

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: THE SAYINGS**

### **GOSPEL Q AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS**

#### **5.1 ~ ACCEPTABILITY OF THE CENTRAL THEORY: THE IDENTITY OF Q'S JESUS**

The hypothesis was confirmed by three levels of analysis. The first level considered the document Q in its entirety, which led to the unavoidable and necessary conclusion that *the Q people remembered and described Jesus as a sage who made use of apocalyptic eschatology to motivate and support his moral message*. This conclusion was corroborated on the second level of inquiry with the sayings in Q that deal with apocalyptic judgment. These specific traditions illustrated how Q's Jesus would unfailingly and consistently use apocalyptic themes and images to substantiate his sapiential message (cf. Theissen & Merz 1998:376). Wisdom also operated as the bedrock from whence Q's Jesus would speculate about the precise nature of the apocalyptic end. It was further realised that apocalypticism was so thoroughly enmeshed with wisdom that we were forced to qualify the hypothesis further: *Apocalyptic eschatology also formed an integral part of the sapiential message of Q's Jesus*. The apocalyptic Son-of-Man logia fit this general schema. In other words, each and every time the Son of Man was a reference to an apocalyptic figure of some kind, it functioned in Q to support the wisdom tradition in question. The third level of analysis homed in on a single saying in the formative stratum, usually taken by scholars as a straightforward and clear-cut example of an uncomplicated wisdom saying in Q. The analysis considered the micro-genre of the saying, its literary context in Q, its intertextual contexts in both the Old Testament and other Jewish texts of the time, focusing in the last case primarily on the ancient myth of psychostasia. These different levels of scrutiny all confirmed that one can not turn a blind eye to the apocalyptic themes that are part and parcel of this sapiential logion (cf. Allison 2010:123, 136 n. 469), thereby confirming the legitimacy of the qualification added to the hypothesis. It was also confirmed that, in this particular

saying, Q's Jesus used an ancient apocalyptic concept to motivate his sapiential directive. In light of all this, it is surely safe to say that the central theory has been verified convincingly, albeit with an important qualification.

## 5.2 ~ A RESPONSE TO THE RENEWED QUEST

We saw in section 1.3.6 that scholars of the Renewed Quest are fond of holding up the stratification of Q as supporting evidence that Jesus was both chiefly sapiential and fundamentally non-apocalyptic. The Sayings Gospel would now like to say something in response:

The Jesus we remember was certainly a wisdom teacher, but he was also fond of apocalyptic language, using it mostly to substantiate his wisdom. For you modern scholars to suggest that apocalypticism was unimportant for Jesus or wholly absent in his teachings is not only a reduction of his person and message, but also severely mistaken. We should know, because we were much closer to him than you.

Q's answer to the Renewed Quest operates not only on such a general level. Apart from the Gospel of Thomas, Q has something to say about each of the developments leading up to and keeping alive the non-apocalyptic silhouette of Jesus (see section 1.3 above). The first of these was already noted, namely the advancement in Q studies. Regarding the progress made in Son-of-Man studies, Q remembered and described Jesus as using this term in exclusive reference to himself. It was not a title, but simply a way of referring to himself in the third person. However, Q also remembered and described Jesus as sometimes using the term ambiguously, referring not only to himself, but also to the expected apocalyptic figure of Daniel 7:13, thereby purposely inviting *and* obscuring the conclusion that he himself was this figure. This ingenious usage of the Son-of-Man designation illustrates that Q's Jesus, not unlike other Jews of the time, had affinities with apocalypticism, which was "in the air" at the time when Jesus lived. Even when the Aramaic criterion is used, and even when philological solutions are preferred, the term is

found in *authentic* traditions that deal with apocalyptic eschatology. Hence, the present study found that a discriminatory “illegitimation” and pushing-to-the-side of the apocalyptic Son-of-Man logia is both unfounded and unnecessary. Even if all the apocalyptic Son-of-Man logia were from Kloppenborg’s Q<sup>2</sup>, which they are not, it still would not necessitate, or even suggest, the conclusion that they are inauthentic. In a long list of apocalyptic themes and images, the Danielic Son of Man was yet another used by Q’s Jesus to support his sapiential messages. The probability that the Q author(s) and/or editor(s) continued this tradition by making midrashic use of Daniel 7:13, but still obscured the identification of this figure with Jesus, shows the extent to which they tried to stay true to the Jesus they remembered.

This tendency to remain faithful to the person and message of Jesus is also noticeable in the parables of Jesus that Q preserved. You will recollect that the parables of Jesus signified another development that led to a non-apocalyptic Jesus. It should not be doubted that at least some of these parables were originally wholly sapiential. The editor(s) of Q cast them in an apocalyptic mould not only by attaching apocalyptic applications to them, but also by placing them in literary contexts that deal with eschatological subject matters. However, this process was not incongruous to the person and message of Jesus, but a faithful, direct and inevitable development from his person and message. Jesus himself applied wisdom to speculate about the end times. He used his sapiential wits to make important deductions about the apocalyptic event and its precise nature. By adding apocalyptic applications to the parables of Jesus and by placing them in apocalyptic contexts, the editor(s) of Q was/were basically and essentially doing the same thing as the historical Jesus. They were deducing from the wisdom of Jesus, expressed in this case by means of parables, important aspects about the apocalypse. Thus, to openly voice Q’s response to the Renewed Quest’s parable research, even though some of the parables in Q did not originally contain any hint of eschatology, it still does not lead to the conclusion that the person and message of Jesus was not apocalyptic. In fact, some of the apocalyptic attachments, as individual traditions, have just as much claim to authenticity as the parables themselves. The tradition of attaching apocalyptic applications to Jesus’ parables reaches back a long way.

This tradition was probably already in practice before the canonical gospels were even written. That the people who were geographically and chronologically closest to the historical Jesus remembered and described him speculating about the apocalypse, even in his distinctive and authentic parables, should warn scholars of the Renewed Quest against results that depict Jesus as non-apocalyptic. The examination of Q 6:37-38 has show that every time one tries to lock the front door in an effort to keep apocalypticism out, it creeps in through the backdoor.

The last development that led to a non-apocalyptic Jesus was the increasing consideration of his Jewishness among scholars. We have seen that this very same development also led other scholars to conclude that Jesus was wholly apocalyptic. Q supports this line of reasoning. To state the obvious, a Jewish Jesus does not necessarily equal a non-apocalyptic Jesus. It was demonstrated in section 2.5 that the people behind Q, including both its creator(s) and its audience, were ethnically and religiously Judean. Yet, this document described and remembered Jesus as a sage for whom apocalypticism was central. Despite this piece of criticism, it should also be said that Q proves beyond doubt that, at the time and place Jesus lived, a person who was essentially a teacher of wisdom did not somehow abolish or circumscribe his Jewishness. Wisdom teachers had just as much claim to their Jewish heritage and ethnicity as apocalyptic prophets, self-proclaimed Messiah's and wonderworkers. The Third Quest is therefore mistaken in their allusions and direct assertions that the Renewed Quest fosters a non-Jewish Jesus. Arnal (2005) is perhaps correct in claiming that these attacks obscure the actual political, religious, theological and post-modern agendas hidden beneath the surface.

### **5.3 ~ A RESPONSE TO THE THIRD QUEST**

The most recognisable feature of the Third Quest is their stubborn insistence that Schweitzer's portrait of Jesus was essentially correct. This is not to say that, in the light of recent scholarly developments, important modifications have not been made to Schweitzer's overall paradigm. Despite these modifications, however, the Third Quest continues to insist upon a Jesus whose person, conduct and message was completely and

almost exclusively motivated by imminent eschatology and apocalyptic urgency. Q has a lot to say about this:

This is not the Jesus we remember! You are correct in thinking that apocalypticism was an important feature of the message and person of Jesus. However, you are wrong to think that apocalypticism governed everything about him. Jesus was essentially a sage. He used apocalypticism to support and justify his wisdom, not the other way around. Moreover, the Jesus we remember did not believe that the end was necessarily near. In fact, he believed that the time of the apocalyptic end could not be predicted and would happen without warning at an incalculable time in the future. Jesus basically believed that the apocalyptic event would be unexpected, devastating, sudden, vivid, final and irrevocable. He also believed that it would bring about a reversal of fortunes. We do not remember Jesus ever speaking of the kingdom of God in an apocalyptic sense. Instead, Jesus referred to the kingdom of God in reference to his mortal message and conduct on earth. By bringing hope and caring for the sick and the poor, Jesus was inaugurating a heavenly kingdom on earth. This message and conduct was in fulfilment of many Old-Testament prophecies, which is why it could be labelled his “realised eschatology.”

The Third Quest might simply want to dismiss these words, given these scholars’ habitual side-stepping of Q. However, their conventional criticism of the utilisation of Q in Jesus research will not in this case suffice, since these results are not dependent on Q being a document, being stratified or being representative of a whole community. In true Third-Quest fashion, these results came from a *synchronic* investigation of all the traditions that make up Q. Even if the documentary status and stratification are utterly denied, Q still understood the eschatology of Jesus in the way described above. Investigating the individual traditions that make up Q, whether they were part of a unified document or had a more chaotic prehistory, leads to the unassailable result that sources much closer to the historical Jesus than the canonical gospels, both geographically and chronologically, adamantly recollect a Jesus who did not foster any kind of apocalyptic imminence or urgency. Moreover, investigating these individual traditions also leads to the

unpreventable result that the regulating and driving force behind the person and message of Jesus was not apocalypticism, but wisdom. Jesus made use of the contemporaneous obsession with apocalyptic eschatology to validate some of his ethical appeals (cf. Theissen & Merz 1998:376). In other words, an imminent eschatology did not underlie his ethics. This was illustrated most convincingly by the analyses of the apocalyptic-judgment logia and the logion in Q 6:37-38. These logia were investigated at face value as individual traditions, mostly disregarding both the documentary status and the stratification of Q. It was already mentioned in the previous section that the Jewishness of Jesus did not necessarily mean that he was not a teacher of wisdom. Similarly, the Jewishness of Jesus did not necessarily mean that he must have been an apocalyptic prophet, to the exclusion of all other (seemingly contradictory) epithets. Regarding the Jewishness of Jesus, Q's response to Third Quest's criticism of the Renewed Quest is that such criticism is wholly unfounded and totally misplaced.

#### **5.4 ~ BUILDING BRIDGES AND CROSSING DITCHES**

In order for the Third and Renewed Quests to move closer to one another, in the hope of reconciliation and a more unified scholarly image of the historical Jesus, the Third Quest would have to admit that imminence was not a feature of Jesus' view of the apocalyptic end, while the Renewed Quest would have to accept that apocalypticism was indeed an integral feature of Jesus' person and message. I will be the first to admit that any hope of reconciliation, or even a mutual movement towards one another, is wishful thinking. Nonetheless, there might be some motivating factors with the potential of persuading a number of scholars on both sides of the ditch. In section 1.3.7, we saw that not all scholars of the Renewed Quest reject all the eschatological aspects of Jesus' message. However, all proponents of the Renewed Quest vehemently deny that an eschatological expectation dictated every aspect of Jesus' message and conduct. This outlook has been affirmed by the present study. Although Q's Jesus made use of apocalyptic themes and images, he was a wisdom teacher first. Apocalypticism functions in Q to substantiate and support Jesus' wisdom (cf. Theissen & Merz 1998:376). These results are not very far removed from what many of the Renewed Questers believe anyway. For example, it

would seem that Borg's issue is not really with apocalypticism or eschatology *per se*, but with imminence (see Borg 1994a:82-84; 88-90; Borg, in Miller 2001:34, 42). It seems extremely likely that the antagonism of Renewed Questers was against imminence all along, and not actually against apocalyptic eschatology. Borg's other issue is the Schweitzerian tendency to view apocalyptic eschatology as the primary *gestalt* for interpreting the Jesus tradition, as if it dictated every aspect of his message and conduct (see Borg, in Miller 2001:43-48, 115-116). According to Borg (in Miller 2001:115-116, 134), Allison's "millenarian prophet" should not be used as a "shorthand characterisation" of the historical Jesus. This shorthand description of Jesus leaves the impression, erroneous in Borg's view, that apocalyptic eschatology dictated every other aspect of Jesus' mission and message. In light of Borg's two main areas of discomfort, scholars of the Renewed Quest may just welcome Q's image of Jesus as an apocalyptic-type sage, who was not at all motivated by imminence or urgency. The results of this study may also encourage scholars of the Renewed Quest to make more of eschatology and apocalypticism in their portraits of Jesus, not least of all because such portraits could end up being more convincing to scholars from the opposing camp.

It may prove more challenging to convince scholars from the Third Quest to take a reconciliatory step across the dividing ditch. The fact remains that the canonical gospels, in which the Third Questers place all their trust, describe the eschatology of Jesus as being imminent and urgent. Yet, there are a few motivating factors from this study that might just nudge these scholars onto the bridge and encourage them to take their first reconciliatory steps across it. The first motivating factor regards the parables of Jesus, which have systematically been ignored or moved to the periphery by scholars from the Third Quest (cf. Miller 2005:121). This observation leads Miller (2005:121) to make the following statement: "For whatever reason, the parables have been unhelpful in making the case for the apocalyptic Jesus." Yet, the current study has indicated that parable research remains just as open as the parables themselves and that a non-apocalyptic Jesus is not a foregone conclusion of such parable research. We have seen that two parables from Q actually went against the stream by motivating apocalypticism with wisdom, and not vice versa, as is normally the case with Q. Another factor that might encourage Third

Questers to start crossing the bridge is the results obtained in this study with regards to the Son-of-Man logia. We have seen that the tendency to discredit the authenticity of the Son-of-Man logia is not supported by Q. The last, and most attractive, motivating factor is the thorn, or rather the log, that imminent eschatology has been in the sides of conservatives since it was introduced by Weiss and Schweitzer. There are no two ways about it: An apocalyptic, Schweitzerian Jesus was plainly wrong about when the end will occur (cf. Miller 2005:113). He was a mistaken, perhaps even deluded, individual. Many conservatives and/or Third Questers have struggled with this inevitable and unassailable consequence of accepting the proposal that Jesus proclaimed a thoroughly imminent eschatology (see Allison 2005:104-105). The discomfort is tangible in Fredriksen's (2005:63) distressing question: "In what sense could the author of such an emphatically disconfirmed prophecy be 'god'?" Many year ago, Jeremias asked the same question: "How could God incarnate be mistaken in his eschatological expectations?" (in Allison 2005:107). In a perfect world, similar to the one the apocalypticists imagine, the results of this study will encourage scholars of the Third Quest to make more of wisdom in their portrayals of Jesus, not least of all because such portrayals could end up being more convincing to scholars from the other side of the tracks.

The thorn goes deeper and deeper the more one tries to pull it out. Miller (2005:114) considers the ramifications of this failure on Jesus' part for his entire ministry and message: "[Jesus'] conviction that the End was imminent is not just one item among others. It is foundational. How much of his message and mission stands or falls with its apocalyptic foundation?" Miller (2005:115) continues to examine this central question in the light of specific traditions. If Jesus' instructions to sever family ties and become part of a new symbolic family was motivated by imminent eschatology, was Jesus not wrong in subverting patriarchal families in the first place? If people left their homes in the expectation of an imminent reward that never came, suffering severe consequences in the meantime, was Jesus not downright, albeit unwittingly, cruel in manipulating people in this way? Was it not just as cruel to make a number of downtrodden and helpless individuals hope against hope for an imminent reversal of fortunes? A host of examples could be added. The thorn cuts deeper yet. As Schweitzer rightly perceived, the



inevitable result of a thoroughly imminent eschatology is that the moral code and ethical teachings of Jesus become useless. We saw in the opening section of this work that others, most notably J. T. Sanders, as one would expect, came to the same result. This consequence of a thoroughly imminent eschatology has troubled conservatives just as much as the suggestion that Jesus might have been wrong about the time of the apocalyptic event. Allison (2005:106) explains why:

Schweitzer offended a host of Christians when he claimed that Jesus had an ‘interim ethic’, that his moral teaching was inextricably bound up with his belief in a near end. It might be natural to disregard families and money if they are soon to dissipate in the eschaton. But if Jesus promulgated an ethic for the interim, if he did not leave behind a set of general precepts or principles designed for every time and place, what good is his counsel? Not much in the minds of many. Can any moralist, firmly persuaded of history’s imminent dissolution, frame an ethical code adequate for those of us who continue to live in history? Presumption of a negative response explains the vehement resistance to Schweitzer’s claims about an interim ethic.

Scholars of the Third Quest have tried in a number of different ways to sidestep these disconcerting, but inevitable, consequences of imminent eschatology. Wright (1992:280-338; 1996:*passim*, esp. 202-214; 1999:265-266), for example, has given us a Jesus who expected not the end of the universe, but of the temple in Jerusalem. This suggestion should be ignored for a number of reasons we do not currently need to develop (see esp. Eddy 1999:43-49; cf. Witherington III 1995:246; Allison 1999:135-136; cf. also Borg 1999:240-241). The point is that some Third Questers have tried to sail around the unassailable, mainly because a Jesus who was wrong makes them uncomfortable. The current study offers an attractive solution: Keep the apocalyptic Jesus, but drop *imminent* eschatology altogether. This would solve not only the problem of Jesus being wrong in his time-keeping, but also the problem of Jesus advocating a moral code that was irrelevant. Moreover, seeing as the Renewed Quest is mainly distressed about *imminent* eschatology, and not apocalypticism *per se*, this move would be welcomed by many intellectuals on the other side of the partition. This would mean, though, that, even

though Jesus was correct in his apocalyptic teachings, the canonical gospels were mistaken when they claimed that Jesus would come again soon. But surely a mistake by the early church is the lesser of two evils. In fact, this mistake is explicable on account of the excitement of Jesus' followers after Easter. It could even be construed as an expression of the longing to be with Jesus – not really a “mistake” in the proper sense of the word.<sup>173</sup>

## **5.5 ~ THE RELEVANCE OF JESUS' WISDOM AND MORALITY**

The study was opened with a section on the views of Jack T. Sanders, which were largely ignored in the pages that followed. As we saw in both the opening and the foregoing sections, Sanders claimed that the ethics of Jesus are irrelevant for today. In order to refresh your memory, allow me the inexcusable freedom of repeating the deductive thinking that forced Sanders to make such a claim: (1) Jesus held an imminent eschatology; (2) Jesus' ethics were motivated by and based on his imminent eschatology, and are therefore inseparable from it; (3) the modern world does not subscribe to an imminent eschatology and neither does its ethics; (4) the ancient and modern worldviews are foundationally different and essentially conflicting; (5) thus, the ethics of Jesus are insignificant, irrelevant, inappropriate and inapplicable for modern society. In light of the results of this study, the first two of these claims can rightly be dismissed: (1) Jesus' eschatology was apocalyptic, but not imminent; (2) Jesus' ethics were not motivated by imminent eschatology, but by a type of wisdom that made room for apocalyptic speculation.

Logic and a changing world also allow us to refute the third presumption. Apart from the many apocalyptic and millenarian movements and fanatics alive today, the more sober members of society are also facing apocalyptic destruction. It is an unfortunate fact that we, as a people, have grown strong and clever enough to destroy ourselves and our world.

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<sup>173</sup> This argument would not be dissimilar to the move that occurred from Reimarus to Strauss. Reimarus convinced a number of scholars that the disciples of Jesus deliberately lied about the nature and content of Jesus' ministry. Strauss subsequently convinced virtually all scholars that this “mistakes” in the gospels were not due to deliberate deceit, but rather due to the ancient process of “mythmaking.”

Global warming, pollution and a number of other global ills are threatening to destroy our world, unless we change our ways. Just like the apocalyptic disaster Jesus foresaw, this apocalyptic event that will finally put the nail in mother earth's coffin will be unexpected, devastating, sudden, vivid, final and irrevocable. It might also have as its consequence an ironic reversal of fortunes (cf. Theissen & Merz 1998:379). The most powerful of all species, the dinosaurs, were at one point in time wiped from the face of the earth, allowing less powerful mammals to take their place. The remnants of the dinosaurs left alive today, the birds in the sky, are among the most fragile and vulnerable creatures in God's creation. Conversely, the once powerless mammals gave birth to us, who are presently ruling the universe – or we like to think so. If this is not a pungent example of a reversal of fortunes, I do not know what might be. The same thing could happen to the most powerful beast alive today, humanity. Who is to say that we will not be replaced by something insignificant, like an amoeba or a mustard seed or, God forbid, a cockroach.

This study has shown that sapiential and apocalyptic paradigms are not mutually exclusive – a result that flies in the face of Sanders' fourth assumption. The eschatological hope that God will intervene unexpectedly and suddenly within history could have an impact on one's activities in the present, which is the subject matter of wisdom (see Edwards 1976:148, 153-154). Yet, the apocalyptic material in Q does not function to develop an ethical system or to create new moral imperatives. Rather, the Q people (and Q's Jesus) used apocalyptic eschatology to motivate and buttress their wisdom. Allison (2001:101) claims: "Apocalypse may offer new revelations, but they also seek to get people to do what they already know they should be doing but aren't" (cf. also Allison 2010:97; cf. further Crossan 2001:61; cf. e.g. 1 Enoch 99:2; 2 Baruch 38:2; Test. Mos. 12:10-11; Test. Lev. 13:2). This quotation points to the inextricable connectedness of ethical wisdom and apocalyptic eschatology. Maxims like: "live every day as if it is your last" are "eschatological ethics" – to use Bultmann's phrase – that are relevant for today and all time. In the preface to his second edition, Sanders (1986:xiv) claims that the inseparability of Jesus' ethics and his imminent eschatology is "...not seen merely by modern intellectual reflection, but by an analysis of the progression of ethical thinking among Christians in the first Christian century, as revealed in the

writings of the New Testament.” This is not true. The authors of the New Testament struggled with the daily application and implementation of Jesus’ ethics *not* because it was based on eschatology, but because it was so radical. It is (post-)modern pre-occupation with categories and classification that has caused us to distinguish between eschatology and ethics (cf. Allison 2010:88). Moreover, we as moderns struggle to understand how moral behaviour could remain valid in the face of apocalyptic doom. As we saw, ancients did not have this issue. Piper (1989:182-184) explains the entanglement of wisdom and apocalypticism well and deserves to be quoted in at length:

The connection between deed and consequence in the present is not totally disrupted in the eschatological future, and thus decisions which affect one’s standing in the future age are informed by past and present experience [cf. Q 3:9; 17:37; 19:26]. [...] But often the confrontation of the hearer with [apocalyptic eschatology] also concerns the establishment of priorities. In these cases aphoristic wisdom plays a somewhat different role. Here it is often a matter of demonstrating the ‘prudent’ course of action in view of the situation which confronts one. ‘Prudence’ in the light of coming judgement may, however, involve extraordinary commitments [cf. Q 12:2-12, 33-34, 58-59; Q 13:24]. The perspective of [future] judgment does not lead to a denial of normal reasoning or experience; it provides a new frame of reference within which the choice of priorities must take place. The extraordinary and critical nature of that new frame of reference is what results in this-worldly reasoning calling one to go beyond this-worldly securities. There is no suggestion, though, that this-worldly reasoning is itself undermined. Indeed, the design of argument in the aphoristic collections would suggest the very opposite. [...] There are, therefore, unifying factors in the way in which aphoristic insights in the double tradition and the more prophetic aspects of Jesus’ message are used. These unifying factors are not based so much upon superficial themes held in common, or upon a radical suspension of the persuasive qualities of aphoristic wisdom, as upon more fundamental convictions about continuities between God as Creator as well as Judge, between present and future

expectations and between man's decision-making as based on this-worldly experience and his consideration of other-worldly prospects.

Not only are apocalyptic and sapiential paradigms not in direct conflict, but the ancient world is also not reducible to an apocalyptic paradigm, just as the (post-)modern world is not reducible to an ethical or humanitarian paradigm. Apocalypticism is just as alive and well as it was in the time of Jesus. Conversely, wisdom and morality were just as important then as it is now, perhaps even more so. Just as Q's Jesus could motivate his moral and sapiential teachings with apocalyptic eschatology, we should do the same. Now that we know that we are causing our own end, what are we going to do about it? Our daily conduct should be motivated not by fame or fortune (cf. Q 11:43; 12:33-34, 22-31; 16:13), but by the reality of the earth's demise. True enough, Jesus did not tell us what to do about global warming and the like, but he did teach us that apocalyptic forecasts should dictate some of our choices in the present. The solutions to these modern issues rest with us, not with some ancient text or personage. We are in a unique situation. For the first time in the history of mankind, we might be the *direct* cause of apocalyptic annihilation.<sup>174</sup> Also for the first time in history, we are capable of preventing Armageddon ourselves, without the assistance of any type of deity. Looking after the planet is an example of an imperative that is motivated by apocalypticism. Today's frequent apocalyptic reminders that we are staring into the face of Armageddon do not create a new moral directive – look after the planet! – *ex nihilo*, but motivates and compels us, in Allison's words, “to do what [we] already know [we] should be doing but aren't.”

Yet, putting the earth's demise aside for now, Jesus did tell us how to live moral and wise lives. In this way, the ethics of Jesus were indeed “interim ethics.” The interim is just a longer period than either the evangelists or Schweitzer had imagined, going on two thousand years now. In essence, these interim ethics are not valid *because* the end is coming soon, but *until* the end comes, whenever that may be. Given all this, Sanders is

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<sup>174</sup> Israel often felt that they were the *indirect* cause of apocalyptic annihilation, since they were the ones who disappointed God, but they never saw themselves as the *direct* cause. God's anger was always the direct cause of apocalyptic destruction.

wrong in thinking that the ethics of Jesus are misplaced or irrelevant for today. It remains just as valid as when he spoke it for the first time. From Jesus we learn not only how to live good lives in the present, but also how to live with one eye to the future, not only of ourselves, but also of our enemies and of the fourth planet from the sun. Today, as always, the relevance and feasibility of historical-Jesus research is being questioned. Hopefully, this study did its part in refuting these sceptics. Concrete knowledge of the historical person known as Jesus is certainly retrievable. More importantly, though, the moral code and sapiential-apocalyptic message of this historical person named Jesus remains valid for all time and all different types of people, not only Christians.

## **5.6 ~ SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

There are so many studies about apocalypticism, wisdom, Q and the historical Jesus out there that one is always tentative to suggest future studies. Yet, two lacunas have come to light through this work, recommending potential avenues for future investigation. The first has to do with Kloppenborg's formative layer. In chapter four, we saw that a logion usually taken at face value as a sapiential teaching should not be read in such a monolithic way. Apocalypticism is as much a part of Q 6:37-38 as it is of the final verse in Q. What remains is to illustrate in a thorough, exegetical, painstaking and detailed manner that other wisdom sayings in Kloppenborg's first stratum also have apocalyptic eschatology engraved into their flesh. As we know, many scholars have indeed seen apocalyptic themes present in a host of sayings from the formative stratum (cf. Q 6:20-23, 47-49; Q 10:2-3, 9; Q 11:2-4, 9-13; Q 12:2-7, 22-31; Q 13:24; Q 14:11; Q 15:4-5, 7-10; Q 17:33). I have argued that some of these sayings should not be so interpreted (most notably Q 6:20, 47-49; Q 10:2-3, 9-14; Q 11:2-4, 9-13; Q 12:22-31; Q 13:24; see sections 2.2.4, 2.4.3, 2.6, 3.2.11, 4.3.1). Leaving all these logia aside for the moment, there are a few additional sayings in Kloppenborg's Q<sup>1</sup> that are normally taken to be pure wisdom, but that could quite possibly be alluding to apocalyptic eschatology beneath the surface.

I want to single out Q 9:60, about the dead burying their own dead, as a possible example of such a saying. Regarding this logion, the two central questions are: (1) Who are these dead people? (2) How are they able to bury other dead people if they themselves are dead? I would suggest that these “dead” people are not physically dead, but symbolically dead. They are dead because they do not accept the teachings of Jesus. Their apocalyptic fate is already sealed, even though they have not physically died yet. This is the only interpretation that would make proper sense of verse 59. Jesus is telling this would-be disciple that he must leave behind those who are already dead, meaning his patriarchal family and his community, since they are all part of “this generation.” In light of the apocalyptic end and the concurrent reversal of fortunes, these people are already dead in the present. Jesus is therefore explaining to the would-be disciple that his father is not alone in being dead. His whole family and community are also dead. Since his father was part of greater Israel, he is also part of those who are symbolically dead. Therefore, this saying is dually shocking and insensitive: (1) The dead father of the would-be disciple is associated and grouped in with those who will face apocalyptic punishment (cf. Q 11:31-32; Q 13:28-29). (2) The living loved-ones of the would-be disciple are part of greater Israel and already symbolically dead (cf. Q 10:13-15, 21-24; Q 11:19b; Q 13:24-27; Q 22:28, 30). As such, the would-be disciple must abandon his former ties and leave his dead relatives to bury themselves (cf. Q 12:53; Q 14:26; Q 17:34-35). Such a reading of this logion might cumulatively assist in understanding the troublesome saying in Q 17:37. If this latter saying is read together with Q 9:60, the vultures could be taken to be the Pharisees, scribes, judges and temple priests of Israel who feed off the dead corpse of greater Israel (compare Q 11:39-52; Q 12:58-59; Q 13:34-35). It follows from the suggested reading of Q 9:60 that this saying can not be properly understood if the presence of apocalyptic language is denied. Future research will have to prove or refute such a reading of Q 9:60.

A second lacuna in current research can now be mentioned. It has been suggested that a non-imminent, but still apocalyptic, Jesus would solve many troubling and uncomfortable difficulties for the Third Quest. What now remains is to determine whether or not this Jesus would pass the test of historical enquiry. If we start with the hypothesis that Jesus

was indeed apocalyptic, but did not claim to know when the end would occur, would this hypothesis stand up to the types of questions usually asked by the Third Quest? Wright has suggested five historical questions that must guide any and every Third Quest for Jesus: (1) How does Jesus fit into Judaism? (2) What were Jesus' aims? (3) Why did Jesus die? (4) How and why did the early church begin? (5) Why are the Gospels what they are? These questions could be answered in turn, albeit briefly. As scholars of the Third Quest know, having an apocalyptic Jesus is one of the best ways of fitting him into his Jewish *Sitz im Leben*. Imminence and urgency are not necessary ingredients for one to end up with an apocalyptic or Jewish Jesus. The question about Jesus' aims could be answered by appealing to both his sapiential and his apocalyptic teachings. Q's Jesus intended to direct people's present conduct in light of both sapiential logic and apocalyptic foreknowledge. Sometimes, these two things are one and the same. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus did not urge repentance because the end would occur pretty soon, but directed people's lives because he thought he knew *how* the end would transpire. Regarding question three, Jesus might have died because of his insistence that both the powers that be and greater Israel as a whole were intrinsically evil. In fact, both the elites and the stubborn commoners would be judged by the disciples of Jesus, experience an unprecedented reversal of fortunes and face apocalyptic punishment. Such an apocalyptic message, albeit not imminent, was sure to ruffle some elitist feathers and stir some political pots.

The fourth and fifth questions are perhaps most important for this type of Jesus. Where did the early church and the evangelists get their notion that the apocalyptic event would occur soon, if not from Jesus? A few suggestions are possible. The excitement of being part of a new community with an apocalyptic message might certainly have evolved into the urgency experienced by the first followers of Jesus. The experiences of resurrection and Easter would certainly have added to this exuberant excitement and could certainly have convinced some that Jesus would soon return. Some of the followers that knew the historical person could simply have missed him and wished that he would return soon. Is it not also possible that the first followers of Jesus could have interpreted the aphorisms and parables of Jesus in such a way that they found, albeit erroneously, evidence of an



imminent return in them? A number of other explanations could be added. The point, though, is that the jump from a non-imminent-eschatological Jesus to an imminent-eschatological faith community is not as far and bothersome as the leap from a non-eschatological Jesus to an eschatological early church. A non-imminent silhouette of the historical Jesus has not been entirely proven by these preliminary suggestions, but such a silhouette certainly is a road worth taking, even if it is presently less travelled in the Third Quest. Could this silhouette of Jesus be synthesised with the knowledge we have of him, particularly the traditions conveyed about him in the canonical gospel? Only time will tell.