

CHAPTER 2**THE PORTRAIT OF A PROPHET: N T Wright**

When checking our positions according to our north star at the starting point of the examination of each of the three models, it is important to ascertain which sources were utilized. Only if the conclusion - that Jesus was a prophet – is based on reputable sources and a sound methodology in the reading and interpretation thereof, can this conclusion be accepted as valid. This will therefore be the first link-up with Wright in the portrait he paints of Jesus.

After explaining his methodology to the reader, Wright halts his journey to determine whether John the Baptist could provide us with a suitable background against which to study Jesus. He believes John to have been a prophetic forerunner of Jesus and this chapter tests the feasibility of whether such a belief can be grounded in solid research.

Wright subsequently lists statements on the general background of Jesus which he believes are well-known and more or less accepted as axiomatic in modern scholarship. He does this so that the scholar may stand on firm ground, relatively speaking, before venturing with him into uncertainty and uncharted terrain. Comparing notes about a firm starting point for researching the life and mission of Jesus can only give it substance and may, in some way, illuminate the issue at hand.

Then follows an exposé of Wright's motivation for choosing the office of eschatological prophet passionately bent on delivering an urgent eschatological message, as best with which to describe Jesus. In conversation with other scholars Wright wends his way through the dirt roads with Jesus and becomes involved in his program of extending a messianic welcome and message of vindication. But his word is, without a doubt, a double-edged sword and Wright hears clearly the warning of judgment and vindication. In this part of the present chapter the question

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needs to be asked whether all of these characteristics detected by Wright, such as eschatology and welcome and warning, are indeed characteristics of classical prophecy. Equally important to compare with the *modus operandi* of the prophets of old, is the form and manner of deliverance of the message of which Jesus and the prophets were conveyers. Wright describes the forms of both parable and miracle as conductors of Jesus' message. In what form was the prophetic message of antiquity delivered and did it bear any resemblance to the forms detected by Wright?

The Jesus accompanied on his prophetic journey by Wright was no people-pleaser. In fact, he was a thorn in the flesh for many, attacking symbols which they held sacred or which upheld them in positions of authority in no uncertain terms, and replacing them with new symbols appropriate to the kingdom of god (the lower case being preferred by Wright) Jesus was inaugurating through his mission. One needs hardly enter into minute research to answer the questions of whether the prophets of old ever attacked the sacred cows or idolatrous institutions of the nation, striving to replace them with new ones symbolic of a renewed relationship with God, or whether they, the prophetic protagonists, had met with any antagonism in the execution of their prophetic commission.

Wright describes the type of prophet he believes Jesus to have been and the significance he is convinced that Jesus had attached to his inevitable death. For any one even briefly au courant with the lives and deaths of the Old Testament prophets, the description reads like a renewed edition of the same manuscript.

Finally, Wright spells out the need for the modern reader to align himself/herself according to the prophetic message of Jesus, compelling him/her to ask whether the prophetic message, in spite of its undeniable topicality, also possesses the capacity of transcending time and announcing to the modern reader a communication of timeless truth.

2.1 Eschatological prophet of the kingdom of God

"Though his followers came to regard him as more than a prophet, they never saw him as less" (Wright 1996:162).

"This portrait of Jesus as a prophet seems the most secure point at which to ground our study of Jesus' public career, and in particular of his characteristic praxis" (Wright 1996:166).

2.1.1 Preparing for the journey

"The historian of the first century...cannot shrink from the question of Jesus" (Wright 1992:468).

In addressing this inevitable question, Wright of necessity chooses for himself "conversation partners" (Wright 1996:xvi) from among the overwhelming number of contemporary writers on Jesus and the gospels. Among these chosen colleagues he has great appreciation for the work of Schweitzer, naming it one of the two main highways of critical writing about Jesus in the late twentieth century.

Wright accredits him with the banishing of sentimental portraits of Jesus and the restoration of the concept of Jesus as an enigmatic figure of "*overwhelming historical greatness*" (Schweitzer [1901] 1925:274), a larger than life prophetic genius, a hero who, though standing in the sharpest contrast to modern man, yet succeeds in enlisting him as follower on the noble path leading to the kingdom. The greatness of these "Colossi", as Wright calls both Schweitzer and Bultmann, lies therein that they saw, according to him, more clearly than any 20th century scholar the "...fundamental shape of the New Testament jigsaw, and the problems involved in trying to put it together." (Wright 1996:5). Thanks to this scholar the necessity has been seen for studying Jesus within (and not merely in shrill contrast to) his Jewish context. He reminded Jesus-researchers that

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in the world of Jesus, Jewish expectation of God's climactic and decisive action in history was uppermost.

Schweitzer was moreover the one who swam upstream against the flood of scholars proclaiming Jesus a revolutionary, opening minds to the possibility that what Jesus shared with his contemporaries was not a revolutionary agenda but rather an apocalyptic expectation that the end of the world was at hand; that his god would intervene in history to bring an end to it imminently – during the course of his ministry. This failed to happen but it nonetheless started an eschatological movement called Christianity.

Schweitzer and Wrede, although approaching the matter from totally different angles - Schweitzer from the historical recognition of eschatology, Wrede from the viewpoint of literary criticism - both abolished fraudulent "historical" pictures of Jesus as well as the methods that had led to their formation. There, however, all similarity between the two of them ends and their differences become irreconcilable. Schweitzer labels his own work "Thoroughgoing Eschatology" in contrast to the "Thoroughgoing Scepticism" of Wrede. This eschatological emphasis finds Jesus within the context of apocalyptic Judaism and enables him to include far more gospel material than Wrede in his research (Wright 1996:20) while claiming furthermore a development from Jesus through the early church and into the gospels, of course recognizing the historical setting in each of these cases. As a matter of fact Wright deduces that Schweitzer thought the synoptic gospels more or less got Jesus right.

"The 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 [1906] 2000: 478).

He adds that

...the historical Jesus whom research will depict,....will no longer be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. Nor will he be a figure who by a popular historical treatment can be made as sympathetic and universally intelligible to the multitude. With the specific characteristics of his notions and his actions, the historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.

(Schweitzer [1906] 2000:478)

The picture that he painted of Jesus was devoid of halo, totally unexpected, a Jesus who defies all our expectations and who can be known only by those responding to his summons to follow him and change the world, to be obedient, to expect conflict and be prepared to suffer, but finally to obtain knowledge, a Jesus who believed himself to be the Messiah when onlookers took him to be Elijah, who dreamed the impossible dream of the kingdom which would bring about the end of world history and “When this did not happen, and the great wheel of history refused to turn, he threw himself upon it, was crushed in the process, but succeeded in turning it none the less. He thus took upon himself the Great Affliction which was to break upon Israel and the world.” (Wright 1996:19). This, according to Schweitzer is what the gospels, read within their own contexts, reflect: Jesus, the apocalyptic prophet proclaiming the kingdom (see Schweitzer [1906] 1954:328-401).

Wright sees the influence of Schweitzer’s work as being so sweeping as to encompass almost all western thought on Jesus to a greater or lesser degree and comments that those who have drawn back from the full implications of the picture of Jesus that he paints, have done so either because they failed to meet the demands of this Jesus or couldn’t uphold the “exacting standards of historical scholarship” (Wright 1996:19) or else could do neither.

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On the other of what Wright calls the two highways of critical writing about Jesus, namely the work of William Wrede, he is more reserved. On the *Wredestrasse*, one may find Thoroughgoing/ Consistent Scepticism, which implies minimal knowledge of Jesus as the only possibility: He was a Galilean prophet or teacher who did and said things that caught the attention and was executed. He believed himself to be neither the son of God nor the Messiah. This scanty information may be gleaned from the Gospel of Mark, the source for all the other gospels, but because Mark had its origin in the early church where much deviation from the agenda of Jesus had already occurred, it can't be rendered as reliable source-material for any historical picture of Jesus but reflecting to a large extent the concerns of the early church. Therefore one may conclude that the gospels are basically fiction.

Wright points out that both of these scholars have their following, a "*Strasse*" each of scholars to carry the banners of their theories into the late twentieth century to form the two "main highways" of critical writing about Jesus adding that "...these days the *Strasse* has in each case turned into an *Autobahn*, with a lot of people going, at different speeds, in a lot of different lanes and indeed directions" (Wright 1996:21). He himself prefers the route taken by Schweitzer although he cautions that many details in his approach would need adjusting.

On the *Wredebahn* he singles out one scholar in particular, namely Burton L. Mack, a scholar whose work, according to Wright, lent "strong directional impulses" (Wright 1996:35) to the Jesus Seminar. Mack is well known for his views on the Gospel of Mark, the stronghold as a source of Wright's argumentation and it is understandable that statements such as the following on this gospel would force Wright to a response:

Mark's conception of Jesus and Judaism must be worked out as his own peculiar construction in distinction from the several other early views held by various Jesus and Christ movements. From the historian's point of view, it will be clear,

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Mark's theory of Jesus' authority and the end of the Second Temple Judaism might be regarded only as a little pretention hardly worth a modern smile but for its legacy. Since Mark's view became the canonical theory, however, the fiction deserves a thorough analysis.

(Mack 1988:14)

And further:

The early Jesus movements did not bequeath the social origins of Christianity to the church. They bequeathed their myth of the historical Jesus as the account of a divine origination. This book is about the plotting of that myth of origins and its designs upon the social histories, both of those who first produced it, and of those who still accept its character.

(Mack 1988:24)

On the origins of Mark he writes:

One might imagine Mark's study as a workshop where a lively traffic in ideas and literary experimentation was the rule for an extended period of time. Colleagues may well have contributed ideas and experimental drafts for many of the little story units used throughout the gospel in a common effort to think things through on the new storyline. The passion narrative is simply the climax of the new storyline. The story was a new myth of origins. A brilliant appearance of the man of power, destroyed by those in league against God, pointed nonetheless to a final victory when those who knew the secret of his kingdom would finally be vindicated for accepting his authority.

(Mack 1988:323)

For Mack thus, the gospel of Mark was theologically motivated fiction originating from the end of the first generation of Christianity and, he reasoned, by this time both the original message of Jesus and the beliefs of his earliest followers had been radically altered so that what was

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presented in the gospel was a completely different scheme of thought. Two strands of development in early Christianity was perceived, the first being the early, mostly Jewish, direct followers of Jesus who perpetuated the essence of Jesus' teaching and the second the members of the Hellenistic Christ-cult, with Paul the best known representative of this latter strand. But whereas Bultmann could recognise the marriage of these two strands as a constructive superposition in the Gospel of Mark, Mack sees it as a destructive one. And since he perceives so much in the gospels to be inconsistent with itself, the researcher, according to him, is forced to pick and choose among the material. What one would then find would be a Jesus belonging largely in the Gentile environment of Galilee, a Jesus finding himself and his teachings reinvented by the second-generation Christians to suit their way of being Christians and closely resembling a Cynic sage in his use of "...parables, aphorisms and clever rejoinders..." (Wright 1996:68).

Mack's study leads him to conclude his book with his final repartee:

Perhaps the sentence should read that "there are no messiahs." It may be time to give up the notion. Neither Mark's fiction of the first appearance of the man of power, nor his fantasy of the final appearance of the man of glory, fit the wisdom now required. The church canonized a remarkably pitiful moment of early Christian condemnation of the world. Thus the world now stands condemned. It is enough. A future for the world can hardly be imagined any longer, if its redemption rests in the hands of Mark's innocent son of God.

(Mack 1988:376)

Although Wright recognizes the thoroughness and vigour with which Mack executed his work and concedes that he brought to light many of the ways in which Christians of all times have, while supposedly serving the crucified and risen Lord, were in actual fact serving their own interests, their points of view are too contrapunctal for Wright to not "reject his proposal both in

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outline and in detail” (Wright 1996:39). For him it fails as an historical hypothesis, furthermore fragmenting texts and randomly relocating them, misunderstanding first-century Judaism and marginalizing Paul’s religion and theology. “Mack’s scheme has no simplicity of design, except in regard to Jesus himself, who is grossly oversimplified” (Wright 1996:43).

There is currently a “new wave of historical seriousness about Jesus, there is also a new sense, well beyond what early redaction-criticism envisaged, that the gospels are to be seen as texts, works of literary art, in their own right” (Wright 1996:89). However, this latter literary appreciation of the gospels has sometimes misled researchers to underestimate its historical value and Wright believes Mack to be one of the scholars to have been misled in this way, with Sean Freyne as an example of how to do justice to both the literary and historical aspects in his book “Galilee Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations.”

Although Wright is full of praise for Dominic Crossan as a scholar, he has to disagree when Crossan in a private conversation with him, like Mack, pronounces the Jesus in the Gospel of Mark to be “beguilingly attractive” but “fundamentally fictitious” (Wright 1996:45). Crossan and Mack, as well as many other members of the Jesus Seminar furthermore share the view that apocalyptic sayings were introduced into the Jesus-tradition without the authority of having originated from Jesus himself. Crossan ascribes to the tradition initiated by Mark dire consequences namely a different kingdom and a different common meal than those Jesus had in mind, but embraced in the Constantinian settlement stemming from the position in which Catholic Christianity had found itself at the time. Mack also lays blame on the tradition founded by Mark: “The Markan legacy is a myth of innocence that separates those who belong to the righteous kingdom within from those without. The boundaries, however, are not at all static. The borders shift as conflicts arise both within and without. Separation occurs when the mission to convert the other is thwarted. Judgments fall to support the righteous cause as justified and the recalcitrant other as wrong” (Mack 1988:372). This has done untold damage to the world, and

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especially to America, which has clung to its own 'myth of innocence'. Christianity now stands condemned."

Wright however argues that the synoptic tradition as a whole, in both its pre-literary and its literary forms, was intent on referring to the actual, original Jesus and not to a mythical cult-figure and adds that a full consideration of the nature of oral tradition in mid-eastern village life of that period would serve to amplify this point (see Wright 1996:40).

He furthermore argues against the status of Q within the Jesus Seminar, pointing out its tenuous character and the speculative nature of attempts to award gospel status to and reconstruct this imaginary document. When proponents furthermore relegate eschatological, prophetic and apocalyptic material to a second stage in the development of Q, awarding a non-apocalyptic, virtually non-Jewish "sapiential" early Christianity and Jesus the status of historicity and originality, no serious scholar can take them seriously.

On the subject of Q Wright not only distances himself from the positions taken by the Jesus Seminar, but also from those of Mack, Crossan and Kloppenborg. Kloppenborg and his followers theorise that the early stages of Q did not expect the "good news" of Israel's god bringing her history to its appointed goal, thereby providing Wright (1996:41) with more reason to protest that applying the word "gospel" to it overreaches the boundaries of the available evidence. Furthermore, their views aren't shared by the majority of Continental or British Q scholars, nor by any North American ones. He maintains that their statements can be refuted point for point by the likes of Siegfried Schulz and Christopher Tuckett. There are no certainties, only hypotheses, or as he calls it: "...the mythology of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and the environmental protests of the 1980's. Gone, in particular, is the sense of certainty that Q was a 'gospel' whose omissions (the crucifixion, for instance) were as significant as its inclusions" (Wright 1996:43).

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The following quotation summarises his opinion on the work of Schweitzer and Wrede and the “Strassen” of followers gained by each subsequently:

Both positions have undergone significant development and modification. The attempt to follow Wrede has resulted not only in the scepticism of his basic position becoming even more “thoroughgoing”, but also in an extremely thoroughgoing *credulity* regarding other matters. History, abhorring the vacuum left by the dismissal of Mark as pure fiction, has come up with new fictions which seem harder to attack only because they are based on nothing at all. The blithe “reconstruction” not only of Q, not only of its different stages of composition, but even of complete communities whose beliefs are accurately reflected in these different stages, betokens a naïve willingness to believe in anything as long as its nothing like Mark.

(Wright 1996:81)

The gospels are, according to him, not merely biography or religious propaganda, yet they share the main characteristics of both of these. They are connected to Jesus and exist because of what he said and did. Of the utmost importance for understanding his *modus operandi* is his following statement: “First-century Judaism, and the gospels, are opposite edges, and all discourse about Jesus must take place between them” (Wright 1996:112). He is optimistic that quite a lot can be known about Jesus. “What we know, with the kind of ‘knowledge’ proper to all historical enquiry, may turn out to generate theological and practical significance far in excess of, and perhaps quite different from, anything that recent scholarship, and recent Christianity, has imagined or wanted” (Wright 1996:123).

In the conclusion to his book he writes:

It has been the burden of this book that the gospels do in fact tell us far more about Jesus than such scholarship had

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dreamed of, and that, though certain types of Orthodoxy may want to recoil from drawing the conclusions, such a response would be self-defeating and profoundly inauthentic. The portrait of Jesus' mindset, aims and beliefs that I have set out suggests...(a God) whose glory is strangely revealed in the welcome and the warning, the symbol and the story, the threat to the Temple, the celebration in the upper room, and the dark night at noon on Calvary.

(Wright 1996:662)

In the book that he co-wrote with Borg (*The Meaning of Jesus – Two Visions*) Wright says that God doesn't leave us to speculate and fantasise about Him, but instead reveals to us all that we need to know in Jesus and that Jesus becomes known to us through both history and faith, in both cases through a no-holds-barred approach.

On the matter of the sources available to us he says that no coherent picture is offered to the researcher. "It has long been assumed among New Testament scholars that in order to work back from our sources to find Jesus himself we must first solve the problem of the literary relationship between these gospels. This is notoriously complex" (Borg & Wright 1999:20). He does not hold much hope that if the gospels had used sources, including one another, these sources can be reconstructed. After a brief summary of some of the problems and pitfalls that may be encountered in this investigation of sources, he poses

...one large question: why did Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape it did? This includes questions about Jesus and John the Baptist; it includes questions about Paul, John, and the Gospel of Thomas; it includes, particularly, questions about the nature of the synoptic material and the way in which it reached its present form. And the way to solve all such questions, whether to do with Jesus or to do with the sources, is once more the scientific method of hypothesis and verification.

(Borg & Wright 1999:22).

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This method implies that the researcher immerses himself completely in the data after which he emerges with an hypothesis, a big picture of how all fits together. This hypothesis is to be tested against three criteria, namely whether it makes sense of the data as it stands, whether it has "...an appropriate level of simplicity, or even elegance" (Borg & Wright 1999:22) and whether it sheds light on other areas of research than the one it was supposed to cover. We are not in a position to first answer the synoptic question and then base a reconstruction of Jesus on this answer. But he is convinced that we know more certainly of Jesus of Nazareth that he was a Jewish prophet announcing the kingdom of God than we know anything about the history of traditions that led to the formation of the gospels as we know them (see Borg & Wright 1999:23).

Wright has only one step in his use of the gospels. He says that because for some researchers the verdict is out on Mark's being the oldest of all the gospels and whether the Q-source really existed, the whole matter is placed on hold and he proceeds without care for what is earlier and what later. His best hypothesis is the one which accumulates and incorporates as much information as possible into the overall hypothesis and he is of the opinion that the two-source hypothesis is not of any great importance in the study of Jesus and that the majority of scholars over the past two hundred years have been wrong.

This creates the problem of not realising that the Gospel of Mark, though one of our oldest sources, may already be interpretation. If one acknowledges this probability, the question could then be raised whether Jesus saw and announced himself to be a prophet or whether that was already Markan interpretation. Wright makes a caricature of Wrede and pleads for an approach which takes the gospels and Mark at face value without considering the possibility of persevering in the search for sources underlying Mark even though such a search is fraught with difficulty. This threatens to turn him into little more than a neo-orthodox theologian, wanting to uphold the theology of the church. He sees Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet anticipating the end of the world and disappointed

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when this fails to come to pass. He then forces the wheel of God to turn full cycle by his death as a martyr. Throughout Wright's argumentation one has the feeling that his selection and evaluation of data is a rather random affair. What follows is the route taken by Wright to reach his destination of concluding Jesus to have been an eschatological prophet announcing the kingdom and dying in order to bring it about.

2.1.2 A preliminary viewing - John the Baptist

In order to arrive at a true likeness when striving to paint a picture of Jesus, one has to give consideration to the starting point. Therefore a quick perusal of Wright's views on John the Baptist is necessary since he believes that Jesus started his public work within the context of his baptism by John the Baptist, that he saw him as the chronological and theological starting point of his own ministry and that he modelled his own style on that of John (Wright 1996:160-162). In this assumption he is supported by numerous scholars, all of whom seem to regard his discipleship as axiomatic.

Meier (1994:116, 117) speaks of the possibility of Jesus' discipleship in the broad and the narrower sense. By the former he means "that Jesus left Nazareth, came to the region of the Jordan to hear John, and accepted his message to the point of receiving his baptism" (Meier 1994:116).

Regarding the latter he sketches the possibilities:

After his baptism, did Jesus stay with John for some period of time, joining an inner circle of the baptized who followed John on his baptizing tours...(cf. John 1:28, 35-37; 3:23), assisted John in his preaching and baptizing (3:25), received more detailed teaching from him about his message (3:26-30), and shared his ascetic spirituality of fasting (Mark 2:18), prayer (Luke 11:1), and perhaps...celibacy?

(Meier 1994:116, 117)

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Becker (1972) and Hollenbach (in Meier 1994:63) are two of the scholars who accept the discipleship of Jesus in this narrower sense. Sanders (1993:10-11) lists as one of the “almost indisputable facts” about Jesus that he had been a Galilean who had emerged from the circle of John the Baptist’s followers and is in complete agreement with Dunn (2003:350) who states: “Indeed, it is quite possible that Jesus began, properly speaking, as a disciple of John.”³ And he even remarks later:

Once again...it is difficult to avoid the inference that there was an early period in Jesus’ mission which the Synoptic Evangelists chose to ignore, presumably because the distinctive mission of Jesus began only after Jesus separated from the Baptist or was forced by John’s arrest to strike out on his own in Galilee.

(Dunn 2003:352)

The evidence presented in defence of this argument remains meagre and unconvincing (cf Gnilka 1997). Jesus must have travelled three or four days south to be baptized, there are no indications of the close relationship of teacher and pupil which had generally existed between the prophet and his apprentice (and John seems to be widely regarded as prophet – Matthew 11:7-9/Luke 7:24-26; Mark 11:27-33/Matthew 21:23-27/Luke 20:1-8; Matthew 14:5; Luke 1:76, see also Tilly 1994) - in fact, Jesus had to identify himself and verify his identity, and Jesus rarely displayed by way of reference to the teaching of the Baptist, the habit of the enthusiastic pupil to quote the wisdom of his master.⁴ The only implied preparation for Jesus’ public ministry seems to have been his isolation in the desert. This would be more in keeping with any suggestion by the evangelists that he had been seen as prophet, as none of the great prophets with whom he seems

³ See also Sanders (1985:91); Webb (1994:214-218); Becker (1998:52); Crossan (1991:227-238).

⁴ And in the rare case in which he did so, it was regarding teaching directed by John at his audience some of which had now become Jesus’ audience.

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to be likened (Moses, Joshua, Elijah), had served a discipleship / an apprenticeship other than a preparation for their role by God.

Meier (1994:117-129) makes the following remarks on discipleship in the narrower sense of the word:

- that there does not seem to have been any kind of structured community during or after John's lifetime,
- that all the evidence in support of Jesus' discipleship comes from the Gospel of John, and in that mainly chapters one and three,⁵
- that John 1:27 about "the one coming after me" cannot in any way be taken as proof of Jesus' discipleship,
- and that in John's gospel, all possible is done to remove any vestiges of an independent role for John.

Meier (1994:117-129) calls attention to the fact that John is no longer called "the Baptist" in this gospel and the event of Jesus' baptism by him is suppressed. His only function is to be a witness to Jesus (Jn 3:30). Meier believes that, however embarrassing some of the statements concerning the relationship between John and Jesus might have been, they were too firmly embedded in tradition to be effaced. One of these statements is that Jesus first appeared in the vicinity of the Baptist - without presenting himself to be baptized, and obviously not an adversary of John's. This constitutes for Meier a reason for suspecting discipleship.

Another argument which cannot seriously be said to hold water is that "some of the most important disciples of Jesus first gave their allegiance to the Baptist, and only after a while transferred it to Jesus, whom they first met in the Baptist's circle" (Meier 1994:120). The last part of this argument is based on speculation, while the first does not take chronological factors

⁵ Meier (1994:118) accedes: "...we must be honest, nowhere in these chapters does the Gospel state explicitly that Jesus was John's disciple. Jesus' discipleship is rather inferred from his appearing in the Baptist's ambit, from Jesus' first followers' being drawn from the group of the Baptist's disciples, and from Jesus' apparent imitation of John's practice of baptizing disciples, an imitation that creates a certain rivalry."

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into consideration. Needless to say, Meier throws in his weight with those who choose in favour of Jesus having been a disciple of John.

Although John's activities could classify him as belonging to at least three types of second-Temple prophets, namely clerical, sapiential and popular, Wright sees John as a prophet of the oracular type, delivering, true to this prophetic genre, oracles of woe on Israel if she does not repent and warnings that not even her status as the covenant people of YHWH would be sufficient to save her from the impending judgment. He differs from other oracular prophets however in that he gathered followers around him and gave them enough coherence as a group to continue his movement after his death. Wright therefore concludes that John had been mainly a leadership prophet (leadership prophecy, according to the classifications by Horsley & Hanson [1985:175-181], together with "oracular prophecy" form the two subdivisions of "popular prophecy"). Horsley and Hanson classify John as an oracular prophet and therefore solitary, while Wright is to a greater extent in agreement with Webb (1991:350-355) who identifies John as a leadership prophet rather than a solitary prophet. Wright adds however that John "...had begun to put together the two types of prophecy ...into a new and explosive combination" (Wright 1996:161).

Like other prophetic figures John the Baptist is mentioned by Josephus (Ant 18:116-119). His prophetic activities had both political and religious overtones as can be seen not only in the assumption that Herod Antipas was the prime target and antagonist of his activities⁶, but also in the potentially subversive symbolism of his actions. The gathering of people in the wilderness implied a new exodus of the people he viewed as the true Israel who would be vindicated by YHWH. Likewise a water-baptism implied that one could have, there and then, what was previously exclusively obtainable in the Temple through the Temple cult.⁷ Those who did not participate, forfeited their claim as being part of the covenant

⁶ See also Hollenbach (in Wright 1996:160).

⁷ See also Webb (1991:203-205).

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people. Wright maintains that John the Baptist's activities would without a doubt have been interpreted as a prophetic renewal movement within Israel aimed at not only the renewal, but the replacement of existing structures.

Wright (1996:160) skims past Jesus' baptism by John, but Dunn (1993:350) calls Mark 1:9 and its parallels a "key fact" saying: "This is one of the most securely grounded facts in all the history of Jesus."⁸ Meier (1994:100-105) examines evidence for and against the factuality of this purported event and submitting arguments such as "embarrassment" (see Meier 1994:101-103) and multiple attestation he concludes: "There are really no weighty arguments to the contrary. We may thus take the baptism of Jesus by John as the firm historical starting point for any treatment of Jesus' public ministry" (Meier 1994:105,129). He adds that, in his opinion, Jesus' being baptized by John is one of the most historically certain events ascertainable by any reconstruction of the historical Jesus. According to Wright the criterion of embarrassment strongly argues in favour of it, and though less sturdy an argument, the criterion of multiple attestation probably does as well. He believes that, to a certain degree, even the criterion of discontinuity adds its voice to the argumentation in favour of Jesus' baptism by John.

Wright fails to indicate the significance of the Baptism of Jesus by John for his subsequent ministry. Dunn (1993:350-352) remarks, like Meier, on the "embarrassment" factor in the event of the baptism, all the more so since it is clearly considered to be a baptism of repentance by the synoptics, forcing Matthew (3:14-15) to add that John himself had protested the impropriety of his baptizing Jesus. He believes that there is no doubting the factuality of the baptism of Jesus as the starting point of his mission, that the gospel tradition remembers John as the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mk 1:1) and that his "martyr-like death prefigures that of Jesus" according to Mark 6:14-29. John reportedly had contemporaries

⁸ See also Webb (1994:214-218), and Funk on the confidant red awarded these passages by the Jesus Seminar (1998:27-28, 54).

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similarly engaged in ministries of baptism, but Dunn doubts this, given the apparent fact that he was the only one designated “the Baptist”. Dunn (2003:357) finds the roots of this practice in the ritual bathing in Jewish piety, but emphasises that John gave it a fresh slant by the “once-for-all” nature of it, as well as the fact that he immersed his converts instead of allowing them to immerse themselves. This is a baptism of repentance, an alternative to the Temple ritual, with John in the role of the priest. It is also a baptism of preparation for a future baptism where initiates would be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

Meier (1994:129) agrees with Dunn on the significance of the baptism, but embroiders further on it, saying that both the baptism and the events surrounding it involved a break with his past. He is convinced that this was in effect a confession that he was a member of Israel the recalcitrant, who had turned their backs on their God. In Meier’s opinion he was signifying, through his baptism, a “conversion” to a life that was completely dedicated to Israel’s religious heritage and destiny. It meant also, that, in submitting himself to the special ritual washing administered by John and John alone as part of the way he offered to salvation, he was acknowledging John as eschatological prophet and embracing John’s message of imminent eschatology.

This seems to exceed the information offered by the gospels by leaps and bounds, without considering the possibility that this baptism and the place in which it was offered, with all its rich prophetic symbolism, was the ideal starting point for the one for whom the way was prepared to start taking over where the Baptist, meeting his prophetic fate, was forced to end his ministry. Nor is it deemed relevant that he declared himself one with the people of Israel under the new covenant, just as the Gospel of Luke considers it to be of importance to indicate his unity with them under the old (Luke 2:21-24).

In closing this topic Wright (1996:169) refers to a selection of passages from the Acts of the Apostles. He concludes from them that, according to

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Luke, Jesus' followers, while dating their point of origin from the baptism of John, at the same time were clearly distinguished from the continuing groups of John's disciples. These passages are Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24,25; 18:25; 19:1-7.

2.1.3 Preparing the basic canvas

About Jesus Wright (1996:147-168) says that the following statements are more or less axiomatic in the opinions of most: That he

- was born in 4 BC;
- grew up in Nazareth, a town in Galilee, close to the major city of Sepphoris;
- spoke Aramaic, some Hebrew, at least some Greek;
- emerged as public figure round about AD 28 in the context of the work of John the Baptist, to whose work his initially showed resemblances;
- exhorted people to repent and announced the kingdom or reign of the God of Israel, mostly by means of parables;
- journeyed habitually from village to village in Galilee, engaging in itinerant ministry⁹ and travelling at least once to Jerusalem, announcing his message and enacting it through the performance of healing miracles, including exorcisms, and through the table-fellowship with a group of sweeping social and cultural scope, eating and drinking with them in a celebratory atmosphere as a further way of inaugurating the kingdom;
- called a group of close followers or disciples, among whom 12 received special status¹⁰;
- often prayed, sometimes in lonely places, addressing God as "Abba" in a way if not unique then at least distinctive of Jesus;
- only (according to sources available) fasted once;

⁹ See remarks on itinerant ministry in 2.3 below.

¹⁰ See Van Aarde (2004) and remarks on "the Twelve" in 2.3 below.

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- through his actions, and one dramatic one in the Temple in particular, incurred the wrath of some in Judaism, especially of the high-priestly establishment, towards the end of his life;
- resulting partly from this, was handed over to the Roman authorities to be executed in a manner reserved for insurrectionists;
- was claimed by his followers, soon after his death, to have been raised from the dead and they carried on his work in a new way, resulting in their persecution by Jews as well as non-Jews.

2.2 Sketching an outline: The profile of an eschatological prophet

Wright is convinced that these statements could all withstand the test of his series of criteria for painting a true picture, namely the criteria of being attested to by the most reliable sources, of dissimilarity and of acceptance by the "almost all serious writers" (Wright 1996:150). He therefore argues that "*...the best initial model for understanding this praxis is that of a prophet; more specifically, that of a prophet bearing an urgent eschatological, and indeed apocalyptic, message for Israel*" (Wright 1996:150 – emphasis mine). His first argument in support of the portrait of Jesus as a prophet is that he believes it to make sense in the general context of Judaism, in the context of popular movements in particular, but especially in the context of John the Baptist. Apart then from his views on the context of John the Baptist which I have already briefly outlined, he believes the remaining aspects of the context to have been as follows:

- Certain dynamics such as an undercurrent of potential or actual revolution were at work in first century Judaism¹¹ and it was not confined to the lowest social classes but had as participants some pharisees and even some aristocrats.

¹¹ This point has been well disputed with scholarly opinions covering the whole spectrum of possibilities between rest and unrest: Dunn (2003:310) writes that during Antipas' rule all had been relatively quiet. Horsley (1987:116) denies emphatically that Jewish society at the time of Jesus had been an incubator for violent revolution. Buchanan (1984:38-39), however, writes: [A]most every year there was at least one guerrilla encounter with Rome in an attempt to evict the Romans from Jewish territory."

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- Wright (1996:151) refers to allegations that prophecy had ceased in the first century and to the absence of prophetic writings since Daniel in the developing canon. However, he argues that despite what seems to be evidence to support these allegations¹² and despite what Josephus refers to as the failure of an exact succession of prophets in the second-Temple period, various types of prophecy seem to have continued unhindered in this period.¹³
- Webb (1991:chapter 9) distinguishes three different types of prophets previously briefly referred to namely
 - clerical prophets, holders of priestly, perhaps even royal office,
 - sapiential prophets, wise men belonging to various sectarian groups such as the Essenes or the Pharisees,
 - and popular prophets which group may be subdivided into leadership and solitary popular prophets.

None of these categories are disjunct from each other but could and did overlap. Popular prophets, including the sub-categories of leadership and solitary prophets, emerged from and appealed to the ordinary Palestinian people and worked without the benefits of office or scribal learning. Solitary prophets gave warning of impending doom through oracles while leadership prophets, in the way of the great classical prophets especially seen in the prophetic ministry of Moses and Joshua, attempted with promises of salvation to start and lead a liberation movement (cf Horsley 1985:435-463; Horsley & Hanson 1985:136-146; Webb 1991:348).

Wright (1996:155) says that, by recognizing that Jesus shared in the traits of the popular prophet, "...we are in touch with part of what we will later see to be bedrock within the Jesus-tradition. It was as a prophet in this basic mould, acting symbolically in ways that would be understood, and were designed to be understood, that Jesus made his decisive impact on his

¹² Confer 1 Maccabees 4:46.

¹³ See also Horsley & Hanson (1985:chapter 4), Webb (1991:chapter 9).

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contemporaries. " Leadership prophets were initiators and leaders of movements promising salvation and liberation, teaching, pronouncing oracles and engaging in symbolic actions. A symbolic entering into the land was often enacted by these prophets leading their followers into the wilderness, particularly around the Jordan, thereby retelling the exodus-story and pre-enacting the great liberation or "return from exile" (Wright 1996:155). Wright emphasizes that these acts were not random but that they underlined and reinforced a controlling story or "metanarrative" underlying the whole programme or agenda. He believes this metanarrative to have been the annunciation of the end of Israel's suffering and hardship to be replaced by a new beginning through the intervention of their God who would finally be king of the world. On this topic he quotes Webb:

These movements were oriented toward the deliverance of those peasants from the oppression and dissatisfaction they felt towards their lot. These prophetic figures called the people to gather together and participate in a symbolic action reminiscent of their past religious heritage, especially the events associated with the Exodus and Conquest. The prophetic figures evidently promised the people that the deliverance would take place by divine intervention. These prophetic movements appear to have had an eschatological dimension.

(Webb, in Wright 1996:155)

Wright briefly peruses the theories of researchers such as Horsley (1987, in Horsley & Hanson 1985) and Crossan (1991:170-174, 452) on banditry and gives his own on the issues of banditry, peasants and revolts as a social context for Jesus. Horsley, he says, builds on the research done by the social historian Eric Hobsbawm (1985) and argues that the banditry in the days of Jesus was of a social kind, a "Robin Hood" type of banditry with the outlaws being supported in their endeavours by the local peasant community as engaging in a struggle against their social, political and economic oppressors on their behalf. He refers to what Horsley (1987)

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terms the first stage in the "spiral of violence" whereby Rome keeps her subjects in check and the second which would be the covert support of the violence perpetrated by the bandits. He maintains that in Horsley's opinion Jesus basically supported the peasants in their attitude and was himself inaugurating a new form of social protest, though as yet non-violent. Furthermore that, to support this theory, Horsley is forced to opt for the following arguments:

- the absence of any serious form of revolution in the time of Jesus explaining why he never protested such a form;
- that, if Jesus had supported these social protests of the peasantry, he would not have embraced such as tax-collectors or prostitutes who did not align themselves with the strict anti-Roman communal stance of the peasantry;

He denies the validity of Horsley's identifications of

- bandits as social bandits;
- social bandits as the "noble heroes of a grateful peasantry";
- Jesus as a social revolutionary who would, by implication, have supported such banditry;
- the essentially non-violent nature of such banditry until before the war in the mid-60's CE.

Another argument of Horsley's is refuted by Wright (1996:157) as follows: "Further, Horsley's suggestion that Jesus did not after all welcome social outcasts into the kingdom flies in the face not only of most recent study, but of the strong historical argument that the early church would have been most unlikely to invent such a theme, and to weave it so thoroughly into the traditions about Jesus, were it not firmly grounded".

There seems to be agreement that bandits were a common phenomenon in the Roman Empire, although their numbers had probably been small. Crossan (1991:171) poses the question why, if their numbers had been

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small, punitive action taken against them by the Romans had been so violent. Codes of Roman law show that the legalities and penalties meted out for bandits, set them apart from common criminals; viewed as a form of state retribution and public terrorism and sanctioned by the law, these punishments were the most brutal of the death penalties - being thrown to the beasts, burnt alive or crucified - and were deemed necessary in order to "set a public example". Why was this the case if there was no real threat that they might overthrow the empire? Brent Shaw (1984:32) supplies the answer to this by ascribing it to "...the inability of the archaic state adequately to define its self-defined mandate of authority."

To this Crossan (1991:173) adds:

And how could it ever define the difference between, say, the soldier who was an ex-bandit and the bandit who was an ex-soldier, unless and until it could show that emperor and army had, over bandit and gang, a monopoly of violence that was not only practically and quantitatively great but theoretically and qualitatively right.

Wright also refers to Crossan's theory that in social banditry the "noble bandits" moved "ambiguously" between powerlessness and power, between the peasant class and the governing class (see Crossan 1991:170). But Wright's view on this topic is that in a situation as confused as it appears to have been in the time of Jesus one should refrain from adding more confusion by applying social theories based on other times and places. He agrees that there was indeed various types of banditry in the Palestine of Jesus' time and that it was widespread, that some forms of banditry was sometimes supported by some of the peasants, that banditry very easily flowed over into "serious revolutionary violence" (Wright 1996:159) the latter of which, though more likely to occur in Judea, could also occur in Galilee and was taken very seriously by the Romans as well as the Jewish authorities. He adds that the relationship between banditry

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and other popular movements appear to have been fluid as well. Therefore he concludes as follows:

...it is impossible to use the social categories of banditry, whether "social" or otherwise, to set up a rigid grid of categories in which Jesus must be made to fit. In particular, it would be wrong to suggest that there was no undercurrent of violent revolutionary intentions in the world that was addressed by Jesus, and hence to deduce that Jesus could not have been speaking of, or to, such violent movements. It would be equally misguided to insist that, in speaking of the kingdom, Jesus must have been aligning himself with the peasant aspirations that may have led some within the class to support, for some of the time, such actual "banditry" as there was. Jesus cannot be pinned down that easily.

(Wright 1996:159).

Wright believes that Jesus was seen as and saw himself as a prophet - a prophet such as the prophets of old, delivering to his people a message from the covenant God of Israel, warning of the dire consequences of the way in which she chose at the time to live and exhorting her to turn back to her God and his laws. Like John the Baptist, but to a greater extent, he conveyed a prophetic message in the manner of the "oracular" prophets and inaugurated a movement of renewal in the manner of the "leadership" prophets. He even bears resemblances to both "clerical" and "sapiential" prophets, although he could also be interpreted as counter-clerical. (He quotes the following passages as scriptural evidence of the prophetic aspect of the work of Jesus: Mt 13:57/Mk 6:4; Lk 4:24; Mk 8:28/Mt 16:14; Lk 9:19; Mt 10:40-41; Mt 21:11; Mt 21:46; Mk 6:14-16/Mt 14:1-2/Lk 9:7-9; Lk 7:16; Lk 7:39-50; Lk 13:33; Jn 4:19; 7:52; 9:17; Mk 14:65/Mt 26:68/Lk 22:64, Lk 24:19 and Ac 7:37.) He calls the evidence "impressive" and says that it stems from "triple-tradition" concluding that "...we are here in touch with firmly authentic tradition, preserved against all the tendencies that may be presumed to have been at work" (Wright 1996:165, 166).

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However Wright concedes that nothing, apart from the one Acts reference, occurs in the New Testament outside of the gospels about Jesus as a prophet. Nor is there anything, according to him, to be found in the Gospel of Thomas or Q typifying Jesus as a prophet. Yet Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1999:308) concludes after minutely studying Q firstly that Jesus and John are portrayed throughout this document as prophets of renewal. Horsley writes that John is labelled explicitly as “a prophet and more than a prophet” who is preparing the way of the new exodus in 7:26-27. Earlier in that same discourse he finds evidence that Jesus declares himself to be the prophet who is enacting fulfilment of the people’s longings previously articulated by the prophets. And in the introduction to the mission discourse in Q 9:57-62, Horsley believes Jesus to be represented as analogous to Elijah. In Q 11:29-32, on the other hand, Jesus’ preaching is analogous to that of Jonah. He concludes that in general the Q discourses consistently represent Jesus in the role of a prophet.

Wright likewise concedes that the gospels “quite often hint at a ‘Moses-typology’” but believes there to be only tangential reference to the idea of a prophet like Moses. He refers to Luke 24:19 where this particular gospel refers to Jesus as “a prophet mighty in word and deed”, adding that in Acts 7:22 a similar phrase describes Moses. Van Aarde (2003:453-467), however, argues to the contrary for a clear typology of Moses (among others) in the Gospel of Matthew:

The rhetoric of intrigue is dependent upon the obedience of the people. Would they, on the one hand, listen to the voice of a scribe, who became a disciple of the heavenly kingdom, to instruct them on both the “old Moses” and the “new Moses”? Or would they, on the other hand, prefer to obey only those conventions which, according to the scribes, are true Mosaic traditions? This choice takes shape in either the recognition of *Joshua* (‘Iysous) as the “second” *Moses* and *Davidic Messiah*, to whom God gave the instruction to save all of Israel from

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their sins, or preferring to kill him and let his blood be on the hands of their offspring (Matt 27:25).

(Van Aarde 2003:453)

Taking the synoptic gospel evidence completely at face value, Wright states furthermore that Jesus had modelled his ministry on that of various Old Testament prophets, regarding his own ministry as being in line with and bringing to a climax the work of the great prophets of the Old Testament "...culminating in John the Baptist, whose initiative he had used as his launching-pad" (Wright 1996:167). Here he has in mind prophets such as Micaiah ben Imlach (1Ki 22:17 - Mt 9:36/Mk 6:34), Ezekiel (Ezk 10:1-5; 15-22; 11:22-23 - Mt 23:38/Lk 13:35), like Jeremiah claiming that he conveyed a message from the one and only God while running the risk of being called a traitor to Israel's national aspirations (Jr 7, verse 11 specifically, Mt 21:12-13/Mk 11:15-19/Lk 19:45-48), or Jonah (predicting imminent judgment on Nineveh following the events involving the fish - Jesus preaching imminent judgment on Israel with a similar sign validating his message - Mt 12:38-42/Lk 11:29-32), Amos (warning that the coming day would bring darkness not light - Jesus warning of the judging of God's people as the climax of divine judgment upon all nations, Lk 19:41-44, Mk 13:24-27), but above all of Elijah.

Although all three synoptic gospels, in his opinion, as well as the early church as a whole, "clearly" regarded John the Baptist to be an Elijah *redivivus*, they likewise portrayed Jesus as Elijah-like in his actions "...and show that the disciples were thinking of Elijah-typology as giving them a blueprint for his, and their own, activity" (Wright 1996:167). Just as Jeremiah and Elijah had done, Jesus conveyed a message from the God of the covenant, verbally as well as through symbolic actions. In, for example, Luke 7:11-17 he finds evidence that Jesus, in explaining the nature of his own work, had been portrayed as using both Elijah and Elisha as models.

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Wright detects in the interaction between John and Jesus a mutual understanding of the person and mission of the other as the new Elijah. At the same time, in spite of parallels, there is also dissimilarity: "Jesus' ministry is so like that of Elijah that they can be easily confused" (Wright 1996:167) and although Jesus, like John, announces to God's people the coming of their God in wrath, he exceeds the message of John by also bringing a message of "celebration and inauguration, which bursts the mould of the Elijah-model" (Wright 1996:167).

A prophet like the ones Israel had known before him, ¹⁴ Jesus was politically a lonely figure in spite of his followers, reprimanding the people for their transgressions of the law, exhorting them to repent and follow a different path, challenging and denouncing the ruling parties and the status quo.

Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1999:238) arrives at the same conclusion, although he had travelled a road more reminiscent of the Wredestrasse than the Schweitzerbahn (to which Wright's methodology shows certain likenesses), searching behind the Gospel of Mark and braving the mostly uncharted terrain of Q, in order to get there. Discussing the prologue to the mission discourse in Q which consists of a sequence of three brief dialogues, he explains that the second probably and the third definitely

...allude to Elijah's call of Elisha as his assistant and successor in the prophetic renewal of Israel during the long struggle against the oppressive regime of Ahab and Jezebel....Mark exhibits parallels to Q's reference to Elijah's renewal of Israel and his call of Elisha to advance the struggle and succeed him in it, in connection with a program of preaching that "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Q 10:9) and a call for repentance. In Mark, immediately following Jesus' announcement of his / God's program ("the kingdom of

¹⁴ "Elijah had stood alone against the prophets of Baal, and against the wickedness of King Ahab. Jeremiah had announced the doom of the Temple and the nation....Though all had followers, all were politically lonely figures" (Wright 1996:168).

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God is at hand, repent" [1:14-15]), Jesus calls four of the principal disciples (1:16-20) and later sends them on the parallel mission (6:7-13; as well as makes explicit the parallel between Jesus and Elijah and Moses [9:2-8]). Many other passages in the Gospels indicate that the early Jesus movement(s) were keenly aware of the similarities of both Jesus and John to Elijah, the great prophet of Israel's renewal.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1999:238)

In sickness the only intermediaries allowed to intervene would be God's emissaries, as illness was seen as the result of sin. Therefore Vermes (2003:6) sees another corollary in the life of Jesus and those of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, men of God who acted as "intermediaries thought licit between God and the sick."

In an interesting moment of verbal skirmish between himself and J P Meier, G Vermes' comments show how, with or without the aid of methodology, the same view of Jesus may be reached:

Meier has strongly objected to my way of employing the model of the charismatic prophet and the Elijah-like miracle worker in the study of the historical Jesus. Therefore let us now enquire how his "*marginal Jew*" is defined. Jesus, according to Professor Meier, is an "eschatological prophet" and a "charismatic" similar to "Elijah". In other words, the "marginal Jew" is the mirror image of the "charismatic Hasid" delineated by me in *Jesus the Jew* twenty-one years before Father Meier. Thus unwittingly he vindicates my cynical remark published prior to the appearance of volume II of *A Marginal Jew* (1994). "Methodology", I wrote, "makes me see red perhaps because more than once I have been rebuked by transatlantic dogmatists for illegitimately arriving at the right conclusion, following a path not sanctioned by [their] sacrosanct rule book"

(Vermes 2003:x)

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Dunn (2003:655-664), meandering upon his own way, forged by means of memories, likewise arrives at this destination. He speaks of:

...the possibility that Jesus may have shaped his mission self-consciously in terms of classic prophetic priorities, particularly in championing the cause of the poor and sinner in the face of establishment priorities and unconcern. Several recent studies have drawn fresh attention to the various "prophetic actions" attributed to Jesus: particularly the choice of twelve, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, the entry into Jerusalem, the symbolic action in the Temple, and the last supper. That Jesus every so often acted, not like the sign-prophets of whom Josephus speaks, but in the mode of the great prophets must be judged very likely.

Wright believes himself to be standing, historically speaking, on firm ground in saying that Jesus was an oracular prophet, but his group of followers - that he had had followers is an undisputed fact - and his symbolic actions (sometimes reminiscent of the exodus) also qualify him as a "popular prophet". Horsley applies the term "action" prophet to describe Jesus, while Webb (1991: chapter 9) prefers the term "leadership" prophet. Webb points out that Horsley, in distinguishing between action and oracular prophets, ignores the fact that action prophets also uttered oracles, so gaining a following and giving them guidance.

Although John the Baptist had already started joining together the two prophetic modes of oracular and leadership, Jesus did this in an innovative and unique way, exceeding John's prophetic mode in three ways: He was itinerant,¹⁵ he taught extensively and with an even greater sense of urgency and he engaged in a regular programme of healing. Wright (1996:169,170) says that at each of these points the double criteria of similarity and dissimilarity can be invoked. In his opinion this outline of

¹⁵ On "Itinerancy", see 2.4 below.

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Jesus' praxis is thoroughly credible within a first-century Jewish context, and makes good sense as part of the presupposition of the early church. At the same time, according to him, this praxis breaks the moulds of the Jewish context, while being, in detail, significantly unlike the characteristic activity of most of the early Christians. He says that, just as Mozart's music is incredible without Bach and Haydn as its predecessors, although being strikingly different from both; it is the necessary presupposition for Beethoven and Schubert, while remaining gloriously distinct. In a similar way Wright feels that Jesus' prophetic work makes historical sense, yet remains in a class of its own.

Jesus went from village to village, repeating in essence the same material, probably with minor variations; sentences, aphorisms, rhythmic sayings, memorable stories with shorter variations, parables, beatitudes. Through these he "...urged repentance, commended faith, encouraged the desperate, rebuked those he considered hard-hearted, spoke words of healing" (Wright 1996:170). There would doubtless have been local variations. Wright warns that in the light of this, sayings and deeds are not disjunct but form a unity and must be perused as such. Moreover different parts of the bigger ministry which had been artificially divided must be allowed to throw light each on the other;

...we find a classic prophetic profile, a classic example of critique from within. Israel's story is retold so as to reach a devastating climax, in which the present Jerusalem regime will be judged, and the prophet and his followers vindicated. The covenant god will use the pagan forces to execute his judgment on his people, and a new people will be born, formed around the prophet himself, bringing the last word from the covenant god, and his immediate followers. In fact, this sense that the present phase of the story has reached its last page has to do not only with the extreme nature of the present crisis, but also precisely with the identity of the prophet as the bearer of the last word.

(Wright 1996:325)

2.3 Against a backdrop in bold colours: The kingdom drama

2.3.1 A drama in three acts: Act one: Annunciation

Jesus the eschatological prophet acting in the kingdom-drama came and announced that Israel's God would once again become king through the telling of a story that evoked many sacred, treasured memories. But somehow the story was different in its sameness for the plot had been subverted and redirected. Wright (1996:199) believes that one may be certain that such retellings of the national story played a key role in revolutionary or renewal movements. In his opinion it was because prophets promised their followers such things as the parting of the Jordan, or the walls of Jerusalem falling down, that people followed them. They were, of course, eager for a new Joshua who would lead them to a new conquest. Wright is therefore not surprised that Jesus retold Israel's story, both explicitly and implicitly, as part of his prophetic work. He says that a refusal to accede to this equals ultimately a refusal to think historically.¹⁶ Nor should it come as a surprise, when one remembers the other "leadership" prophets, that Jesus would place himself, as the kingdom-announcer, at the centre of the redrawn narrative.

He reasons that Jesus would not have used the phrase "the reign of God" if he were not in some or other sense announcing the fulfilment of or even himself claiming to fulfil those deeply rooted expectations of the people of Israel. His mindset and message was simultaneously a public announcement, a public warning and a public invitation. In this respect Wright pronounces him similar to other first century prophets of the "leadership" mould. He comments that only the facts that he was itinerant and concentrated on villages rather than major cities, prevented his being arrested sooner, given the nature of the content of his speeches which was certainly neither bland nor non-provocative. In announcing the advent of the "kingdom of God" Jesus was confirming what the people of Israel had

¹⁶ Confer Meyer (1992:15-17).

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long expected and hoped for, deliberately evoking with the big picture of his story-line a story-line time-ingrained in the memories of his audience; that their God would be lord of the world and would bring an end to their suffering and exile. At the same time however, he was painting a dramatically new picture, of what the kingdom meant, who would in reality enter into it and on what terms; and who were excluded from it, so "...as to subvert and redirect its normal plot" (Wright 1996:199).

Wright warns that Jesus' teaching should not be seen as timeless ethics nor merely as instructions for the ongoing life of his followers (to use Schweitzer's term "*Interimsethik*"), nor may the observer of the ministry of Jesus fail to realise that his sharpest criticism is aimed not at pagans, but at Israel herself.

If we take seriously the public persona of Jesus as prophet, the material we think of as "moral teaching", which has been categorized as such by a church that has made Jesus into the teacher of timeless dogma and ethics, must instead be thought of as *his agenda for Israel*. This is what the covenant people ought to look like at this momentous point in their long story.

(Wright 1996:174)

Jesus in the role of a prophet was pushing the boundaries of the genre in innovative ways, employing various narrative forms in which to mould the "story" he was telling - the verbalisation of a new vision of Israel and her destiny, a destiny which was hurtling toward fulfilment - and simultaneously subverting rival interpretations. Wright attaches major importance to his argument that "...a good deal of what is generally called the 'teaching' of Jesus is best characterized in terms of implicit, and sometimes explicit, story" (Wright 1996:198,199). By the term "explicit story" he is referring to the parables. The gospels offer renditions of these in the forms of parables, shorter epigrammatic sayings, "nuggets of wisdom or summaries of complex issues" (Wright 1996:174) and sometimes extended discourses and through these, Wright believes, present a coherent overall picture.

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The kingdom-stories as told by Jesus generated a very specific praxis, a profile of which can be seen by viewing the four elements which constitute it, namely invitation, welcome, challenge and summons and which are implemented in the following way: In retelling his story of Israel as the fulfilment of all their traditional expectations, Jesus was urging his hearers to subscribe to this new rendition and all it implied and involved while at the same time he was overturning all other agendas. His story addressed other worldviews and mindsets and targeted a realigning in his audience from these to his new story, symbols and praxis. This realignment meant that his audience could not remain spectators in this play - they had to make a choice which roles they would play on the stage in the drama of the new exodus of the coming kingdom that Jesus believed himself to have been unfolding through his work.

2.3.2 Act two: Welcome, challenge and summons

Wright believes that Jesus claimed to be the true prophet of God spearheading the movement of renewal and salvation in Israel by which Israel's true god would become king. In this he is in agreement with E P Sanders who writes on the topic of how Jesus viewed his own role: "He regarded himself as having full authority to speak and act on behalf of God....Jesus was a charismatic and autonomous prophet; that is, his authority (in his own view and that of his followers) was not mediated by any human organisation, not even by scripture....He said, in effect, 'Give up everything you have and follow me, because I am God's agent'" (Sanders 1993:238).

His behaviour seems to show that the return from exile was already taking place, consisting of his own efforts and the results of his mission and that this entitled him to make pronouncements on who belonged to the new restored Israel and who not. He therefore enacted his announcement in terms of a welcome and a warning: The welcome he extended to those in need; all and sundry, but especially to the poor and the sinners whose repentance and restoration would culminate in their return from exile and

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celebration. They would reap the benefits of his work although they had to bear in mind that the true Israel returning from exile must naturally expect to meet with resistance. The warning applied to those who rested upon the laurels of their ancestral heritage and the assumption that the coming kingdom implied their vindication, and the threat of the judgment of YHWH returning to Zion to those who rebelled against his rule.

Acceptance of his invitation meant by implication a realignment of praxis as well as of some elements in their worldview. Wright speaks of a *welcome* to live, personally and corporately as the new Israel in a new way of being the people of God as well as a *summons* to follow him and accompany him on his mission which entailed a journey to Jerusalem and would reach a startling climax.

Part and parcel of this invitation is for Wright the call seemingly made by Jesus for repentance and belief. He says that older dictionaries and commentaries commonly shared the opinion that "repentance" is a major theme in the ministry of Jesus - repentance being in this understanding the negative side of conversion. Conversion including repentance would, according to this view, be an undeserved divine grace in contrast with legalism in the Jewish ideologies. "'Repentance' thus belongs in the world of individual moral conduct: One of Jesus' fundamental aims, it seems, was to make people change their behaviour for the better (though without, if possible, becoming Pelagians in the process)" (Wright 1996:247).

The flaws in this interpretation have long since been brought to light, with theologians such as Sanders (1993:230) arguing the opposite: "Jesus was not a preacher of repentance: he was not primarily a reformer". Sanders points out that the words "repent" and "repentance" are very rare in Matthew and Mark, that "there is scant material which depicts Jesus as calling Israel to repent" (Sanders 1985:203) and that "Jesus was not a preacher of repentance: he was not primarily a reformer" (Sanders

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1993:230).¹⁷ If Jesus' aim was to bring dishonest people to repentance, we would expect the word "repent" to be a prominent one in his teaching, "he would have been a national hero" instead of incurring the wrath he had through his association with sinners (Sanders 1985:203). But Jesus granted himself the right to admit or refuse entry into this kingdom, besides which his summons asked for something far removed from repentance in the way his contemporaries would have understood the word: He called for people to follow him (Sanders 1993:234-237).

Wright (1996:247-249) himself argues for a happy medium, saying that Jesus called for "repentance" to end the exile of his people. The words "*shub*" and "*epistrephein*" both of which translate as "return" are used by the prophets and in post-biblical Jewish literature to denote Israel returning to YHWH with all her heart which would enable her to return to her own land. He therefore concludes that what Jesus meant by the word "repentance" implies "what Israel must do if YHWH is to restore her fortunes at last" (Wright 1996:249) and the repentance here to mean giving up her militant confrontation with Rome and buying into his radical alternative vision of the kingdom.

A welcome is extended by Wright to the recent emphasis on Jesus as "sage" or "teacher of wisdom" and as such "standing in a line of great wisdom teachers going back in both Jewish and pagan traditions to the book of Proverbs and beyond" (Wright 1996:311)¹⁸. Jesus' teaching has been the object of scrutiny as has the way in which it, "by its very style, was designed to subvert the worldviews of his hearers. Teasing aphorisms, laconic and cryptic sayings, and strange subversive stories, all challenged their perceptions of reality and deftly unlocked fresh possibilities" (Wright 1996:311).

¹⁷ See Chilton (1988) for various points of debate with Sanders on this subject.

¹⁸ See also Witherington (1994:172-201).

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Borg (in Borg & Wright 1999:68-70) subdivides teachers of wisdom into two groups: the teachers of conventional wisdom on the one hand, and on the other teachers of subversive or alternative wisdom, the latter indicating through their didactics a way beyond the paths of convention. Both the “sheer weight of wisdom teaching attributed to Jesus” and the “form of memorable short sayings (aphorisms) and provocative short stories (parables), both classic wisdom forms” (Borg 1999:68) in which his teaching was cast, persuades Borg that the category of teacher of subversive wisdom is the one best suited to him. Of particular interest is what he believes to be the origin of this subversive wisdom: “The most likely source of such wisdom is mystical experience: enlightened wisdom teachers see and teach as they do because of their own enlightenment experience. Such, I am persuaded, was the source of Jesus’ teaching: he spoke differently because he had seen differently.” And “[t]he way Jesus taught led beyond convention. As one who knew God in his own experience, he knew that God was accessible apart from convention and institutions. His wisdom teaching invited a new way of seeing, centering, and living” (Borg 1999:69). What then was his mission as teacher of wisdom?

I see him as inviting his hearers to a way of being in relationship to God that was not dependent upon convention or institutions. Though we need not think he was intrinsically opposed to both, he was critical of the way they functioned in his day, especially among the peasant and marginalized classes...he taught a path of transformation centered in the sacred. His wisdom teaching invited people to life in the Spirit.

(Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:70)

What is, however, a source for concern in Wright’s opinion, is that “within this quite recent wave of study...the picture of Jesus as a sage, a teacher of subversive wisdom, has regularly been played off against various other emphases” (Wright 1996:311). This would imply that if Jesus had been a

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sapiential teacher it would exclude the possibility that he had been a prophet, if he had called for a new way of life in the present, he would have nothing to say about the future and if “wisdom” had been his forte he would be totally ignorant on matters “apocalyptic”. Wright emphasises that wisdom and prophecy, and similarly wisdom and apocalyptic, do not cancel each other out, but on the contrary, enhance each other. “Prophet and apocalypticist share the agenda of the Jewish wisdom tradition: to break open the worldly perspectives of readers and hearers, so that the truth of YHWH can be seen, and his call heard” (Wright 1996:312).

Witherington (1994:172,180-183, 200-202) describes Jesus as “a sage who expressed his eschatological convictions in Wisdom forms” for his wisdom had been tempered and moulded by his eschatological convictions and he finds a probable grounding for the wisdom sayings of Jesus in his conviction that the eschatological reign of God was manifesting forcefully in the midst of Israel through Jesus’ own ministry.

In Jesus' drama in which he himself is the agent, recipients are needed for the action and helpers are needed to assist the agent in his endeavours. Wright sees in the storyline of the implicit as well as the explicit kingdom-narratives an invitation to his audience to see themselves as the "Israel" to whom all the benedictions which this invitation implied, were extended. He adds that many of Jesus' contemporaries intended for their followers to see themselves as the "true Israel" and considers himself to be on historically firm ground in predicating all this of Jesus.

He is also certain that Jesus would have equipped his followers with a way of life that would distinguish them as his followers. Wright (1996:317) believes that if we rule out this entire aspect of Jesus' teaching as unhistorical, on the grounds that “Jesus did not intend to found a church”, we are quite simply failing to think historically. If, conversely, we were to treat this aspect of the kingdom-story as merely a timeless ethic, we are certain to misunderstand it, not least by ignoring its eschatological dimension. In the opinion of Wright Jesus' kingdom-story was about a very

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different sort of eschatological fulfilment. This fulfilment was in actual fact one that was more consonant with other first-century Jewish expectations, the kind of fulfilment which generated quite naturally and appropriately a set of community rules for those who were prepared to make the story their own.

The invitation further calls for helpers to actively contribute towards the execution of the action the story needed. However, acceptance of this invitation implied specific conduct from these exiles returning to become the new Israel, not merely enforcing a new set of rules or abstract ethical codes, but rather generating an appropriate realignment of praxis and of certain other elements in their worldview among those who accepted it. According to Wright (1996:245) "The unique and unrepeatable nature of Jesus' own sense of vocation extended to those who followed him. They were summoned to specific tasks, which had to do with his own career and project"

His kingdom-story comprising invitation, welcome, challenge and summons (Wright 1996:244-319) had created a following, but one riddled, even among the twelve closest to the heart of his ministry, with all the ambiguity of the old Israel. The Twelve are painted as doubting, blundering, uncertain failures who, though Jesus bestowed on them the titles of Old Israel, deserted him as he fulfilled the vocation of Israel in solitude. However, Wright has reached the conclusion that Jesus had been aware both that he would have to do alone what needed to be done for the rebirthing of Israel into a new community and that his followers would be muddled and ambiguous. Most definitely he had anticipated that the whole of the nation would not repent. And paradoxically these factors had vindicated his new way of being Israel instead of annihilating it, to the extent that his followers, having failed to respond to his summons during his lifetime, would recall it after his death and accept the challenge to Israel to see themselves as the renewed community of the people of God, just as he had intended them to do all along.

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For his purpose had had a scope far wider than mere social reform within Israel; he was the prophet destined to fulfil God's purpose, through the people of Israel, with the whole world. He adds that Jesus was deeply concerned with the corporate and social effects of his kingdom-announcement. In terms of his use of the word "corporate" over against "personal" meaning for each and every one of Jesus' followers, he explains that it does not undermine, but instead enhances the personal meaning of Jesus' announcement for everyone who listened to him.

The idea that Jesus expected the end of the world to dawn at any moment is, according to Wright, scholarly *passé*. Moreover, he says that there is virtually no evidence that Israel was expecting the end of the space-time universe, on the contrary, he believes evidence to point in the direction that they did not, but merely used metaphor and cosmic imagery to portray to the full the theological significance of cataclysmic events on the social and political fronts. Although he believes Jesus to have expected it to come soon, he evidently thought there would be time aplenty for the manifestation of a new form of community. However, when the end came, it would do so in an earth-shattering climax of judgment falling on the impenitent and by contrast in vindication bestowed on the followers of the true path.

2.3.3 Act three: Judgment and vindication

Wright (1996:367, 368) judges the major kingdom-theme to be the defeat of evil, of paganism, of Babylon in a drama of the God of Israel becoming king, a drama staged by Jesus himself and for which he is in search of a cast, a narrative in search of fresh characters. His audience must become his cast, they could not remain spectators, but they themselves must choose which role they were to play. Jesus himself would be the agent but recipients and helpers were needed for the action of the play. That Jesus spoke with power and authority seems to be undisputed.

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But what was it that lent him authority of this nature? Wright means the answer to this question is that his message was a new one, not merely a rehash of previous sayings and messages but an innovative message from the "covenant god" of Israel. He heralded an urgent message not of timeless truths but of the kingdom, a public warning of imminent catastrophe, a call for an immediate change of heart and direction and a public invitation to a new way of being the people of God. Liberation for Israel would not come through a militant confrontation with Rome, on the contrary, if they did not relinquish that misconception and with it all their futile attempts at liberation, wrath would most certainly come upon her, and not so much in heavenly fire and brimstone, but through Roman weaponry and the falling of masonry. "In so far as Israel cherished nationalist ambition, it would end up on the fire. Those who took the sword would perish by the sword" (Wright 1996:336).

The followers of Jesus, however, would be protected like the sparrows, they had merely to pray not to be led into the *peirasmos* and they would be delivered from *poneros* (Wright 1996:337). Throughout the tribulation and persecution that would be suffered by those who did not heed his warning, they would be given positions of great responsibility and would occupy twelve thrones, acting as judges over the twelve tribes. If they abandoned all to follow him, they would receive in return far more than they had lost and in them Jesus would rebuild the Temple, which would be destroyed - they would be the true new Jerusalem. However, they must brace themselves for the birth pangs of the new Israel which were about to commence in full force.

Mark 13 and its parallels provide Wright (1996:339-368) with a source for studying the themes of judgment and vindication in Jesus' kingdom-stories.

Jesus' disciples are warned not to be misled by false messiahs and reassured that they would be protected through all that was about to occur. Through animosity against them, persecution by the authorities and isolation they must persevere for their vindication would not be withheld.

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These were the answers given to his disciples by Jesus when they eagerly asked about the coming of this kingdom in which Jesus himself would be king, about this time in which all Israel's hopes would be fulfilled and the story begun in Israel's scriptures reach its predestined climax. Jesus' answer was a "classic piece of reworked apocalyptic" (Wright 1996:346) reported in Mark 13:5-13; Matthew 24:4-14 and Luke 21:8-19. Likewise do the passages in Mark 13:14-23; Matthew 24:15-28 and Luke 21:10-24 reflect, according to Wright, extrapolations from ancient biblical prophecy rather than history taken post-event and turned into "pseudo-prophecy" (Wright 1996:349). He finds in Mark 13:5 allusions to Micah 33:12; Jeremiah 7:14; 46:8 and Ezekiel 24:21; in Mark 13:17 to Hosea 13:16; in Mark 13:20 to Isaiah 65:8, in Mark 13:22 to Deuteronomy 13 and Jeremiah 6:13 and in Mark 13:14 to Ezekiel 7:12-16.

Passages from Daniel (9:26-27; 11:31-35; 12:10-11) provide him with ground for his theory that the coming destruction could be aligned with the Maccabean crisis, that first-century Jews would read into them the destruction of the Temple, the setting up of pagan symbols, perhaps even pagan worship in its place, accompanied by trial and tribulation for the true followers of YHWH and that the invasion would be a Roman one? His *coup de grâce* then becomes: Who, in this new situation, are the true people of YHWH, expecting persecution and standing firm under it? And who is the true deliverer, who will fight YHWH's battle and emerge vindicated at the end? It is a question of *ROLES* within a *STORY*: Granted the shape of the plot, who is now the Agent, who the Helper, and who the Opponent? It is precisely questions like these that Mark 13 and its parallels address. "There is no good reason for denying that Jesus himself could, and most probably did, speak of them in this sort of way" (Wright 1996:351). He views Daniel 9 as a crucial determining reference, the prayer of Daniel for the restoration and vindication of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by Babylon, being given an angelic answer comprising various themes, namely an end to transgression, a final atonement heralding covenant renewal and the restoration of Jerusalem in 9:24-25. It

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also speaks of an anointed one who will be cut off and have nothing in 9:26a.

He understands these themes to make up a complex grid of meaning for Mark 13 and its parallels, and he mentions YHWH's final faithfulness to the covenant, his rescue of those who remained faithful to him, both of which would come about through the destruction of the rebuilt city and "...the cutting off of an abandoned 'anointed one'" (Wright 1996:349). He likewise sees close ties between Mark 13 and the first book of the Maccabees, the second and third chapters. No historical events tallied so well with these prophecies that after-event backdating of prophecy could be suspected in these warnings of a terrible fate that would befall Jerusalem. Wright sees no problem in attributing them to Jesus as the prophet of God filled with horror at what Jerusalem had become or the godly zealot encouraging his followers to leave the corrupt shrine and organize a counter-official movement. They signified the utter destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, so corrupted by the official Temple cult that destruction was the only logical consequence and a warning for those loyal to the covenant to leave behind all that they had and flee to the hills. Wright thus understands the overtones of Jesus' sayings in this chapter to be as follows:

The official Temple cult was (in his view, as in that of the Essenes) so horribly compromised that the only solution for it was to be destroyed. Jesus was claiming the high ground of true covenant loyalty; to defend the sanctuary and cult when they were so corrupt would be disloyalty to YHWH. The way of loyalty was the way of flight. Such flight would not betoken cowardice. It would be undertaken with the intention of regrouping as a body, in order subsequently to be vindicated as the true people, indeed the true leaders.

(Wright 1996:353)

In a different set of Old Testament allusions taken from the prophets of old Wright sees Jerusalem designated as Babylon and enemy of the true

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followers of the god of the covenant. He refers to Luke 19:42-44, saying that it referred to Hosea 13:16 on the judgment of Samaria (Wright 1996:354), with Nahum 3:10 and Psalm 137:9 referring to Babylon. He quotes Isaiah 13:6; 9-11; 14:4,12-15; 19 and 34:3-4 foretelling the downfall of Babylon and the escape of Israel from the midst of the destruction. In Ezekiel 32:5-8 he finds references to Ezekiel's judgment pronounced on the king of Egypt. Joel (2:10-11; 30-32; 3:14-15), Amos (8:9) and Zephaniah (1:15) all warn of a nearing cataclysm and cosmic darkness while Isaiah (48:20 and 52:11-12) prompts Israel to flee before the coming destruction of her enemy. Wright finds in the last Isaiah passage and the verses preceding it (Is 52:7-10) resonance with the proclamation, ministry and self-understanding of Jesus and remarks on the ironic use of this passage in Mark 13 saying that the original form announced the *salvation* of Jerusalem while here Jerusalem has become Babylon and Jesus and his disciples Jerusalem.

In these passages as well as in Jeremiah (50:6,8,28; 51:6-10; 45-46; 50-51; 57) he finds similar motifs, namely "...YHWH's victory over the great pagan city; the rescue and vindication of his true people who had been suffering under it; and YHWH's acclamation as king" (Wright 1996:356,357). Flight is the only appropriate response for God's people to the destruction of this city, and as to this he finds allusions in Zech 2:6-8; 14:2a; 3-5; and 9. He adds that these passages are clearly the intended background for Mark 13 and parallels, which he describes as "...a well-known Jewish story retold" (Wright 1996:359) but with far-reaching dissimilarities - Jerusalem and the Temple have become the antagonists whereas the protagonists assembled themselves in a little group around a prophetic figure as the true Israel.

This announcement surprises and alerts the hearers by the sheer unexpectedness thereof to flight from the coming war. Involvement in the coming destruction of Jerusalem was not what Jesus had in mind for his followers; although he himself would die at the hands of the Romans on the charge of being a Jewish rebel, it was of paramount importance that they

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do not. When they saw the Roman standards planted in the holy ground of the sanctuary they were desecrating in fulfilment of the Danielic warning, they would know that the time to flee had come. And though the flight in itself would be horrendous, it would be nothing compared to the horror of the instantaneous destruction of the latter-day Babylon for its rejection of Jesus' message of peace. His followers should be wary of false messiahs and not be misled by them. And by the destruction of the great city Jerusalem, Jesus would "...be vindicated as a prophet; yes, and more than a prophet" (Wright 1996:360). He who rejects the son is in actual fact rejecting his last chance, for the son is the final prophet carrying a warning from the father to his vineyard and the generation rejecting Jesus would be the last before the great cataclysm.

Furthermore, in Matthew and Luke he points out references to the desperate days of Noah and Lot which seemed to be the mundane, normal, day-to-day mode of existence - eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage - till the earth-shattering judgment of YHWH broke over those who failed to heed the divine warning. Only Noah and his people, and Lot and his daughters who had lost no time in fleeing, escaped unharmed. What befell Lot's wife should act as a warning not to stop in order to pack or prepare, or hesitate on sentimental or nostalgic grounds, nor be hampered by burdens of loyalty to nation or family, but to make all haste and make your escape lest judgment overtake the hesitant as well. This time would cause rifts in families and between colleagues - one would be taken while the other would be left.

Wright states the idea of a rapture to heaven and substitutes as interpretation a taking in judgment by a nocturnal visit by secret police or enemies sweeping through a village and seizing whomever they can. The disciples would escape narrowly but the god of Israel would vindicate his elect and this group - the elect - would astound. For they would not be "...the official or self-appointed guardians of Israel's national life, but those who cry to their god for vindication, without presuming to claim that they have kept the whole Torah and so are automatically within 'Israel'" (Wright

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1996:366). Luke follows this discussion with the parables of the unjust judge and the Pharisee and the publican and the warning to the disciples not to lose focus, but be ready to stand before the "son of man" and share in his vindication. Jerusalem and in particular the Temple and its hierarchy had become hopelessly corrupt and was as culpable as it had been in the days of Jeremiah.

The judgment proclaimed by Jesus should not be interpreted as post-mortem judgment in hell but rather as warnings of a national disaster on the social, political as well as the military fronts of the impenitent Israel, which would climax in the destruction of Jerusalem in particular. His followers on the other hand were assured that they would escape these consequences of divine wrath and were admonished to keep themselves in readiness to do so at the right moment. Wright interprets the warnings of Jesus to have a quadruple character within the context of the times in which he lived:

- Firstly, within the wider context of Jewish sectarianism and within the milieu of first-century inner-Jewish polemic, distress over and pronouncements of judgment on the current regime with its corruption was considered loyalty to the true god and true vocation of the people of Israel.
- Secondly his warnings also fit seamlessly into the context of Palestine straining under the threat of oppressive Roman rule: God, finally returning to his people, would find that they, rejecting Jesus' programme of peace, had been untrue to their vocation - they had opted for militant action against Rome, only to be allowed by YHWH to fall under crushing retaliatory judgment from the latter, as well as divine judgment at the hands of their god who, having warned his people through time immemorial, now deliberately abandoned them to their fate.

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- Thirdly, although this message may be interpreted to have general validity for all times and generations of Israelite, Jesus fine-tuned it to be time-specific to the very moment in history he was addressing.
- Lastly, his message antagonised several parties at variants with each other: It was counter-revolutionary and specifically warned his followers against the Pharisees who had revolution on their agenda.

His words and actions launched scathing attacks on the Temple and Temple-establishment, calling it a den of "*Iesta*", inviting his hearers to join him in establishing the true Temple and like of a predecessor, Jeremiah, aggravating the chief priests as keepers of the Temple in all its inviolability. All of this implies a serious renovation and alteration of Israel's traditional symbols depicting their worldview. Needless to say, it was perceived to be a serious threat and Jesus to be a traitor and it would lead directly to conflict with those upholding, officially and unofficially, the very symbols he wished to subvert and undermine through his teaching. But more than this: "Behind his conflict with rival agendas, Jesus discerned, and spoke about, a greater battle, in which he faced the real enemy. Victory over this enemy, Jesus claimed, would constitute the coming of the kingdom" (Wright 1996:200).

Wright feels perfectly justified in his kingdom-exposé seeing that it satisfies his two major hypothesis-criteria, namely that it includes the data and that, within a fairly simple framework, it "places Jesus credibly within the turbulent world of first-century Judaism" (Wright 1996:367).

In conclusion, Wright (1996:367, 368) Wright states that Jesus' story of the kingdom told in a subversive way of the long-awaited final end to Israel's long exile with the present regime in Jerusalem targeted as the main antagonist. Jesus spoke and acted as prophet for the true ancestral traditions of Israel, "denouncing what he saw as deviation and corruption at the very heart of Israel's present life" (Wright 1996:367). This denunciation could not but provoke anger and dissent and this wrath would concentrate

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itself in hotspots exactly where Jesus' story with all the symbols sacred to and characteristic of the prophet threw down the gauntlet to opposing symbols at the heart of the dominant worldview.

2.3.4 Dramatic recension: Same title, different plays

On the subject of the kingdom Meier (1994 [2]:237-349) writes that one searches in vain for explicit comments by Jesus on any burning social issues or political injustices of his day:

Direct excoriation of economic exploitation, so prominent in certain OT prophets, is largely absent from Jesus' words and can be read into them only by contorted exegesis. The reason for this disconcerting silence is simple: Jesus was an eschatological prophet tinged with apocalyptic in a sense that at least some of the OT prophets were not. The definitive arrival of God's kingly rule was imminent; calls for social and political reform...were thus beside the point.

(Meier 1994 [2]:332)

Meier refers to the fact that in the intertestamental period the symbol of God's rule had been used to refer to God's kingship in Israel's past, present and all eternity, and had been especially prominent in eschatological or apocalyptic contexts where it conveyed hope for the final future salvation of Israel. Anyone wishing to make use of this symbol would have to contend with that. After having examined four examples of kingdom-sayings and how they yield clues as to the question of how Jesus saw this future eschatological kingdom, he concludes that it had to be anticipated with intense expectation and prayer on the part of the disciples (Mt 6:10), that it would bring a reversal in the unjust oppression and suffering, a showering of the faithful Israelites with promised reward

and the joyful participation of believers (and even of some Gentiles!) in the heavenly banquet with Israel's patriarchs....when Jesus prophecies that God will save him

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out of death and seat him at the final banquet. The symbol of the banquet is “unpacked” with various images of consolation, the satisfaction of hunger, the inheritance of the land, the vision of God, the bestowal of mercy as well as with other metaphors meant to suggest and evoke what cannot properly be put into words: the fullness of salvation wrought by God beyond this present world....[I]t is clear that this future, transcendent salvation was an essential part of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom.

(Meier 1994 [2]:349, 350)

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:87), after his minute examination of Q, remarks that John’s speech on the crisis of impending judgment and deliverance in Q 3:7-9 and 16-17 as well as Jesus’ declaration on the restoration or liberation of Israel in Q 22:28-30, function as the opening and closing respectively of the whole series of speeches comprising Q and that the principal, unifying theme of the whole document is clearly “the kingdom of God. He points out that, featured prominently at crucial points in most of the speeches (6:20; 7:28; 10:9; 11; 11:2; 20; 12:31; 13:18-21, 28-29; 16:16; 22:28-30), the kingdom of God is virtually assumed or taken for granted, not only as the focus of Q discourses, but also as the comprehensive agenda of preaching, practice, and purpose in Q.

What does the kingdom of God comprise in Q? Immediately after a discourse condemning the Pharisees and scribes, Q 12:2-12 exhorts the Q people to be confident and bold when brought before authorities for the heavenly court will bring vindication and judgment for the Q people and the Pharisees and scribes respectively. This shows the kingdom of God to be double-edged promising judgment and retribution for those who fail to respond to its presence but vindication and salvation for those who respond and makes all mention of this kingdom either a threat and warning or a promise and reassurance, depending on one’s response to it. A single-minded pursuit of the kingdom, the renewal of Israel, will dissolve the anxieties of the Q people about their daily necessities for it will provide

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what is needed (Q 12:33-31 [33-34]) and it. The Pharisees and scribes are condemned for effectively blocking the people's entry into the kingdom (11:29-32, 39-52), but in the face of such opposition the Q people are encouraged to confess with confidence (12:2-12) for despite their poverty they would be absolved from all anxiety in their pursuit of the kingdom which means bread and the cancellation of debts for those seeking it with single-minded fervour (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:87, 88, 270).

The discourse in Q 7:18-35 Jesus' teaching and actions are claimed to be a fulfilment of the persistent longing of Israel as captured especially in prophecies that "became incorporated into the Isaiah scroll (cf. Isa. 61:1; 35:5-6; 42:6-7)" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:96), with John fulfilling the prophecy of messenger preparing the way for the new exodus. The discourse in its entirety is bent upon embodying the fulfilment of Israelite prophecy, for the climax of the history of Israel, its renewal (in its basic social form, the village community) – the kingdom of God – an event surpassing anything heretofore experienced in greatness, is now underway in the mission of Jesus. The "finger of God" is claimed to be active in the exorcisms performed by Jesus, manifesting the kingdom of God like a new exodus (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:96, 97, 270).

The kingdom of God means the realisation and practice of just relations according to the covenant. If the "law and prophets" in Q 16:16a is indeed "...a standard phrase for the authoritative Israelite tradition among the people as well as in scribal circles, then Q 16:16 suggests simply that beginning with John the kingdom as the fulfilment of that tradition is suffering violence, not that the kingdom has superseded "the law and the prophets" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:115, 116). But if it referred to the great tradition in the popular mind, then the "law and prophets" version of Israelite tradition which had prevailed up to the point of intervention by God's prophet as instrument of his innovative and decisive action for the renewal of his people, takes on a polemical edge. For "...the kingdom – including John, Jesus himself, and the Q prophets / or people – is

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experiencing violent opposition, apparently from rulers and their representatives” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:116).

Dunn, in attempting to ascertain what the driving force behind the mission of Jesus had been by reading the map of memories, reaches the conclusion that his message of the kingdom/kingship of God is one of the main signalling posts along the way to a clear view of Jesus, one which cannot be avoided but rather has to be heeded at all cost, for he seems to have lived out his mission in the light of the coming kingdom, encouraging his disciples to do the same. In this kingdom one is a *subject* and the loyalty to this kingdom should exceed all others, one is a *child* living in complete dependence on the goodness of God the Father, a *learner* of Jesus, *in service of what is right*, out of *love* to God as first priority and to one’s neighbour a close second, in *forgiveness* and *repentance* offered and received. Jesus envisioned a reconstituted community living as a *new family* around an *open table*, “...typifying the breaking down of boundaries between the religious and the nonreligious and...both imaging and to some extent already realising the hope of the great banquet of the coming kingdom” (Dunn 2003:888).

Within the context of Jewish expectation the term “kingdom of God” must have referenced a visible manifestation of God’s authority in a more complete and final way. Jesus seemed to expect the manifestation of that royal rule to be imminent. This imminent expectation brought about a crisis for Jesus audience, a crisis hinging on more than political or social levels, but nevertheless with indubitable consequences in both these spheres of life. Jesus envisioned a whole new social order, a new creation, or else he meant this as metaphor for a new society on earth: “For God’s rule would be characterized by eschatological reversal, the haughty humbled and the poor uplifted, the little ones made great, and the last given first place. And the kingdom’s coming would be attended by great suffering, and followed by judgment, but also by rich reward...for the penitent faithful” (Dunn 2003:885, 886). Dunn issues a warning, however, that one should not

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impoverish the thrust of Jesus' message by politicising it to mean a reconstituted peasant or village society. He envisions rather:

...a vision of society under God, where God's sovereign rule is at work, where his will is done; the political ramifications are inescapable but secondary...What can be said is that Jesus was recalled as encouraging and enacting a society which works to eliminate any unnecessary and hurtful boundaries between its members.

(Dunn 2003:887)

The message of the kingdom was intended expressly for Israel and Jesus' choice of the twelve may have betrayed a hope for the restoration of Israel, possibly reconstituted as the assembly of Yahweh with a new focal point for worship. But at the basis it was simply "...to bring good news for the poor and to call sinners. From a kingdom perspective, a society in which the poor are uncared for is unacceptable to God" (Dunn 2003:886).

Jesus was remembered as frequently announcing the realisation of many long-term prophetic hopes, with future blessings already provisionally enjoyed in the here and now.

But someone persistently announcing a new kingdom while criticising present social practices was bound to attract negative attention and incur suspicion, animosity and wrath from those who controlled and benefited from the status quo, such as the high-priestly party, so that it is hardly surprising, nor can it in all earnest be doubted, that he was executed as claimant to the throne of David, as the memory of the ironic "king of the Jews" signifies.

2.3.5 The script: How best to convey the message

2.3.5.1 Parables

When Jesus delivered his prophetic message, he very often and in a totally unique way used parables to best convey what was of such importance for Israel to hear and experience:

- “Jesus was articulating a new way of understanding the fulfilment of Israel's hope” (Wright 1996:176).
- “The struggle to understand a parable is the struggle for a new world to be born” (Wright 1996:176).
- “Jesus' parables, then, belong with, rework, re-appropriate and redirect Israel's prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. They belong substantially, as they stand, within the specific period of his public career and ministry, of his work as a prophet of judgment and renewal” (Wright 1996:180).
- They express "...the very heart of his message in their form as well as their content, in their style and language as well as their particular imagery and apocalyptic or allegorical meaning" (Wright 1996:181).¹⁹

Jesus used parables extensively. They were like blueprints of his career applied to explain and motivate "...the paradoxical and dangerous campaign he was undertaking" in a performative way (Wright 1996:181). In doing so he superponates constructively with many traditions and memories of old in the minds of his listeners - the telling of stories about God that is so typical of the Old Testament, old and well-known Jewish themes such as the image of a vine/vineyard or sheep/flock used for Israel and shepherd for her king as well as more contemporary ones such as steward and master or son and father for Israel and God. In doing so he

¹⁹ Crossan (1992:152) writes: “It is a parable’s destiny to be interpreted and those interpretations will necessarily be diverse. When the diversity ceases, the parable is dead and the parabler is silent.”

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was inviting his listeners to enter into the world of the stories depicted by the parables and identify themselves in terms of the narrative.

Similarly the parables are reminiscent of apocalyptic discourses with their extraordinary storyline, secret symbols and cryptic undermining of present powerful and dominant status quo and encouragement and support of one new and revolutionary. Just like apocalyptic literature they defy understanding in all but those "with ears to hear" implying the true Israel, people of the covenant God who will be vindicated while the rest of Israel and the world will fall under divine judgment.²⁰ Some of the parables bore strong resemblance to Jewish apocalyptic and subversive literature (e.g. Qumran), with the disciples in the role of the traditional seer or recipient of the apocalyptic message. Jesus himself would then be seen as both discloser and interpreter of the mystery, an angel usually being the interpreter in apocalypses.

The mystery, when revealed and explained, proves a dangerous one. The climax and/or crisis in the history, or "the controlling story" (Wright 1996:178) of Israel is drawing nigh, but there are some dramatic and unexpected new twists in the way that it will come to realization. What had been perceived to have been the most cherished of cultural boundaries and religious and social symbolic bastions, basically questions underlying an entire worldview, is challenged in this "controlling story" which in some ways sounds strangely familiar but in others astoundingly different.

He expresses strongly his belief that Jesus, as oracular prophet, had indeed announced oracles of judgment on God's recalcitrant, unrepentant

²⁰ Dunn (2003:494) writes on the *masal*, the word most probably used for this style-form by Jesus, that it had a range of meaning. He explains that, confronted by the "paradox of the parables", which typically denoted proverbial wisdom but in broader reference could also refer to an obscure or puzzling saying, one should not allow the more impecuniary Greek word, "*parabole*", to limit one's thinking on the range of interpretive possibilities allowed by the original term: "If Jesus referred to his teaching (in whole or part) as *meshalim*, then the *double entendre* lay close to hand. He could hardly have been unaware that his teaching, while bringing light to some, came across to others as obscure and puzzling....Parable even more than metaphor...depends for its effect on the hearer's hearing of it, on how it impacts the hearer". One should heed, however, against thinking that Jesus would have used a word denoting a form of style to try and mould the free orality of his teaching accordingly, all the more since one doesn't actually know whether he used this term or not.

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people in a way that had come to be expected of and was considered completely natural in the prophetic vocation and role. The warnings typically issued by Jesus were that Israel was treading a path of doom that would consequently incur God's judgment on his people through disaster affecting the whole nation and very aspect of their lives, if they did not repent and change their ways.

According to Wright (in Borg & Wright 1999:41) “[t]his was not simply the present and local aspect of Jesus’ opposition to a more general phenomenon called ‘the domination system’; it was the unique and decisive challenge to the people of God at the crucial point in their history.”

Sanders (1985:115-117), using the criterion of dissimilarity, suspects the warnings about imminent judgment and the summons for repentance directed at Israel of either conforming to the message of John or betraying the creative activity of the early church. Borg (1984:201-227, 265-276), however, is in agreement with Wright when he says that he believes the tradition of the judgment sayings to be on firm footing.

Wright views these admonitions to be in line with those of the classic prophetic type, thus placing Jesus firmly in line with the "...sad, noble, and utterly Jewish tradition of Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist" (Wright 1996:185). So, when he warns against false prophets who urged the people to place their trust in the Temple, it is strongly reminiscent of Jeremiah warning against the very same thing. Like Micaiah ben Imlach he sees in Israel a flock scattered on the mountains with no shepherd. He knows what fate awaits prophets in Jerusalem, that they stone emissaries and kill the prophets of God.

Wright is convinced of Jesus’ awareness of his own impending death. Dunn (2003:378) agrees with him, saying: “Given the precedent of what had happened to his mentor, the Baptist, and given that Roman power in Judea would be, if anything, more arbitrary and ruthless, it would be very odd indeed if Jesus did not reckon with the possibility of his life being

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abruptly cut short by quasi-judicial or other means.” He discusses several landmarks, all pointing in the direction of a knowledge prior to the event, such as a self-identification of Jesus with and awareness of the fate of the prophets, the mounting hostility surrounding him, his passion predictions, and his use of other metaphors such as cup, baptism and fire (Dunn 2003:796-804). And he concludes: “He is clearly remembered as fully alive to the traditional fate of the prophet to be rejected, and his enemies were no doubt equally aware of that tradition” (Dunn 2003:889).

In the opinion of Wright, Jesus' anticipation of his own death places him so firmly within the mould of a prophet that it becomes one more piece of evidence proving without a doubt that "...his habitual praxis marked him out as a prophet, in the sense of one announcing to Israel an urgent message from the covenant god" (Wright 1996:185). On the other hand he welcomed those who heeded his message and gathered them, people of all kinds, as his followers announcing to them a message of vindication, once again in line with the prophets of tradition and putting his message into operation around him.

2.3.5.2 Miraculous deeds

Wright next touches on a subject which has occupied theologians for centuries, but which simultaneously forms one of the most direct links to the prophets of old – the miracles of Jesus.

The first onslaughts on the miracle had been made by Spinoza, Chubb (see Dunn 2003:29) and Reimarus (see Chapter 1 above). H E G Paulus, at the climax of rationalism (and K A Hase and K Venturini before him), tried to explain Jesus' miracles as plausible naturalistic feats, so that Jesus himself and not his feats became miraculous and therefore still significant, while careful not to remove God completely from the picture. His intentions were, however different from the outcome: “My greatest wish is that my views on the miraculous narratives should by no means be taken for the chief matter. O, how empty would be devotion or religion, if the truth

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depended on whether one believed in miracles or not” (in Brown 1985:165).

Strauss (1835:56-57) had no qualms in dismissing the gospels as myth containing hardly anything of historical value precisely on the grounds that they brimmed with contradictions and implausible tales of the supernatural. Ernest Renan is similarly distrustful of miracles: “If miracles has any reality, this book is but a tissue of errors....If, on the contrary, the miracle is an inadmissible thing, then I am right in regarding the books which contain miraculous recitals as histories mixed with fictions, as legends full of inaccuracies, errors, and of systematic expedients” (Renan 1864:xi).

Many scholars have broadly followed this line of thought, not least of these Bultmann. Crossan, Mack and Vaage are presently some of its notable exponents. Crossan, for instance, in a passage which sums up his views on the miraculous, writes:

I presume that Jesus, who did not and could not heal that disease or any other one, healed the man’s illness by refusing to accept the disease’s ritual uncleanness and social ostracization (sic)...By healing the illness without curing the disease, Jesus acted as an alternative boundary keeper in a way subversive to the established procedures of his society. Such a position may seem to destroy the miracle. But miracles are not changes in the physical world so much as changes in the social world.

(Crossan 1994:82)

On the other hand, while scholars in the so-called “Third Quest” such as Wright (1996), Craig Evans (1989:35-36) and Ben Witherington III (1994), while not reverting to a “new conservatism”, have thrown open the shutters imposed upon miracles by rationalism and scepticism in a “post-mythological era” (Evans).

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Craffert and Botha (2005:5-35), in an article on *inter alia* his walking on water, issue a warning to scholars busying themselves with the study of Jesus' miraculous deeds:

[M]uch of current scholarship either does not consider cultural events relevant for discussion in this case or simply assumes that the reports were either about objective, observable supernatural events or simply made-up narratives about some other aspect (such as authority) in society. Each of these “looking the sources in the face” excludes the possibility of seeing a cultural but real event, because the register of reality adopted does not allow such events.

(Craffert & Botha 2005:19)

Instead of naturalist solutions, they offer by way of explaining his walking on water that he probably did, if it can be understood adequately as a cultural event. Like Borg (in Borg & Wright 1999) they apply the metaphor of lenses in viewing this miracle: “Lens shapes image and we have to reflect about our lenses” (2005:18).

Vermes (2003:6) issues a similar warning that it has to be borne in mind that it is anachronistic and therefore incorrect to judge the events of the first century with modern-day criteria.

He furthermore sees a likeness in the healings performed by Jesus to those achieved by faith-healers and their “secular counterparts in the field of medicine” if the person in question has faith in the healer's abilities.

He applies an appropriate lens to attempt to understand how, in the time of Jesus understood illness, and discovers a relationship in their understanding between sickness, devil and sin. Till more or less the third century BCE consulting a physician in case of illness was considered to display a lack of faith since God owned the monopoly on all acts of healing that were to be performed exclusively by men of God as his instruments.

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The holy man, apart from “healing the flesh and exorcising the mind”, had the additional task of forgiveness of sin to perform.

Jesus’ healing abilities were never attributed to any study of disease, but rather to a mysterious power emanating from him and transmitted to the sick by means of touch, or even contact with his clothes. Vermes (2003:6-9) brings to the attention the incident reported (see Chapter 5 below) in a Talmudic report on Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa about the expectation that a prophet would be able to perform a cure in a similar fashion and that when people saw the Rabbi’s healing skill they assumed that he must be a prophet.

In terms of his exorcisms Vermes (2003:8) points out that he differed from the “professional exorcists in refraining from chanting incantations or pungent substances. “Jesus confronted with great authority and dignity the demoniacs and commanded the devil to depart.” He says that, instead of ascribing physical and mental illness to natural causes, Jesus’ contemporaries saw the former as a divine punishment for sin instigated by the devil, and the latter as resulting from a direct demonic possession. In this way, by expelling and controlling these evil spirits, the exorcist was believed to be acting as God’s agent in the work of liberation, healing and pardon.

Dunn (2003:889) writes about Jesus: “He was a famous exorcist and healer in his day, and many experienced miraculous happenings in his company. But he evidently resisted any temptation to take on the role of itinerant wonder-worker, and to call him “magician” is as dismissive and denigratory now as it was then.”

Followers and determined non-followers of Jesus alike are witnesses to his remarkable powers. This is attested to by accusations of his being empowered by Beelzebul, unlikely to have been invented by the early church, and not advanced unless needed as explanation for some “quite

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remarkable phenomena" (Wright 1996:187).²¹ He says that the closest word to "miracle" in the Greek would be "*thaumasia*" in Matthew 21:15 indicating "...that something has happened, in what we would call the "natural" world, which is not what would have been anticipated, and which seems to provide evidence for the active presence of an authority, a power, at work, not invading the created order as an alien force, but rather enabling it to be more truly itself" (Wright 1996:188).

He differentiates between magic and miracle, saying that magic is the human manipulation of divine or quasi-divine forces with harmful results, whereas a miracle is the gracious act of a god with beneficial results.

Crossan states that

...magic is to religion as banditry is to politics. As banditry challenges the ultimate legitimacy of political power, so magic challenges that of spiritual power....Religion is official and approved magic; magic is unofficial and unapproved religion. More simply: "we" practice (sic) religion, "they" practice (sic) magic. The question is not whether magicians are for or against official religion. Their very existence, totally apart from such intentions, is a challenge to its validity and exclusivity.

(Crossan 1991:305)

Wright points out that Crossan has widened the earlier meaning of "magic", including within his understanding of the term any mighty work performed outside an unofficial context. And that "Crossan pours scorn on those who refuse to recognize that Jesus - and for that matter the Jewish charismatics Honi and Hanina, and the prophets Elijah and Elisha - were in some such sense 'magicians'" (Wright 1996:190). Crossan indeed describes magic as "subversive, unofficial, unapproved, and often lower-class religion" (Crossan 1991:305) and furthermore that "[M]agic, simply, is what any socio-religious ascendancy calls its deviant shadow" (Crossan 1991:309).

²¹ Confer Matthew 12:24-32/Mark 3:20-30/Luke 11:14-23 and Thomas 35.

These views of Crossan lead him to ponder the reported miraculous deeds of Jesus and he takes as a starting point that "...few serious historians now deny that Jesus, and for that matter many other people, performed cures and did other startling things for which there was no obvious natural explanation" (Wright 1996:188). The miraculous activities of Jesus do not allow themselves to be labelled according to any known pattern, nor do they fit into the complete picture of the ministry of Jesus with the obvious unease of later additions. Instead they fit seamlessly into the bigger picture as part and parcel of the story which Jesus was not only telling but illustrating in the context of what he called "faith". Like John the Baptist, his movement *in toto* could be seen to be non-conformist, subversive and a serious threat to the social, cultural and religious world of his day. But his followers would have perceived his mighty works to have been a confirmation and one sign amongst others of his claim that the kingdom of the god of Israel was on the verge of realization. "They were indications of a prophetic ministry to be ranked at the very least with those of Elijah and Elisha" (Wright 1996:196).

Most of the "mighty works" of Jesus are works of healing, whereby membership in Israel is restored to those who, as a result of their condition, had been labelled as being ritually unclean. Thus the healings, just as his open welcome to sinners, had the intended effect of welcoming the unwelcome in his initiation of the rule of the healing and sovereign god of Israel. The re-inclusion of the outcasts also pertained to his association with the dead which, instead of rendering him unclean, instead brought restoration to them. It pertained likewise to the miracles performed for gentiles and a Samaritan in order to carry the message of their inclusion within the people of YHWH. This non-exclusivist message and the actions pertaining to it furthered his subversive agenda. The vindication for which they had longed, had been accomplished in the here and now, the waiting was over. On them was bestowed the unsurpassed blessings of the renewed covenant and it included the forgiveness of sins.

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These signs of covenant renewal may also be seen in the multiplication of the bread in the wilderness and the stilling of storms, both according to Wright carrying overtones of the exodus. Other acts such as the withering of the fig tree and his actions in the Temple symbolize the flipside of the coin, namely the judgment that would fall on those of the nation who would not repent. He concludes that the mighty works were never meant to be a power display, but formed an essential part of the fulfilment of the promises that had been made to Israel as a whole and were as such the inauguration of the kingdom of their god coming "...in power to save and heal" (Wright 1996:193) and quotes Matthew 15:31: "They glorified the god of Israel" (Wright 1996:193). Israel believed herself to be the linchpin of what god the creator was doing and therefore her restoration would also mean that the whole of creation would be restored; hence the overtones found in the gospels of the natural order being restored to its original state of harmony and the divine salvific purpose which had previously only been seen in events such as the crossing of the Red Sea. Within these ranks he includes the extraordinary catch of fish in Luke 5:4-11, the stilling of storms, the feedings in the desert, and in a negative sense the withering of the fig tree. "The echoes of prophecy, and the theme of fulfilment, belong therefore not simply in later theological reflection, but as part of the question, what did people see when they saw Jesus at work? The praxis of the prophet invited the interpretation: he was announcing the great fulfilment, the great renewal, the time when Israel's god would at last become king" (Wright 1996:194).

However, Wright (1996:193) argues that Jesus believes the real battle has to be waged not against Rome, but against the Satan and therefore engages in head-on battle with him as is signified by the exorcisms. A battle with the accuser makes, according to Wright, perfect sense within the worldview of first-century Jews in which Jesus as a Jew would have partaken. He says the particular interest of the exorcisms lies in the fact that they did not form part of Old Testament predictions nor of first-century Jewish expectations for the coming kingdom and the healing and deliverance expected to accompany it, nor yet were they a major focus of

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the life and work of the early church. The criterion of dissimilarity thus points them out to be manoeuvres in a battle in which Jesus alone was engaged, with the exorcisms indicating that he was winning (Mt 12:28/Lk 11:20) although the battle was still building up to its climax. But he elaborates his point further to claim that Jesus saw himself as more than a prophet (Wright 1996:196,197); that he saw himself as the prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18 through whose work Israel's history would finally reach a climax in the inauguration of the kingdom.

To summarise: Jesus the prophet is saying that Israel is at long last experiencing the true return from exile. YHWH is finally returning to Zion and judgment awaits those in Israel who has failed to be truly loyal to their God. All this is coming to pass in and by Jesus' own work. There is nothing original in the mould of this claim; it had been used many a time by movements in this, the second-Temple period. What is unique though, is the content of this message which drastically redefines both fulfilment and catastrophe through his work. This drastic redefinition can be tolerated when and if it only pertains to his own work and private actions. However, the moment it leads to what Wright terms a "Clash of Symbols" – and he believes that exactly this occurs at various junctions in his public career - he becomes a danger.

2.3.6 Code red: Symbols and controversy

A very important part of Wright's understanding of the antagonism which greeted Jesus and ended his life, comprises his theory on symbols: "Controversy, and perhaps even violence, can be expected at the point where, in continuing our journey around the worldview model, we arrive at the quadrant labelled 'symbols', the things which bring the worldview into visibility" (Wright 1996:369). His argument is that neither wandering holy men nor healers were an unusual sight at the time, and although the stories told by Jesus were radically subversive and clanged the final bell in the ears of Israel, the opposition and aggression were not in response to

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these. He maintains that only the clash of symbols could have elicited a response of anger akin to that with which he had finally met.

In his prophetic office he deliberately and proficiently targeted the symbols of Israel which carried in them the potential for explosive contention, as Wright eloquently illustrates in the following quotation:

One can close one's eyes to unexpected behaviour. One can stop one's ears against a tale newly told. But if someone burns the flag, something must be done. Controversy, and perhaps even violence, can be expected at the point where, in continuing our journey around the worldview model, we arrive at the quadrant labelled "symbols", the things which bring the worldview into visibility....Stories may be subversive. But lay a finger on a cherished symbol, and the fat will be in the fire.

(Wright 1996:369)

Wright argues forcibly that Jesus, in his annunciation of the kingdom of Israel's God, covertly and overtly targeted what had over time become the standard symbols of the Jewish second-Temple worldview, redrawing their symbolic world and replacing it with his own deeply provocative symbols (see Wright 1996:369, 372). He attacks those symbols he considers to be showing resistance to his own vision for the kingdom. This leads to his contemporaries labelling him as a revolutionary who is "leading people astray", an offence spelled out in Deuteronomy 13.

In his usual rule-of-thumb way Wright pronounces the so-called controversy stories to be in all possibility historically correct, but meaning something completely different to what had previously been surmised; they do not address the subjects of religion or morality, but far more likely those of eschatology and politics. When he clashes with his contemporaries it is not because of any abstract religious ideas or moral values, but because of extremely topical eschatological beliefs and indeed agendas. "What was at

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stake was *eschatology*, ...not a comparison between two styles or patterns of religion” (Wright 1996:380). So when the Pharisees preach purity and fiercely defend the Temple cult, the observance of Sabbaths, food taboos and circumcision, they are actually aiming for that which is symbolized by the laws of purity, namely “...the political struggle to maintain Jewish identity and realize the dream of national liberation” (Wright 1996:378, 379).

In this sense defending the ancestral codes - the Sabbath and other festivals, food laws and taboos, laws of purity, et cetera - was not merely the defence of “...some abstract system, but of the Jewish nation whose laws these are” (Wright 1996:388). He expounds that it is undeniable that, in the first century, there had been a substantial amount of people, not least in Judaea and Galilee, who considered themselves Jewish. This they did on the basis, more or less, of shared ancestry. These people considered it their god-given duty to protect that identity by careful observation of the god-given law, particularly the laws of Sabbath, food, and circumcision, and of the sanctity of the Temple which set them apart (Wright 1996:389).

Three of the four of these became bones of contention in disputes between Jesus and his contemporaries, but the Pharisees especially. That is what separated Jew from Gentile and “These key ‘works of Torah’ were the constant *leitmotiv* of Jewish...existence” (Wright 1996:384). He is certain that the Pharisees, clinging tenaciously to the Jewish identity and its signposts took a very lively interest in the actions of those outside of their own circle and calls to mind Saul of Tarsus and Josephus who had “...been sent...to investigate, and to deal with, activities that might prove troublesome and dangerous” (Wright 1996:379) and a passage in Philo from which he quotes to prove that the Pharisees were merciless guardians and upholders of the ancestral traditions.

Thus Israel gets what she had hoped for, but as the result of YHWH’s initiative and Jesus’ *modus operandi*. The politics of his day that Jesus

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strives to undermine through his kerugmatic kingdom is the “revolutionary anti-pagan zeal” as taught and aspired to by the main body of (Shammaite) Pharisaic teaching and that he believed to be the direct cause of Israel’s imminent ruin (see Wright 1996:372).

2.3.6.1 The Torah

On the subject of the Torah the question becomes not what to think of the Torah in the abstract, but what the God of Israel is doing with and for Israel and the world and what role has the Torah to play in this. God, through Jesus, is innovating, creating that which had been yearned for by Israel and everything will change. The Torah is important to lay down laws for human conduct, but it did not touch the heart. However, when God fulfils his promises, hearts will be changed and the superlative importance of the Torah will be diminished. He refers to Paul who says that the holy, good, just Torah can become demonic in the system by which Israel strives to maintain her own superiority and it is therefore understandable that Jesus would have found various aspects of the Mosaic dispensation to challenge with regards to their adequacy, on the grounds that the day for a new dispensation was now dawning. (see Wright 1996:382, 383). All of this leads him to the important conclusion that “[I]t was precisely Jesus’ eschatological programme which led him into opposition with a good many of his contemporaries, and which finally steered him towards the actions which provoked his death” (Wright 1996:383).

The zenith of conflict, according to Wright, was that Jesus announced the arrival of God’s kingdom, here and now, through his own person, praxis and stories, warning his contemporaries that their interpretation of tradition would be the cause of their downfall and urging them to instead embrace his interpretation, which, though it did not seem that way at present, is the way to victory. Jesus interpreted anew the scriptural tradition which he shared with his Jewish contemporaries, offering “critique from within”(Wright 1996:385) on the zeal for the aspects of the Torah that fuelled Jewish exclusivism over against the Gentiles.

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With the inauguration of the Kingdom of the one true God already occurring through the words and actions of Jesus, it became clear that this kingdom would be characterized not by exclusivism, the setting up of boundaries or defensiveness, not by angry zeal, by retribution, or violent revolution against the *gojim*, but by the radically different interpretation of Israel's ancestral tradition, hence the calling for Israel to be the light of the world, to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile and to love her enemies.

Wright believes the stories of the plucking of the corn and the Sabbath-healings to be perfectly plausible historically. When Jesus opposes the revolutionary aspirations of his day he claims that he does so on authority of the God of Israel and the scriptures. Of course fastidious Pharisees would want his teachings and actions examined to see if it complied with their standards of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, if the new kingdom-prophet would be a fellow-defender of ancestral tradition and if he would side with them in their revolutionary aspirations. Jesus answered their questions about his Sabbath-healing with a legal argument, so implying that his eschatology with its kingdom-praxis could not be refuted or contested, even if the symbolic implications thereof raised their animosity.

Jesus' response to the corn-plucking charge he believes to be a "kingdom parallel in an essentially kingdom-case" (Wright 1996:393). The hearer is invited to find which role he is playing as in the parable of the prodigal son. David, the true king, was fleeing before Saul, but was eventually vindicated by YHWH himself. Jesus and his followers represent David and his band of men. The Pharisees are in the role of Saul's spying servant Doeg, running off to report to the authorities. With the cryptic words of Jesus: "The son of man is lord of the Sabbath" he believes Jesus to be referring to himself "...as the one anointed but not yet enthroned, as the one who would be vindicated when YHWH finally did for Israel what he intended to do" (Wright 1996:394).

He adds that there is evidence that some first-century Jews would already have seen these words as a reference to the time when YHWH would

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vindicate Israel over her pagan enemies in a movement spearheaded by a Davidic king as the central figure. The Lukan Sabbath-healing stories he takes to mean that the Sabbath is the most appropriate day for this healing to take place, the Sabbath symbolising release from captivity or bondage, as well as from work. Jesus defines the plight of the woman to be bondage to the satan, an analogy of the plight of the whole Israel and that his ministry brought about the dawning of the great Sabbath of Israel's release from bondage, the woman's foreshadowing Israel's. But "[w]rapped in her own aspirations, she could not recognize the coming of the kingdom when it stood before her in flesh and blood" (Wright 1996:395).

A passage found in both Matthew and Mark deals with a dispute over hand-washing, then reports Jesus accusing the Pharisees of attaching importance to their traditions at the cost of scripture and concluding with his view on the essence of true purity as being a state of the heart rather than food ingested. Because Mark has to explain to his readers the customs around hand-washing, Wright believes them to fit better into the context of the ministry of Jesus than into the teachings of the early church. He sees these three occasions as being bound together by the central issue of purity and poses two questions, namely whether Jesus is loyal to the symbols of Israel's identity and who has the right to decide what constitutes this loyalty. Jesus teaches that true purity issues from the heart and so renders laws for purity redundant.

His teachings about family must likewise have caused animosity in Pharisaic circles, awarding loyalty to him precedence over family loyalty and identity "...which was both a universally recognized obligation in the ancient world and a major Jewish cultural and religious identity-symbol" (Wright 1996:402).

Israel had received a land in which to live and tribes and families had been allotted their own portions of this land, to pass on from generation to generation as inheritance. It was part of Israel's cultural and religious symbolism to maintain their ownership of this land they received from God,

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quite apart from any individual security they might provide. But Jesus, in bringing about the real return from exile, had other things in mind than defending symbolic territorial inheritances and ethnic aspirations and he challenges his followers to renounce the religious and cultural bastions of family and property.

2.3.6.2 The Temple

According to Wright nearly all modern scholars agree that Jesus performed some kind of contentious action in the Temple (Mk 11:15-17 pars) and that this became one of the main reasons for his execution. Crossan, for example, writes: “No matter, therefore, what Jesus thought, said, or did about the Temple, he was its functional opponent, alternative, and substitute” (Crossan 1991:355) and “I think the symbolic destruction was but the logical extension of the miracle and table conjunction, of open healing and open eating; I think that it actually happened and, *if* it happened at Passover, *could* easily have led to arrest and execution” (Crossan 1991:360).

Dunn (2003:637) agrees that there is a wide consensus that Jesus did indeed engage in a symbolic act in the Temple referring to the “fairly lone voice” of Becker (1998:333,345) who believes: “...that Jesus did not engage in the action in the temple and that it cannot have been the cause of his final fate.” He believes that in all likelihood Jesus’ words regarding the future of the Temple had sparked the flame needed to incite his opponents to arrest him and that this leads to retrospection on the episode of the cleansing of the Temple a few days earlier. But he proceeds with caution:

Whatever Jesus may have intended (and we should beware of the easy assumption that he was following out a clearly thought-through strategy), the act could hardly have been understood by the priestly authorities as other than critical of the Temple in its present form or operation. Here we need to

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bear in mind that the Temple was the principal focus for economic and political power as well as for religious power.

(Dunn 2003:637, 638)

He maintains that the cleansing act may have appeared to others to have been some kind of symbolic purification of the Temple, a purification of the kind necessary if Zion was to fulfil its eschatological function, and such as is seen in several strands of Jewish expectation (Dunn 2003:639, 640).

Meier (1994:894) writes that the cursing of the fig-tree and the account of the Temple-cleansing are mutually explanatory, with the cursing of the fig-tree only assuming function or meaning when seen coupled with the Temple-cleansing where Jesus comes face to face with the fatal antagonism of the temple authorities as part of his climactic final days in Jerusalem. "As the passion tradition developed, a pre-Markan author sought to emphasize that the cleansing of the temple was not an act of reform and purification but rather a prophetic judgment on the temple....By mutual interpretation, the two intercalated stories made clear that Jesus was not urging the temple's reform but pronouncing the temple's doom."

The words of Carol Meyers express sufficiently the extreme importance of the Temple for Israel:

The Temple in conception was a dwelling place on earth for the deity of ancient Israel...The symbolic nature of the Jerusalem Temple...depended upon a series of features that, taken together, established the sacred precinct as being located at the cosmic center of the universe, at the place where heaven and earth converge and thus from where God's control over the universe is effected.

(Meyers, in Wright 1996:407)

Apart from being a place of superlative holiness with matching requirements for purity on the part of the person entering it, it was also the

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place where sacrifices took place and where burnt offerings and peace offerings were daily brought before God. For these latter two the Temple-tax was collected and this meant that the whole of Israel was involved in it. The people came to have their sins forgiven and to cleanse themselves through the sacrificial ritual in the Temple. This explains why the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the subsequent cessation of sacrifice filled the people of Israel with such an acute sense of tragedy and personal loss. Borg (1998:174) writes in this subject:

The centrality of the Temple as one of the two pillars of the post-exilic quest for holiness has already been developed. As the place of God's presence, a sign of Israel's election, and the sole locus of sacrifice where atonement was made for sins and impurity, it was an institution substantive to the definition and existence of Israel. Representing for most Jews "the nexus between heaven and earth," the *axis mundi* by which the holy was connected to the earth, its proper operation was essential for the holiness of the land.

(Borg 1998:174, quoting Neusner 1973:3)

The Temple also had considerable political significance. Anyone connected with it became people of great prestige and importance. Furthermore it had been a key feature in Solomon's reign and now, even though the monarchy had not been restored, the restoration of the Temple symbolized a measure of autonomy to the people of Israel. Coins were minted depicting the façade of the Temple and Herod's rebuilding of it seemed to cement his claim to kingship. According to Wright (1996:411) the Temple in this way functioned as the central political, as well as religious, symbol of Judaism. It represented not only YHWH's promise to dwell with his people, and to his expurgation of their sins, their impurities, and ultimately of their exile, but it likewise signified his legitimation of the rulers who built, rebuilt or ran it. Wright maintains that, because the Temple was bound up inextricably with

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the royal house and royal aspirations, it is imperative that Jesus' actions in relation to the Temple be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Borg (1984:174) voices the meaning that the Temple had a powerful role to play in Israel's resistance against Rome. Just as in the days of Jeremiah, the Temple had for many become the focal point of hope for national liberation, a guarantee that YHWH would be on the side of Israel when they launched their nationalist violence and defend her against her enemies. All this concurs with Jesus' accusation that the Temple had turned into a den of "*lesta*" which translates not as thieves but as revolutionaries. Light is also cast on the sentiments surrounding the Temple by Wright's remarks on the poorer classes who saw the Temple as a symbol of their oppression at the hands of the rich elite. He reminds his reader of an earlier remark of his that revolutionaries who took over the Temple at the start of the war, first of all made haste to burn the record of debts. As he eloquently puts it, the well-documented and widespread dislike of the ruling classes "...meant that the first-century Temple, and particularly the way in which it was being run, came in for regular criticism. Jesus' Temple action belongs on this larger map of disquiet" (Wright 1996:412).

Several scholars have recently argued, like Wright, that Jesus' Temple-action was a symbolic enactment of the destruction of the Temple in its entirety. According to Crossan the destruction of the Temple was the unavoidable result of its non-egalitarian and oppressive system.

I think it quite possible that Jesus went to Jerusalem only once and that the spiritual and economic egalitarianism he preached in Galilee exploded in indignation at the Temple as the seat and symbol of all that was nonegalitarian, patronal, and even oppressive on both the religious and the political level. Jesus' symbolic destruction simply actualised what he had already said in his teachings, effected in his healings, and realized in his mission of open commensality. But the confined and tinderbox atmosphere of the Temple at Passover, especially

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under Pilate, was not the same as the atmosphere in the rural reaches of Galilee, even under Antipas, and the soldiers moved in immediately to arrest him

(Crossan 1994:133)

Borg likewise interprets the Temple actions of Jesus as symbolic and prophetic:

Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, he apparently experienced a call....Like the prophets, he called Israel to be faithful to the Torah, but in a manner differing from present practice: the word “repent” had both an individual and national dimension. He even used one of their most characteristic means, the prophetic act. Clearly fitting into this category are his disruption of the Temple, his entry into Jerusalem, his table fellowship with outcasts....

Like Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah...Jesus warned that Israel’s course would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans. Like them...he was filled with sorrow about the suffering which he foresaw for his people.

(Borg 1998 2nd ed: 212)

Wright himself sees the Temple action as the “head corner-stone” of the “building under construction” (Wright 1996:415). He explains his methodology in interpreting it as the development of an hypothesis based on other elements and exploring how the Temple action may fit into it. Jesus, who understood his vocation to be that of a prophet within the long line of Israel’s prophetic tradition, a prophet such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, sometimes, like these prophets, acted symbolically. Very often their actions related to Jerusalem and the Temple and sometimes specifically to its destruction.

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Jesus fully underwrote the god-giveness of the institutions of Temple and Torah, but he offered, following tradition, sharp prophetic, symbolic critique from within – Israel was misappropriating these ancient symbols and this was leading her headlong into ruin. He warned on several occasions, just like Jeremiah, that the Temple would be destroyed by pagans in an outpouring of YHWH's wrath on his recalcitrant people. Jesus' kingdom-announcement and his warnings of imminent destruction echo the contexts of the prophecies of Zechariah, Isaiah and Jeremiah's. He quotes from the last two of these prophets and his actions involving the fig tree point ahead to his Temple-actions (see Meier 1994:894). Just as with the fig tree he went to the Temple expecting it to have borne fruit, but on finding none, he announces destruction because of its bareness. The saying about the mountain being cast into the sea is likewise not a general reference to the power of prayer and faith, but according to Wright refers to the Temple Mount which will be taken up and cast into the sea. His critique was part of his eschatological programme as may be expected from a prophet. *For Wright it makes sense that he would bring his prophetic career to a climax through an action which dramatized his prediction.* Moreover, he prophesied that Israel's God was at last becoming king. Then Israel would return from exile and YHWH would return to Zion. He would come to his Temple in mercy, but also in wrath and Herod's Temple would fall under his judgment. The Essenes would have confirmed that the Temple, under its façade of beauty, was rotten to the core and would have to be levelled with the ground if the return of Israel from exile and their God returning to dwell amongst them was truly to come about.

Jesus' itinerant ministry was characterized by a welcome to all and a challenge to become his followers. He would lead them away from the way of "zeal" which, although it is the conventional route of the day, was the route of folly which led to danger and ultimately destruction and onto his way, which, although it may appear to be subversive, is the way of true wisdom. The welcome and warning of his ministry likewise focuses on the Temple and warnings of its imminent destruction by foreign armies in language strongly reminiscent of Jeremiah and Daniel.

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The Temple had always symbolized and drawn together the themes of Israel's national life and self-understanding in its entirety, so Jesus focuses on the Temple when he conceptualises the new and subversive way of being Israel. Rome would become the agent of YHWH's wrath because Israel failed to obey YHWH's call to be his people in the true sense of the word by committing on a large scale to national rebellion and tolerating social injustice in its midst. The house built on sand would become a pile of rubble if Israel did not repent and accept his challenge to become God's people in a new way, but what he had erected through his announcement of the kingdom would endure, for it was built on rock. His actions during his Galilean ministry challenged the symbols which were the focal points of the thoughts, aspirations and actions of many of his contemporaries, especially the Pharisees. Wright emphasizes that virtually all the traditions, in the canonical gospels and further afield, which speak of Jesus and the Temple, announce not its cleansing nor reform, but its destruction in no uncertain terms. He argues as evidence that it originated from Jesus himself - all these can surely not be retrojections, nor do they fit, according to him, early Christian theology.

But Jesus, according to the author, saw himself as more than a prophet like Jeremiah who announced doom and destruction upon the Temple. He understood himself to be the true king who had been given authority to speak and act as he did. Like Meyer (1992:263) who spoke of Jesus conjuring up the nation's most compelling traditions exactly when they were at their most receptive, Wright says that "[P]assover pilgrims with their hearts set on YHWH's kingdom, would have been most likely to comprehend the multiple symbolic meanings of his action" (Wright 1996:417). But why did Jesus target the Temple traders through his actions? It seems strange that he would have singled them out as the ones to be banished from the Temple.

Borg (1998:188).suggests:

The key lies in recognizing the reason for their presence on the Temple mount in the first century: to protect the holiness of the Temple. They did this by exchanging profane coinage for “holy” coinage, by providing sacrificial doves (and, as in John, animals) guaranteed free from blemish. Manifesting the clear-cut distinction between holy/profane, holy nation/profane nations, their activity served and symbolized the quest for holiness understood as separation, a quest at the root of resistance to Rome.

Wright is of the opinion that Jesus was not attempting a reform, but enacting a judgment. If there were no Temple-tax, there would be no sacrifice, if there were no Temple currency, worshippers could not buy pure animals to sacrifice. If there were no animals, no sacrifice could take place. And without sacrifice the Temple would lose its whole *raison d'être*. According to Wright (1996:423, 424) Jesus' action symbolized his belief that, in returning to Zion, YHWH would not after all take up residence in the Temple. The reason for this was that YHWH did not legitimate its present administration or the role it played within the first-century Jewish symbolic world. Instead, as Josephus himself claims to have realized, the cessation of sacrifice meant that the God of Israel would use Roman troops as instruments of his punishment. They would execute upon the Temple the fate which its own impurity, not least its sanctioning of the ideology of national resistance, had brought upon it. The brief disruption effected in the Temple's normal business by Jesus' Temple action symbolized the destruction which would befall the whole institution within a generation.

Sanders (1993:259) has an opinion similar to his:

If Jesus threatened the Temple, or predicted its destruction shortly after he overturned tables in its commercial area..., he did not think that he and his small band could knock down the walls, so that not one stone was left on another. He thought

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that God would destroy it. As a good Jewish prophet, he could have thought that God would employ a foreign army for this destruction; but, as a radical first-century eschatologist, he probably thought that God would do it directly.

And then Wright reveals a crucial part of his understanding of Jesus by saying: “But I do not think that Jesus’ action was motivated by his expectation that YHWH would shortly build a new Temple of bricks and mortar. I think that Jesus saw himself, and perhaps his followers with him, as the new Temple” (Wright 1996:426).

He refers to Israel’s royal ideology and how closely it was bound up with the Temple. He reminds his readers that the shaky line that it traced from David and Solomon through to finally Bar-Kochba bears witness to this, as well as does passages such as Zecharaiah 6 and Psalms of Solomon 17. He poses the questions whether Jesus made this link, whether his Temple-action was not only prophetic but deliberately messianic and whether the onlookers got this point. And his answer to all of these is “Yes”.

2.3.7 Positive symbols of the kingdom

We have now seen that Jesus, in true prophetic style, set his face against the central institutions and symbols of Israel. He did so, not because he thought they were bad in themselves, but because he believed they were being wrongly used by his contemporaries to buttress a spurious reading and enacting of the true Jewish worldview.

(Wright 1996:428)

2.3.7.1 A new worldview

The symbols of the work of Jesus did not mean that his followers had to abandon their prevailing worldview, they were merely invited to buy into an alternative one. When Jesus retold the story of Israel, one of the main

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kingdom-themes of his telling was that both the real return from exile and the true return of YHWH to Zion, was coming about in and through his own work. He chose major worldview-symbols to strengthen and illuminate the retelling in theory and praxis. They are the symbols of Israel's hope and accumulate in order of importance from land and family to Torah and Temple. "Jesus subverted the common interpretation of these, and offered his own fresh and positive alternatives" (Wright 1996:428).

Wright believes that Jesus intended his "mighty works" of healing to be seen in the light of his prophecies of return from exile, and of YHWH to Zion which would both bring about a dramatic restoration of creation. His healings were socially and religiously subversive, but were to be understood symbolically as the fulfilment of expectations such as were expressed in Isaiah 35:1-2, 5-6 and 10, that YHWH was coming to save and heal his people. This belief is strengthened by the answer that Jesus gives John the Baptist in Matthew 11:4-6 and Luke 7:22-23 when John is puzzled by Jesus' modus operandi, pointing out the symbolic value of his characteristic praxis, namely that the blind are seeing, the lame walking, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are being resurrected and the poor are receiving the good news. And he adds: "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Mt 11:6). Jesus offered healing and restored human lives and human communities through the coming of the kingdom rather than restored land, inheritance and possessions. "The pearl of great price was available for those who sold everything else" (Wright 1996:429).²²

He maintains that Jesus deliberately acted in a symbolic prophetic fashion, purposefully travelling to Jerusalem, choosing the Temple mount for his action and the Mount of Olives for his discourse, so that his actions may evoke symbolically those exact strands of kingdom-expectation he was claiming to fulfil.

²² See Matthew 13:45, The Gospel of Thomas 76.

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He drastically challenged the symbolism of family and nation and in creating a fictive kinship of restored, redefined family around himself, reminiscent of that of Qumran, he gathered his followers around himself in total devotion and loyalty to himself, advising them to leave the dead to bury the dead and go and announce the kingdom, so overriding even the most pressing of the usual symbolic obligations. In calling twelve close disciples Jesus symbolically announces that here YHWH is at last restoring and redefining his people of Israel, creating a new family, open to all, even those traditionally beyond the pale of the borders of the Israelite nation. The prophets had foretold a time when many would come from east and west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God. *According to Wright, Jesus the prophet was saying through his symbolic acts among other things, that this time had arrived* and that the only requirement for kinship within this renewed family was loyalty to him. All who underwrote his agenda and was an ally of his kingdom-movement was welcome to share in open table-fellowship with him, one of the best-known and most characteristic features of the work of Jesus. And this was controversial, because if these open table-fellowships were symbolic of the inauguration into the long-awaited kingdom, they implied that sinners and all the wrong people were sharing in the messianic banquet.

Wright says that Jesus redefined the Torah in a similar fashion. The Torah defined Israel – the works of the Torah symbolising that these are the people of the covenant. Now Jesus redefines in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout his ministry the symbolic praxis that would mark out his followers as the mercy and forgiveness that they had received by being invited to be his people, reciprocated in their new familial relationships. Table-fellowship had virtually replaced food laws and forgiveness lay at the core of everything that symbolized his redefined Israel.

2.3.7.2 The rebuilt Temple

The Temple was to Judaea what the Torah was to Galilee. Fasting was more than the observance of laws of purity – it symbolized that Israel was

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still in exile and commemorated the destruction of the Temple. They held on to Zechariah's prediction that when YHWH restored the fortunes of his people, fasts would become feasts. This is exactly what Jesus implied when he prohibited fasting while the bridegroom was with them, that no one sews unshrunk cloth onto an old garment, or pours new wine into old skins. The time has come, the exile is over, in his work the Temple was being rebuilt. And just as sin was the cause of punishment and exile, so forgiveness would be the returning from exile.

Sean Freyne writes under the heading "The Religious Situation of Galilee, an Essential Ingredient of Mark's Plot" that it was completely understandable why the scribes came down from Jerusalem to discredit Jesus while he was still in Galilee; he was making claims which subverted the unquestioned authority of city and Temple, which formed the basis of their control over the people (Freyne 1988:47). Discussing the plot of the Gospel of Mark, he says: "For our author then, Jerusalem-based scribal authority is the real source of opposition to Jesus, whose deeds of power gave his teaching an authoritative quality as being from God in a way that the scribes could never match" (Freyne 1988:46). In the light of this he finds the episode in Mark 12:28-34 about the friendly scribe encountered in Jerusalem remarkable. With Jesus' authority "from heaven" it is he and not the religious authorities who can pronounce the scribe to be close to the kingdom of God precisely because he has had to distance himself from his fellows in recognising that God's presence was no longer definitively linked with Jerusalem and its Temple.

He was claiming that the kingdom he was inaugurating would bring with it all that the Temple offered and more, thereby making redundant Israel's greatest symbol. The Sabbath observance speaks of a great day of rest still to come and food laws underline Israel's seclusion from other nations. All of these were redundant now that the return from exile was taking place. When Jesus forgave people their sins, the objection of the Pharisees would be that he was offering them what he had no jurisdiction or power vested in him to do so. Jesus, according to Wright, differed from this opinion because

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he reserved for himself the right to bestow on his followers the title of the truly penitent Israel, returned from exile. And he concludes that it is no wonder that when Jesus came to Jerusalem, the city was not big enough for both Jesus and the Temple.

Under the heading “Symbolic focus” Wright (1996:437) paints a picture of Jesus’ counter-Temple movement:

...[a] young Jewish prophet, reclining at table with twelve followers, celebrating a kind of Passover meal, constituting himself and them as the true Israel, the people of the renewed covenant, and doing so in a setting and context which formed a strange but deliberate alternative to the Temple. The symbols of Jesus’ kingdom-announcement, in other words, come together in the upper room (emphasis mine).

He believes that the Temple action of Jesus and this Last Supper were mutually interpretive and that Jesus himself was the greatest symbol of his own career. *He describes the prophet from Nazareth saying:* “If anybody hears my words and does them...”, and “If I by the finger of God cast out demons...” and “But I say unto you...”, launching his movement, inviting people to follow him, persuading others that through his work, God would manifest his kingdom. There were others like him, Wright says, some “leadership” prophets, some would-be Messiahs. But he concludes his thoughts on this topic by saying: “Anybody acting and speaking as Jesus did was running straight into trouble. People were bound to say he was leading Israel astray; and that, traditionally, was a capital offence (Wright 1996:438).

2.3.8 Hues of tragedy: The death of the prophet

2.3.8.1 The charge of leading people astray

In Deuteronomy 13 three categories of transgressors are doomed to a punishment of death: The prophet who persuades people to go after other gods, a friend or family member who does the same, and someone who leads a whole town astray. According to Wright (1996:439-442) the contemporaries of Jesus might very likely have seen him in the light of one or more of these categories. He busied himself doing mighty deeds, which drew the crowds, but with what motivation and of what origin? And his teachings sounded very much like gross disloyalty. If there had been the suspicion that he was leading people astray, it would explain why people wanted to kill him in the light of Deuteronomy 13:12-18 and why whole towns refused to listen, fearing that to even be associated with him would be dangerous for both him and them.²³ Stauffer wrote in the light of John 9:16:

Das Synhedrium veranstaltet eine lange Sitzung und kommt nun endlich zu dem einmütigen Beschluss, jeden zu exkommunizieren, der sich zu Jesus Christus bekennt. Der Geheilte wird vorgeladen und verwarnt, zeigt sich aber verstockt und wird dermassig exkommuniziert (Jn 9:34; 1:22) Die Exkommunikation wird amtlich bekanntgegeben, damit das schwankende Volk durch einen heilsamen Schrecken vor dem Massenabfall bewahrt werde (Jn 9:35). Der Blindgeborene ist sehend geworden, aber er hat seine religiöse Heimat verloren und muss ausziehen in das fremde Land eines neuen Glaubens. Er tut es mit Furcht und Zittern.

(Stauffer 1960:74)

²³ See also Neale (1993:96-100) on this topic.

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Wright (1996:442) arbitrarily believes that the sayings of Jesus being pronounced mad by his family members are historically speaking on firm ground seeing that the charges that he was in league with the prince of demons were surely unlikely to have been invented by anyone. And this proves that he impacted on people in this way - either you became his follower or you suspected him of being a deceiver, leading people astray, perhaps through magic or false prophecy – there was, according to Wright no other alternative.

He summarizes: *Jesus was a prophet in his public persona, performing prophetic actions and announcing the kingdom of YHWH in a thoroughly subversive way.* He gave his followers an agenda and issued a warning of what would happen if Israel did not follow his way. He spoke and acted subversively in relation to Israel's symbols and this aroused huge controversy. Jesus taught that God had a vision for Israel, calling her to be the light of the world. But he showed Israel that she was dangerously disobedient to this vocation. However, between Jesus and his contemporaries there was a clash of visions which meant a clash of agendas and which culminated in a clash of symbols, so leading to serious confrontation. For his contemporaries could only regard someone doing and saying these things as a deceiver leading people astray. He saw himself as the leader and focal point of the true Israel who was returning from exile. Wright is convinced that Jesus saw himself as king and Messiah and believed that through his work YHWH was restoring his people.

He warns though, that in Jesus' time the title of Messiah did not carry any divine or even quasi-divine overtones.²⁴ He remarks furthermore that the "false historical modesty" (Wright 1996:478) which shies away from accrediting Jesus with any capability of theological thinking, while Matthew, Mark and Luke have rightfully of late been recognized as theologians, is much like "...arguing that all the most majestic and subtle music attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach was in fact the work of his four composing

²⁴ See Schweitzer (1950) and Wrede (1971) for their views on what Messiahship meant to Jesus.

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sons...” (Wright 1996:479) and ends his line of thought by saying: “we may perhaps be allowed to look forward to a new day, in which Jesus himself is acknowledged, in his own right, as a thinking, reflecting, creative and original theologian” (Wright 1996:479). Or as Schweitzer put it: “...[I]f the poor evangelist can make him do it on paper, why should not Jesus have been quite capable of doing it himself?” (Schweitzer 1913:315).

Lastly he maintains that it is no impossible task to discover how Jesus envisioned his own role within historical events. He points out that John the Baptist before Jesus had believed that Israel’s God had called him to speak and act as eschatological prophet and agent of the renewal that would prepare the way for the final great drama of YHWH and Israel and that Paul, likewise, had a similar strong sense of vocation. If therefore it is possible to know this about two figures who functioned immediately before and after Jesus, he asks the question why it should provide any difficulty saying the same about Jesus. In this regard he therefore proposes the following hypothesis: That Jesus felt himself called to announce, enact and embody the major kingdom-themes, namely the return from exile, the defeat of evil and the return of YHWH to Zion. In pursuit of these aims he acted in specific symbolic ways because he was convinced that the fortunes of his people were drawn together in his work as Messiah, but his very take on the situation and his role in it, redefined even the notion of Messiahship.

2.4 The portrait: Finishing touches

Wright, in striving to paint as complete a picture as possible of the profile of Jesus as a prophet, poses questions the answers to which would help clarify his world-view and at the same time help to explain his relation to Judaism and his aims:

2.4.1 For the art critics viewing his picture: Who are we?

“[W]e are Israel, the chosen people of the creator god” (Wright 1996:443). Jesus gathered around himself a group of followers, people of the new covenant whose sins are forgiven and therefore have returned from exile. They form the true Israel, people chosen by the God of Israel, the covenant God. Either one followed Jesus or one believed he was peddling dangerous nonsense. But he and his followers had a collective identity which placed them firmly within the world of Jewish eschatological expectations. Israel was the chosen people not for her own sake, but to be a light for the world. Now Jesus and his followers inherit, as the new Israel, this vocation of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Through them God would make his ways known to the rest of the world. “He and his followers were the eschatological people of the one true god, and as such would be, in a way yet to be explicated, the people through whom this god would make his ways known to the rest of the earth” (Wright 1996:445).

2.4.2 Where are we?

The majority of Jesus’ contemporaries still believed themselves to be in exile in terms of all that really mattered to them. They would have echoed the sentiments of Ezra and Nehemiah who said that although they were back in their land, they were still slaves. Jesus’ work proclaims freedom for those who had been enslaved, that the meek would inherit the land and that hunger and thirst would be stilled. *But although he was well aware of the symbolic geographical significance of Jerusalem, he was more concerned with the fact that this was the city where prophets were slain* and he travelled around announcing the kingdom without really paying heed to the subject of land. The symbol of the holy land would now be included in the arrival of a kingdom which would embrace the whole of creation.

2.4.3 What is wrong?

Wright sees Jesus as standing consciously within the long tradition of Hebrew prophets who through the ages have chastised Israel for their failure to comply with God's vision for them as his chosen people. They had repeatedly turned their backs on YHWH and engaged in paganism and idolatry. Now Jesus brings similar charges against his contemporaries: "They had misread the signs of their own vocation, and were claiming divine backing for a perversion of it. The call to be the light of the world passes easily into a sense of being the children of light, looking with fear and hatred on the children of darkness" (Wright 1996:446).

Four great empires had oppressed Israel and Rome was merely the last of these. Wright reminds his reader of the multi-dimensional understanding of the world in Jesus' time. So the Temple became the focal point not only of Israel, but of the whole cosmos and the real enemy was the accuser, the Satan as he is known in certain Old Testament traditions. All would come to a head not in a mere military skirmish, but in a cosmic battle in which the Gentiles would be fellow-sufferers.

2.4.4 The Beëlzebul controversy

And now the time has come to confront the dark power known in the Old Testament traditions as the Satan, the accuser, and who is the true cause of the rift between Israel and their god. As Wink (1984:105) puts it: "... 'Satan' is the actual power that congeals around collective idolatry, injustice, or inhumanity, a power that increases or decreases according to the degree of collective refusal to choose higher values." The struggle is cosmic, not merely martial and is reaching its climax.

Exorcisms formed an integral part of Jesus' mission and to Wright it is clear that Jesus understood them as much more than merely the release from bondage of a few "tormented souls" (Wright 1996:451). Onlookers ask whether this man who seems to be fighting the real enemy on their behalf

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could maybe be the son of David. But the Pharisees say (in texts historically on firm ground according to Wright as the church would not have invented a charge such as this) that he performs these exorcisms by “Beëlzebul, prince of demons.” To which Jesus replies logically that the Satan would not turn against himself to cast out the Satan and offers a counter-charge: “If I cast out demons by Beëlzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?”

Wright interprets all of this as meaning that onlookers witnessing the exorcisms within the context of first-century Judaism, were forced either to acknowledge that Jesus was legitimately redefining the kingdom on authority of the true god, or suspect that a dark power superseding those exorcised in strength – the enemy – was at work in him. The historicity of the exorcisms cannot be doubted, he believes, as it is unthinkable that the early church would have invented either the charge that Jesus was possessed by the prince of demons or that the demons frequently testified as to his messianic identity.

From Jesus’ perspective he was redefining the battle for the kingdom in a classic way, focusing the climactic battle not on Rome, but on the real enemy, Satan. In this battle he, as the spirit-equipped agent of the kingdom, had already won a decisive victory in the events of his ministry and his exorcisms implemented this victory to demonstrate that to a certain extent the kingdom had already materialised; Israel’s god was already becoming king. His victory over the powers of evil began right at the outset of his public career with the private struggle he was said to have experienced in the temptation narratives.

Just as many of the healings signified the healing that Israel’s god was ready to perform on his people, so too were the exorcisms signs that this god wished to deliver her from her real enemy: The Satan. However, the parable of the seven other demons as related in Matthew 12:43-45 and Luke 11:24-26 is understood by Wright to be an indication that Israel had in the past attempted to rid herself of the demon, but without success. These

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failed past attempts could be a thrust once again at the central institution and symbol: the Temple, and could be a reference to the rebuilding of this Temple, which Yahweh had no inclination to dwell in or to some attempts at reform or revolutionary movements. He interprets this as yet another critique on the Temple and nothing short of a new inhabitation of “the house” would solve the problem.

It is clear to Wright that Jesus perceived Israel to be in need of rescuing and that he had come to do exactly that. The protests of Jesus the “Jew” were “Jewish” protests-from-within. The enemy was not, however, an outside enemy such as Rome, but an intrinsic one – her present leaders – both real and self-appointed. He concludes: “The battle he himself had to fight was with the satan; the satan had made its home in Israel, and in her cherished national institutions and aspirations” (Wright 1996:461).

The disciples played an ambiguous role in all of this; on the surface they were to be his helpers, in the proclamation and inauguration of the kingdom,

But, as Jesus perceived the moment in history at which he found himself (remembering that for a first-century Jew, particularly one *who perceived himself to be a prophet*, the reading of what Israel’s god was doing in history was of central importance, he naturally came to see and experience those same disciples, not least the twelve, not least Peter himself, as ambiguous; allies after a fashion, but also a potential threat.

(Wright 1996:462; emphasis mine)

Increasingly the indications are that Jesus would ultimately have to fight a solitary battle and “His reinterpretation of Israel’s symbolic battle would ultimately generate a new symbol, more potent than any yet conceived” (Wright 1996:463). *For Jesus perceived himself to be a prophet such as John the Baptist or Jeremiah, and ultimately he would meet with a fate*

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similar to or worse than theirs. In keeping company with sinners, the unclean, and engaging in battle with the authorities and the “dark power that, he believed, stood behind them” (Wright 1996:466) he was hurtling towards the inevitable conclusion to his kingdom-inaugurating career. He would die, but his death would signify the actual victory of the kingdom and the defeat of the enemy of the people. Wright deems it therefore perfectly natural that Jesus would have predicted his own death.

Through his life he had retold the story of Israel as his own story; Israel’s god was finally to become king through the work, life and finally death of Jesus. It was inevitable that he would be regarded as a traitor leading people astray through his vision which involved the loss of cherished ancestral symbols, his radical redefinition of the praxis, story, symbol and question of the kingdom of Yahweh. All this was part and parcel of the profile of a prophet and he persevered because he believed that along this way, by winning final victory in the final battle, Yahweh would prove himself to be God.

The kingdom was at hand, indeed it was already present where Jesus was. “To deny its presence, indeed, would be to undermine the hoped-for future; if it was not, in this sense, already present, what guarantee had Jesus’ followers that the final victory was imminent?” (Wright 1996:472). Jesus “...aimed, then, to reconstitute Israel as the true returned-from-exile people, the people of the renewed covenant, the people whose sins would now be forgiven, around himself as the focal point; to achieve the victory of Israel’s god over the evil that had enslaved his people; and, somehow, to bring about the greatest hope of all, the victorious return of YHWH to Zion” (Wright 1996:473) and intended to “engage in the prophetic ministryHe intended to call disciples, twelve in particular. He intended to announce the kingdom in praxis, story and symbol. And so far as we can see, he achieved these intentions” (Wright 1996:474). He also intended to bring matters to a climax, in one specific visit to Jerusalem. “He embodied what he had announced. He was the true interpreter of Torah; the true builder of the Temple; the true spokesperson for Wisdom” (Wright 1996:538). He was

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claiming to be a Messiah through his kingdom-agenda. The people had a picture in their mind's eye of how the long-awaited Messiah should look and Jesus fit the bill closely enough to get him executed and for his followers to view the resurrection as affirmation for his claim, yet he differed sufficiently from this picture for at least certain misinterpretations to arise. He was a Messiah with a difference.

Two tasks awaited the Messiah: He must purge, restore or rebuild the Temple and he must engage in battle with and defeat Israel's enemies. Both of these Jesus intended to accomplish by his death (see Neusner 1989:223). Wright understands the Last Supper as Jesus' substitute for the Temple cult and both the Supper and his Temple-action as offering keys to Jesus' understanding of his death; Jesus intended through his death to accomplish what could normally be accomplished in and through the Temple, namely sacrifice. Isaiah 53:10b, a phrase from "near the heart" of the book, (Wright 1996:605) was, regardless of what it had signified in its original context, by the first century certainly taken to refer to sacrifice: "And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand."

He does not doubt the veracity of the texts suggesting this as they were not "proof-texts" but actions and events which may be regarded as historically plausible without fear of Christian retrojection, adding that during his life Jesus had acted as though he were offering a replacement for the Temple in offering forgiveness then and there to all and sundry. His sacrificial death would stand in the light of the Passover as controlling metaphor, signifying a new future for Israel just as the events surrounding the Passover had been the definitive moment of liberation in Israel's past. Through this last great symbolic action the Messiah would create a new reality to supersede the Temple. To accomplish this he had to engage in battle with the "real enemy, the accuser, the satan", "the forces of darkness" behind the visible forces, both Roman and Jewish (Wright 1996:605).

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Throughout his ministry and through engaging in controversy with the proponents of the false hope and security on a national scale which they had proposed to achieve through the national symbols, he had already fought the initial skirmishes, but two decisive battle-grounds still lay ahead: Facing Caiaphas as his accuser, firstly, and the second and climactic battle which would test his vocation to the limit and for which he prepared himself in Gethsemane; the battle against “darkness itself” (Wright 1996:606). Steered as is often the case by the rudder of his gut-feeling, Wright motivates:

The scene in Gethsemane, involving Jesus in weakness, fear, and (apparently) an agony of doubt, is hard to comprehend as a later Christian invention. It is entirely comprehensible as biography. It was, after all, failed Messiahs who ended up on crosses; the Jesus we have described throughout must have had to wrestle with the serious possibility that he might be totally deluded.

(Wright 1996:606)

When he finally engaged in this battle he fought by the rules he had laid down; he who saves his life shall lose it and vice versa, by turning the other cheek, going the second mile, you become the salt of the earth, the light of the world, “...in such a way as to be, I suggest, inexplicable unless they are substantially historical” (Wright 1996:607). He quotes Ben Meyer (1979:252, 253) on this topic: “If authenticity lies in the coherence between word (Mark 12:28-34 parr.) and deed (Gal 2:20; Eph. 5:2; John 13:1; Rev. 1:5), our question has found an answer.”

He would bring Israel’s history to a climax, through him YHWH would reveal that he was God, Jesus would act on behalf of, in the place of, Israel, doing what she was failing to do and be in her vocation as the chosen people; true to his essence as a first-century Jew, this meant for him upholding Israel’s honour, her election as the chosen nation, her traditions, opposing the pagans as well as the compromisers – especially

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those who held the power, those who presided over the holy place, those shepherds who had been leading the flock astray - within her midst, going to where the satan dwelled to engage in one-on-one confrontation with him. He went to Jerusalem to preach and to die.

His Temple actions for Wright are the enactment of two symbols, the first portraying the corruption and recalcitrance of the system, the want for justice within it. And because Jesus is the Messiah through whom YHWH, the God of the world, would save Israel and so the world, the second symbol portrayed the way in which the new exodus would come about, evil be defeated and sins forgiven.

The likelihood of his being put on trial as a would-be Messiah, a false prophet leading Israel astray was so axiomatic that there can be no reason to doubt that Jesus knew that his words and actions would get him handed over to the Romans and executed. Wright sees in him an unshakeable sense of vocation and trust in God. Through his actions the long night of Israel's exile would draw to an end and a new day would dawn for Israel and the world. The way of the cross symbolized for him more than merely the Roman oppression – it meant the way of love and peace he had preached with such fervour, the way of defeat which he had made into the way of victory, passion instead of action, but ultimately the victory of God.

He believed, like all martyrs, that he would be vindicated, and “[t]he relevance of Jesus, then, becomes radically different depending on whether one accepts or rejects the witness of the early church to his resurrection” (Wright 1996:659). *Wright concludes that if Jesus had in actual fact been an eschatological prophet/Messiah announcing the kingdom and dying in order to bring it about, the resurrection would mean in principle that he had succeeded in his task “...and that his earlier redefinitions of the coming kingdom had pointed to a further task awaiting his followers, that of implementing what he had achieved”* (Wright 1996:660).

2.5 A true likeness?

Wright thus builds up an impressive picture of Jesus the prophet, but because it is obvious that, apart from turning a deliberate blind eye to what/whomever may lie behind the Gospel of Mark, his determining factors in proving case for case what can be traced back to Jesus are gut feelings and healthy logic, one can't help wondering about the accuracy of the image. He seems to bring much of his theological presuppositions to bear on his picture so that Jesus seems to be a slightly one-dimensional and removed from the social and political realities of his context – a figure promoting abstract theology which has too little bearing on the true crises in which his people found themselves to be at the time.

One wonders furthermore to what level Mark had already applied interpretation in portraying Jesus as a prophet; whether he had maybe succumbed to the longing created by years of expectation of "The Prophet" who was to come and save his people so that when Jesus appeared, seemingly displaying so much of what had been hoped for, that he interpreted him too lithely as that prophet.

It is therefore interesting to peruse the image Horsley derives from what may lie behind the Gospel of Mark in oral sources and particularly Q to see how that compares with the picture painted by Wright and whether Horsley also sees in Jesus the reflection of a prophet.

If Wright has travelled mostly on the Schweitzerbahn to find a view of Jesus where he may set up his easel to start his painting, one suspects that he already had a painting of his mental image of Jesus in his pocket as the real model from which to make his painting. What is surprising is the overall believability of it and the fact that it differs less from that of say Dunn than one would imagine.²⁵

²⁵ See the comment of Vermes (2003:x) about methodology and the lack of it having led him to the same destination.