker’s challenge (1959) and reiterated in her chapter in Bellinger & Farmer (1998, 88-103).

24 Powery (2003, 252) offers a contrary view. The fact that Jesus only alludes or echoes these texts, rather than explicitly quoting them, shows that ‘christological issues are not central to Jesus’ use of scripture’.

25 For a recent assessment, see Hannah (2005).

likely that Jesus knew the passage and perhaps even identified with the servant but there is not enough evidence to deduce *how* he understood it or what he wished to convey by his allusions (if present).

## **6. Jesus and Isa 54:13**

The majority of scholars are doubtful that much of the “bread of life” discourse (John 6:25-59) goes back to Jesus. The context is of the feeding of the 5000 with five barley loaves and two fish and yet in the discourse, Jesus speaks of eating his body and drinking his blood. There is no particular objection to Jesus citing the story of the manna but the overtly christological (“I will raise them up on the last day”) and Eucharistic themes are more at home in an early church setting than the life of Jesus. Few scholars would wish to defend the authenticity of the quotation of Isa 54:13 (“And they shall all be taught by God”) in the midst of this discourse and so we shall not include it in our analysis.

## **7. Jesus and Isa 56:7/Jer 7:11**

### *7.1 Authenticity*

While some scholars doubt whether the so-called “cleansing of the Temple” actually occurred (Becker 1998, 333), the majority of scholars accept that something must have happened to provoke Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. However, not all accept the authenticity of the quotations, partly because of their Septuagintal character and partly because of the nature of the accusation (“den of robbers”).<sup>26</sup> The first is not significant: (1) because the LXX is a close rendering of the Hebrew, even maintaining its word order; and (2) the fact that the Gospel writers cite texts from the LXX is not in itself evidence that they created them. For the second point, if Jeremiah can say that the Temple of his day had become a “den or robbers”, there seems no reason why Jesus could not have done likewise. Furthermore, the link between the two verses is clearly the word “house”, a Jewish exegetical procedure that Jesus uses on more than one occasion. A positive argument can also be put forward based on Mark’s inclusion of “for all the nations”. Had he, or the tradition before him, wished to place a quotation on the lips

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26 Vermes (2003, 185).

of Jesus to justify the Gentile mission, Isa 56:7 would be a strange choice, since the Gentiles did not see Jerusalem as the focus of their worship.

## 7.2 The texts

<i>Isa 56:7</i>	<i>Jer 7:11</i>	<i>Mark 11:17</i>	<i>Matt 21:13</i>
ὁ γὰρ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἶπε κύριος ὁ συνάγων τοὺς διεσπαρμένους Ἰσραηλ...	μὴ σπήλαιον ληστῶν ὁ οἶκός μου οὐδ' ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου...	ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; ὕμεις δὲ πεποιήκατε αὐτὸν σπήλαιον ληστῶν	ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται,   ὕμεις δὲ αὐτὸν ποιεῖτε σπήλαιον ληστῶν

Recent writers have focused on Jesus' use of Jer 7:11. Thus Holmén (2001, 312-328) suggests that the emphasis should fall on “den” (σπήλαιον) rather than “robbers” (ληστῶν). Jesus is not accusing the buyers and sellers of “robbery” as they carry out their (essential) Temple business. Like Jeremiah and the prophets before him, Jesus accuses them of hypocrisy, namely, attempting to fulfil their Temple duties while continuing to live immoral lives (Jer 7:8-10). Wright has a more specific view. The meaning of ληστής is not just “robber” but “armed robber” or “bandit”. According to Wright, “the Temple had become, in Jesus' day as in Jeremiah's, the talisman of nationalist violence, the guarantee that YHWH would act for Israel and defend her against her enemies” (Wright 1996, 420).

On the other hand, Bryan thinks that Jesus is deliberately citing traditions concerning judgment (Jer 7) and restoration (Isa 56). This is not a contrast between the present material Temple and a future eschatological Temple, but the fact that the Temple should by now have become the eschatological Temple. In support, he cites the fig tree episode where Mark (confusingly) explains that Jesus did not find fruit because it was not the season for figs. Bryan suggests that in “Jesus' estimation, the tree should have been laden with figs whatever the season, for it was the time of eschatological fulfilment” (Bryan 2002, 225).

There is clearly no consensus on the precise meaning of Jesus' words and all we can conclude is that: (1) The two texts were most likely combined

by the common word “house”; (2) Jesus endorsed Isaiah’s promise of restoration; and (3) Jesus appropriated Jeremiah’s judgement as applicable to *some* aspect of the Temple service in his own day.

## 8. Jesus and the Anointed One who Brings Good News (Isa 61)

### 8.1 *The Nazareth sermon*

According to Luke 4:16-21, Jesus attends a synagogue service, is handed the scroll of Isaiah and reads the passage that we know as Isa 61:1-2. He then returns to his seat and declares, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. If authentic, this would be a key passage for understanding Jesus’ use of Isaiah but there are several reasons for doubting its authenticity: (1) It is clearly based on the “rejection in his home town” story, which occurs much later in Matthew and Mark; (2) The purported reading (Isa 61:1-2) omits a phrase from Isa 61:1 (“to bind up the brokenhearted”), includes a phrase from Isa 58:6 (“to let the oppressed go free”) and agrees with the LXX on reading “recovery of sight to the blind” (τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν) rather than “release to the prisoners” (לְשִׁבוּיִם דְּרוּר); (3) The most likely link between Isa 61:1 and Isa 58:6 is the Greek word ἀφέσις (“release”), whereas the Hebrew uses two different words. Though the import of these can be lessened,<sup>27</sup> even Kimble suggests that what we have here is most likely a summary of Jesus’ sermon (not recorded) rather than an actual reading from a Hebrew scroll.<sup>28</sup>

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27 For example: (1) It is unlikely that Mark’s ‘rejection in his home town’ is Luke’s only source for this incident; (2) The LXX reading (‘recovery of sight to the blind’) was known at Qumran; and (3) If Porter is correct that Jesus would have known some Greek, it can hardly be said that Jesus could not have known that both texts use the common word ἀφέσις.

28 Kimble (1994, 108). This then allows him to make deductions about Jesus’ use of Scripture because he thinks we have the remnants of an actual sermon: ‘Jesus defined his ministry in terms of OT prophecy and fulfillment: he cited Isa 61:1-2 to claim that he was the herald who proclaimed the messianic release and inserted Isa 58:6d to emphasize that he was also the agent of this spiritual liberation’ (110).

Isa 61:1-2/58:6	Luke 4:18-19
<p>πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ  οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέ με  εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς  ἀπέσταλκέν με  ιάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῆ  καρδία  κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφρασιν  καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν  καλέσαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου  δεκτόν...  οὐχὶ τοιαύτην νηστείαν ἐγὼ  ἐξελεξάμην  λέγει κύριος ἀλλὰ λυθε πάντα  σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας διάλυε  στραγγαλιὰς  βιαίων συναλλαγμάτων  <u>ἀπόστελλε τεθραυσμένους ἐν</u>  <u>ἀφέσει</u>  καὶ πᾶσαν συγγραφήν ἄδικον  διάσπα.</p>	<p>πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ  οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με  εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς  ἀπέσταλκέν με    κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφρασιν  καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν    <u>ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν</u>  <u>ἀφέσει</u>  κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.</p>

### 8.2 Jesus' reply to John the Baptist (Matt 11:4-5/Luke 7:22)

According to Matt 11:2-3/Luke 7:18-20, John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask if Jesus was the expected one (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) or should they wait for another. Now this surprising admission of doubt could be a convenient fabrication to allow Jesus to proclaim that his miracles are in fulfilment of Scripture but there are several reasons for accepting the authenticity of the dialogue, even if the context (John being allowed to send emissaries from prison) is more doubtful:<sup>29</sup> (1) given John's emphasis on judgement, it is quite plausible that he later came to doubt whether Jesus was "the one to come"; (2) we know from 11QMelch and 4Q521 that the Qumran community reflected on the figure of Isa 61, so it is quite plausible

29 'As if Herod Antipas would have granted his prisoner the leisure and liberty to discuss messianic claims' (Chilton 2000, 63). Casey (2002, 105-145) also doubts the historicity of the setting but argues for the authenticity of the dialogue. On the other hand, Allison (2000, 113) finds it significant that Jesus' reply omits any reference to setting prisoners free; most apt if John is communicating from prison.



that Jesus did; (3) the saying reflects the activities narrated in the Gospels more than the christological affirmations of the early church; and (4) had it originated in the early church, one might have expected a statement that John was convinced by Jesus’ reply. Thus there are good reasons to suggest that Jesus saw in Isaiah a description of his ministry in word (εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς) and deed (τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν, χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν, κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν) and fashioned a reply to John by crafting a short *florilegium* or *cento* of allusions from Isa 29:18-19, 35:5-6 and 61:1. As Meier (2001, 134) points out, it is noteworthy that Jesus omits any mention of the vengeance or judgement that occurs in neighbouring texts (Isa 35:4, 29:20, 61:2b) for “the accent is now on what a loving, merciful God is already doing to save Israel”.<sup>30</sup>

Isa 61:1	Isa 35:5-6/ 29:18-19	Matt 11:4-5	Luke 7:22
<p>πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με</p> <p><u>εὐαγγελίσασθαι</u> <u>πτωχοῖς</u>... καὶ <u>τυφλοῖς</u> <u>ἀνάβλεψιν</u>...</p>	<p>ἀνοιχθήσονται ὀφθαλμοὶ <u>τυφλῶν</u> καὶ ὅτα <u>κωφῶν</u> ἀκούσονται τότε ἀλείται ὡς ἔλαφος ὁ <u>χωλός</u>... ἀκούσονται... <u>κωφοὶ</u>...</p> <p>ὀφθαλμοὶ <u>τυφλῶν</u> βλέψονται... ἀγαλλιάσονται <u>πτωχοὶ</u>...</p>	<p><u>τυφλοὶ</u> <u>ἀναβλέπουσιν</u> καὶ <u>χωλοὶ</u> περιπατοῦσιν λεπρὸν καθαρίζονται καὶ <u>κωφοὶ</u> ἀκούουσιν καὶ νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται καὶ <u>πτωχοὶ</u> <u>εὐαγγελίζονται</u></p>	<p><u>τυφλοὶ</u> <u>ἀναβλέπουσιν</u> <u>χωλοὶ</u> περιπατοῦσιν λεπρὸν καθαρίζονται καὶ <u>κωφοὶ</u> ἀκούουσιν νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται</p> <p><u>πτωχοὶ</u> <u>εὐαγγελίζονται</u></p>

30 On the other hand, ‘Jesus has not given up John’s hope of a consummation yet to come, including punishment for those who harden themselves against the final offer of salvation’ (Meier 2001, 134).

### 8.3 *The beatitudes and Isa 61*

In the beatitudes recorded in Matt 5:3-6/Luke 6:20-21, the kingdom of God/Heaven is promised to the poor/poor in spirit (Isa 61:1), comfort to those who weep/mourn (Isa 61:3), and in Matthew's version, there follows a promise of inheriting the land (Isa 61:5,7). This latter promise is not in Luke and agrees exactly with the LXX of Isa 61:7 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν), against the Hebrew text. Meier (1994, 380 n.124) is thus sceptical that the earliest form of these beatitudes can be traced to Isa 61:1-3, though he accepts that the promise of comfort to those who mourn shows "clear influence of Isaiah 61". Dunn (2003, 516-517) summarises:

Even if Luke's portrayal of Jesus reading the passage and explicitly claiming its fulfilment (Luke 4.16-21) is an elaboration of the briefer tradition in Mark 6.1-6a, we can still be confident that this elaboration was based on a strong remembrance of Jesus making clear allusion to the passage on more than one occasion.

## 9. Conclusions

### 9.1 *Exegetical techniques*

The combination of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 was probably suggested by the common word "house". Though there is little agreement about Jesus' intended meaning, it is safe to say that he was juxtaposing traditions of restoration and judgement. In the parable of the tenants, the connection between the rejected stone and the death of the son appears to be a well-known wordplay (1 Kgs 18:31; Isa 54:11-13). Thirdly, the response to John the Baptist's question produces a *cento* of phrases from Isaiah, a mini *florilegium*. According to Bryan, what is most characteristic of Jesus' use of Scripture is his selection of texts:

Unlike many of his contemporaries whose understanding of Israel's situation was shaped by biblical traditions which anticipated Israel's restoration and the judgement of the nation's Gentile oppressors, Jesus' expectations were heavily informed by traditions which declared that the heat of God's wrath would be vented on Israel for covenant unfaithfulness (Bryan 2002, 86).

However, in the light of Jesus' use of Isa 61, his focus on the positive rather than negative aspects of Isa 29 and 35, and his general habit of combining texts, it might be more accurate to say that Jesus *juxtaposed*

traditions of restoration and judgement, rather than *emphasising* judgement. It is Casey's view that Jesus' mastery of Scripture made it "obvious" to move from text to text in such a fashion (Casey 2002).

### 9.2 *Hermeneutical themes*

We have seen examples where Jesus introduces an innovative element into his interpretation of texts. In the parable of the barren fig tree, the action focuses on the fate of a fig tree placed within the vineyard, which nevertheless represents the vineyard. In the parable of the tenants, Jesus introduces emissaries sent by the owner to obtain a share of the produce. This allows the parable to speak about their shameful behaviour and in particular, the death of the owner's son. Though the connection with Ps 118 is problematic, these elements are sufficient to take the allegory of Isa 5 in new directions. Indeed, since Jesus is interpreting texts in the light of his own role in salvation history, some would go as far as to call this a "christological" or "messianic" interpretation. Thus Meyer (1999, 172-173) says that, "Jesus, in the consciousness of election to a climactic and definitive mission to Israel, sought and found in the Scriptures the specifications of God's eschatological deed and the specifications of his own role as the chosen instrumental doer of that deed". Others would say that this goes beyond what can be regarded as probable and that we should be more cautious than this.

It would appear that Jesus identified with the anointed prophet who brings good news to the poor, and saw the lack of responsiveness to his message in terms of Isaiah's call-vision. His miracles confirm his role as the anointed prophet, as well as echoing the restoration hopes expressed in Isa 29 and 35. It is less certain that Jesus saw his role in terms of the servant of Isa 53 but he may have seen his coming suffering in terms of what *typically* happens to God's faithful servants and prophets.

We began our study by noting that some scholars think Jesus made little reference to Scripture and when he did, it was only to confirm a conclusion reached on other grounds. Though some of our conclusions are necessarily tentative, they are sufficient to challenge this view. Indeed, Vermes (2003, 173) opens his chapter on "Jesus and Scripture" by saying: "The Bible played a fundamental part in the religious and literary creativity of the Jews in the intertestamental era when the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the earliest rabbinic writings were produced". Since he goes

on to assign the majority of the quotations found in the Gospels to the early church, he presumably also includes the apostles in this list. How strange then that he concludes that Scripture was of little importance to Jesus. The most “plausible” Jesus is the one who discusses, debates and argues the meaning of Israel’s scriptures, as those who came before him did and those who came after him did. As stated at the beginning of this study, we need to exercise caution when Jesus is using scriptures that we know to be important to the early church but since this is true for only 20% of the quotations, it should not be overemphasised. From our study, we can conclude that Isaiah was an important text for Jesus, even though many of the explicit connections are most likely the work of the early church.

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