

**JESUS THE PROPHET:  
MAPS AND MEMORIES**

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**CHAPTER 1****CHARTING A MAP****1.1 Introduction**

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

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

**1.1.1 N T Wright**

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

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

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

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

### **1.1.2 R A Horsley**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **1.1.4 Prophecy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1.2 Scriptural Passages with Prophetic Overtones

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

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

And someone said to him: “I will follow you wherever you go.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On who the people believed he was:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Luke 7:39-50:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.3 A pathfinding mission

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

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

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

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

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

Schweitzer (2000:478-479) wrote:

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

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

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

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

Described by Baird (1992:246) as “the most revolutionary religious document written since Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses” it was the work of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), entitled “*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*” (1972), which gave a radically escalated sense of intensity to the critical approach in the study of the gospels. Whereas previous rationalistic accounts of the life of Jesus had taken as starting point the general reliability of the gospel renditions, Strauss effectively eradicated in his own theory any reliability in these accounts. No one can, after all, seriously consider as historical, sources in which tales of the supernatural and irreconcilable contradictions abound. He defined gospels as “myth”, that is mythological figments with Jesus directly or indirectly as subject, woven by his followers into narratives not necessarily factual.

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

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

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

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

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whatsoever. They saw in him a *misguided eschatological prophet* who lived in expectation of the imminent, apocalyptic end of the world, a man of no relevance to anybody who does not share his apocalyptic worldview.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Schweitzer 2000:478)

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

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

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

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

(in Schweitzer 1950:34)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Schweitzer 2000:315)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Funk 1996:300)

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

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

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

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

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

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

##### **1.4.1 N T Wright**

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.4.3 J D G Dunn

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

### 1.4.4 My own north star

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

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

**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 conveyors. 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 pretension 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

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,<sup>5</sup>
- 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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."

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 activities<sup>6</sup>, 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.<sup>7</sup> Those who did not participate, forfeited their claim as being part of the covenant

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<sup>6</sup> See also Hollenbach (in Wright 1996:160).

<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> 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 inappropriateness 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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 ministry<sup>9</sup> 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 status<sup>10</sup>;
- 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;

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<sup>9</sup> See remarks on itinerant ministry in 2.3 below.

<sup>10</sup> 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 Judaism<sup>11</sup> and it was not confined to the lowest social classes but had as participants some pharisees and even some aristocrats.

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<sup>11</sup> 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]lmost 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 allegations<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>
- 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

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<sup>12</sup> Confer 1 Maccabees 4:46.

<sup>13</sup> 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

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* ('lysous) 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,<sup>14</sup> 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 Schweizerbahn (to which Wright's methodology shows certain likenesses), searching behind the Gospel of Mark and braving the mostly unchartered 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

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<sup>14</sup> "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,<sup>15</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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

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<sup>16</sup> 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 Schweizer'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).<sup>17</sup> 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)<sup>18</sup>. 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).

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

<sup>18</sup> 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 pf 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 predating 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 "*lestai*", 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 prophesies 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).<sup>19</sup>

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

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<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>20</sup> 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 impecunious 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).<sup>21</sup> 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).

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<sup>21</sup> 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

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-Marcan 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 legitimization of the rulers who built, rebuilt or ran it. Wright maintains that, because the Temple was bound up inextricably with

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 "*lestai*" 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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-givenness 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 barenness. 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.*

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 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 Zechariah 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).<sup>22</sup>

*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.*

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<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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)

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<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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

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<sup>24</sup> 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 if 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 ministry ....He 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 Schweizerbahn 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.<sup>25</sup>

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

## CHAPTER 3

### **WALKING THE SECLUDED ALLEY OF Q: A VIEW OF THE PRE-MARKAN JESUS? R A HORSLEY**

Checking our position in accordance with the North Star on the road with Horsley, we once more start our journey by determining which source(s) to use. We furthermore examine the reasons for the choice of the source(s) in question. Horsley chooses Q as source, because it reaches back in time behind both Paul and Mark to earlier strands of tradition. Quite some time is spent on an examination of the nature of the Q source, discussing the feasibility of the hypothesis that it consists of various layers. This is important to our discussion, as earlier layers, if they exist, can only shed additional light upon the freshest impressions made by Jesus upon the minds of spectators. If, in these impressions, Jesus had been perceived as a prophet, it would contribute generously to the discussion at hand.

In examining Q for the possibility of different tradition layers, we stumble upon the issue of orality in the traditioning process. Here we pause for a significant space of time as this part of the process could form an invaluable link between actual happenings and the written-down accounts thereof. This could once again impact upon the immediacy of the impact Jesus had made upon onlookers, and of the perception, or lack thereof, that he had been a prophet.

When we reach, at the end of Horsley's investigative route, the view he offers of Jesus, the apocalyptic prophet bent on covenant renewal, we have to compare this view with that of the typical prophet. This should enable us to determine whether Horsley's prophetic figure meets the requirements. When, for instance, Horsley finds the whole scope of the mission discourse to be prophetic in nature and its purpose to be the enlistment of prophetic representatives to spread and manifest the kingdom of God he was announcing, we have to ask whether it had been common for prophets of the olden days to enlist aid in such a way. When Horsley

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seeks to reconstruct the political-economic-religious Sitz-im-Leben of the Q people, he discovers a cauldron of conflict between wealthy and powerful rulers and their "retainers" on one hand, and the common people on the other. This conflict was intensified by long-standing historical regional differences and by dissatisfaction with Jerusalem rule in particular. When these conclusions are examined in the light of the prophetic phenomenon, we shall attempt to ascertain whether this type of Sitz-im-Leben was common to prophecy in Old Testament times.

Horsley simplifies our task when he himself sets his study against the backdrop of the prophetic books of the Old Testament and as a comparative result discovers in Jesus a prophet not only as receiver and transmitter of oracles, but a prophet in the political-religious role of leader in the exodus and mediator of the covenant. He, along similar route, finds true prophetic timbre in Jesus' message with its passionate concern for the social issues of his time and, in particular, the repression of the poor by the rich. He underlines his conclusion that the social aspect is sine qua non for the understanding of prophecy in general and even more intensely so for Jesus as prophet.

It seems as though we shall not deviate, but are indeed true to the guidance of our North Star.

### **3.1 Q**

Richard Horsley concentrates on Q as the source of his study of the historical Jesus. The following are two of the reasons why he chose to single out this particular source notwithstanding the challenges and complications it holds for the researcher - if, as some New Testament scholars would have it, this source existed at all:

- It offers a very different view of Jesus from that found in either Paul or Mark.
- "...[I]t is intriguing to get behind the written Gospels to an earlier, more 'original' source through which Jesus might be understood" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:1).

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Study of Q has revealed that one after the other theological concept, presumably retrojected into the gospels in post-Easter, early-Christian times, cannot be applied to Q. So, for instance, would the researcher search in vain for a christology in this source for in Q Jesus is never accorded the title "Christ" nor does not appear in the source as a whole. In Q "*Kyrios*", used by Paul to denote the concept of "Lord", designates a form of address designating a master or authoritative teacher. "Son of God the Father" is used as title not only for Jesus but also for John and the Q people in general. Q does not appear to have a "wisdom christology" but Jesus is said to have been sent as prophet by Wisdom and is one of the children of Wisdom. In the past an apocalyptic Son of Man christology was identified in Q. However in most cases the title "'Son of Man'...refers indefinitely to a human and by implication to Jesus himself....The ability to use the term to refer to Jesus during his public ministry would seem...to be due to the term's use as an unimpressive Aramaic idiom with an implied reference to the speaker" (Robinson, in Horsley & Draper 1999:3). He furthermore points out that the Matthean portrayal of the Son of Man as a judge on the day of judgment does not apply here, but that the "son of man", just as the Queen of the South and the Ninevites, is more accurately "a defender or accuser at the divine court of judgment" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:3). Q is lastly uninterested in the crucifixion and resurrection which are the dynamics behind Paul's writing.

He is not supportive of the Q Seminar's hypothesis that all Q-sayings can be sorted into either sapiential or apocalyptic strata, saying that the criteria used for this labelling are difficult to find within Q itself and would appear to be the results of modern scholarly concepts in the field of New Testament studies which have been superimposed on Q. Kloppenborg (2000:146) argues for an earlier sapiential layer and a secondary prophetic redactional layer but J D G Dunn disagrees saying that "...the attempt to classify and demarcate genre types has not proved very helpful in the discussion of Q" (Dunn 2003:155; see also pp 152-155).

### 3.1.1 A sighting by word of mouth

One of the major strongholds in his argumentation is that *Q must be dealt with as an oral tradition in the vein of "... the predominantly oral communication environment of antiquity, ...performed orally before groups of people."* (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:3) *and not as a written text.* Texts such as Q are believed by some to have been a copy or transcript of an oral performance before a group of people.

But recognizing the power and process of orality in research has proved difficult, if not impossible for scholars for whom reading the written word in countless ways through countless mediums is *sine qua non.* P F Craffert and P J J Botha (2005:5) explain: "Reference to 'criteria of authenticity' and 'historical reliability' in conventional scholarship ignore that such 'methodo-logical' aspects relate to culturally determined assumptions. Confusion with regard to multiple cultural realities leads to misleading criteria for historicity."

W H Kelber (1983:xv) confirms this:

I have written this book out of a concern for what seemed to me a disproportionately print-oriented hermeneutic in our study of the Bible. Walter J. Ong, who has amply documented the problem outside the field of biblical studies, has termed it the "chirographic bias" of Western intellectuals, and Lou H. Silberman has, in the words of Marshall McLuhan, drawn critical attention to the "Gutenberg galaxy" in which much of biblical scholarship is conducted. In New Testament studies the problem manifests itself in the inability of form criticism to produce an oral hermeneutic, our misconceived search for *the original* form of oral materials, the collaboration of form with redaction criticism in reconstructing tradition according to the paradigm of linearity, and a prevalent tendency to perceive the written gospel in continuity with oral tradition.

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He joins the ranks of some of the most prominent biblical scholars of today, such as J D G Dunn, in regarding as a starting block for his use of this source "...the working hypothesis that Q was a carefully structured document" (Dunn 2003:153) and particularly expresses support and appreciation for the results of John S Kloppenborg's "...groundbreaking 'composition criticism'" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:5) that Q was a coherent series of discourses and not a collection of sayings. On the topic of the composition of Q Kloppenborg writes:

The Synoptic Sayings Source is not, as is sometimes thought, a "random collection of sayings" but manifests a variety of types of literary organization. Not only are the sayings grouped into several topically coherent clusters, there is also a measure of unity and coherence among the clusters as well as logical and thematic development throughout the course of the entire collection.

(Kloppenborg 1987:89)

On the issue of the orality of Q though, their opinions diverge: Kloppenborg starts his discussion on the literary genre of Q by saying that it is necessary for Q to be shown to have been a document with an identifiable order and arrangement for any discussion on it to be meaningful. That this is indeed the case is, according to him, widely assumed by critics. Although the written nature of Q has in the past been disputed, it

...has been conceded be the majority of critics even if this conclusion was not always defended in a very systematic fashion....An oral Q, collapses in the face of four considerations: the presence of strong verbal agreements of Matthew and Luke, the use of peculiar or unusual phrases by both evangelists, agreements in the order of Q pericopae and the phenomenon of doublets.

(Kloppenborg 1987:42)

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He addresses each of these four in turn. On the first he says that insufficient evidence from either Christianity in general or Q specifically exists for the techniques necessary to have preserved the words of Jesus as faithfully as they have been and as is shown in the said similarities. There is a lack of the mnemonics which appear in the presumably easily memorized units of tradition and would account for the verbatim or nearly verbatim similarities and there is no evidence that points to mnemonic practice in contemporary Christianity. Thus, according to him, only a written document can sufficiently explain these similarities. The second highlights some very unusual words and grammatical constructions which are very rare in the LXX and other early Christian literature. In oral transmission these would most probably have been dropped for more popular expressions in at least one of the Synoptic versions. On the matter of order Kloppenborg writes: "...[I]f little or no common order existed in the Matthean and Lucan reproduction of the sayings, or if the order which existed fell within the range of probabilities of random or accidental agreement, or again if all of the agreements could be explained on the basis of casual oral associations, then the case for a written Q would be greatly weakened (Kloppenborg 1987:47). However, this is not the case and he cites evidence that in vocabulary, selection and placement of particles, prepositions and other sentence elements which are highly likely to vary in such instances, such minute agreements occur that a choice for the alternative of a written Q is obvious.

He discerns three layers in the development of Q. Of these only the first, Q1, is oral and delivered by a performer. In the Q2-layer the material was already in written form and in Q3 the exegetical process had already begun.

He concludes without a doubt: "Q must be regarded as a written document, not simply a stratum of oral tradition" (Kloppenborg 1987:87) and even applies this conclusion as evidence: "The very fact that Q was *written* and not simply a set of oral folk sayings of a pre-literate group is evidence of use by Christians with access to literary technology" (Kloppenborg 1987:90). He describes Q as "...relatively well-organized, with clearly constructed arguments and with a degree of topical organization that places it among the best organized ancient sayings

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collections....Q, then, is far from unreflective, unsystematic oral tradition” (Kloppenborg 1993:25).

Horsley disagrees. He directly responds to this last theory of Kloppenborg’s, saying:

Even before the intensive recent analysis of oral performance, we knew that the oral tradition is far from unreflective and unsystematic. Recent studies of oral performances in contemporary societies and of oral-derived literature are demonstrating just how complex and sophisticated oral composition and oral tradition can be....Thus, like most other literature extant from antiquity, Q must now be understood as orally composed and only written down by means of scribal technology.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:294, 295)

He considers it to be of paramount importance to be noted by whomever involves himself in biblical studies "...devoted as it is to the interpretation of sacred texts,...that the communication environment of Palestine in particular and Hellenistic Roman antiquity in general was oral" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:5,6) and even more assuredly so in villages and towns among ordinary people. According to him the vast majority of people in any given historical situation was certain to be illiterate, literacy having been confined to the elite and maybe some of those employed by them and who formed a mere fraction of society. For him the correct approach to an orally derived text "...attempts to appreciate (1) the public performance (2) of a whole discourse or set of discourses focused on issues of common concern (3) to a community gathered for common purposes (4) who in the performance experience certain events verbally enacted and/or are affected by the performance (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:7).

On the subject of oral traditioning Dunn argues as follows: “I refer to the repeated failure to take seriously the fact that in the initial stages of the traditioning process the tradition must have been *oral* tradition; and thus also the failure to investigate

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the character of the tradition in its oral phase, and to ask what its orality must have meant for the transmission of that material” (Dunn 2003:192).

Dunn (2003:149-158) grapples with Kloppenborg on this issue as follows:

- If identification of redaction is difficult in a case where the text of the document (Mark) is firm, how much more so would it be in the case of Q where the text is always a matter of argument and hypothesis.
- Moreover, how is one to distinguish redaction from (initial) composition?
- Dunn (2003:155, 156) poses the question of whether, if a redactor was not troubled by the presence of aporiae and tensions in his final text, an initial compositor of Q have felt any different?
- How can one both argue for the coherence and unity of Q (as proof of its existence), and at the same time argue that internal tensions indicate disunity, without the one argument throwing the other into question?
- “Textual tensions are no clear proof of redactional layers.... Clinical technique here is in danger of running ahead of common sense. That said, I do not deny the plausibility of detecting at least some redaction in the composition of Q....” (Dunn 2003:156).

Dunn (2003:237) finally concludes:

...again and again in the case of “q”/“Q” material we are confronted with traditions within different Synoptics which are clearly related (the same basic teaching), and which were evidently remembered and valued as teaching of Jesus. At the same time, in the cases examined above the relation is not obviously literary, each version derived by editing some written predecessor. The relation is more obviously to be conceived as happening at the oral level. That could mean that these traditions were known to the Evangelists not (or not only) in a written form, but in the living tradition of liturgy or communal celebration of the remembered Jesus. Or it could mean that they knew the tradition from Q, but regarded Q as a form of

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oral retelling (that is, they had heard Q material being read/Performed), so that their own retelling retained the oral characteristics of the traditioning process.

Dunn furthermore questions what Kloppenborg regards the status of his first layer of Q to be – oral or written, as well as the reason why this should be regarded as a single document, as opposed to different clusters of Jesus' teaching,<sup>26</sup> concluding that he would proceed using as a working hypothesis that of Q, as opposed to a stratified one as suggested by Kloppenborg.

Like Horsley he favours a theory of performance of the material, saying that it seemed to be teaching material which had been rehearsed in the regular gatherings of the Q-communities (see Dunn 2003:157). Orality in the transmission process of Q is a matter of importance to him:

What does emerge, however, is some sense of tradition history, of the process by which these traditions were transmitted. This is a process which Catchpole and Allison, for example, would suggest began with Jesus himself, which is indeed probably the case, though the fact that they think in terms of literary editing (rather than of oral transmission) is a further example of a blind spot which still needlessly restricts contemporary perspective on the earliest stages of the history of the Jesus tradition.

(Dunn 2003:160)

Public performances were probably repeated in more than one community. The performed messages were short and had as subject matter the concerns of the community to whom it was addressed. Sayings were embedded in speeches by repetition, at some stage were written down and were then transcribed into a manuscript that might have been used by Matthew and Luke. According to Kelber (In Horsley & Draper 1999:8) orally derived texts such as these "were viewed as

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<sup>26</sup> In this regard see also Dunn (2003:156, 157).

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constituents of a collective cultural enterprise or of a communal memory." These texts were probably repeatedly enacted before a community resonating with the subject matter, and some members of the movement would have repeated the sayings to others. Because of its enactment to a community experiencing conflict or concern, there is an immediate social and historical context. It is necessary to look for these contexts in order to understand the effect of the performative discourse. As examples of performative discourses he cites the renewal of a covenant, the commissioning of envoys for the expansion of the movement, prayer for the Kingdom in order to make it a social reality, pronouncement of woes against the Pharisees and a calling down of divine judgment upon them, as well as the reassurance of those anxious about the necessities of life as examples of performative discourses and says that all of these accomplish far more than the mere repetition of sayings to preserve them in the memory of the people. They also, through what lies behind the mere meaning of the words, consolidate communities of people and help them in times of crisis to hold on to their solidarity and purpose. This happens when oral performance fits in with cultural tradition in a particular context: "Performance is the enabling event, tradition the enabling referent" (Horsley & Draper 1999:8). Horsley says that scholars of oral-derived literature have detected the importance of the cultural tradition for the effectiveness of oral performance and the necessity, therefore, for the modern interpreter to immerse himself as thoroughly as possible in the tradition with which an oral-derived text resonates. In the words of Foley (994:171).:

Each work of verbal art is nourished by an ever-impinging set of unspoken but implicitly articulated assumptions shared among the discourse community. To remove the event from the biosphere of tradition is therefore to sap its cognitive lifeblood, to deprive it of very obvious potential for conveying meaning, to silence the echoes that reverberate through it...What will be required...is an informed audience alive to their illocutionary force, auditors who can invest the extended utterance with its due heritage of performative meaning. Without that experience and ability no reader or auditor can construe the map of textual signals in traditional context...Once such an audience has been "written out of

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 existence” by decades of exclusively textual discourse, ...it is left to scholars to re-establish analytically - and artificially – what we can of the lost context of oral tradition.

And Kelber (1994:159) writes:

We must learn to think of a large part of tradition as an extratextual phenomenon [shared experiences, etc.]....Tradition in this encompassing sense is a circumambient contextuality or biosphere in which speaker and hearers live. It includes texts and experiences transmitted through or derived from texts. But it is anything but reducible to intertextuality. Tradition in this broadest sense is largely an invisible nexus of references and identities from which people draw sustenance, in which in which they live, and in relation to which they make sense of their lives. This invisible biosphere is at once the most elusive and the foundational feature of tradition.

He firmly believes in the case of Jesus addressing the people of Galilee that this tradition was definitely Israelite, although many arguments for a predominantly Hellenistic Greek cultural tradition have been made. Throughout his explanation of his views concerning Q he shows how this statement applies, and makes it clear that it was popular Israelite tradition over against the great Israelite tradition that had its origin in scribal circles.

The historical context is Hellenistic Judea and Galilee under Roman rule with the Herodians and wealthy and powerful high-priestly families of Jerusalem the rulers on behalf of the Romans. The Pharisees and scribes were mediators between these power-players and the people, most of who lived in agrarian villages and conducted their own community affairs according to Israelite traditions.

AJ Saldarini (1988:4, 5) states:

The Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees as a variety of Jew, as thinkers and as leaders must be seen as part of Palestinian Jewish society and accurately located and described in relationship with other Jewish leaders and social movements from 200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. Jewish leaders included the high priest, the chief priests, elders and notables who were probably the recognized heads of prominent families at the local and national level. These leaders were assisted by several groups whom Gerhard Lenski identifies as retainers (see ch. 3). Retainers included the bureaucrats, soldiers and functionaries associated with the Hasmoneans, the Herods and the Romans as well as the Temple servants and officers associated with the chief priests. It is among the retainers that we shall find the scribes and most of the Pharisees. The Sadducees were members of the governing class, according to Josephus, but we know little more of their roles in society.

G Vermes (2003:10, 11) writes that circumstances in the first century had not been normal: “An eschatological and politico-religious fever was always close to the point of eruption, if it had not already exploded, an Galilee was a hotbed of nationalist ferment.” And later:

But for the representatives of the establishment – Herod Antipas in Galilee, and the chief priests and their council in Jerusalem – the prime unenviable task was to maintain law and order and thus avert a major catastrophe. In their eyes, revolutionary propaganda was not only against the law of the Roman provincial administration, but also murderously foolish, contrary to the national interest, and liable to expose to the vengeance of the invincible emperor not only those actively implicated, but countless thousands of their innocent

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compatriots. They had to be silenced in one way or another, by persuasion or by force, before it was too late.

(Vermes 2003:11)

Apart from all these rifts between rulers and subjects, there furthermore existed regional differences between the Galileans and the Jerusalemites for whom the focus of their political, economic and religious lives centred around the Temple.

On this topic Vermes (2003:4,5) makes several illuminating remarks: The Galilean context is very important seeing that Jesus spent his early years as well as the greatest part of his public life there, leaving it, if the chronology of the synoptic gospels with their chronology of a one-year ministry is to be taken at face-value, only once for the fateful journey to Jerusalem at Passover. He writes that this was a rich and mostly agricultural region. “The inhabitants were proud of their independence and jealous of their Jewishness, in which regard, despite doubts often expressed by Judeans, they considered themselves second to none. They were also brave and tough. Josephus, the commander-in-chief of the region during the first Jewish War, praises their courage, and describes them as people ‘from infancy inured to war’ (BJ iii.41)” (2003:4).

In the mountainous regions of Upper Galilee rebellion against the government – any government, be it Hasmonean, Herodian or Roman – had been brewing from the middle of the first century BCE to 70CE. “In short, the Galileans were admired as staunch fighters by those who sympathized with their rebellious aims; those who did not, thought of them as dangerous hot-heads” (Vermes 2003:4).

In Jerusalem their reputation was not a good one: branded as an unsophisticated people and referred to in rabbinic parlance by the derogatory term “*Gelili shoteh*”, or “stupid Galilean”, perceived as “peasants”, “boors”, “*am ha-arez*”, they were cut off from the Temple and the study centres of Jerusalem, so that Galilean popular religion appears to have relied “not so much on the authority of the priests or on the scholarship of scribes, as on the magnetism of their local saints like Jesus, younger contemporary, Hanina ben Dosa...” (Vermes 2003:5).

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In these three respects, politics, religion and economy, there existed complex structural divisions in ancient Roman Palestine and Israelite tradition was far from unitary. Horsley believes that Q discourses were grounded in the popular tradition of Israel and not the "official" Jerusalem-based tradition, which further complicates matters. Over against recent scholarly interpretation, especially American, of Q, which found important similarities with Hellenistic Greek literature, he reiterates the pervasive presence of Israelite tradition in Q. He categorically states that his studies of Q have led him to the conclusion that what we have in Q are performative speeches of the renewal of the covenant and mission in a popular movement and not sapiential teaching originating from sages and scribes which have partially solidified into this genre of literature. He says that because Q 6:20-49 and 9:57-10:16 are the longest and most schematic discourses and because their purpose as well as their performance context is inherent in them, he chose to begin with a scrutiny of these discourses. Starting off with Q 6:20-49 he immediately refutes the two main gripes he experiences with the findings of common scholarly assumptions, namely that:

- a) the contents of Q are overwhelmingly sapiential and
- b) the sayings of Jesus were separate aphorisms and admonitions saying that these can be supported by neither argument nor evidence.

Horsley joins Kloppenborg in opposing the first of these. Kloppenborg writes on the topic of the form of the beatitudes that it

...is common in sapiential literature. But...the beatitudes of Jesus are not simple moral or religious exhortations of wisdom; they are proclamations of eschatological salvation. And unlike both sapiential beatitudes and the majority of those found in apocalyptic books, the beatitudes do not function as conditions of salvation or admonitions concerning how one ought to act; instead they pronounce blessings upon a group defined by social and economic circumstances: poverty, hunger, sorrow and persecution. In Q they pronounce blessing upon the community. Even though the Q beatitudes should be

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(Kloppenborg 1987:188)

### **3.2 A prophet bent on covenant-renewal? Q 6:20-49**

Form-critical considerations back up what Horsley concluded from the substance and tone of these texts, namely that we here encounter covenantal blessings rather than sapiential maxims. He stresses the importance of the Mosaic covenant that seems to have functioned as an unwritten "constitution" that unified Israel and likens the key biblical texts of the Mosaic covenant in form to treaties from Hittite emperors to their subject kings and in the absence of a central government in Israel the purpose of the covenant is for the people to observe the stipulations on the grounds of God's gracious deliverance of his people. The Mosaic covenant thus had a very prominent role to perform and was renewed and recited repeatedly in biblical history, particularly in times of historical turmoil.

Dunn (2003:506) writes emotively on this topic:

If it is indeed the case that behind the Greek *metanoeo* is the Hebrew *sub...*, then it should not escape notice that the call to "repent" was a call to "return". This was a frequent appeal in the prophets, including but by no means only the return necessary if the scattered of Israel were to be restored to the land. Particularly poignant was the repeated call of Jeremiah 3: "return, apostate Israel", "return, apostate sons" (3.12, 14, 22). In all cases the appeal was to Israel as a whole to keep covenant with their God, ...Similarly, the call to "trust"...has covenantal overtones" to rely on Yahweh, on his commitment to his people. The covenantal implications are evident in all the biblical passages...and Deut. 32.20....We may conclude confidently, then, that any call of Jesus to "repent and believe"

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would have been heard by his hearers as a reiteration of the prophetic call to the people of Israel to return to their God and trust him afresh.

Covenantal tradition also underwent development. Already in Deuteronomy we see that teachings mention the way of death and the way of life as well as blessings and curses resulting from the way one chose. Scribal circles furthermore identified with Mosaic covenantal materials that formed part of what later became the Torah and identified their traditionally cultivated wisdom with the Torah. So Horsley detects both of these development-strains in the collection of wisdom discourses to be found in Proverbs 1-9 and in Sirach 24 where Wisdom is personified as a heavenly figure. In this way he argues that what seems to be purely sapiential material may have been shaped by covenantal teaching.

Notable are the socio-economic-political concerns of covenantal teaching and the numerous biblical references indicating that these weren't merely ideas and theory, but that the covenant was operative in the life of Israel, indeed, that its functioning in village life appears to be presupposed by the periodic *prophetic protests* about its violation by the ruling elite. Of primary importance for the motivation of his theory is also his argument that the Qumran texts contain many covenantal motifs and that the document in its totality displays the structure of the traditional Mosaic covenant and its renewal. This argument opens the way for him to conclude that the clear presence of covenantal influence as late as the Qumran document indicates "...both that Mosaic covenantal forms were alive and well in second-temple Judean society and that those forms were adapted in response to new historical crises to which Judean groups were responding" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:207, 208).

Covenantal forms had, however, undergone an evolution in some important aspects. Firstly blessings and curses were no longer motivation for adhering to the covenant in an exclusive to God and the prescribed social relations among the people of Israel. Instead it had now become the distinguishing factor between those outside the group and those within to reassure them of their status as the

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elect, as those favoured by his grace and redemption. And because of the latter's loyalty and total commitment to God and to the prescribed social relations among themselves, a declaration of present and/or future salvation by God replaces or complements his salvation in the past.

Secondly the opening statements of the Community Rule are, Horsley states, explicitly for ceremonial procedure and it is clear from other passages that oral enactments occurred regularly in the community. His conclusion drawn from this is that the renewal of the Mosaic covenant was undoubtedly ceremonially enacted and that the master and/or priests and Levites orally instructed the community in the covenant. "The priests and Levites were literally 'blessing' God and ceremonially 'blessing the men of the lot of God' and literally pronouncing 'curses on all the men of the lot of Belial'" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:209). The yearly performed, orally enacted renewal of the covenant within the community had been preserved by literate scribes who had written it down.

Thirdly he detects a number of themes and features in the Community rule which resembles those in the covenant renewal discourse within Q. With regards to Q, connections, catchwords and the development of themes, all show coherency and refute the theory of independent, separate aphorisms. Parallels to Q in 1 Clement, Didache and Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians point to oral derivation and throw serious doubt on assumptions of original independence of these sayings. Close literary and compositional analyses furthermore show coherency in these discourses. And the beatitudes are no exception, thanks to the newly acquired availability of a document from Qumran, 4 Q 525, containing a series of five or more two-line blessings (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:197) indicating that this rhetorical pattern had become a standard one well before the time of Jesus. He subsequently analyses Q6: 20-49 as Covenant Renewal Discourse and points out that Jesus in this discourse pronounces blessings and curses before the covenantal teaching, a departure from the original Mosaic covenant in which blessings and curses formed the sanctioning closing step. This indicates to him how Jesus is simultaneously drawing upon, transforming and renewing the covenantal tradition. In the Mosaic covenant the reminder of God's deliverance in the past precedes and motivates the principles of socio-economic

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relations. It was malleable enough to be used in the style of Nehemiah 9-10 for the centralization of religious-economic power as well as on the other side of the spectrum by the Judean and Galilean peasantry for the maintenance of Israelite families in economic viability on their ancestral land and their ongoing membership of the local village communities.

At whichever point in the social spectrum these covenantal requirements and ordinances functioned, the blessings and curses would motivate the observance thereof. Evidence is to be found in both Mark and Matthew that "...[I]n a well-intentioned attempt to encourage the people's keeping of the covenantal Torah, the scribes apparently pointed to the people's own suffering as evidence of their previous disobedience" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:218). Horsley is of the opinion that Jesus, in the discourse under discussion, would have resonated with people blaming themselves for sickness, misfortune, poverty, the battle of daily subsistence and whatever was amiss in their lives and thinking themselves insignificant and unworthy. These people, the peasants, were the substance producers and as such had a multitude of oppressive revenue demands made upon them by the hierarchy of rulers lording it over them. It is to people such as these that Jesus offers blessings and the comfort of the kingdom of God.

The curses apply to those believed to be blessed; the rich, in a new and imminent act of deliverance by God to restore justice. This then provides the motivation for a renewal of the covenantal demands. *Of importance is also the reference to the prophets in the fourth pronouncement of blessing, obviously indicating that the participants in this movement identified with the prophetic tradition and saw the movement as a continuation of the prophetic movement.* When read within their literary and social context, the sayings beginning with "Love your enemies", the slap on the cheek which is an insult and not a physical attack and the seizure of the garment all refer to economic relations and not to non-resistance or non-violence to a foreign enemy.

The plight of the poor was a matter of utmost concern in the economic provisions of the Mosaic covenant, its law code, as well as ongoing teachings on the covenantal laws of which we find evidence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. When

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we read the "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" of Q 6:29-36 these words echo the very essence of the traditional line of covenantal teaching, building on it and renewing it in a way that would recall the covenantal teachings of the past to the minds of those who listened to them, echoing Leviticus 19:18. Horsley cites the example of Exodus 23:4-5 and Deuteronomy 22:1-4 which commands that upon meeting the ox or donkey of the enemy lying down under its burden, one should help him lift it and refrain from simply leaving him with it. When we read in closing: "...be merciful as your Father is merciful", it immediately evokes the memory of Leviticus 19:2: "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." So for instance is "neighbour" the term used in both law code and covenantal teaching for a fellow member of the Israelite community and "enemy" or "the one who hates you" for a neighbour with whom you have developed a conflictual relationship.

Based on the promise that the listeners in Q would inherit the kingdom of God, Q's Jesus demands even greater rigor in these covenantal commands pertaining to economic relations than the traditional. In this vein he asks that if the creditor were to seize the outer garment of the debtor, the latter should relinquish the undergarment as well, so standing naked before him and embarrassing him. Loving one's brother also means not judging and good fruits of proper socio-economic interaction should flow from the heart, the source of behaviour. All of these stand in firm covenantal tradition and recall to mind well-known proverbs or metaphors.

To conclude: Q's Jesus addresses people in dire economic straits who, because of the heavy burdens of taxation and demands from rulers, barely subsist. He addresses villagers who are already in debt and unable to repay their creditors and others who are reluctant or unwilling to lend and eager to collect debts owed to them. To such as these last Jesus in Q addresses admonitions to carry economic responsibility for one another, to "do good" and to "lend", in short, to imitate their merciful Father, who gives to them, the poor and hungry, his kingdom. And, just as the covenant encouraged the keeping of the commandments by concluding with blessings and curses, so does Q 6:46-49, Q 6:20b-26, already having opened up this covenantal discourse, offer positive

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results, just as a house built upon the rock, to those who adhere to these words of Jesus. However, disaster is spelled out for those who do not, just as a house built upon sand. The end is a sanction of the preceding covenantal teaching.

### 3.3 An image of a commissioning emissary

When Horsley focuses on the so-called "Mission Discourse" - Q 10:2-16, once again stressing the importance of reading it in its context and taking the whole of the discourse into consideration, he comes to the conclusion that neither the hypothesis of "...the homeless lifestyle of 'itinerant radicalism'", nor the similarities drawn between what is wanted from the persons addressed and the sedentary ancient Cynic philosophers are justified or grounded in contextual fact. One cannot interpret, as some scholars do, either this discourse or Q as a whole, as requirements for discipleship, nor can one label it a collection for charismatic missionaries and a new missionary direction, maybe even with inherent judgment, away from the Jews and towards the Gentiles.

According to Horsley this discourse, as also the rest of Q, are not isolated sayings, but should be seen within the context of a discourse and discourse series which add up to Q in its totality. So the Mission Discourse actually commissions envoys for preaching and healing village by village. "Sending" is what holds together this discourse and he who sends them is also the sent. The sending statement is followed by instructions on what to take and what not, on where to stay and what to eat, and how to react to welcoming or rejection by towns and places on their journey.

*The total focus and scope of the Mission discourse is prophetic:* The new movement was passionately concerned with spreading through the villages and towns of Israel the news and manifestation of the kingdom of God. For this prophetic representatives of Jesus were needed and the Mission discourse commissions likely candidates: "This mission and the workers involved in it were understood in prophetic terms, a prophetic extension of Jesus' own prophetic mission by a prophetic movement" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:248). *He compares this discourse to the prophetic movement aimed at the renewal of*

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*Israel which was led by Elijah but participated in by not only Elisha but hundreds of bene-nabi'im and which, as told of in 1 Kings 18, was repressed by the rulers.*

The closing statement of this discourse seems to motivate and authorize it from the backdrop of the well-known Israelite tradition of the prophetic commissioning of Elisha by Elijah, to pass onto him the prophetic mission for the restoration of Israel. Horsley maintains 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).

The first introductory dialogue of the Mission Discourse refers, according to him, to the political-economic situation of ordinary people and/or Jesus in contrast to that of beasts and animals of prey and/or people's predatory oppressors. He warns on the one hand against the assumption of a christological meaning within the "son of man" used here, saying that it may refer to any number of things in Q, one of these being to the broader humanity. But on the other hand he says that within the wider context of Q with its references to Jesus through this title, it might here refer to Jesus himself. He therefore conflates the two, saying that the term here may refer to both humanity and Jesus or to Jesus as a representative figure. Foxes are the contrasting images, referring to prowling, invasive, destructive, "repugnant" creatures.

He also alludes to the reference in Luke where Jesus refers to Herod Antipas as "that fox". The birds he assumes to be birds of prey, devouring carcasses. Both of these parties have secure dwellings. By contrast Jesus/the people have no house or home whatsoever, depicting gross injustice. This introductory speech clearly echoes the opening of the preceding covenantal discourse: "blessed are the poor, ... woe to the rich, ..." and would without a doubt resonate with "...hungry and indebted Galilean villagers required to render up tax revenues to Herod Antipas, from which he had reconstructed the new city of Tiberias, with his own luxurious palace on the hill above the city" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:240). It thus highlights the deep contrast between on the one hand Herod Antipas in his royal palace by implication and on the other hand the people and their prophet who have no home.

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In the second and third dialogues he surmises that the statements "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" and "No one who puts his hand on the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" to refer to the calling of Elisha by Elijah as his assistant and successor in his prophetic endeavours to bring about renewal in Israel. In connection to the first of these he reminds the reader of the importance in the given context of the burial of the dead even cited in the Mishnah as of more importance than reciting the Shema. The burial of a deceased parent was a solemn obligation, implying in capital letters and by making use of hyperbole/metaphor, that this mission for which they are being called is of such importance and urgency as to be rendered to have precedence over that obligation of supreme importance and gravest urgency. Even more important is his following statement: "In both Jeremiah and Ezekiel we catch sight of how a violation of the sacred obligation to bury the dead was used as a prophetic sign" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:241). He is referring here to Jeremiah 16:1-8 and Ezekiel 24:15-24. By contrast, in the call of Elisha by Elijah to which this dialogue alludes, Elisha is permitted by Elijah to go and kiss his father and mother. This mission however, supersedes the one of Elisha in importance, therefore the refusal in this case of a request to perform or comply with a filial obligation so important as to be sanctioned by the Mishnah. The reason for this urgency is not individually conceived discipleship but the mission of preaching and realizing the kingdom in Israel.

The third dialogue also alludes to the calling of Elisha by Elijah in which Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha in a symbolic gesture while the latter is ploughing. The Q-dialogue, however, uses the ploughing image to signify the mission to which then listeners are called instead of the activity that as been left behind, thus recalling but creating contrast. So furthermore is Elisha allowed to take leave of his family, whereas now the urgency of the mission is such that it is not even permitted to look back. What is required for this mission of Jesus is total dedication to the task (9:62), despite separation from the family (9:60) and travelling without permanent residence (9:58?; 10:4, 5-7)" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:241).

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Prophetic tradition as well as, in continuation, Jewish apocalyptic literature after the time of Jesus and Q, employs the imagery of a harvest in a long-standing tradition for judgment. "Harvesting" in the broader Q context and in this mission discourse in particular means that the ingathering would take place now that the right time has, at long last, dawned and the implication that those who reject the message of the kingdom and the healing of this mission in doing so bring judgment upon themselves. It is furthermore important that the movement/community that Jesus and John the Baptist have established, merely initiated the work, but that much remains as yet undone and that "workers" are required, (this being a term apparently used in Palestine for the expanders of the Jesus-movement, see 2 Cor 11:13, Phil 3:2, Mt 20:1-16.)

The mission is apparently to Israel with no extension to the gentiles implied. In lieu of this he considers it highly probable that Matthew 10:5b and possibly even 10:6 belonged to this discourse. He furthermore sees in Matthew's emphatic "I" in the parallel to Luke 10:3 in which the "I" had probably been deleted because it is obsolete in the Greek, an indication of a prophetic form in this sending or commission. The image of sheep among the wolves was a standard one within Israelite tradition and would have resonated with the audience. It was traditionally used to indicate the Jews among the hostile Gentiles and usually understood here to be a kind of inversion to indicate Christian emissaries among the hostile Jews or even a failed mission to Israel. Horsley understands it to mean the Jews straining under "oppressive, predatory rulers" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:245). He cites several examples of extortion, violence, even murder charged to the address of rulers and Pharisees. This image expresses vulnerability, the potential political trouble that envoys might evoke on the possible success of their mission. For success could bring them to the attention of the rulers and might pose a threat to the powers that be. *Parallel to the prophets of the past who had been killed by the Jerusalem authorities, these prophetic messengers are sent out "as lambs among the wolves" and a similar fate may await them.*

These prophetic envoys are instructed to leave behind all the appropriate equipment in a prophetic sign that this movement for the renewal of Israel and

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the kingdom it announces are for the poor. After the instructions on what not to take and the response to the welcoming or rejection by the household, there follow traditional prophetic forms introduced typically by "I tell you" and "Woe to", and the names of places which resonate with symbolic places of divine wrath, judgment and destruction from Israel's prophetic tradition, wherein God speaks through Jesus. Now, in an ironic hypothesis, these cities of ill-repute turn repentant while Bethsaida and Chorazin, two of the very cities that might have resented Tyre and Sidon for their exploitation of their peasant inhabitants, remains unrepentant. This stark irony serves to emphasize the shamefulness of their unrepentant, recalcitrant attitude.

In Q "Kyrios" mainly refers to Jesus, here it refers to God who is the Lord of the harvest, the "immediate sender of envoys" who has commissioned Jesus. However, there seems to be no discrepancy between these two names and functions, but rather a functional equivalent. The closing statement of the Q mission discourse in an antithetical parallelism is the summary and completion of the discourse, bringing the motifs of reception or rejection to a close. The primary concern here is not with the rejection of the envoys, but rather with their authority stemming from "... the intimate and direct representative relationship between Jesus and the prophetic Q envoys" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:248).

Horsley concludes that we have here a mission discourse that was performed to communities within a movement, a fundamental concern of which was expansion. God's kingdom had to be announced and manifested and this meant that helpers had to be enlisted as "prophetic representatives" of Jesus in the conveyance of his message, his acts of healing and the support given to the community. *The healing aspect of this mission stands firmly rooted in the tradition of the renewal of Israel by the great northern Israelite prophets of history, Elijah and Elisha. The whole discourse is infused and saturated with prophetic allusions, clearly in continuation with the classic prophets and prophecies of old.*

He peruses several more passages, concluding that they similarly resonate with Israelite tradition of covenant-making and the prophetic mission of renewal for

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Israel. In a conflation they can be seen as addressing problematic relations and concerns in the fields of politics, economy and religion in the Palestine communities of the movement in the late second Temple. They condemn the Jerusalem rulers and their representatives and announce and realise the kingdom of God in the village communities. An interesting example of pertinence to this is Q 7:18-35 with its metonymic references to the exodus and covenant and the prophetic tradition. He sees in the list of images in 7:23 a possible reference to the preaching and healing activities of Jesus, but to a far greater extent a definite echoing of the tradition of longing for God's new action to end oppression and bring restoration to his people.

From what he calls the "prophetic anthology that comprises the book of Isaiah" (such as Is 26:19, 29:18- 21, 42:6-7, and 61:1) he cites several passages. The allusions to the wilderness similarly speaks of prophetic *déjà vu* recalling escape from oppression in Egypt and the subsequent wonder-filled trek through the wilderness, place of purification and preparation where the covenant had been given to Moses. He refers to Josephus reporting that several "Moses-like and/or Joshua-like prophets" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:264) emerged in villages of Judea in the middle of the first century, who led their followers out into the wilderness "...to experience the anticipated new deliverance by God.... In 'going out into the wilderness' the crowds would clearly have been seeing and hearing a prophet like Moses and/or Elijah, the paradigmatic founder and restorer of Israel as a covenantal society under its divine ruler whose main concern was to free them from unjust and oppressive human rulers" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:265).

These prophets were contemporaries of John the Baptist and Jesus and there were a sufficiency of them to justify the assumption that an act of going out into the wilderness such as is mentioned here, would be interpreted by *hoi polloi* as prophetic in the tradition of Moses and/or Elijah, founders and restorers of Israel as people of the covenant and therefore free from social injustice and oppressive rule. This is underlined by statements such as "A prophet, indeed more than a prophet" and "Behold, I am sending my messenger in front of you, who will prepare your way before you." The "Lord's Prayer" and "...the accompanying

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exhortation to petition God boldly for the kingdom" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:267) focus on concrete day-to-day economic necessities such as bread, the staple food of the peasant, and the cancellation of debt, while the following minitable mentions bread and fish, another of the most basic foods consumed by the peasants. "The Q discourse on prayer...is instruction of whole communities to petition God, in precisely the short prayer in 11:2-4, to effect the kingdom by providing for the most concrete concerns of villagers: food for subsistence and the cancellation of debts, which threatened the viability of the peasant household in the moral economy of the peasantry" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:267). So 11:2-4 as well as the admonitions in 6:27-35 are direct and explicit references to the Israelite covenantal tradition of economic principles which had as their aim keeping Israelite families economically viable on their land and remaining members of the village communities constituting Israel.

Another important aspect of Horsley's thinking is that he believes the Q-communities to have been under attack. In Q 12:2-12 he believes evidence is to be found that the movement was under attack and embroiled in intense political-religious conflict with the rulers/representatives of Israel. Typical of leaders threatened by the popularity and increasing influence of another leader under the people, this latter person is vilified and slandered by the leaders, this of course being the case of the Pharisees accusing Jesus of being an emissary of the devil. When the communities are urged not to fear those who could kill the body, it means by implication that they are to bear witness of Jesus' tidings flying fearlessly in the face of the judgment, threats and (he believes very real) attacks from the powers that be and trusting in the evidence of God's unwavering care for the lesser creatures.

Community members may well be sent out as sheep among wolves (this of course being a metaphor for the rulers) as we have on good authority that retribution and punitive action was swift to quell those dangerous popular movements of prophetic or messianic nature which could easily incite a restless people. Isaiah 40 and 1 Kings 22 describe prophetic visionary experiences in which historical political interactions and altercations were mirrored in God's court in heaven, just as Q 12:8-9 mirrors a human judgment scene. These acted as

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incentives to persevere in the resistance against rulers even to the point of enduring martyrdom until the day in which God would resolve their historical crisis in judgment of those oppressive rulers and the vindication of his people.

It does not seem likely that the trials mentioned were fictitious. Not all "prophetic" or "apocalyptic" sayings were directed against outsiders. Mention is made of sudden judgment, symbolizing the day of the Son of man and this is directed at members of the Q community itself to urge them to maintain community discipline and adhere to their purpose in the renewal of Israel; the renewal of Israel over against its rulers. In the Galilee and Judea of Jesus' time a chasm existed on socio-economic level between the rulers and the ruled. Moreover there was a pronounced historical regional as well as a political-economic-religious divide between Jerusalem and Galilee where the Q-document originated.

Layers of rulers; Roman, Herodian and Jerusalem high-priestly, imposed cumbersome tributes, taxes and tithes on villages and families, threatening their viability, ancestral heritage and participation in community life. Q's prophetic overtones against high-priestly aristocracy can be discerned in the Q prophetic materials, condemning them for their injustices perpetrated against the people and mirroring the general dissent in Palestine against the Jerusalem rulers, the scribes and the Pharisees. The Lord's Prayer addresses this when it mentions a cancellation of debts by implication incurred when demands from ruling classes could not be met. Other passages urging people to cancel debts, to love enemies and to be prepared to lend are related to this issue, as are curses against the "sons of the pit" and the "wicked priest". He furthermore sees them, like the covenant renewal discourses, as performative utterances.

The chasm that existed between these regions and groupings pertained not only to their status-quo, but also to their visions for the future restoration of Israel. There was a commonality in their dreams, namely the restoration of the twelve tribes and the establishment of a just society. The rulers and Pharisees envisioned themselves as playing an integral part in the governing of society together with their king, whereas Israelite peasantry were longing to be free and sovereign to operate their own communities according to the principles of the Mosaic covenant.

For the latter the rulers and their representatives were not only redundant but undesirable as perceived "agents of injustice".

In prophetic woes and laments against the Pharisees, Horsley sees a continuation with earlier Israelite prophets and a reverberation of generations of covenantal tradition. He categorically denies that they could be abstract discussions of piety and ethics, but interprets them to be an indictment on Pharisees and scribal elite "...that had been entrusted (since the Hasmoneans, according to Josephus) with the guardianship, cultivation, and interpretation of the 'great' or official tradition based in Jerusalem...." (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:288) and were abusing this trust in social-political issues. These were grave charges, meant to be taken seriously and referring regularly to the slaying of prophets in history and the "...contemporary cultivation of memorials to martyred prophets of the past" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:291).

### **3.4 The backdrop: A sweeping scope: Reflections on genre, context and origin**

The fervour among scholars to define and exercise control over Q as a written document when it was still considered to be a collection of sayings has, according to Horsley, inspired incorrect deductions that its germination genre was a collection of sayings from the sages and this in turn led to the assumption that it may be compared to Near Eastern instructional collections originating from scribal and palace schools. It is, however, clear that Q was definitely counter-establishment in its attack on scribes and Pharisees of the Judaean Temple-state establishment. This implies that the genre of this collection must rather be sought in the more elite instructional literary types ordinarily associated with Near-Eastern scribal schools and furthermore that the composers had to have been not-establishment yet literate intellectuals. The wealth of agricultural imagery found in Q initially suggests a peasant audience, but if this relatively learned genre of a characteristically scribal nature is to be selected, a different social location for the germination and forming of this document will have to be found.

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He reminds his reader of Kloppenborg's description of Q as much more than sayings strung together, but rather as a collection which speaks of literary organization, gathered into coherent groupings (see Kloppenborg 1987:89,90).

This underlines the importance of not abstracting or isolating sayings or clusters of sayings from their concrete communication situations for their meaning in themselves only, but questions as to their function or significance in those very situations should be asked and answered as far as possible with the help of the key aspects of communication, namely the communication context, the register and the cultural tradition out of which the text can be understood. He suggests that the scholar find the key to the situation of the receptors and the nature of the performers who recited these words within the text itself: The key to determining the situation of the people who heard and resonated to the text recited or performed at its register, analysed according to its key features in the communication context: its field (what is happening), its tenor (between whom), as well as its mode.

Attending to cues of the registers of Q discourses should enable us to obtain a sense of the more general communication contexts, such as covenant renewal and prayer. The texts of particular discourses then may provide more detailed indications of the particular situation of the Q people who heard them. By reviewing the discussion of Q discourses in the preceding chapters, it should be possible to develop a composite sketch of the situation of the Q people who listened and resonated to those discourses, before considering the performers who recited them.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:295)

Thus he sees Q 11:2-4, 9-13 as instruction in prayer for the kingdom of God to the people. The contents of the prayer and the admonitions that follow, tell of an urgency in the situation of the people being thus instructed. The principal prayer is for the kingdom of God, but is paralleled in the second and third petitions by prayer for simply the means to subsist; bread and the cancellation of debts. This once

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again tells of people hungry and indebted, initially marginalized economically but now in desperate straits and longing for the meagre means to enable them to live the simple life of the peasant, people already so poor that they worry about basic necessities such as food and clothing. There is no indication that these are exhortations to voluntary poverty. "The Q discourses are addressed to and are concerned not simply (or primarily) with individual piety and morality but with community social-economic life....The communities of Q understood themselves as part of a larger movement of renewal of Israel" (Horsley & Draper 1999:297).

What endures in oral tradition is what is really pertinent to the situation of the hearers, therefore the discourse encouraging the hearers to fearless confession when being led to the test of standing trial before authorities with the jurisdiction to have them executed, speaks of a real threat in their circumstances. The Q-people's stance over against the Jerusalem rulers and their scribal-Pharisaic representatives formed part of their sense of identity and mission of the Q people as communities in a movement for the renewal of Israel. "In all of this material the register is that of prophetic condemnation of rulers or their officers for exploitation and oppression of the people" (Horsley & Draper 1999:298).

A reading of Q as setting itself over against all Israel in condemnation of their lack of faith and its rejection of Jesus and/or the Q-people's message is determined, according to Horsley, by a standard Christian theological view of the separation of Christianity as a universal religion from Judaism as a parochial religion. The true political-economic-religious situation of the Q-people is, however, one of conflict between opulently wealthy and powerful rulers and their "retainers" on the one hand and the *hoi polloi* on the other, compounded by historical regional differences and a long-standing cultural heritage of northern Israelite conflict with Jerusalem rule.

The Q-discourses are addressed to members of a movement for the renewal of Israel over against the Jerusalem rulers and their scribal representatives who feel themselves to be secure and superior because of their lineage and privileged position, articulated in a set of woes against the scribes and Pharisees for their extortion of the people and the heavy burdens with which they weighed them down.

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"This generation" is being condemned for their killing of God's prophets and his other envoys in a way reminiscent of prophetic oracles or laments in biblical books indicating abusive power relations. The prophets of the imminent fulfilment of God's promises, namely John and Jesus, will vindicate the wisdom of God in spite of the attacks on them.

The performers of the Q discourses were spokesmen for Jesus (and John) and also spoke about them. This is clear to Horsley from Q 10:16: "[W]hoever hears you, hears me." And as they were speaking for Jesus (and John), so the envoys were being commissioned by them to become new prophetic delegates. In these performative speeches the Q-performers enact what was spoken; renew the covenant, pronounce condemnation over the Pharisees, lament the imminent desolation of Jerusalem, commission envoys, admonish to bold confession under trial and exhorts to cease worrying about the necessities of/for daily life, etc. He considers these performers to be "early Christian prophets" (Horsley & Draper 1999:301). Horsley emphasizes that in no case was Q material transmitted from individual to individual, rather were the discourses repeatedly performed before the same audiences, probably by local leaders residing within the communities, rather, he says, like the assemblies (*synagogai*) of village communities in Galilee and elsewhere.

He adds that the Q-document has recently come to be understood as having come from a Jesus-movement distinct from the mission of Paul or the community or movement connected with the Gospel of Mark. This has led to more particular focus on Q and its distinguishing traits and has brought to light an absence of Jesus' death, resurrection and heavenly exaltation in this document. Jesus as the exalted Lord simply does not feature in Q. The Jesus that speaks through the Q-performer(s) speaks with the authority given him by the Father, is called *kyrios* and proclaims the kingdom and the renewal of Israel, but the *kyrios* is not a christological title for Jesus nor is he a transcendent emperor exalted to heaven.

Jesus continues to speak with authority through the performer(s) of the Q discourses. Whatever dichotomy may have been felt by Paul or another Jesus movement between

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the remembered and recited words of Jesus as a historical figure of the past and the “word of the Lord” as a revelation in the present, no such dichotomy appears in the Q discourses. But there is a third alternative: Jesus still speaks in the recitation of his speech by his spokesperson. Through the performer(s) of Q discourses Jesus continues as proclaimer of the kingdom and the renewal of Israel, with authoritative presence effective in his recited speech. The remembered speech of Jesus comes alive again in the performer’s recitation.

(Horsley & Draper 1999:302, 303)

Kelber (1983:20) writes that, in oral culture, words exhibit the power of manifesting the “presentness” and “personal authority” of the person for whom they speak/act. In this way, speakers in early Christian culture who spoke in Jesus’ name, thereby manifested his authority. The name itself was like an incantation, effecting wonder-working. So, through the medium of the spoken word, they became vehicles to carry the voice of Jesus, so that he could continue to speak through him.

As seems obvious to Horsley, the Q performers may be easily identified as prophetic in nature and office in imitation of Jesus the prophet condemning the oppression by the rulers. He deduces that certainly the role of Jesus and the performers were prophetic from their use of the speech of Moses, seen by Israel as the great prototype of all later prophets. By enacting the covenant renewal, they were enacting the role of the new Moses. Elijah, another great prophet from tradition, renewer among the northern tribes of Israel, leader of scores of *bene-nabi'im* in a renewal movement, commissioned his follower Elijah. His renewal movement is remembered and revived by the discourse in Q12:2-12 which threatens and exhorts to “fearless confession in the face of persecution and oppression” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:305). The commissioning is remembered in the mission discourse.

### 3.5 A sighting in Q: The reflection of a prophet

Horsley, in studying the prophetic role of the Q-performers, as well as the macro- and micro-Gattungen of Q as literary document and of the individual sayings, discovered that there was more to the prophetic role than had previously been supposed. With as backdrop the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, consisting mainly of collections of oracular fragments, the model of a prophet as receiver and deliverer of oracles emerged. Q was found to represent "an atavism in terms of the history of the genre' of the prophetic period, especially of Elijah and Elisha" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:305). Extra-biblical evidence indicates however, that another type of prophecy had dominance over oracular prophecy in the late second-temple period, especially among the people. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, Liberal Christian theology and New Testament studies tended to push narratives on the actions of Jesus to the background because the miraculous nature of these accounts were foreign concepts to the modern mind, and tended to focus on the teachings of Jesus. An examination of the great prototype of prophet, Moses, reveals that not only did he deliver oracles revealing the will of God, but that he played a much broader political-religious role as leader in the exodus and mediator of the covenant.<sup>27</sup> It is obvious furthermore from a perusal of the lives of Israelite liberators (*sophetim*) and prophets (*nabi'im*), from Joshua to Deborah, from Gideon to Samuel, that they not only announced the will and action of God to the people but as the charismatic leaders of their people founded and led renewal and even military campaigns often in protection against the threat of outside rule. Elijah and Elisha both became known as prophets of renewal against oppressive domestic rule. Thereafter a great prophetic tradition emerged in Jerusalem but only individual oracular prophets came forward to pronounce the judgment and sentencing of God against oppressive rulers and officials.

Horsley is of the opinion that both John and Jesus were of the earlier prophets, not the oracular prophets of the great Jerusalem tradition but of the popular tradition

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<sup>27</sup> See also Van Aarde (2003:453-467).

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cultivated among the Judean, Samarian and Galilean people<sup>28</sup>. He names Jesus ben Hananiah the peasant prophet, as an example of oracular prophets and Theudas as an example of a prophetic leader of a movement from the time of Jesus and the origins of Q, the mid-first century. And as he had examined the resonance of individual Q passages with Israelite tradition, so he examines the whole discourse series in Q to see how it references and resonates with the pattern of prophetic leaders of renewal movements in popular Israelite tradition, using both biblical books and accounts of popular movements as sources. From this examination he concludes that both Jesus and the Q-performers unquestionably worked from the oracular prophetic tradition as is seen clearly in the woes against the Pharisees (Q 11:39–52) and the prophetic lament over the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in Q 13:34-35. He points out that the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem and its imminent destruction has long been noted to bear striking similarities with those of Jesus ben Hananiah.

But the Jesus depicted in Q is, according to Horsley, more than simply an oracular prophet. Right from the start John depicts him as burning chaff and gathering grain into the granary, as the one who will baptize with the fire of judgment but also with the Spirit of renewal. Jesus enacts a covenant renewal as the new Moses in Q 6:20-49, in his actions age-old longings for a new era of restoration and wholeness are fulfilled (Q 7:18-35), as the New Elijah (Q 9:57-10:16) he commissions prophetic envoys to expand his program of announcing the kingdom and healing to the village communities to bring about renewal. He performs exorcisms as manifestations of the kingdom (Q 11:14-26) which are portrayed as the new exodus and Horsley here quotes from Exodus 8:16-19: "...if, by the finger of God, I cast out demons...". Not only does he and the Q-performers enacting his words condemn the rulers and their representatives for the unjust and oppressive treatment of their people, but they offer encouragement to the people, exhorting them to work together in peace and solidarity, to put their faith in the renewal and reversal of fortunes that God is inaugurating through his coming kingdom and to remain committed in solidarity to the movement even under threat of persecution or death.

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<sup>28</sup> See above: Wright in Chapter 2 on types of prophecy.

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He furthermore points out that there was a tendency for the work and words of the prophets inaugurating movements of renewal to be carried on by the "...protegés of the head of the movement": For example as Elijah had commissioned Elisha to continue his program of renewal, so Jesus commissioned envoys to continue and expand his program of renewal by acts of healing and the proclamation of the kingdom of God among the people. In assuming the prophetic mantle of Jesus the final prophet, the whole movement takes on a prophetic identity.

He says that this is evident from three connections: Firstly Jesus and John are depicted throughout as prophets of renewal, with John being called "a prophet and more than a prophet", preparing the way for the new exodus in 7:26-27, and Jesus declaring himself to be the prophet that would fulfil the longings of the people expressed by the earlier prophets. When Jesus commissions envoys in Q 9:57-62, he is represented as a prophet in the mould of Elijah. In Q 11:29- 32 his prophetic action is an analogy to that of Jonah. Secondly there is a marked tendency in Q to refer to the many persecuted and executed prophets of the past, forming eventually the grounds for the punitive action against Jerusalem and its Pharisaic representatives. And thirdly the receptors of the Q message hear themselves being addressed as successors in the long line of prophets under siege and co-commissioned in an Elijah-Elisha typology.

Horsley also finds clues as to the sweeping scope of the prophetic mantle he believes to have been worn by the Q-performers and communities as followers of Jesus, the leader of their movement, with the nomenclature and functions of leadership employed by other movements of Jesus' believers. So for example did Paul distinguish "apostles", "prophets", "teachers", "deeds of power", "gifts of healing" and "forms of leadership" in 1 Corinthians 12:27-28. He calls himself an apostle, but portrays his own calling as prophetic, bearing similarities to the commissioning of Jeremiah and also functions as one, receiving and communicating the word of God. By the same token he functions as a teacher instructing assemblies in the tradition he had received (1Cor 11:23-26; 15:1-5).

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Horsley's (in Horsley & Draper 1999:309) conclusion after this brief perusal is as follows:

Were we to examine how Paul's nomenclature would apply to Jesus as portrayed in Q discourses, he would be 'all of the above.' That is, Q's Jesus was an 'apostle' of God, a 'prophet' receiving and declaring the will of God, a 'teacher' of the people in the movement, and a healer and performer of deeds of power (exorcisms), as well as an organizer of a movement. And Moses and Elijah, the two principal paradigmatic prophetic leaders of movements in Israelite tradition, had also performed all of the same functions.

He compares the functions of prophet and teacher as applied in Q to those in the Didache and Acts 13:12 and reaches the conclusion that in all of these cases of application these two functions seem to be undivided and adds that in the Qumran-documents left by their scribal-priestly movement, their leader, although being referred to as the "teacher", clearly plays a prophetic role as founder-leader of the movement.

In a reference to Max Weber's use of the concept "charisma" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:310) and says that sociologists are in agreement that "individual charismatic" would be an individualistic abstraction. He reminds his readers that particular historical social relationships such as dislocation, conflict and distress lead to charismatic relationships. All people, and that includes people of the present-time as well as the times of Jesus and the origins of the Q discourses, are embedded in a network of social and power relations and charisma and are part of just such social and power relationships between leaders and their followers.

He maintains that, in the study of orally derived literature, another factor should be taken into consideration, namely that "...leaders and followers who form a movement in struggling to deal with their particular historical situation are also working out of a particular cultural tradition and the crisis into which it has come in their historical situation" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:310). He concludes

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finally that any approach to the Q-discourses and any orally derived texts have to consider four essential analytical factors: The leaders or performers, the followers or hearers, their historical situation and the cultural tradition in which the leaders and followers are interacting in response to the situation in which they find themselves.

### **3.6 The message of the prophet in view**

Through a careful and detailed analysis of what lies behind the earliest written gospel material, evidence of profuse and deliberate prophetic referencing and alluding is to be found emitting from a main character or subject who displays in his being and words distinctly prophetic characteristics. It is of paramount importance that here, in an unbiased and unpremeditated study of the traces of the earliest Jesus traditions, the banner of prophecy is found to be flying so clearly over the heads of Jesus, his followers, his words and their activities.

What is found, furthermore, is that, like with the prophets of old, there is a passionate concern for the social issues of the day with repression of the poor by the rich topping the bill. This social aspect is of paramount importance for the understanding of Jesus – also and especially in his role as prophet as is further expounded in the work of Max Weber as is referred to below.

However, with Horsley focusing his attention on the Q-material, although he discovers there an undoubtedly prophetic Jesus complete with the concern for the social welfare of his people, a thorough examination of the phenomenon of prophecy and what exactly it entails is sorely missed, just as in the case of Wright.

One more image of Jesus, from the point of view of J DG Dunn must be examined before we pay due attention to the essence and scope of prophecy. Dunn, like Horsley looks behind the Gospel of Mark and delves into the memories of all who saw, heard and was affected by Jesus in their renditions, both oral and written of the images he so clearly imprinted there. He poses the question whether in looking for the historical Jesus as a flesh and body person with biographical details of his

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life, one may be chasing a phantom and in a wonderfully detailed, meticulous and enlightening exposition, reaches some interesting and encouraging conclusions.

**CHAPTER 4****A MEANDER DOWN MEMORY LANE: J D G DUNN**

In a study as extensive as the one by Dunn, it is essential to ascertain that one's North Star is still visible in the firmament among the array of facts and the wealth of information offered by this author:

- Dunn spends time plotting the route he is about to take. He examines Christianity in an attempt to grasp the mission and message of Jesus and the scope of their influence. He likewise investigates scholarship on this subject to avoid the pitfalls and build upon the strengths of the past. We sit in on this examination to be able to evaluate later whether the road that leads to his conclusions is a legitimate one.
- He examines an extensive range of sources as all, according to him, shed light on how Jesus was remembered and what impact he had had on his followers. These sources offer glimpses into the earliest phases of the traditioning process and Dunn believes them to have retained a greater portion of stability and continuity within the Jesus tradition than has previously been believed, thanks to the pattern and technique of oral transmission. Among the sources examined is, for instance, the Gospel of Thomas, over which there is a hanging jury as to its origin, with some scholars opting for its knowledge of and dependence upon the synoptic Gospels as sources, and others believing it to be earlier than and independent of these Gospels. Do any of these sources show that Jesus was remembered as prophet?
- The sources lead to a summary of the background of Jesus' life and mission. Do we see here the germination of a prophetic awareness? Imbedded in this phase of Dunn's argumentation is the literacy/illiteracy debate. We briefly enter into the fray to answer questions such as whether, if Jesus had been illiterate and unable to read, for

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instance, the words of the earlier prophets, it would detract from the likelihood that he had been a prophet himself?

- Geography takes up some of Dunn's time as he gleans whatever information he can from the topography of Jesus' mission. For example, he examines the validity of Horsley's statement that the Q-material with its prophetic overtones possibly originated in Galilee. Dunn further investigates Horsley's conviction that this point of origin attuned the Q audience to the possibility that Jesus in Q is denouncing the ruling house, scribes and Pharisees in a way particularly reminiscent of that of the prophets. Is the reader justified in detecting a thin line of provincial bureaucracy in Caesarea-Philippi and was this evocative of the turning point suggested to have hinged on Caesarea-Philippi in the mission of Jesus? These possibilities definitely seem worth investigating in the current study.
- In Dunn's examination of the gospel genre, which, according to him, attests to a lively interest among first Christians to know about Jesus, to preserve the memory of his mission and to learn from his example, useful information is offered as to the possibility that these memories include recollections of prophetic awareness and behaviour.
- As with Horsley, the oral traditioning process comes under the spotlight as an important contribution to the validity of the road leading to the conclusions of who Jesus was and what role he had assumed.
- Dunn subsequently examines the Kingdom of God theme in Jesus' mission, a theme pertinent to the prophetic message since time immemorial.
- Is Jesus' invitation to all and sundry to participate in open table-fellowship with him a flashback to the symbolism inherent in Old Testament prophecy?
- What does discipleship entail in the message delivered by Jesus and can any prophetic overtones be detected in these requirements?

- Among the roles such as messiah and sage which, according to Dunn, seem likely to be suitable for Jesus, does the role of prophecy feature at all, and if so, why?
- “Apocalyptic” and “eschatology” are two terms which are often mentioned in conjunction with the prophetic message. We join Dunn as he clarifies the distinction and overlap between these terms.
- Was the end of Jesus’ life reminiscent in any way of the end generally met by prophets?

#### **4.1 Preparing for the journey:**

Dunn, in his search for an authentic, original view of Jesus, makes use of an alternative route which enables him to appreciate a familiar view from an angle which allows the viewer greater scope and clarity. Meandering with him the mental image of the familiar portrait of Jesus gets stripped of many obscuring layers till eventually the fog clears and the person behind the portrait emerges into view, multi-dimensional and in full colour. One, and certainly not the least of the dimensions that come into view, is that of Jesus the Prophet.

In his work, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, he aims to give a comprehensive overview of Christianity as the most enduring and important influence to mould the character and culture of Europe, and indeed the West, over the last two millennia. In doing so he is engaging in the essential and continuing challenge of *attempting to gain a better understanding of the unique character and core elements of Christianity*, and in particular the beginnings of Christianity, all of which contributed towards making its beliefs and values so influential. At the basis of his work is his desire to understand the writings of the New Testament in their historical context, as well as an “...instinctive hermeneutical awareness that the part can be understood only in the light of the whole, just as the whole can be comprehended only through a close understanding of the

parts" (Dunn 2003:xiii). All of these bode well for a sound methodology as the way by which to gain proximity to the truest picture of Jesus.

In his thoroughgoing scrutiny of the sources at hand as well as the history of research on his subject, Dunn lists some criteria which, for him, have been pinnacles to aim for as he waded his way through landscapes of material. He upholds that three recent developments in particular have to be taken into account when attempting an investigation such as this.

Firstly, in terms of methodology, there is the crisis that post-modernism brought upon the historical-critical method of analysing sources and traditions. Secondly, there are the new insights gleaned by critically taking into account the light that social-scientific disciplines, sociology in particular, may cast on the New Testament texts and Christianity's beginnings, and, thirdly, there is the discovery of new texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices which have "…undermined the older wisdom which had previously determined scholarly views on the emergence of Christianity in its distinctiveness from its Jewish matrix and within the religious melting-pot of the first- and second-century Mediterranean world" (Dunn 2003:3).

He considers three questions to be of paramount importance when researching the beginnings of Christianity, namely:

- Why did Jesus make such an impact on his disciples and why was he crucified?
- Why did the Jesus-movement not remain within first-century Judaism and why had it been unacceptable to the emerging rabbinic Judaism?
- Was the Christianity of the second century (a predominantly gentile religion) the same as that of the first century?

All three of these are, in his opinion, large-scale issues, the second and third having as a matter of course impacted back on the first, namely the

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attempt to grasp the mission and message of Jesus and the scope of their influence (Dunn 2003:5). Moreover, the search for answers to all three questions may shed light upon the way in which Jesus and his mission were interpreted by his peers - both followers and opponents - as well as by those who carried his torch after his death. What mantle did they drape over his shoulders as they either followed in his footsteps and/or perpetuated his memory, or plotted against him?

Baur (1845:3) had already commented on the importance of the subject matter of the second question, which, in his opinion, cannot be over-emphasized. According to him, the way in which Christianity freed itself from the confinement of the national Judaism to realize itself historically and universally as separate and independent, "...and took its stand as a new enfranchised form of religious thought and life, essentially differing from all the national peculiarities of Judaism is the ultimate, most important point of the primitive history of Christianity." Dunn's critique of Baur's formulation of the issue (Dunn 2003:4) does not cloud the recognition he extends to him for setting the stage for "...attempts to clarify the history of primitive Christianity for the rest of the nineteenth century." The reappearance of the subject of the emergence of Christianity from Judaism in the second half of the twentieth century is considered by Dunn to be of vital importance for gleaning insight into the formative stages of Christianity as well as Judaism.

On the subject of the answer to the third question, Dunn examines the multitude of other influences upon Christianity as it Hellenizes upon emerging into the Greco-Roman world (the main focus of the *religionsgeschichtliche* school). The disparity between Paul and Jesus is mentioned with a reminder of Wrede's (1908:180) remark that Paul had been the second founder of Christianity, his influence having been stronger, but not better, than that of the founder. That this remark holds water is obvious from the obscurity to which the life, programme and words of Jesus have over the years become relegated, starting when Paul shunted the engine of the virgin faith onto the somewhat different track of a

Christianity based more or less solely upon the post-Easter dogma of the crucified, risen and ascended Christ.

Walter Bauer's (1934) exposition leads up to the conclusion that in several of the major Mediterranean cities the earliest forms of Christianity may very well have been what subsequent "orthodoxy" would have regarded as "heresy". Dunn calls his work a breakthrough (Dunn 2003:5), adding in agreement that Christianity strikes one as much more of a "mixed bag" than had previously been imagined and wondering if there had ever been a "pure" form. He ponders the possibility that the pluralism detected by Bauer may have been present at the outset, when the very first audience had listened to Jesus preach.

Harnack (1904:203) described the influence of Hellenism as a feature of the second century and Dunn wonders if traces of this influence are already to be detected in the teaching of Jesus:

A history of earliest Christianity can no longer treat the mission and message of Jesus simply as prolegomenon, nor confine itself to the period and documents of the NT. Unless the major transitions, from Jesus to Paul, from the NT to the early Fathers ... are also appreciated, neither the significance of Jesus nor that of Paul, neither the Christianity of the NT writings nor that of the early Fathers can be adequately comprehended or fully grasped. In other words, what is envisaged... is the attempt... to give an integrated description and analysis, both historical and theological, both social and literary, of the first 120 or so years of Christianity (27-150 CE).

(Dunn 2003:5, 6)

## 4.2 Tripping the well-trodden road of Jesus-scholarship

### 4.2.1 As the crow flies

In this volume Dunn spans the first hundred and twenty years of Christianity (27 – 150 CE).

Regarding issues of fundamental perspective and method he asks what the starting point of such study should be. He proceeds to take the reader on a comprehensive tour of New Testament scholarship and concludes with what useful lessons may be gleaned from the insights of various scholars and movements. The following is an attempt to follow his train of thought on this as succinctly as possible:

- Reimarus and Harnack - There exists a gap between Jesus and his followers, especially Paul (in Dunn 2003:65);
- Harnack (*Die Christliche Welt*) – Theology can be defined historically, the simple gospel of Jesus historically rediscovered and applied “to the believer’s knowledge of Jesus: If the person of Jesus Christ stands at the centre of the gospel, how can the basis for a reliable and communal knowledge of this person be gained other than through critical historical study, if one is not to trade a dreamed-up Christ for the real one” (in Robinson 1959:45).
- Strauss - Miracle narratives should be taken seriously;
- Liberals and Neo-Liberals - Tradition should be checked against sources, so that the sources may be tracked;
- Schleiermacher - There is an important experiential rapport between interpreter and text;
- Liberals - The ethical outcome of beliefs should be taken seriously;
- Schweitzer - The danger in modernizing Jesus is that it contributes to a failure to recognize his otherness especially in terms of apocalyptic teaching ;

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- Kähler (1964:74) - Faith has, from the very beginning, been important in shaping tradition, “Historical facts which first have to be established by science cannot as such become experiences of faith. Therefore Christian faith and a history of Jesus repel each other like oil and water.”
- Theissen, Horsley - The social context of Jesus and his movement is of the utmost importance;
- Willhelm Hermann (1971:72) - “Jesus himself and his power over the heart is the vital principal [sic] of our religion”, “The traditional record may appear doubtful; but the essential content of that record, namely, the inner life of Jesus, has the power to manifest itself to the conscience as an undeniable fact. That means everything” (Hermann1971:235-236).
- Koester, Crossan - It is important to search beyond that boundaries of the canon for sources of Jesus’ teaching;

Other critiques and comments upon the research process which he highlights and which, together with the former, profoundly influence his work, are:

- “...emphasis on the reality and power of religious experience, over against an understanding of faith primarily in terms of uniform dogma, is to be welcomed”;
- Lessing - Enlightenment - Religious truth differs from historical truth and the former does not depend upon the latter;
- Kähler (1964:72-73, 109-110) – Is faith then to depend on the findings of a few scholars? Are critical historians to become the new priests and pope of Christian faith? No! To tie faith to the historical accuracy of this or that detail, would wholly undermine faith. Faith looks only to the historic Christ, the biblical Christ, the “Christ who is preached.”

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- Braaten – “The biblical Christ is the ‘invulnerable area’ from which faith can gain its certainty without relying on the heteronomous guarantees of external authorities” (in Dunn 2003:72).
- Barth – Although historical criticism has its rightful place, it also has its limitations – it can deal with the words of Paul, but it cannot get to the word of God within Paul’s words (in Robinson 1959:45).
- “In an outcome that reflects the influence of Hermann and Kähler, Bultmann was able to find secure refuge for faith in the moment of existential encounter with the word of proclamation, an area for faith invulnerable to the challenge and assets of historical criticism”;
- History and faith make uncomfortable bed-partners but history and hermeneutics are twins, the latter too little acknowledged third partner. But there is no progress unless inter-dependence of history and hermeneutics are recognized. “The foundation for the study of history is hermeneutics” - Gadamer (in Dunn 2003:99);
- An effective historical method and use of historical texts cannot be reduced to a single principle. We are faced with the unavoidable task of balancing and integrating different and at times competing emphasis (Dunn 2003:100);
- “For the incarnation, by definition, means the commitment of God to self-manifestation in Jesus at a particular time and place within human history, and thus places a tremendous weight of significance upon certain events in the years 28-30 of the common era” (Dunn 2003:101);
- The otherness of the past should be taken into account. If Jesus does not come to us as a “stranger and enigma” (Schweitzer – see chapter 1) we must know we have modernized him.
- Should we expect certainty in faith? Is faith an absolute? Faith deals in trust, not mathematical calculations. Faith is commitment, not just conviction. Faith can live more comfortably with the uncertainties of human testimony than Lessing or Troeltsch thought” (in Dunn 2003:104,105);

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- “[A] faith perspective can be and has to be self-critical, but historical method which lacks empathy with the subject-matter is unlikely to enter far into the lived experience of the historical characters being studied (Dunn 2003:106)”;
- “The task of seeking to describe and evaluate data and reach some sort of judgment regarding the facts which is not nearly subjective may demand proper critical respect, not only viable, but, in case of Jesus, necessary. In particular, the model of historical study as a dialogue between present and past, between historian and history, is one which has always appealed to me, not least because it recognizes that history not only asks questions, but in genuine engagement with the subject-matter often finds him/herself put in question” (Dunn 2003:111). So the model of critical realism is mediated to us primarily through historical texts.<sup>29</sup>
- The principle of respecting a text and allowing it as far as possible, using all the tools of historical criticism, to speak in its own terms, is still valid. Any less a goal for exegesis would be self-condemned.
- Plain meaning should be given priority and is gained by properly respecting the text and listening to it breaking through previous understandings and calling for their revision.

Armed with the benefit of insight gleaned from great scholars and scholarly movements of the past, he now proceeds to his own contribution.

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<sup>29</sup> Bernard Lonergan (in Dunn 2003:110) wrote: “the criteria of objectivity are not just the criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging, and of believing. The reality known is not just looked at; it is given in experience, organized and extrapolated by understanding, posited by judgment and belief.” His work has been perpetuated by Ben Meyer (see Dunn 2003:110): The hallmark of critical realism is its insistence on the empirical (data), the intelligent (questioning and answering), the rational (the grasp of evidence as sufficient or insufficient, the personal act of commitment) as – all of them together – entering into true judgment.” Wright, on critical realism, suggests: “This is a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence ‘critical’)”. DH Reinstorf ((2002:21) sums it up: “The critical realist conceives literature as the articulation of worldviews, or better still, the telling of stories that bring worldviews into articulation. In the process of reading, the reader enters into conversation with the text. Knowledge takes place within the larger framework of both the worldview that is articulated by the text and the worldview of the reader engaged in dialogue with the text. When pieces of this puzzle fall together for the reader, that is, when things start to fit within the framework of the readers (sic) own story or the stories they are accustomed to, there is knowledge.”

#### 4.3 Road maps and starting lines

##### **4.3.1 Where to start and what sources to use**

There are a few other questions with which Dunn grapples before embarking on his own search for an authentic picture of Jesus. These include the questions of what should count as sources for the earliest phases of the Jesus-tradition; what conception of a traditioning process one should operate with; whether the implications of Jesus' particular setting in Galilee are being taken into account adequately and what is realistically attainable in such a study.

To enable him to achieve his research goals, he examines all available sources but especially the gospels (and primarily the synoptic gospels) to detect how Jesus was remembered in the impact he made on his followers. He pays special attention to the historical context of Jesus' mission and the suggestion that the pattern and technique of oral transmission ensured greater stability and continuity of the Jesus tradition than had previously been imagined. He furthermore investigates claims that there had been diverse and alternative forms of Christianity as early as those attested in the New Testament.

"The first task in any historical investigation is to ascertain what the sources are on which the historian can draw, and to ask how reliable these sources are. In this case our sources are almost entirely limited to those which evidence direct influence from Jesus at one remove or another" (Dunn 2003:140).

A starting point for all the quests always has to be the Jesus-tradition in the synoptic gospels, but in order to detect how Jesus was remembered in the impact he made on his followers, he examines not only the synoptic gospels but also all available sources, paying special attention to the

historical context of Jesus' mission and referring to the current debate, archaeology and sociology.

#### **4.3.2 External sources**

The paucity of these sources notwithstanding, they are well known and on the whole uncontested in terms of veracity, lack of bias and general reliability.

Looking outside of traditions immediately influenced by Christianity, the first source to be examined would be Josephus the Jewish historian. Dunn considers the translations done by Meier in his work, *Marginal Jew*, of Josephus' references to Jesus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, to be superior to those of the Loeb editions and therefore uses these in his perusal of the external sources (see Dunn 2003:141).

*Antiquities* 18:63-64, as translated by Meier (1994 [1]:59, 60), reads as follows:

As it stands in the Greek text of *The Antiquities* (the so-called “Vulgate” text) the Testimonium reads thus:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who received the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.

Vermes (1987:1-10) points out that the two key phrases in these passages, namely “a wise man” and “a doer of startling deeds” are both characteristic of Josephus and thus unlikely to be Christian interpolation.

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In Antiquities 20: 200 a brief description of the execution of one James in 62 CE alludes back to the first passage by describing James as the “brother of Jesus who is called Messiah”.

The other external source, Tacitus, the Roman historian who wrote in the early second century, identifies the scapegoats used by Nero to take the blame for causing the great fire, as people known to the hoi polloi by the name of “Christians”, explaining further: “Their name comes from Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate” (Annals 15.44).

He also refers briefly to Suetonius and the Jewish rabbinic sources without attaching much importance to them as sources in this particular enterprise (See Dunn 2003:142).

One of the few contrary voices to be heard saying that Jesus never existed and that all talk about him has been an invention on a large scale, is GA Wells (1999) and Weaver talks about the very fine line of thought about the “unhistorical Jesus” (Weaver 1999:45-70).

#### **4.3.3 The earliest references to Jesus**

The earliest sources of Jesus as a person in history are the letters of Paul, beyond reasonable doubt the earliest Christian documents available. 1 Corinthians 15:3 teaches “...that Christ died...”. Dunn (2003:142, 143) estimates Paul’s conversion to have taken place approximately two years after the death of Jesus, the obvious conclusion from the catechism in this verse being that, in the early thirties Paul had been taught that a person called Jesus had died more or less two years before.

In his letter to the Galileans (Gl 1:18-20) Paul recollects his first visit to Jerusalem succeeding his conversion. If Dunn’s (2003:143) estimate of Paul’s conversion having taken place approximately two years after the crucifixion of Jesus is correct, then his visit to Jerusalem had to have taken

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place no later than five years thereafter. He recounts meeting with James, the brother of the Lord, and later refers to “the brothers of the Lord” (1 Cor 9:5), both of which references are in accordance with that in *Antiquities* 20: 200.

From this evidence Dunn justifiably concludes: “It is a work of some desperation which denies the obvious deduction from these references, that there was a man called Jesus whose brothers were well known in the 30s to 60s” (Dunn 2003:143). Paul Barnett emphasizes the value of the epistles of the New Testament, and especially the Pauline letters, in an assessment of Jesus as teacher on both pre- and post-Ester Christianity. He lists fifteen pieces of information which may be gleaned from the letters of Paul, such as his descent from Abraham, his direct descent from David, that he was “born of a woman” and lived in poverty and his institution of a meal of memorial before he was betrayed (see Barnett 1997:57-58). Dunn is in complete agreement with him on this score, warning the scholar against starting from the assumption that a great gulf separates the Jesus-tradition and the Pauline epistles. But he qualifies, in my opinion correctly so, that

[I]t is true, of course, that if we had nothing but Paul’s letters to depend on for our knowledge of Jesus’ Galilean and Judean mission we would know very little about him. Nevertheless, in letters not intended to provide biographical details, the number of allusions is probably enough to confirm both Paul’s knowledge of and interest in Jesus prior to his death and resurrection.

(Dunn 2003:143)

#### **4.3.4 The Gospels**

Dunn (2003:6) believes that “...the Gospel traditions provide a clear portrayal of the remembered Jesus since they still display with sufficient

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clarity for present purposes the impact which Jesus made on his first followers.” A starting point for all quests always has to be the Jesus-tradition in the synoptic gospels. Although Dunn asserts that the Markan hypothesis still stands secure, he also, in an innovative way, considers the Gospel of John to be an important source to be taken seriously in research even though it cannot be valued as a source at the same level as the synoptic tradition which has provided us with a norm for distinguishing the earliest tradition. The value of the Gospel of John lies rather in the window it opens upon the way in which the Jesus-tradition was used as early as the first century considering that it both worked heavily upon and is well-rooted in the earlier Jesus-tradition. As a secondary source it supplements and corroborates the testimony of the Synoptic tradition.

Holtzmann had, as early as 1863, established the two-source hypothesis for German scholarship, although not referring to “Q” but to a “*Spruchsammlung*”.

In English-speaking scholarship, working independently from Holtzmann (nowhere is he listed in any of their indices), the Oxford scholars J C Hawkins (1898) and W Sanday (1911) were establishing theories in similar vein. Streeter (1924) was to build on their work in 1924 to deliver what became in English-speaking theological circles the normative work on this topic and currently theologians such as Fitzmyer and Styler “...have become classic restatements” (Dunn 2003:144).

#### **4.3.4.1 The Gospel of Mark**

In Dunn’s opinion the Holtzman-hypothesis still stands secure and he reminds the scholar of the remarkable fact that virtually all that is distinctive in Mark also appears in Matthew, leaving no clue as to who depended upon whom. Older theories had assumed Mark to have been an abbreviation of Matthew, but synoptic analyses have shown the coinciding episodes to be more lengthy on the whole than those of Mark and so put

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paid to the older theory. Besides, as Dunn (2003:145) points out, why would an evangelist taking such care to paint a picture of Jesus as a teacher omit great quantities of the teaching material that occurs in Matthew, such as for instance the Sermon on the Mount and the kingdom parables? All of this leads to a conclusion of Markan priority and that Matthew had actually abbreviated Mark in order to accommodate all the other sayings material at his disposal in his gospel.

Dunn (2003:145,146) briefly enters into the debate on whether an *Ur-Markus* or earlier edition of Mark had existed and been sourced by the evangelists of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Koester (1990:284-286) as well as Theissen & Merz (1998:26) argue the case for different editions of Mark. Koester, speaking of the “Urmarkus”, writes: “External evidence for two different versions of Mark circulating at an early date can be derived from only the observance that Luke does not reproduce Mk 6:45 – Mk 8:26.” And Theissen and Merz write about the Gospel of Mark: “There are indications that the version which became canonical and is first attested by manuscripts from the third century is not the only form of the text that was in circulation.” These indications are, according to them, the instability of the text, that the Secret Gospel of Mark<sup>30</sup> had probably been longer, with more early material from tradition, as well as minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark in texts which they have taken over from Mark could indicate a common original which diverged from canonical Mark. The Markan “special material”, that is the Markan material which neither Mark nor Luke use without giving any reason for omitting it, may perhaps not have been included in the “original” Mark which they used.

Dunn’s (2003:145, 146) argumentation on the matter is twofold. Firstly he remarks on the persistent doubt as to whether the Gospel of Mark had in actual fact been the source used by the other two Synoptic Evangelists.

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<sup>30</sup> “The Secret Gospel of Mark” refers to a version of the Gospel of Mark regarded by Clement of Alexandria to be a “more spiritual” elaboration of canonical Mark, further amplified by the Carpocratians, a second-century Gnostic sect. Inserted after Mark 10:34 and 10:46a respectively, is a longer account of the raising of a young man, presumably a variant of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, and a brief account of Jesus’ encounter with the mother and sister of said young man and with Salome. Crossan (1985:98-100) provides interesting and detailed information on this subject.

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This hesitance leads to the question of whether we should rather speak of an early Mark (*Ur-Markus*), or of different editions of Mark? The majority of scholars agree that the Matthean and Lukan source was as near to the canonical Mark as makes no difference.

Secondly Dunn (2003:146) touches on the issue of orality in what I consider to be valuable insight into the traditioning process, advising that the suggestion of different “editions” invites a word of caution. He readily concedes that, as textual criticism has made us all too aware, any act of copying will have introduced variants, both deliberate and unintended. Similarly he is open to the probability that documents were absorbed and redacted by others. But the extensive recension which Koester (in Dunn 2003:146) seems to imply in his examination of Mark, raises the concern in Dunn’s mind that the processes at work in the formation of the documents may be retrojections of the modern literary pattern of a book in several editions.

Should we not rather be attempting to adjust our thinking away from the literary mindset of the modern world and to re-envision the situation in terms of oral tradition? The point then being that much of the traditioning process would include oral variations of the traditions used by Mark, as also oral memories of those who heard readings from Mark’s version of the Jesus tradition. More attention needs to be given to the possibility that Evangelists were able to select the version of tradition they used from more than one version, written or oral.

(Dunn 2003:146)

It is of considerable interest to note the words of Papias:

Regarding Mark, the writer of the Gospel,...: The Presbyter used to say this also: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter<sup>31</sup> and

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<sup>31</sup> *Hermeneutes*.

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wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that he remembered<sup>32</sup> of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, a follower of Peter. Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord's sayings, so that Mark did not err in writing down some things just as he recollects them....”

(Eusebius [1953], H E 3.39.5)

This seems to fit in with texts such as 1 Peter 5:13 where Mark is referred to as Peter's “son”, and Dialogue 106:3 where Justin refers to ‘Peter's memoirs’ as containing a passage found exclusively in Mark 3:16-17 but he does not consider the evidence sufficient to substantiate hypotheses on the matter.

In conclusion he says that “...a very large consensus of contemporary scholarship” (Dunn 2003:146) dates Mark somewhere between 65-75 C E. He adds that Mark's gospel is beyond reasonable doubt the oldest surviving written gospel, having solidified traditions about Jesus which had circulated in the generation prior to this date into a gospel form and dating from approximately forty years after the crucifixion.

#### 4.3.4.2 Q

Of further importance as a source, of course, is Q, although all the uncertainties have to be borne in mind constantly. The close verbal similarities between Matthew and Luke point to literary dependence on a source already translated into Greek and are difficult to explain in any way other than the second conclusion of the two-source hypothesis. A “substantial majority” of scholars build upon this conclusion as a “persuasive working hypothesis” (Dunn 2003:147). These scholars include Kloppenborg (1987:51-64; 2000:72-80), whose work includes the

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<sup>32</sup> *hosa emnemoneusen, akribos agrapsen, ou mentoi taxei.*

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“unavoidable conclusion that Q was written in Greek” (Dunn 2003:147) and D Catchpole (1993:1-59) “who argues overall persuasively that in sixteen shared pericopes Luke has preserved the original form” (Dunn 2003:147). Catchpole (1993:6) mentions “...the discovery in directly related Matthew/Luke traditions of a substantial number of examples of verbal variations in which Luke has preserved the original form” and writes: “The suggestion will be that all traditions in the sample provide evidence that Luke gives us access to an earlier version than that in Matthew...” (Catchpole 1993:7).

However, there are still a minority of scholars arguing against this conclusion and voting for either of these gospels relying on the other as source, the majority of these arguing for Matthew having been sourced by Luke. Flusser (1998:21-22, 221-250) is one of the few who considers Luke to be the oldest gospel and Hengel (2000:178, 206) is convinced that Matthew was dependent on (Mark and) Luke as source and can’t contemplate the possibility of a sayings source. A revival of interest in Q has its origin largely in the strand of Bultmannian studies under the leadership of Gunther Bornkamm.

Dunn (see 2003:148) would have preferred to see the Matthean and Lukan common material labelled as “q” with “Q” reserved for the “hypothesized written source” to avoid confusion and he reminds his readers that Matthew used some parts of Q that Luke ignored and vice versa. Streeter (1924:183) argues that a substantial portion of the 200 verses in question were probably derived from some other (oral) source than Q, that some passages from Q were probably preserved by Matthew only or Luke only, that some of the common material may have been proverbs circulating independently, and (1924:229) that the author of Q “wrote to supplement, not to supersede, a living oral tradition.” In Q research he finds it difficult to see the forest for the trees: “In other words, the very definition of ‘Q’ (material common to Matthew and Luke) prevents us from seeing the true extent of the hypothesized source” (Dunn 2003:148).

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He questions two arguments on this topic, namely, a) that Q/q material displays a constant unity which implies a coherent compositional strategy, a statement that had been made earlier by Manson (1949:15-16) and has now been revived by Jacobson (1982:365-389) and b) that q, the material used by Matthew and Luke, makes use of most of Q. His concerns with these are that there are significant variations in wording in the corresponding texts and before jumping blithely from q to Q one has to bear in mind the possibility of editorial modification on the parts of Matthew and Luke.

Can immediate access to the historical Jesus be gained through Q? Dunn believes that an answer to this question hasn't been sought satisfactorily in the current revival of interest in this source.

Dunn addresses three issues that he labels “fallacies” and strongly argues against a fourth:

Remarking on Kloppenborg's hypothesis that behind the Q-document one may catch glimpses of a Q-community (indeed, Kloppenborg (2000:354-363) comments that, form-critically speaking, the tradition can hardly be anything other than community tradition), Dunn says that a question to consider would be whether this document originated in such a community as a deposit of its tradition or whether it was addressed to it, as well as whether it may be typified as merely a collection of community tradition or as a carefully constructed composition (Dunn 2003:150). What concerns Dunn is that this theory may assume that Q defines the community as being the only Jesus-tradition such a community possesses and that it belonged to only one community, bordering them in, defining them and distinguishing them from other communities, each with their own distinguishing documents. He calls this “*the ‘one document per community’ fallacy*” (Dunn 2003:150) and refutes it by pointing out the lack of evidence that this document was the sole document or traditional material of a community.

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Dunn (2003:151) insists that the Dead Sea Scrolls should have illustrated that communities did not limit themselves to possessing and treasuring only one document or tradition genre. Similarly the life and identity of any community of Jesus' earliest followers was unlikely to depend solely on the written traditions it possessed, let alone on a single document. Therefore the absence of various themes such as purity issues and the Torah from Q should not necessarily be taken as evidence of the Q community's limited concerns, but may rather serve to indicate that Q does not represent the totality of the concerns of the Q people.

In a further point of interest Dunn (2003:150, 151) writes: "Where documents have different purposes, the lack of cross-reference between them tells us nothing as to whether both documents were known or unknown to the writers or recipients of each." Lindemann (2001:13-17) expressed an opinion that Q belongs to a Gattung different from that of Mark, a Gattung other than "Gospel".

The second fallacy regarding Q is that the absence of reference in this source to the Passion kerygma or narratives automatically equals a Q-community ignorant of Passion kerygma or stories and, within these communities, a christology at odds with that of the canonical gospels. Meadors (1995:316) considers it to be highly unlikely that Matthew and Luke would both amalgamate two christologically incompatible sources in their gospels. The core of his reasoning is indeed that Mark and Q are "utterly compatible" with each other. The argument is thus reduced to illuminating places in Q where it could have borrowed from Passion kerygma or narratives, but consistently failed to do so. Dunn, however, believes that Q does show an awareness of Jesus' death. Indeed it seems impossible to envision groups in Galilee who cherished the teaching of Jesus, but were either ignorant of or unconcerned with his execution. Considering evidence pertaining to second-century Jewish-Christian

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groups, it seems as though this was not only probable, but in actual fact a reality that such groups, for example the Ebionites,<sup>33</sup> existed.

Another argument to refute these claims compares this issue to that of miracle references in Q and rests on Kloppenborg's argument that Q hints at a knowledge of more miracles than those it actually recorded. He argues: "...the appeal to wonder-working would be largely irrelevant to the formative stratum, since it is not concerned to defend a particular portrait of Jesus, but to promote an ethic based on the providential care and loving surveillance of God" (Kloppenborg 1996:330). Dunn questions this, saying:

One might simply observe that the limited purpose of a particular collection of Jesus' sayings should not be taken as indication that this purpose encompassed the full extent of the concerns and knowledge of Jesus tradition on the part of those who compiled or used the collection.

(Dunn 2003:151)

Dunn (2003:151) adds that Paul, for instance, uses several metaphors and that they are by no means all completely consistent with each other: "[T]here are different ways of presenting and understanding Jesus' death in the NT writings; they are not mutually exclusive, nor do they testify to ignorance of others."

In the pattern of suffering-vindication that Dunn believes is to be found in evangelistic sermons in Acts, where once again no soteriological function is attached to Jesus' death, he finds similarities with the implications of his death in Q.

The third fallacy is that disciples formed communities that were isolated and disjunct from one another and that teachers apparently, after having taught a certain body of tradition for many years, suddenly found it

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<sup>33</sup> The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian sect, their name being derived from the Hebrew *ebjoon* which means "poor". Epiphanius, Saint, Bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, writes about them in his *Panarion*, as translated and commented on by Koch, G A (1976).

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necessary to write these teachings down, but for their own community exclusively. Dunn refutes this, saying that these claims are unsubstantiated. Evidence seems rather to point to ongoing communication between the communities and it is more than likely that tradition was written down for the exact purpose of sharing it with other communities.

Against the fourth issue he argues the most forcibly but without labelling it a fallacy. Kloppenborg (2000:146) builds on the foundation laid by Helmut Koester (1997:145) and James M. Robinson (1991) and has invested much work and research in constructing a theory of layers in Q. He starts from the assumption that Q must have been compiled of different strata and because "...of course one cannot assume that the compositional themes governing one section of Q were those of the final redactor," the opposite has to be true: "Hence it is necessary... to reconstruct one or more redactional stages." (Kloppenborg 1987:98). His working hypothesis is that Q is a carefully structured document. He discerns a Q1 which is an earlier wisdom layer, Q2; a secondary prophetic redactional layer and a tertiary level into which material such as the temptation narrative has been interpolated.

Dunn's criticism is that Kloppenborg's demarcation of Q1 as belonging to the sapiential genre confuses rather than clarifies (see Dunn 2003:153,154). Whereas Kloppenborg (1987: 31) says that sayings are appropriate to different genres, Dunn seems to believe that one should move away from the old form-critical concept of "pure" forms which forced its adherents to also create the concept of "mixed" forms for various synoptic pericopes, also that one can conceive of the wisdom genre "permitting" apocalyptic forms (Dunn 2003:153). However, Christopher Tuckett (1996:345-48, 353-354) points out that because the sayings seem to be of a wider range than would normally be understood under "wisdom", Kloppenborg, in defining these sayings as such gives such a width of definition to "wisdom" that it diminishes its usefulness as distinguishing category. At several points he considers texts labelled "sapiential" by Kloppenborg to be rather "unsapiential", and he concludes: "Although there

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may be similarities between the structure and form of Q and that of other ‘instructions’ or other sayings collections, the actual *contents* of the specific instructions given seem to differ significantly and it is only at a high level of abstraction that Q can be called ‘sapiential’” (Tuckett 1996:348). On the whole, attempts to identify and demarcate Q and its surmised layers into different genre-types are in the opinion of Dunn too fraught with uncertainty to be of any help (Dunn 2003:155).

He also finds Kloppenborg’s theories on redaction contentious and questions the methodology which led to such conclusions. If the Gospel of Mark may be used as a parallel case study, determining redaction in this existing, written source has proven extremely difficult. How much more difficult, if not impossible, would it not then be in a hypothetical document to distinguish initial composition from redaction. Besides, how is it possible to argue simultaneously for two conflicting arguments, namely for coherence and unity in Q, and at the same time for inherent tensions that indicate disunity, as Streeter (1924:235-238) also points out. Although some redaction is plausible in Q, textual tensions are not necessarily indicators of redaction, for no texts are completely devoid of tension.

On the matter of Q1, Dunn detects an obscurity in Kloppenborg’s (2000: 159, 197, 200, 208-209; pp 154-159) definition of Q1 as to whether it was also a document, though he assumes it. He similarly fails to indicate whether it ever functioned as a single document or stratum, merely indicating the possibility that a series of sayings-clusters might have been taken over and redacted for the formation of Q or Q2 (Kloppenborg 2000:144-146). Dunn (2003:156,157) remarks on the absence of any unifying motif or redactional theme in these clusters, finding no plausible reason for considering it to be a single document: The material in question is Q 6:20-23, 27-49; 9:57-62; 10:2-11, 16; 11:2-4, 9-13; 12:2-7,11-12; 12:22 -31, 33-34; 13:24; 14:26, 27, 34, 35; 14:34, 35. Dunn (2003:157) writes:

It looks in fact more like the sort of teaching material which was no doubt rehearsed in the Q communities in their regular

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#) gatherings, some individual items already grouped (different clusters) for convenience and as good pedagogical practice. If we follow this line of reasoning, then the rationale for two distinct compositional layers is undermined, and the related hypothesis that a single document (Q1) represented the sole concerns and interests of the Q people... makes even less sense. The evidence is fully satisfied by the alternative hypothesis of a single compositional act, when the Q author/editor pulled together these different clusters, adapted them (the redactional interpolations), and knitted them into the larger single collection Q (or Q2).

Tuckett (1996:70) comments on this aspect of Kloppenborg's work: "Kloppenborg makes a strong case for the existence of some secondary additions modifying earlier traditions ....But it is a big step to jump from earlier (possibly disparate) material to a unified collection of sapiential speeches in a Q1." And furthermore:

In conclusion, Kloppenborg's detailed stratification model may be not quite as securely founded as some have assumed. Certainly his model is perhaps the most detailed and well-argued one that is available in the present debate. However, I remain unpersuaded by certain aspects of it. If, as I have tried to argue, it is unnecessary to postulate a Q3 subsequent to Q2, and if the pre-Q2 material is perhaps rather more disparate, and the alleged "Q1" stratum not necessarily capable of being shown to have existed as a literary unity in its own right before Q2, then we may have a rather simpler model, viz. a Q-editor taking up and using (possibly a variety of) earlier materials.

(Tuckett 1996:73)

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper [1999:5]), comments that one would struggle to find in Q the criteria by which the two principal strata namely the sapiential and the prophetic and apocalyptic, have been determined. "...[F]or all its sophistication and generation of scholarly energy, this

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hypothesis appears to be based primarily on modern theologically rooted scholarly assumptions and concepts” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:5).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper, 1999:67) writes on the subject of Kloppenborg’s elaborated hypothesis of Q strata, that they do not stand up to critical scrutiny. The common features that supposedly characterize the sayings clusters assigned to the different strata either fail to appear in the clusters or do not appear consistently across the various clusters. Horsley summarily announces that the hypothesized layers cannot in fact be differentiated according to the stated criteria of these features.

Dunn (2003:158) points out the snowball effect of the problem, saying that different layers represent different understandings of Jesus - “asymmetrical kerygmata” (Kloppenborg 1987:21-22), and different circles of discipleship, that tensions within Q become tensions between the redactional levels, between different *Sitze-im-Leben*, added to the tension between Q and the circles focusing on cross and resurrection. This is then used as proof that the earliest responses to Jesus were far more diverse than had previously been recognized, and that the historical Jesus was first remembered as a teacher of wisdom. “But, as Kloppenborg himself has pointed out, ‘tradition-history is not convertible with *literary history*’: tradition brought in at a redactional stage might be as old as or older than the tradition redacted” (Dunn 2003:158, referring to Kloppenborg 1987:244-245).

Overall, Dunn (2003:158) judges it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the leap from Matthew’s and Luke’s common material (‘q’) to ‘Q’, to a ‘Q community’ with markedly different stages in its development, and thence to a wisdom-teaching/non-apocalyptic Jesus, is too much lacking in visible means of support. In Dunn’s opinion the various attempts to build hypothesis upon presupposition upon hypothesis fails to inspire confidence in the outcome. He states categorically that he will use the Q hypothesis as a working hypothesis, but not assume a stratified Q (Q1, Q2, Q3). Downing (1996:48) agrees with Dunn:

If then,...the Q community was as important in the oral formation of the collection as this oral social composition model suggests, the arbitrarily imposed “strata” of much recent discussion seem very implausible. Then if there were “wisdom” and “apocalyptic” and/or “deuteronomic” strands, they could anyway have lain happily intertwined from the start (as indicated, incidentally, by Paul in Romans), demanding no complex explanation in terms of successive radical revisions.

Dunn (2003:237) concludes that he wishes neither to deny the priority of Mark nor the existence of a Q document. However, in the case of ‘q’/‘Q’ material we are repeatedly confronted with traditions within different synoptic gospels which are clearly related (the same basic teaching), and which were evidently remembered and valued as teaching of Jesus. Moreover, in these cases the relation is not obviously literary with each version derived by editing some written predecessor. The relation much rather lends itself to being conceived as taking place at the oral level. That could imply, according to Dunn (2003:237) that “these traditions were known to the Evangelists not (or not only) in a written form, but in the living liturgy or communal celebration of the remembered Jesus.” Alternatively it could mean that they knew the tradition from Q, but regarded Q as a form of oral retelling (that is, they had heard Q material being read/Performed), so that their own retelling still displayed the oral characteristics of the traditioning process.

#### **4.3.4.3 The Gospels of Matthew and Luke**

In research the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are often neglected as sources while Q and Mark steal the limelight as older and therefore superior sources. Dunn (2003:160), however, reminds us that these two Gospels are sources to be valued, not only for the light they cast on the two-source hypothesis, but also for their *Sondergut*. And it is indeed from their *Sondergut* that he concludes that there must have been a much richer

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collection of Jesus-tradition than could have been used by any one evangelist and that the evangelists had been selective in their choice of material. The slight discrepancies between Matthew and Luke has, in some cases at the very least, to imply that common oral tradition with which they were familiar, was known to and used by both evangelists. As a matter of fact, he suspects and opens the mind of the reader to the possibility that there must have been a “fairly lively oral tradition” (Dunn 2003:172) of the sayings of Jesus which continued to be circulated alongside the canonical gospels. He further cautions against deeming material to be of lesser value as a reminder of Jesus because it occurs only once.

Would that we knew how wide was the ‘pool’ of Jesus tradition and how widely known. But we don’t. At least, however, we need to be conscious of the likely breadth and dispersal of the Jesus tradition and suspicious of the too simplistic rule of thumb that tradition only once attested is therefore necessarily of less value as a remembrance of Jesus.

(Dunn 2003:161)

This is directly contrapunctal with the working criterion of Crossan (1991: xxxi-xxxiii) to use material only if attested to more than once. Dunn thinks that his criterion would definitely subtract from the clarity of the picture presented of Jesus.

#### 4.3.4.4 The Gospel of John

Years ago, Baur (1847:137-138) conceded that every gospel has its own *Tendenz*, but produces convincing argumentation for his conclusion that the Gospel of John had never been intended as “a strictly historical Gospel”. Inevitably the result of his argumentation was that scholars considered the Gospel of John to have been determined more by John’s own theological than by any historical concerns and therefore that the Synoptic gospels are superior to John as historical sources. “Like the

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miracles of Jesus, though not quite so decisively, the Fourth Gospel had been effectively knocked out of the quest” (Dunn 2003:41).

Wrede (1901) made the observation, which petrified all efforts to renew the quest for the “historical Jesus”, that neither Mark, nor for that matter any of the synoptic gospels, should be relied upon heavily as sources for objective history for the primary intention of their authors had been to write, not documents of history, but documents of faith. They were portrayals, not of Jesus the historical person, but of Jesus as seen through the eyes of his disciples. This means that the synoptics were just as theological as the Gospel of John. Wrede’s insights made the rift between John and the Synoptics, just as between theology and history, less jagged and pronounced, but this gospel mostly suffered from a serious lack of consideration and recognition as a source.

Dodd (1963:355-8), however, argues convincingly that both narrative and discourse material contain good, early tradition.

In particular, John’s account of the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry probably contains information which the Synoptics passed over; geographical details provided by John are best explained as remembered details; and many are persuaded by John’s assessment of the length of Jesus’ ministry (three Passovers), the indication of more frequent visits by Jesus to Jerusalem, and the chronology of the last week of Jesus’ life.

(Dunn 2003:166)

The dating of the Gospel of John according to general consensus is more or less 100 CE.<sup>34</sup>

J A T Robinson’s (1976) is a lonely voice arguing for a dating of around 70 CE without winning much support.

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<sup>34</sup> See Koester (1990:267), Schnelle (1998:476-477), Brown (1997:374-376).

Summarily Dunn considers the Gospel of John to be an important source, one to be taken seriously in research (even though it cannot as a source be valued on the same level as the synoptic tradition), which has provided us with a norm for distinguishing the earliest tradition. The value of the Gospel of John, according to him, lies in the window it opens upon the way in which the Jesus-tradition was used as early as the first century, considering the fact that the tradition is both heavily worked upon and well-rooted in the earlier Jesus-tradition. As a secondary source he values the contribution made by this gospel in supplementing and corroborating the testimony of the synoptic tradition.

#### 4.3.4.5 The Gospel of Thomas

As commented by Dunn (2003:161), “[t]he amount of credibility invested in the *Gospel of Thomas* by Koester and the neo-Liberal questers makes the issue of *Thomas*'s value as a source for the teaching of Jesus particularly sensitive”. Initially publicised in 1959, this document cleft opinions regarding its origin in two, with some opting for a solution in which The Gospel of Thomas knew the synoptic gospels (and John) and sourced these, and others, for a knowledge and sourcing of a form of Jesus tradition earlier than the synoptics and independent of them.

Koester (1990:84-85) points out that a number of studies have shown that in many cases a saying or parable has been preserved in a more original form in the Gospel of Thomas than any of its canonical parallels, thereby ruling out the possibility of dependence on any of these gospels. Contrarily, Meier's (1991:128-30) opinion, after considering the possibilities, is as follows: “With all due hesitation, I incline to the view that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on the Synoptic tradition” (Meier 1991:130) and later: “In view of all this, I conclude that the more probable

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hypothesis is that the Gospel of Thomas knew and used at least some of the canonical Gospels, notably Matthew and Luke” (Meier 1991:138,139).<sup>35</sup>

Patterson (1993:110) has as central theme that Thomas is the product of a tradition history “basically independent of the synoptic tradition” and reaches the conclusion that “Thomas is the offspring of an autonomous stream of early Christian tradition.” Dunn believes this statement to border on an oxymoron given the substantial overlap between the Gospel of Thomas and synoptic tradition (see Dunn 2003:162).

This area of research is fraught with hazard to the extent that Tuckett (1988:132-57) concludes that “the problem of the relationship between Th[omas] and the synoptics is probably ultimately insoluble”.

Dunn issues a twofold warning when seeking to solve this problem: Firstly he believes that the issue of the value of the Gospel of Thomas as a source, has become ensnared in the ongoing search for evidence of pre-Christian Gnosticism because of its obvious propensity towards Gnosticism. An early dating of the material would carry the implication that one of the earliest responses Jesus met with, had been Gnostic, and therefore that a Gnostic Christianity as old as or at least as deeply rooted in the Jesus tradition as the Christianity of the canonical gospels. However, Dunn believes that the older view should rather be upheld, namely that it would be more correct to define Gnosticism as a Christian heresy of the second century, and indeed that the overall perspective of the document bears the stamp of second-century Gnosis.

Secondly he labels as a fallacy the equation of “independent” with “more original”. Because “...the ancient Mediterranean world was a melting pot for many religious traditions and philosophies”, “...’independent’ may simply mean ‘independent of Christianity’ rather than ‘earlier than Christianity” (Dunn 2003:164) and Crossan (1985:35) likewise warns:

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<sup>35</sup> Dunn (2003:162) believes Meier to be overconfident in this conclusion, although he is supported by scholars such as Feiger (1991), Meier (1999:464) and Charlesworth and Evans (1994:479-503).

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“...independent does not necessarily mean earlier.” He himself treads safe ground, remarking: “At the very least, then, *Thomas* provides evidence of the different forms or versions which particular sayings could and did take, and possibly from an early stage of the traditioning process” (Dunn 2003:162).

Neo-Liberals have pounced on the absence of apocalyptic sayings in *Thomas* as proof of an early dating, just as a supposed non-apocalyptic layer in Q would indicate a pre-apocalyptic Q1. Dunn believes that the propensity to date this document early, such as shown by scholars such as Crossan (1991:427-429) who confidently dates this gospel between 30-60CE and Patterson (1993:120) who estimates a dating of 70-80 CE, tells of a theory of tradition history which opts for literary strata/editions above or to the exclusion of oral retellings or performances (Dunn 2003:165).

He values the Gospel of Thomas for its attestation to the different forms assumed by the Jesus-tradition, his criterion always being to give precedence to the consensus of the synoptic tradition in the case of marked dissimilarity, for “...the likelihood will usually be that the synoptic tradition is closer to the earliest remembered sayings of Jesus than is the Gospel of Thomas” (Dunn 2003:165). While saying this, he accedes to the possibility that a particular saying from the gospel in question may have captured an earlier version of a saying than has the synoptic tradition or that an unparalleled saying from it is as early as the earliest synoptic tradition, but “...it will always be the undoubtedly early Synoptic tradition which provides the measure by which judgment is made on the point” (Dunn 2003:165). He motivates his choice of criterion by saying that it is preferable to base any portrayal of Jesus on clusters and themes within the Jesus-tradition rather than on individual sayings even though heeding the warning of C W Hedrick (1988:1-8) of “the tyranny of the synoptic Jesus.” To my mind this seems to be the logical thing to do, given the nature of oral traditioning and “performances” which had to lock memory and therefore would have refrained from the utterance of individual sayings.

#### 4.3.4.6 Other Gospels

Although Dunn's judgment of the diminished value of the remaining gospels as cited by Crossan (1985) and Koester (1990) seems to be met with overall consensus, there still seems to be some points of argumentation worthy of mention:

Dunn's point of view on the Dialogue Gospel,<sup>36</sup> which he labels as clearly Gnostic, and even more so on the Apocryphon of James is that, similar to the Gospels of Thomas and John, they provide evidence of the different ways in which the sayings tradition developed. He qualifies, however:

But even more than in the case of *Thomas* it is doubtful whether the distinctive features of the *Dialogue Gospel* provide earlier or more original versions of Synoptic traditions. And much less than in the case of the Gospel of John does it provide evidence of rootedness in the earliest forms of the Jesus tradition.

(Dunn 2003:168)

And on the Apocryphon: "The document is clearly Gnostic in character and the parallels could very well be explained as echoes of tradition known from the canonical Gospels" (Dunn 2003:168, 169).

On the subject of the synoptic gospels' precedence of the Dialogue Gospels, Dunn (2003:168) sets out to prove that this Gospel had access to the finished version of Matthew and most probably also of Luke. He finds in this Gospel parallels to the Gospel of John, both in content and in the mirroring of the development of reflection on earlier tradition of the sayings of Jesus, but in an alternative way.

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<sup>36</sup> The "Dialogue Gospel" is Gnostic in content and contains material known to us only through the Gospel of Thomas. It contains parallels to the Gospel of John in both content and the implication that it had contributes to developing reflection on the earlier tradition of the sayings of Jesus (Dunn 2003:168).

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Koester (1990:180), however, pleads the case of exactly the opposite scenario, namely that John betrays knowledge of this “...more traditional Gnostic dialogue, which the *Dialogue of the Savior* has preserved in its more original form”, with John 14:2-12 apparently being a deliberate christological reinterpretation thereof. Dunn is convinced that the Dialogue Gospel, which had been sourced to create the Nag Hammadi Dialogue of the Saviour, already bears testimony to advanced development of reflection on earlier tradition to such an extent that the earlier form is visible only occasionally (Dunn 2003:168).

Likewise Koester’s (1990:191-96, 200) so-called “Tendenz” is in evidence when he argues regarding the Apocryphon of James that it presupposes an earlier stage of the sayings tradition attested in both the synoptic tradition and the Gospel of John. He finds support for this theory from Cameron (1984), but not from Crossan (1991:432), who includes this source only in his fourth stratum since the earlier tradition cannot be abstracted as a unified first-century source.

The source known as “The Secret Gospel of Mark” seems to have sparked an equal amount of controversy. Clement of Alexandria (Crossan 1985:98-100) called it a “more spiritual “elaboration of the canonical Gospel of Mark, which in its turn had been further amplified by a second-century Gnostic sect called “The Carpocratians”. Crossan (1991:328-332,411-416) and Koester (1990:295-303) both suggest that this source precedes the canonical Gospel of Mark. They argue the diversity of pre-canonical tradition using two extracts from this gospel which resemble Mark 10:34 and 10:46a as part of a store of pre-canonical gospel tradition. Crossan considers it likely that “...canonical Mark scattered the dismembered elements of those units throughout his gospel” (1985:108), but Dunn considers this to be highly unlikely, opting for the probability that this gospel is a composition “...drawing on remembered phrases from other stories in canonical Mark” being much more plausible (Dunn 2003:169).

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Koester (1990:295-303), having examined the parallels between this gospel and John 11, concludes that it is “impossible” that this gospel sourced John 11. Dunn says: “With such logic, the recognition of any allusion to earlier documents would be equally ‘impossible’” concluding and providing us with important insight into his view on the traditioning process: “The fallacy here, as elsewhere, is to assume that what is in view must be some kind of literary editing process, whereas many traditions even when already written down would still have been remembered orally” (Dunn 2003:169, 170).

He further mentions that the “Gospel of Peter” may “...bear witness to accounts of Jesus’ Passion which circulated orally apart from the canonical Gospels and on which both the canonical Gospels and Peter were able to draw, each to retell in his own way and with his own variation and elaboration” (Dunn 2003:170).

#### **4.3.5 Where the sources led us**

##### **4.3.5.1 In silhouette**

These sources have led us to reasonably firm ground for sketching an outline of the life and mission of Jesus. Dunn (2003:312) sketches this outline as follows: The gospels refer to Herod the Great (37-4 BCE), Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) and Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea (26-37 CE), and so provide a fairly accurate backdrop for locating Jesus and his mission. A date for his birth may be fixed at between 6 BCE and 4 BCE and for his crucifixion on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan 30/33 CE with the former date being the one most favoured by research. His mission may have lasted for two or three years although the Gospel of John mentions three Passovers. One is forced to generalize about his upbringing and education in the lack of firm evidence. He hailed from Nazareth, a small, relatively poor village in lower Galilee, the son of a *tekton*, part of a large family of four brothers and some sisters, at a time of relative quiet. He and his family, though not poverty-stricken, must have been fairly familiar with the face of poverty. In

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this regard Meier (1991:278-85) states that there is no evidence of poverty with regards to Jesus:

On this rough scale, Jesus the woodworker in Nazareth would have ranked somewhere at the lower end of the vague middle,....He was indeed in one sense poor, ....But Jesus was probably no poorer or less respectable than almost anyone else in Nazareth, or for that matter in most of Galilee. His was not the grinding, degrading poverty of the day laborer or the rural slave.

(Meier 1991:282)

Hengel (1989:17) says that Jesus as “...a building craftsman belonged to the middle-class”, but Meier (1987:312) warns that this statement could be misleading. Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:179) says: “...[T]he Gospels give clear indications that Jesus and his followers were members of the underclass: peasant cultivators, laborers, and fishermen.”

Surprisingly Buchanan (1984:240) speculates that he might have come from a wealthy family. Even more surprising is Chilton’s theory that Jesus was never found once he was separated from his parents in Jerusalem, that he joined “the legions of poor who sought alms around the Temple and begged among the merchants in the Lower City...” (Chilton 2000:35), that he

probably considered seeking shelter from Miriam and Martha back in Bethany, but they would have insisted that he return to Nazareth. Breaking with the family brought dishonor, and those who left the community, by divorce or flight, brought shame on both themselves and those who harboured them. He was forced to take his chances on the street.

(Chilton 2000:35, 36)

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All of these circumstances caused in Jesus feelings of anger, estrangement and resentment against his own people in Nazareth, so that when his turn came to be baptized by John, he could do so after repenting, just like all the other people. The water cleansed him and he was able to release the grudges he felt (Chilton 2000:48, 49).

On one point, namely that of honour, does Malina (1993:25-50) agree with him. By forsaking his clearly defined role in society, namely that of Nazarene carpenter to assume the new and ambiguous role of teacher and miracle-worker, Jesus was also giving up an assured position of honour, albeit modest, in order to become a person of great honour in the eyes of the believers, but great shame in the eyes of his opponents.

Meier argues in similar vein when he says that Jesus marginalized himself to a certain degree by abandoning his socially respectable livelihood and hometown, opting for a homeless, itinerant lifestyle to undertake a prophetic ministry. As a poor rural Galilean he would never have attended a scribal school or studied under any teacher of note, yet he marginalized himself by daring to challenge the teachings and practices of his day, proclaiming "...his own teachings with a sovereign authority whose basis was by no means clear to his opponents" (Meier 1991:8). No wonder then that he was meted out rejection, disbelief and shame in this honour/shame-driven society. His style of living and teaching offended many a Jew and marginalized him from within Palestinian Judaism to such an extent that, at the time of his death,

...he had managed to make himself appear obnoxious, dangerous, or suspicious to everyone from pious Pharisees through political high priests to an ever vigilant Pilate. One reason Jesus met a swift and brutal end is simple:

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he alienated so many individuals and groups in Palestine that, when the final clash came in Jerusalem in AD 30, he had very few people, especially people of influence, on his side.

(Meier 1991:9)

#### **4.3.5.2 Literate/illiterate?**

At this point Dunn (2003:313,314) enters into the literacy/illiteracy debate for a brief spell, remarking on the strong presumption of widespread illiteracy among the lower social groupings in the Roman Empire. Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:125-127), after having asked what literacy would have entailed in ancient times, estimates that working with even the minimum of what constitutes literacy, the percentage of illiterates in the Roman Empire is almost certain to have been as high as ninety percent. He is aware that recent studies of Jesus and early Christianity acknowledge this fact, but “trust generalizations about high rates of Judean or diaspora Jewish literacy that preceded recent critical studies of literacy in antiquity” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:127). Josephus wrote that it was a duty, indeed a religious commandment, that within first-century Judaism children be taught to read and that rabbinic sources convincingly suggest strongly a strong interest in basic literacy so that even small communities had access to elementary schools. According to Horsley, however, what was meant by Josephus was:

...not that children were taught to read but that the teaching and learning of scripture / the laws were carried out by public oral recitation (at Sabbath assemblies), suggesting both that the general populace was illiterate and that communication of the most important matters was oral. Indeed, the concept of writing in these contexts is magical-religious: by hearing the sacred laws taught aloud, the latter would become “engraved on [the people’s] souls...and guarded in their memory”....The rabbinic sources cited for the ubiquity of schools not only are

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late but also clearly refer to a limited segment of the Israelite population, mainly rabbinic circles themselves. Rabbinic texts that have previously been claimed as evidence for people *reading*...in fact refer to them *reciting* from memory, and with different abilities, certain psalms and prayers”

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:127)

Chilton (2000:12) applies the term “*mamzer*” to Jesus, and distinguishes between the meaning of this term and that of “bastard” or “mongrel”. For the term “*mamzer*” is a taunt used for a child born out of “prohibited sexual union, such as incest”: “An unmarried woman impregnated by a man outside her own community was in an invidious position, suspected of illicit intercourse” (Chilton 2000:13). Because Mary had been living in Nazareth and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ conception, it would have been virtually impossible for her to have proven that he was the father and Jesus’ suspect paternity would be exposed to all and sundry through the label of “*mamzer*” which he would have acquired at birth. The stigma attached to this label made the person carrying it an undesirable in the community and would later have excluded him from the privilege of speaking in “...the public congregations that regulated the social, political, and religious life of Israel (Dt 32:2)”. Chilton believes that Jesus “...belonged to the caste of the *mamzer* or ‘silenced one.’ From the beginning of his life Jesus negotiated the treacherous terrain between belonging to the people of God and ostracism in his own community” (2000:13). From this conviction it is only one step further to postulate his illiteracy as the very product of this ostracism (Chilton 2000:99).

Meier’s (1991:271-278) opinion regarding the literacy of Jesus differs from those of the above-mentioned scholars, although he admits that some of his arguments, such as reverence for the Torah and respect for literacy, do not prove that Jesus was among the Jews that could read and study the Scripture, they simply indicate a likelihood. “It is sobering to realize, though, how here, as so often in Jesus research, we reach our conclusions not by

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direct, clearcut, indisputable texts, but rather by indirect arguments, inference, and converging lines of probability" (Meier 1991:278). There exists the danger, as he correctly points out, of making sweeping statements regarding the state of Jewish education at the turn of the era and producing a "homogenized" picture which would accommodate the majority of Jewish children (Meier 1991:271).

Another problem is that the source generally used to cast light on the state of Jewish education at the time of Jesus, the Mishna, dates from approximately two hundred years after the childhood of Jesus. Meier (1991:273) refers to the work of Shaye Cohen who has argued against the existence of "public schools" in the Jewish community of both Palestine and the Diaspora. Cohen points out that neither Philo nor Josephus makes any mention of a formal or institutionalised system of education for children at that time and that the rudimentary education received by Jewish children came to them in the form of instruction by the father in a craft, a familial "craftsman's literacy" which would enable them to write up bills or sign agreements, but that "any sort of 'higher education' was the prerogative of the rich and leisured class" (Meier 1991:273).

But "counterinfluences that would have favored literacy" existed especially among pious Jews:

By the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the Jewish people had created a unique body of sacred literature, at the heart of which stood the "five books of Moses," the so-called Pentateuch....So central was this literature that it had generated literature about itself, ....While we must not think anachronistically of a closed canon of Scripture during Jesus' lifetime, the Pentateuch, along with the continuation of its sagas in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, created the national consciousness of all religiously aware Jews, whatever their particular theological bent. In addition, the prophetic books both directed the ongoing interpretation of the Torah in new situations and held out to an oppressed nation the hope of future glory. For all the

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differences among the various groups of Jews, the narratives, laws, and prophecies of their sacred texts gave them a corporate memory and a common ethos.

(Meier 1991:274, 275)

Given the importance attached to these Scriptures, it is small wonder, says Meier, that religious Jews attached great importance to the ability to read and expound them. He reminds the reader that Ben Sira, in the second century BC had written in praise of the professional scribe and said that his sentiment held true in the first century CE. From there he takes an unmapped slipway to the conclusion that literacy held special importance for the Jewish community. He refers to the archaeological evidence produced by Riesner (in Meier 1991:275) for the existence of “a wide diffusion of literacy among Palestinian Jews in the first centuries B.C. and A.D.”<sup>37</sup>

He admits that some groups, such as the intellectuals from the Jerusalem society, professional scribes and Pharisees, were in a better position financially as well as being desirous to spread reading literacy among their comrades and children which would enable them to read the Scriptures. By the same token peasants in the villages in the hills would not have had the luxury of time and resources on their hands to enable them to emulate the intellectuals and aristocracy. He also acknowledges that the existence of Aramaic Targums argues the case that numerous ordinary Jews did not understand Hebrew.

There are, however, several considerations which enable him to do away with generalisation and speculation and make “some reasonable extrapolations about the boyhood that produced such an adult” one of

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<sup>37</sup> These include inscriptions on ordinary vessels and instruments such as pitchers and arrows, as well as exercises, at least one of which shows the hand of a beginner. Once again jumping to a rather precarious conclusion, Meier (1991:275) writes on the strength of this: “...plainly there were special factors in Jewish life that fostered respect for and pursuit of literacy, and archaeology provides at least some relics of this pursuit.”

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which is that his religious formation within his family had been intense and profound and included being taught how to read biblical Hebrew (1991:276):

- He “became fiercely focused on the Jewish religion”.
- Almost all the gospels contain reports of him engaging in learned disputes with students of the Law over Scripture and halaka.
- He was given the title of rabbi with all the respect it entails.
- “[M]ore than one Gospel tradition presents him preaching or teaching in the synagogues (presumably after and on the scripture readings).”
- And most importantly, his teaching carried the indisputable stamp of the outlook and language of the sacred texts of Israel.

Meier sees in Joseph the mentor of his firstborn son upon whom he lavished special attention and to whom he passed on knowledge of his trade as well as the religious traditions and texts of Judaism. He admits that a great deal of this would have been done by word-of-mouth, but that Jesus’ skilful debate on interpretations of Scripture and halaka when confronted by Pharisees, scribes and Jerusalem authorities in temple and synagogue indicate a reading knowledge of the sacred texts, by Joseph or some learned Jew, with maybe education at the Nazareth synagogue added to that.<sup>38</sup> According to Riesner (in Meier 1991:277) the education or lack of it of a boy from the lower strata of Palestine would depend upon the piety of the father and the existence of a local synagogue.

Dunn (2003:312-315) also opts for Jesus having been literate on the grounds of his challenge: “Have you not read...?”<sup>39</sup> which is reasonably well attested and probably presupposes that Jesus himself could read. He mentions, however, the opposing view of Harris (in Dunn 2003:314) that Jesus asks Pharisees, chief priests and scribes this question and that they

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<sup>38</sup> Meier says that Mark 6:1-6a acquires a new depth of meaning if one accepts that Jesus did indeed receive instruction in the Nazareth synagogue (see Meier 1991:227).

<sup>39</sup> Mark 2:25/Matthew 12:1-8/Luke 6:1-5; Mark 12:10/Matthew 21:42/Luke 20:17; Mark 12:26/Matthew 22:31/Luke 20:37; Matthew 12:5; 19:4; 21:16; Luke 10:26.

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could presumably read. The parable in Luke 16:6-7 assumes a probably basic but nonetheless widespread ability to write and Dunn believes the picture painted in Luke 4:16-17 to be quite a realistic portrayal. Given the degree of the Greek language into first-century Palestine, he views as probable that Jesus knew some Greek at the very least and may occasionally have spoken it.

A number of problems present themselves in this debate:

- One wonders at Meier's acceptance that Jesus' father was actively involved in his upbringing and that he would have enjoyed the privileged position of first-born son. Add the ominous silence in the gospel accounts regarding Joseph to what AG van Aarde (2001, but especially 115,116) has written about him and the picture painted by Meier of a doting father lavishing education and trade secrets upon a favourite first-born son disappears like mist before the sun. Even if there had been a consistent father figure, would he himself have received sufficient education to qualify him for teaching his sons? And if his father hadn't taught him, who would have been interested in teaching a "*mamzer*"?
  
- Horsley is correct in pointing out the importance of orality in education which is still not taken into account to any serious degree. If modern day Jewish children still has to learn by heart chunks of their tradition for their Bar Mitzvah, in keeping with generations of adherence to their traditions, how much more would first-century Jews expect memorisation from their children in a culture that had it down to a fine art (to the extent that they are described as "walking encyclopaediae"). We who have access to the written and printed word which opens up into meaning before our literate eyes, can have no idea of the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the oral process of traditioning and how for centuries it had kept traditioning alive.

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- We have learnt about the wide gap that existed between peasants in Galilean society and the elite in Jerusalem. Social studies show time and again a conservativeness in the religious and general value system of rural areas, little villages where traditional beliefs were held onto long after change had occurred in Jerusalem, for instance. Lucretia Yaghijian (in Craffert & Botha 2005:27) says that the terms “literacy” / “illiteracy” are in their application often “freighted with an ethnocentric twentieth-century stigma inappropriate to first-century Mediterranean readers.” What we understand under illiterate, may actually have been either oraliterate or auraliterate, *αγραμματος* not having been a desultory word, but a technical, socially descriptive term.

The reverse of the stigma attached to illiteracy today, may have been felt among peasants, for literacy in the sense in which we understand it was the privilege of the indolent elite. The traditional art of memorisation might have been upheld in villages over against the reading and scribal abilities of the learned, elite, modern uppercrust. In this case literacy would have carried the stigma as the usurper of ancient ways of education and traditioning, an art that had been handed down for centuries, from generation to generation, and the vehicle for safeguarding their sacred traditions, replacing it with new, modern ways which threatened to render the old art obsolete, much as computer literacy today is replacing the art of writing and the ability to spell, and the way it is frowned upon for this reason. Memorisation would have been upheld as the art that requires more skill and loyalty to tradition and especially in villages education is likely to have taken place in oral mode with reading and scribal literacy regarded as the inferior qualification. Meier (1991:277) admits:

The Judaism of Galilean peasants, while fiercely loyal to basics like the Mosaic Torah, circumcision, and the Jerusalem Temple, had a strong conservative streak

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that would not be attracted to what they considered the novelties of the Pharisees, especially if the latter were viewed by the former as refined townspeople.

Craffert and Botha (2005:22, 23) propose:

...that literacy was of little concern to most Galileans (and most Judeans as well) in the first-century world. No doubt schooling was practised, and various teachers were active but first-century education, teachers and teaching served purposes relative to Jewish peasant communities to whom modern concerns were unknown and irrelevant. Consequently, when one comes across a reference to reading (or writing), appropriate, cultural-historical scenarios with which to conceptualise “literacy” in the world of Jesus is crucial.

- It is not really the question of whether Jesus was literate or not that matters, but what knowledge and skill the learning process, be it memorisation or literacy, had enriched Jesus with. And a learning process of memorisation puts knowledge, references and quotes at one's disposal for use in an impromptu oral situation, such as reasoning with Pharisees and scribes, in a way that reading cannot.

#### **4.3.6. Geography and biography**

##### **4.3.6.1 Galilee in general**

Reconstructing an historical context from the sources available, Dunn emphasizes the need to appreciate the geographical context of Galilee and Judea in the first century of the common era:

Although the northwest quadrant of the lake seems to have been the hub of Jesus' mission, the impression has remained that he travelled extensively

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through Galilee. Gerd Theissen (1978:9), in viewing the texts from a sociological perspective, happens on a picture of wandering charismatics, homeless and itinerant, but Dunn warns against an exaggeration of the amount of itinerary, given the proximity of both upper and lower Galilee to Capernaum. Arnal (in Dunn 2003:322) suggests: “Not itinerary but short day trips to the villages and towns of the region”. This seems to be more plausible seeing that most of Upper and Lower Galilee were within two days journey from Capernaum and that, apart from Jesus enjoying village hospitality, “a number of women acted as a support team, following him (Mk 15:40-41) and providing for him from their own means” (Dunn 2003:322).<sup>40</sup>

“...Jesus is remembered as a Galilean<sup>41</sup>, and no one disputes that most of his mission was centred in Galilee” (Dunn 2003:293). The question is, however, whether Galileans were part of Judaism and whether it is legitimate to call Jesus a Jew?

Being part of the northern kingdom of Israel, Galilee had been separated from Judea since the division of the Davidic kingdom after the death of Solomon in approximately 922 BCE. Under Assyrians rule the inhabitants had been exiled (2 Ki 17:6) and only in the internecine warfare of 152 BCE were they reincorporated with Judea. Fifty years later (104-103 BCE) saw the Hasmoneans under Aristobulus I take control of the region. According to Ant 13:318, the inhabitants were given the option of being circumcised and living in obedience to the laws of the Jews/Judaism or leaving the territory. Less than a hundred years later, at the death of Herod the Great, Herod’s kingdom was divided and Galilee given to Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) while Judea soon came under direct imperial rule. Dunn (2003:293) poses the question of whether Jesus was brought up in a merely superficially “judaized” Galilee.

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<sup>40</sup> The question springs to mind how the hosts extending hospitality and this female support-group viewed Jesus and his mission. In what capacity had his impact upon them been sufficient to evoke this amount of assistance?

<sup>41</sup> Mark 1:9; Matthew 2:22, 21:11, 26:69, 27:55; Luke 2:39, 23:6; John 7:41,52.

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Meier (1991:207-208) paints a picture of a Galilee in which Judaism had been forced to live alongside a strong pagan influence for centuries. Only after the victory of the Maccabees had a “vigorous Jewish presence” once again made itself felt in the “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Meier 1991:208). He writes about James, “the brother of the Lord” that he might have been associated with conservative Christian Jews intent on upholding circumcision and food laws (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 15:13-29) and that he hadn’t “suddenly become an urban Pharisee; he had rather remained very much a Galilean peasant” (Meier 1991:277).

Vermes (2003:10,11) paints a vivid picture of Galilee as background to Jesus, the Galilean Hasid who, as typical Galilean, made xenophobic statements, describing it as a rich agricultural region, especially in the lower-lying areas around the Lake of Gennesaret. The inhabitants of the region were courageous and resilient, but inherently militant, rebels and fighters who were regarded as dangerous and volatile enemies. In Jerusalem and Judean circles they were looked down upon as uncouth and ignorant, shunned from the Temple and so religiously ostracised. The conflict between Jesus the Galilean and the Pharisees was echoed in the nationalist explosiveness of the eschatological and politico-religious cauldron of the time so that the region always teetered on the brink of an eruption of some kind.

An unresolved issue between Richard Horsley and Sean Freyne is whether the Galileans were Jewish in their identity, with Freyne (1980:33-36,392-393; 2000:248) arguing that they had retained a firmly Jewish identity.

Freyne has done thorough research on Galilee, keeping abreast of current topical archaeological findings. His findings are that Galilee retained a definite Jewish identity throughout. He argues that both Judea and Galilee had been incorporated in the administrative region of Samaria under the Ptolomees and Seleucids and that Josephus (Ant 12:142) reports a decree of the Seleucid king Antiochus III that all members of the *loudaioi* shall be ruled in accordance with their ancestral laws. Therefore there would have

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been no need for the “judaisation” of Galilee under the Hasmoneans. Furthermore, the area taken over by Aristobulus is called Iturea and Freyne has his doubts whether any of lower Galilee was included in that (1980:43-44). On the contrary “Galilean Judaism was now politically reunited with what had always been its cultural and religious center” and “the Jerusalem temple continued to exercise a powerful attraction for them” (Freyne 1980:392-3).

Horsley (1995:46-52), however, believes that Galilee had not been incorporated into a culturally unified common “Judaism” and that it is important to distinguish between Galilean peasants and imported aristocrats, who were first the “Judeans” as decreed by the Hasmoneans and later the Hellenized appointees of the Herods. He believes that the ancient Israelite traditions of the time of the northern kingdom was the only prevailing factor which lent continuity throughout these drawn-out periods of political upheaval and change. The theory of Horsley is that political-economic-religious subordination to the Hasmonean high priesthood in Jerusalem was required for a life in accordance with the laws of the Judeans just as (re-)circumcision signified entry in to their body-politic. This did not mean, however, that Galileans had thereby been “integrated into the Judean ethnos”.

Dunn (2003:294) says in critique on Freyne that “Judaism’ had at that point in time been less of an inclusive term than Freyne seemed to think.” He identifies the underlying problem in this argument as one of a difference in opinion regarding the translation of “loudaioi” as used by Josephus, with Freyne opting for “Jews” and Horsley for “Judeans”.

The argument has, however, been settled to Dunn’s satisfaction, by recent archaeological findings which correspond with the literary data and he finds much of value in the research of Jonathan Reed (2000:23-61) on the subject. Evidence found through study of the settlement patterns of Galilean sites points to two surprising conclusions: Firstly, the Assyrian campaigns of 733-732 BCE had been totally devastating, leaving a Galilee

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almost completely abandoned in its wake. Following the Hasmonean conquest however, a sudden windfall of data in the nature of architecture, pottery and Hasmonean coins leads one to conclude that new settlements had rapidly been forming, a phenomenon which, in its turn, indicated economic and political ties between Galilee and Jerusalem. This contradicts persuasively Horsley's theory "...of a Hasmonean aristocracy imposing themselves over a continuing Israelite population and point clearly to a wave of Judean settlements spreading over a depopulated territory" (Dunn 2003:295).

Fascinating are what Reed (2000:39-43) calls the "four indicators of Jewish religious identity"; found exclusively in Galilee and the Golan, which do not occur outside of it;

- stone vessels, impervious to ritual impurity according to the Mishnah and indicating that ritual purity was a concern,
- Jewish ritual baths (miqwaoth) which are plastered stepped pools,
- evidence of the observance of burial practices reflecting Jewish views on afterlife - "Placing ossuaries inside so-called kokhim or loculi, horizontally shafted underground family tombs, was a distinctly Jewish phenomenon at the end of the Second Temple period" (Reed 2000:47),
- as well as bone types with bones from pork noted by their absence, once again betraying adherence to Jewish dietary laws.

"In the light of such finds we can hardly do other than speak of the characteristically Jewish population of Galilee in the late Second Temple period" (Dunn 2003:295).

Questions as to the Hellenization of Galilee have had responses covering the full spectrum, the most radical of those being that of Walter Grundmann (1941:166-175): "Galilee was Gentile", "Jesus was no Jew". The main causes for disrupting the certainty pertaining to the Jewishness of Galilee and Jesus, are the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, re-established as

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administrative centres by Herod Antipas in the lifetime of Jesus. Horsley (1995:214-5) has, however, pointed out that the historical evidence concerning lower Galilee shows that neither of these cities were anything like the Hellenistic cities of the Decapolis. Unlike independent Hellenistic poleis they had no territorial jurisdiction over surrounding districts and were not major Hellenistic cities, but minor provincial centres. Besides which the four strands of archaeological evidence noted above were excavated from Sepphoris just as clearly as from anywhere else in Galilee. “The conclusion that Sepphoris contained a predominantly Jewish and devout Jewish population is hard to avoid” (Dunn 2003:300).

And Meyers (1992:325) writes that the discoveries made during archaeological excavations “...point to a Torah-true population, judging by the number of ritual baths (*miqva’ot*) in houses and by the strict practice of burial outside the city precincts.”

Dunn (2003:296) lists attestations which prove the regard felt in Galilee for the Jerusalem Temple and as proof that it was matched by their regard for the Torah, he reminds his readers of Jesus’ knowledge and use of the Torah, which implied that Galileans were schooled in matters of the Torah. “Some of the issues confronting Jesus were matters of Torah and Torah interpretation (including Sabbath, purity laws, Temple offerings, and fasting) and imply a similar breadth of concern for the law” (Dunn 2003:296). On the grounds of this evidence and more he concludes (2003:296): “The pillars of Temple, monotheism, and Torah (the second of the ten commandments) were evidently as deeply embedded in Galilean as in Judean soil.”

The scholar should therefore have no reserve in calling Galileans, and in particular Jesus of Nazareth, “Jews”, even to the extent of understanding the implications to be that they practised “common Judaism”. `

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:46-60) remarks on the ambivalent relationship between the Galileans and the temple-state, saying that,

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although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment of origin for this tension, the hundred years in which Galilee was under direct Jerusalem rule seems to be the obvious breeding ground. A careful consideration of ancient Galilean history, its social forms and its political-economic-religious relations reveals neither an overly parochial Jewish religion transcended by the Q people nor a Hellenized Gentile culture moving towards universalism, but a majority of villagers adhering to their Israelite heritage, their lives embedded in the traditional social forms of family and village community. The increased economic pressures under Antipas would have evoked deeper attachment to their traditional Israelite heritage among Galileans.

Moreover:

Those who would interpret Q sayings as calling for voluntary poverty and abandonment of home and family must explain the absurdity of addressing such a call primarily to people who were already marginal and under increasing economic pressure – that is, already mired in poverty and struggling to keep their households and village communities from disintegrating any further. It is difficult, finally, to discern how the abstract individualism of the itinerant radicalism thesis fits in any way the circumstances of first-century CE Galilee.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:60)

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:101, 102) remarks on the diametrically opposed interests of the different classes:

In patterns of income, consumption, and residence, the high-priestly and Herodian elite were building ever more sumptuous mansions and palaces in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Tiberias in Roman-controlled Palestine, funded by the revenues they derived from the peasantry, while the Judean and Galilean villagers labored under multiple layers of economic dues, tithes, offerings, Herodian taxes, and Roman tribute.

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This chasm was widened by those of social religious status; concentric circles of priestly aristocracy, priests and Levites. These scribal guardians and cultivators set up the great scriptural tradition as interpreted by them as the great divide between them and the mass of Israelites on the far side of the chasm. The top layer of Jerusalemites would have ranked Galileans below Judeans and this, compounded with differences in language and education further widened the gap between the urban elite and the *hoi polloi*, or villagers in this instance. Biblical Hebrew was the language used by the scribal elite for the cultivation of the official tradition, Herodian administrations in Jerusalem, Sepphoris and Tiberias employed Greek, while most of the ordinary people spoke some dialect of Aramaic. “The scribal circles that cultivated the great tradition presided over education of subsequent generations precisely for purposes of continued cultivation of the tradition, whereas the popular tradition(s) would have been learned informally from household and community practices and interactions” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:101-102).

That there had been diversity in contemporary Judea and Galilee cannot be ignored, nor the fact that this diversity had as bedrock the fundamental political-economic divide between rulers and ruled.

If the scholar were to take into account the historical regional differences as well as the political-economic-religious structural divide between Jerusalem and Galilee, it would hardly surprise him/her that the majority of Israelites, including the Galilean tribes, had been in latent but sometimes overt rebellion against Jerusalem rule since King Solomon’s death, that there had been a general dissatisfaction with the high-priestly aristocracy and that “several passages and at least one clearly delineated discourse in Q are directed ostensibly against Jerusalem rulers or their scribal representatives.” Horsley (in Horsley and Draper 1999:277) believes Galilee to have been the point of origin for the Q material with its prophetic ambience and that one can be more attuned to the prophetic overtones of the denunciations against the ruling house, the scribes/lawyers and the Pharisees in Jerusalem, bearing all of this in mind. In this way he sees Q

13:34-35 as a condemnation of Jerusalem for the killing of the prophets and Q 11:49-51 of “this generation” for shedding their blood in the past and of the Pharisees for all they extorted from and the burdens they placed upon the people.

Similarly, Matthew takes Q 11:30, the reference to the “sign of Jonah” and builds upon it to construct an allegory referring to the death and resurrection of “the Son of Man”. The prophet Jonah had originally come from lower Galilee where local tradition locates his tomb, and popular tradition seems to attest to the heroic status this prophet enjoyed in Galilee especially where a village only a few miles from Nazareth is traditionally linked with his name.

Freyne (2000:243) puts the issue of the connection between messianic expectation and realisation and Galilee under the magnifying glass and, in doing so, touches on some very important aspects for this study which Dunn have overlooked. He says that almost all messianic material originated in groups which may be described as scribal elite, such as the Essenes or the Pharisees who had amongst them a history of rivalry and dissidence in terms of the Hasmonean and Herodean ruling classes. Essene material shows the expectation of a teacher/prophet messiah which was never absorbed into the expectation of a royal messiah, just as the various sign and oracular prophets documented by Josephus appear to have enjoyed popular appeal and to have been a response to the social conditions of the time.

Freyne asks whether any indigenous characters may have had special resonance for Galileans in formulating their hopes for the future. After the Assyrian conquest, Isaiah 8:23 (echoed in Mt 4:13-16) delivers an oracle of salvation for the north, including “Galilee of the Gentiles (Megiddo)” (2000:254) and is linked, in its present context, with the Davidic promise of Isaiah 9:1-6 in which darkness and gloom will be replaced by light and rejoicing and slavery and war with justice and peace. The catalyst for this

will be the birth of the child named “Wondrous Counsellor”, “Mighty God”, and “Prince of Peace”.

“...Galilee can provide an alternative location for divine revelation. In a place that would have been deemed pagan from a Jerusalem perspective, judgement was passed on the Jerusalem priesthood. It also suggested that its patriarch, Levi, had received his commissioning there” (Freyne 2000:255). The prophets Elijah and Elisha operated within the northern kingdom (see Freyne 2000:256). He quotes Richard Horsley on the important implications he reads into this fact, namely that in the memory of Galilean Israelites, Yahweh’s victory over the prophets of Baal through his prophet Elijah, with king Ahab as mere witness of Yahweh’s victory and the people’s choice, projected “an ideal that could become a rallying symbol for more active resistance to oppressive rule” (2000:256). Freyne (2000:257), however, believes Elijah’s rapture into heaven and his anticipated return to be more prominent in Jewish imagination than his role as social agitator and reasons: “Subsequently, his role as restorer is embellished in various ways, and it is in this setting that his miraculous deeds are recalled and expected (Mk 15,33-36).”

Of all of this Freyne finds echoes in the gospels, with both John the Baptist and Jesus being identified with Elijah.<sup>42</sup> In John’s gospel it is emphasized that Jesus’ messiahship may not be understood in nationalistic terms but rather that he be identified with Elijah or the coming prophet as well as in royal terms. In the spectrum of messianic repertoire, that of militant nationalist is rarely now ascribed to Jesus, the prevailing one being that of teacher/prophet, a prophet like Moses, sometimes combined with the returning Elijah. Freyne (2000:266) writes: “[I]n both Mark and John the figure of the prophet appears side by side with that of the messiah. Mark warns against false prophets as well as false messiahs and John suggests that because Jesus had been perceived as the prophet he might have been forcibly made king, thereby implying a link between the two roles”. He

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<sup>42</sup> See Mark 15:33-36, 6:15, 8:28, Mk 9:12; Matthew 11:14; Luke 4:23-25; John 1:21.

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adds: “[T]here were several aspects of the prophet’s career...which might be expected to resonate in a particular way in Galilee, not least his projected role as end-time restorer of all Israel” (Freyne 2000:257, 258).

The refurbishing in Antipas’ time of Sepphoris and Tiberias had disrupted Galilean social life through the introduction of a politically controlled economy into a situation of free land-owning peasants with the inevitable results being debt, penury and homelessness. “These are the conditions that best explain the particular thrust of Jesus’ teaching ministry – the blessings for the poor and the woes on the rich, the call for total trust in God’s provident care, the injunction to share with the needy and the refusal to endorse retaliation....In all of this we are hearing the voice of a prophet with a passion for justice” (Freyne 2000:267). Considering all the evidence, Freyne concludes it to be sufficient to cast Jesus in the role of end-time prophet whose concerns with justice for the oppressed struck a deep messianic chord.

It is highly probable that tension existed between the city of Sepphoris and the villages, Nazareth for example, the normal kind of friction that exists between “local bureaucrats and administrators on the one hand and the producers of agricultural and other material goods on the other” (Dunn 2003:301). “That such tension did indeed exist between Sepphoris and *inter alia* Nazareth is strongly suggested by the social situations reflected in many of Jesus’ parables – wealthy estate owners, resentment against absentee landlords, exploitative stewards of estates, family feuds over inheritance, debt, day labourers (forced to sell off family patrimony because of debt?), and so on” (Dunn 2003:302).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See also Freyne (2000:195-196, 205-206).

#### **4.3.6.2 Sepphoris and Tiberias**

Given the proximity of these two cities it seems strange that the Jesus tradition seems to maintain virtual silence on both of them. Dunn (2003:321) finds in this silence a parallel and shared motive, perhaps political, to the silence regarding Jesus' attitude towards Herod Antipas, rendering it deliberate and therefore an indication of deliberate avoidance by Jesus of these seats of Herodian power in Galilee.

#### **4.3.6.3 Capernaum**

A number of towns had significance in the ministry of Jesus, one of these being Capernaum. "That Jesus had made Capernaum the hub of his mission is also clearly indicated by the records" according to Dunn (2003:317), citing for example Matthew 4:13 - "*katokysen eis Kapharnaoum*" , Matthew 9:1 - "*tyn idian polin*" and Mark 2:1 - "*en oiko*" and Mark 3:20 - "*eis oikon*" as well as the references that "he used to teach" in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mark 1:21/Luke 4:31. Crossan and Reed (2001:94-96) argue, in spite of passages such as these, that the mission of Jesus had been constantly itinerant and therefore that the covenantal kingdom he brought "...could not have a dominant place to which all must come, but only a moving center that went out alike to all." Although this certainly sounds in keeping with the big picture of Jesus' mission, the evidence in this case seems to be made subject to the theory and in my opinion Dunn (2003:317) is justified in labelling this argumentation "tendentious".

Interesting to note are also the vehement renunciations in Q of Capernaum (Mt 11:23/Lk 10:15), and of Chorazin and Bethsaida (Mt11:21/Lk10:13), the latter two being the towns closest in proximity to Capernaum, as well as the apparent relocation of Peter and Andrew from their home town Bethsaida (Jn 1:44) to settle in Capernaum (Mk 1:29).

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This town had significance as the main fishing village in the area which supplied the surrounding area, but greater significance as the last village in Herod Antipas' territory on the road running northeast, across the Jordan and through Herod Philip's territory to Damascus, explaining its status as customs-post. Dunn (2003:319) understands the presence of the military officer and his staff in Matthew 8:9/Luke 7:8 to be an indication of Capernaum's strategic importance, and that "[t]oll-collector and royal officer require only a small revision of the picture emerging from the archaeological evidence to include a thin line of provincial bureaucracy." Reed (2000:165) speculates that Capernaum was conveniently close to the edge of Herod Antipas' territory as well as the lake, allowing Jesus to slip in and out of his territory when the need arose and this makes sense to Dunn (2003:319) who recalls vividly the "short shrift given to Jesus' mentor John the Baptist by Antipas (Mark 6.14-29 pars.)." However, any real answer as to why Jesus singled out this town eludes us.

#### **4.3.6.4 Jerusalem**

There is total consensus among the synoptics on the implication that Jesus, prior to the final week of his life and crucifixion, never visited Jerusalem. The Gospel of John paints an altogether different topographical picture of Jesus' mission, when he narrates the cleansing of the Temple (Jn 2:13-22) and activities of Jesus in the south in a period of apparent overlap with the mission of John the Baptist (Jn 3:22-26). Although Dunn (2003:323) concedes that some of this may readily be discounted, there are considerations which may suggest that the fourth evangelist might have drawn upon sound tradition, such as;

- that the missions of John and Jesus may, in all probability, have overlapped,
- that a mission aimed at the restoration of Israel would hardly have omitted the people of Judea and Jerusalem,

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- that the synoptics report followers from Jerusalem and Judea and that John 11:1 specifies the “*komyn*” of Luke 10:38-41 where Mary and Martha resided, to be Bethany,
- that the arrangements for the entry into Jerusalem suggest secret disciples there.

He does not make an effort to motivate these considerations as the synoptic tradition seemingly attaches little value to the chronology or the geography of Jesus’ mission and he himself, following their example, bases no arguments on either.

#### **4.3.6.5 Caesarea-Philippi**

From topical information or the lack thereof in the gospels, he deduces that the synoptics attached no great value to the citing of specific traditions at specific times. There are, however, a few exceptions, one of these being that there had been some kind of turning point in the area of Caesarea-Philippi around which the evangelists had structured their gospels. Dunn touches on the question of whether this turning point in Mark 8:27-9:50, which may have been the source for the accounts in the other two synoptic gospels, is data remembered or building blocks in the structure by which Mark wished to encase his message.

In the light of Kenneth Bailey’s observation on Middle Eastern tradition, the scholar learns that total flexibility in the traditioning process would be allowed in what is considered to be unimportant detail. Topographical detail, considered by Dunn to be of lesser importance in the Synoptics Gospels, would therefore qualify as material trivial enough to be subjected to total flexibility in the transmission.

But Caesarea-Philippi seems to have been anything but unimportant, indeed, it apparently played a pivotal role in the Gospel of Mark, and Dunn (2003:644) accedes that, in Mark’s plot, there is a definite “before-and-

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after-Caesarea-Philippi” structure to be found. Wrede (1971) with his reference to the Markan secret (Mk 8:30) has influenced many and the episode in question has subsequently been regarded as the product of early Christian, and more specifically Markan, theology. Bultmann (1963:258, 259) sees this narrative as an Easter story, carried back into the ministry of Jesus, perhaps for the first time in Mark.

Dunn finds several indications that Mark had been able to draw upon well-rooted memory and explains the variations among the synoptic accounts to be the result of performance flexibility. Firstly Mark’s gospel recounts the locality of the confession and states that it happened “on the way”, both rare features. Secondly, John’s gospel (Jn 6:69) recalls a similar turning point in Galilee which drew a confession from Peter, and in the absence of literary interdependence, these two accounts probably attest to different versions of a memory of such an event transmitted in different streams of oral performances. Thirdly the question as to the messiahship of Jesus was sure to have arisen at the end and posed by his close disciples who had, after all, sacrificed their lives and families to follow Jesus.

After considering the sources of importance and the history of research on this subject, Dunn (2003:330) asks how the researcher participating in the quest should proceed. His critiques are that Liberal questers have been approaching the text with too many cultural and intellectual predispositions and that form criticism has isolated individual Jesus-sayings in their focus for field of study.

#### **4.4 The birth and application of the sources**

##### **4.4.1 The gospel-genre**

Dunn (2003:184) disagrees with Bultmann (1963:372) when he says that there is nothing of historical-biographical interest to be found in the gospels “...and that is why they have nothing to say about Jesus’ human

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personality, his appearance and character, his origin, education and development....” He acknowledges, however, that what Bultmann meant was that the gospels aren’t the equivalent of modern biographies. A study of the gospel-genre will show that they are very similar in appearance to the ancient biographies where character was set, unchangeable, and the task of the biographer was to portray his subject by reporting his words and deeds – characteristic of all canonical gospels but not of non-canonical gospels. The aim of these biographies of antiquity was to “...provide examples for readers to emulate, to give information about their subject, to preserve his memory, and to defend and promote his reputation” (Dunn 2003:185). This likewise holds true for all the canonical gospels.

Of course, it remains true that the Gospels were never simply biographical; they were propaganda; they were kerygma. But then neither were ancient biographies wholly dispassionate and objective (any more than modern biographies). In other words, the overlap between Gospel and ancient biography remains substantial and significant.

(Dunn 2003:185)<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, although the gospels fit into the category of ancient biography, they are so much more than mere biography and a great deal of historical interest contributed to the formulation, repeated performance and collection of the material in the synoptic gospels. Burridge (1995:80-81) makes a contribution towards the understanding of this genre by writing:

[B]iography is a type of writing which occurs naturally among groups of people who have formed around a certain charismatic teacher or leader, seeking to follow after him. If it was true of Socrates, Cato and St Francis that their followers sought to keep their memory alive by writing *bioi* and *vitae* of them, then *bios* literature is a sensible place to begin a search

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<sup>44</sup> See also Aune (1987:28-58).

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 for the genre of the gospels, written about Jesus by his  
 followers.

He adds (Burridge 1995:80-81) that a major purpose and function of these *bioi* was to be found within a context of didactic or philosophical polemic and conflict and that:

*Bios* is a genre capable of flexibility, adaptation and growth, and we should avoid facile and simplistic definitions. Furthermore, *bios* nestles among neighbouring genres such as historiography, rhetoric, encomium, moral philosophy, polemic and the novel or story, with some examples tending towards overlap with one or more neighbouring borders and yet still remaining recognizably within the genre of *bios*.

Burridge agrees with Momigliano's comment that not all biography had been intended for great debate and quotes him (in Burridge 1995:150,151) as saying that the "...educated man of the Hellenistic world was curious about the lives of famous people. He wanted to know what a king or a poet or a philosopher was like and how he behaved in his off-duty moments."

So the Gospels attest to a lively interest among first Christians in knowing about Jesus, in preserving, promoting and defending the memory of his mission, and in learning from his example. This makes them very useful indeed as sources in the search for the clearest, most authentic picture of Jesus and of the way in which he was perceived.

#### **4.4.2 The traditioning process**

Of particular interest is Dunn's focus on the oral tradition of Jesus' mission and the suggestion that the pattern and technique of oral transmission ensured greater stability and continuity of the Jesus-tradition than had previously been imagined. He also investigates claims that there had been

diverse and alternative forms of Christianity as early as those attested to in the New Testament.

The passing on of tradition had from the first been part of church founding, as the reader of the New Testament is reminded on numerous occasions (1 Cor 11:2; 15:3; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6-7; 1 Th 4:1; 2 Th 2:15, 3:6)<sup>45</sup> and as is seen from the prominent role played by teachers who appear to have been present in even the earliest Christian churches (Ac 13:1; Rm 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; Heb 5:12; Ja 3:1; Did 15:1-2). The tradition passed on by them could have included community tradition, teaching on how new converts should live, as well as teachings of Jesus according to which their lives should be conducted. Teachers were apparently even paid for services rendered. More importantly, in the absence of encyclopaediae and books for research, people became human reference libraries (cf Vansina 1985:37).

The relationship between Jesus and his disciples was that of teacher<sup>46</sup> and students reaping the benefit of the teaching.<sup>47</sup> Van Aarde believes that a

<sup>45</sup> Although Dunn makes no distinction between Pauline and deutero-Pauline authorship at this point, critical science regards Colossians and 2 Thessalonians among the above-mentioned texts as deutero-Pauline, which could then indicate later dates of origin. See in this regard Horrell (2000:113-122).

<sup>46</sup> See Dunn (2003:177) for Scriptural passages confirming this. In an interesting footnote he adds that Matthew and Luke seem mostly to have avoided the term “*didaskalos*”, presumably because they deemed it lacking in sufficient overtones of exaltation.

<sup>47</sup> There exists a line of thinking in scholarly research that assumptions such as these concerning the disciples and in particular the group of twelve, are too readily made and uncritical. Andries van Aarde (2004:711-738) states that the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem had used the term “the Twelve” as an inclusive reference to themselves and all of Israel. This stemmed from their belief that they were the “apostles” and “prophets” of the “new Israel” and that by applying this term to themselves, they were symbolically referencing the twelve patriarchs of Israel. Meier (in Van Aarde 2004:732) points out that the Twelve had rapidly disappeared and were subsequently completely absent for the rest of the New Testament. By way of an explanation he offers that maybe, after the death of some of their number, or the possible mission of some to Diaspora Jews in the East or West, it hardly made sense to still refer to them in this way, or that some strong individual leaders came to the fore eclipsing the Twelve as a unit. Schmithals (in Van Aarde 2004:732, 733) had been the first to pose the idea that the Twelve had been a retrojection by the post-Easter group into the public ministry of Jesus. He links this to his understanding of Mark’s view namely that Jesus acted within a Greco-Roman environment, outside the boundaries of Judean exclusivity so that the transformation of their self-designation from “the Twelve” to “apostles” was intended to free the Jerusalem group from their exclusivist attitude. Van Aarde (2004:733) is in perfect agreement with him on this score, basing his conviction in this regard on the paucity of reference to the Twelve in the earliest Jesus traditions such as miracles, chreias, apothegms and

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calling of disciples, more specifically “the Twelve” should not be too readily regarded as historically accurate. He believes the twelve to have been a post-Easter concept that came into being as a result of the traditions concerning the risen Jesus, and that the number twelve designates the “apocalyptic ‘true Israel’” (Van Aarde 2004:724).

However, a number of scholars, including Dunn believes this exact symbolism had been the motivation for Jesus the prophet to have chosen this number of followers to allude to the new Israel and that this deduction is supported by the fact that it is strongly confirmed by the only Q passage which speaks of the twelve (Dunn 2003:510). Moreover he believes the tradition concerning the twelve to be firmly rooted and widespread with enough variation to suggest oral transmission. Paul recalls the summary of the gospel he had been given at his conversion (2-3 years after the crucifixion) which contains a resurrection appearance to the twelve which was unlikely to have been established only as a result of these appearances. Variations in the lists of their names, as well as some obscurities, not only underline the orality of the material, but also indicated a less prominent role played by the members of the twelve in the earliest groups and churches, so that their identity as Jesus’ inner circle “became somewhat confused in corporate memory” (Dunn 2003:509).

As such the disciples would have been committed to remembering the teaching of the teacher. In Acts the role of the first disciples, or the apostles in particular, was that of witnesses (*martyres*) bearing testimony of especially the crucifixion and resurrection. Acts 1:22 and 10:37-39 show that witnessing was meant to start right at the very beginning from the baptism of John. Paul calls himself a “witness of Jesus” (Ac 22:15,18; 23:11; 26:16) and it is not only in Acts that witnessing is deemed an important part of being a follower of Jesus. The Gospel of John heavily emphasizes witnessing as well; John the Baptist was himself a model

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controversy reports. “The primary evidence for this statement, from a tradition critical perspective, is that both Paul and Mark related their knowledge of the idea of ‘the Twelve’ to their receipt of the kerygmatic tradition (gospel about the salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus)” (Van Aarde 2004:733).

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witness (Jn 4:39; 12:17), the inner circle of disciples bear witness, helped by the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27) and they bear Spirit-assisted witness through the Gospel of John.

This theme permeates the Johannine epistles and is strengthened therein by two complimentary motifs, namely an *ap' arches* theme and a theme stressing the importance of continuity of “hearing” from the first disciples to converts, the latter retaining what they had heard and living accordingly. This motif is found not only in the Johannine epistles, but also in Hebrews 2:1,3 and later Pauline epistles. But more striking still is the motif of “remembering” which was of importance also for identity-forming. What is meant here by “remembering” is definitely much more than merely a cognitive act of recollection. It implies that more or less from the very first those who established new churches would take care to provide and build a foundation of Jesus-tradition. This must have been of particular importance for gentiles adopting a wholly new lifestyle and social identity as this would provide them with guidelines and models for the conduct now expected from them. A solid basis of Jesus-tradition was thus what they were expected to remember, that is to take in and live out.

This leads him to believe that we are presented in the gospels, not with last editions or the top of ever more impenetrable layers, but “...the living tradition of Christian celebration which takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus” (Dunn 2003:254).

Dunn (2003:180) speaks aptly of “apostolic custodians” who had already been regarded as the foundation of the church or the “new Jerusalem” in Ephesians 2:20 and Revelations 21:14. There is clear emphasis on this office in the early chapters of Acts, their role being to ensure a continuity between what Jesus had taught and the expanding mission of movement reinvigorated at Pentecost. The opening words of Acts (Acts 1:1) therefore imply continuity with all Jesus had begun to do and teach as recorded in part 1 of this work, namely the Gospel of Luke, and in Acts 1:2 it continues with instruction to the apostles. The first trademark a new apostle had to

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acquire was therefore continuity with and firm adherence (*proskartereo*) to the teaching of the apostles. The earliest churches would have wanted to remember and refer to the Jesus-tradition which was passed on to them as foundational tradition by their founding apostle and in actual fact succeeded in doing so.

The oral character of the traditioning (transmission) process means that in and through the performative variations of the tradition still evident in the Synoptic tradition we are even now able to hear the stories first told about Jesus and his teachings which initially drew the tridents into discipleship and sustained the churches in the early years of their common life of discipleship. Therefore:

Where we find consistent features across the range of performed tradition...we may conclude that they derive from the most formative influence on tradition – that is, most likely, not from any one of the many performers of the tradition but from the creative impact of Jesus, as embodied in the tradition shared by and definitive for the communities which celebrated the tradition.

(Dunn 2003:329)

He adds that the rule in evaluating these slants should be to question whether they were consistent with the originating impulse. Dunn (2003:329) comments further on the unlikelihood of “jarring inconsistencies” having been introduced by or accepted from a prophet or teacher and believes that a synopsis of all this would serve to bring home the full impact that Jesus had on his followers.

Rudolf Bultmann (1962:1) had said: “The purpose of Form Criticism is to study the history of the oral tradition behind the gospels”, furthermore concerning the agreements between the gospels:

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[M]ay not the agreements go back to some lost primitive gospel which the three synoptists used? Or if not to a complete gospel, at least to single fragments or written sketches of the works and words of Jesus? Or may not the oral tradition of the Christian church have arrived at a sufficiently fixed form so that the evangelists needed only to draw from this source?

(Bultmann 1962:12)

And, voicing an insight essential to Dunn's own understanding, "Whenever narratives pass from mouth to mouth the central point of the narrative and general structure are well preserved; but in the incidental details change takes place...". However, he obscured this insight, according to Dunn, by maintaining that certain "laws of style" found in studies of folklore and applied to the transmission of forms in the gospels, determined the course of this process of transmission. His assumption of a literary model which had the capacity to explain this transmission process led him to the concept of layers in the Jesus-tradition and raised his hopes of being able to strip down later Hellenistic layers in order to expose earlier Palestinian layers.

Voces have been raised in criticism but that of Sanders (1969:272) will suffice when he writes: "There are no hard and fast laws of the development of the Synoptic tradition. On all accounts the tradition developed in opposite directions. It became both longer and shorter, both more and less detailed, and both more and less Semitic..."

C F D Moule (1959:100-114) and his pupil Eugene Lemcio (1991:8-18,109-114) have contributed the insight that the Gospels distinguish between pre- and post-Easter perceptions of Jesus within the content of the related Jesus-tradition. So, even if it is self-evident that they retell the story within the context of a post-Easter perspective, this rarely intrudes or is interjected into the content thereof. And if this is indeed the case where the

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often retold and developed material constituting the synoptic gospels is concerned, to what larger extent would it not be true of the retelling in the case of the traditions which had been sourced by the evangelists.

Although Helmut Koester does not develop a model or study the dynamics of the whole traditioning process, he is quoted (in Dunn 2003:196) as contributing that Jesus-tradition existed in “oral streams” (free tradition) well into the second century. Harald Riesenfeld (1970:16, 24, 26) brought to the attention that the technical terms used for the transmission of the rabbinic tradition, underlie the Greek terms used in the New Testament for the same process (*paralambein* and *paradidonaī*) and deduces from this that, similar to the rabbinic traditioning process, the early Christian one was “a rigidly controlled” transmission of the words and deeds of Jesus memorized as holy word. He was of the opinion that the idea of a community-shaped tradition derived directly from Jesus and had been transmitted by authorized teachers in a far more rigid and fixed form. His student, Birger Gerhardsson (1961:130-36), who made a minute study of rabbinic tradition and transmission, as well as several techniques of oral transmission, found that the operative word in all of this was “memorization” and that this was achieved via repetition. The memorization was not some haphazard, random act of hit-or-miss recollection, rather the pupil had to memorize the “exact words” of the teacher as a basis for any commentary of his own. Dunn points out that Luke and Paul both use the same phrase “the words of the Lord” and that Jesus as teacher would require his disciples to learn by heart and memorize his words. This meant that the evangelists could work on a fixed tradition form, but an oral one. The theories of the latter two were rejected, however, as being too rigid and fixed to explain the divergences of the different gospels.

Of great importance to the work of Dunn are the conclusions reached by Werner Kelber (1983:26, 27):

Orality and social world cooperate through the vehicle of a formulaic mode of communication. Both the effectiveness and

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the memorability of spoken words is (sic) enhanced in direct proportion to their conformity with rhythmical, acoustic demands. If a saying is to enjoy social survival, it is to be articulated in accordance with mnemonic formalities.

He refers to scholars whose work has demonstrated the exceptional degree to which the sayings of Jesus have retained the heavily patterned speech forms saturated with alliteration, paranomasia, appositional equivalence, tautologic parallelism, et cetera. Similarly, the predictable traits of the synoptic miracle stories have been highlighted by Bultmann, Dibelius and Theissen (in Kelber 1983:27), so that may be seen to comply with the requirements for oral utility, encoding the miracle stories in the manner of habitual, not verbatim, memorization.

[O]ral life is not merely embellished by rhetorical conventionalities, but it lives from them. Thoughts in orality are not merely clothed in patterned forms, and formalized language is not merely a matter of added skill, but oral thinking consists in formal patterns from the start. So much does information depend on form, and spirit on style, that in orality one could almost say that the form is the soul of the message.

Furthermore, he comments on the datedness of thinking that verbatim memorization is a key factor in oral transmission, substituting “the inevitability of change, flexibility, and degrees of improvisation” (1983:27).

The miracle stories, according to Kelber, have conventionally been seen in New Testament scholarship, as the fruition of Hellenistic culture, with Bultmann as one of the most prominent advocates of this view. However, Howard C Kee (in Kelber 1983:50) has shown miracles as a sign of eschatological deliverance to have become “a central ingredient in Jewish apocalyptic literature” and Eugene Trocme (in Kelber 1983:50), deliberately leaving behind the terminology of the Religionsgeschichtliche terminology, posed the question whether the miracle stories in Mark may

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have been, not Jewish, nor Hellenistic, but animistic. Trocme's theory is that the miracle stories can be traced back to the popular memory of Galilean storytellers, rather than the memory of an organized Christian community in Jerusalem.

In a study of the distinctive character of oral tradition from classicists to folklorists to social anthropologists, Kelber (1983:141, 199) discovered that the distinguishing factor was mnemonic patterns shaped for oral recurrence, such as heavy rhythmically balanced patterns in repetitions, antitheses, alliteration, et cetera. He furthermore comments on the huge difference between oral performance and literary transmission which, according to him, lies in the ability of the oral to claim an immediacy and direct, personal engagement between speaker and auditor. This Dunn readily agrees to, saying that it coincides with what he meant by the "impact" made by Jesus on his disciples.

Kelber (1983:29) reminds us that documents of the ancient world were written to be heard, to be read out loud and that the letters were effective substitutes for personal absence and that every reading of a text is therefore like a fresh performance of the text in terms of reader-response criticism. He admonishes against idealising the original form and feverishly hunting for it to the exclusion of all else, for each oral performance is unique and a new creation. Moreover, he thinks that the retelling started taking place during the life of Jesus and not only post-Easter (as Bultmann has already pointed out in the past) and so narratives or retold stories about Jesus have again become prominent.

An interesting and important observation by Kelber (1983:65-68, 91, 94) is that the Gospel of Mark still shows many traits characteristic of the oral, such as activist syntax, colloquial Greek, the use of storyteller's redundancies and repetitions, and that this gospel takes an oral story and adapts it "for the eye more than for the ear". He adds that Mark's gospel may be *frozen orality*, but that it is without doubt frozen *orality*.

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Dunn's critique on Kelber is that he overextends his thesis on Mark as having indicated a major transition from oral to written, thereby seriously compromising its overall value. Quoting Kelber (1983:95,98,131), he comments:

The first step in his thesis development is that the written Gospel disrupts the "oral synthesis"; it "arises not from orality *per se*, but out of the debris of deconstructed orality"; it indicates "alienation from the oral apparatus"; it "accomplishes the death of living words for the purpose of inaugurating the life of textuality". The transition is overdramatized: it is widely recognized that in a predominantly oral culture, oral versions of a tradition would continue after it had been transcribed and that knowledge of the written version would usually be in an oral medium.

(Dunn 2003:202)

G N Stanton (in Dunn 2003:202) gives a more tempered-down opinion of the matter: "There is no reason to doubt that it was not the writing of Mark's gospel, but the later slow acceptance of Mark as a fixed and authoritative text which led to the death of oral traditions about Jesus".

Kelber himself (1995:195) later seems more cautious about, as he calls it, "the great divide thesis, which pits oral tradition vis-à-vis gospel text."

The work of Horsley and Draper on this subject is also highly regarded. The benefit they reaped from the work of J.M. Foley (1991,1995) must be acknowledged, while Foley in his turn relies upon the "receptionalist" (Dunn 2003:204) theories of W Iser and HR Jauss, as proponents of contemporary literary criticism. The main thrust of their work is that it is imperative for a text to be heard within the correct "horizons of expectation" (Jauss) and furthermore for the scholar to realize that any text has gaps of indeterminacy (Iser) which may be filled only from a prior understanding on

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the part of the receiver of the text, author or tradition. Traditional phraseology and narrative patterns provide ways for a poet to convey meaning or tap into a traditional reservoir.

Foley (1991:6-13, 40-48) points out that oral traditional texts imply an audience with a background which enables them to respond faithfully to signals encoded in the text, to bridge gaps of indeterminacy and so to formulate an implied consistency. “It is the responsibility of the “reader” of an oral traditional text to attempt to become as far as possible the audience implied by that text” (1991:54, 55). “Performance is the enabling event, tradition the enabling referent” (1995:28). Foley adds (1995:35):

The tale must be well known to the public if the performance is to be a success for the audience must not be overly preoccupied with the task of trying to follow painstakingly what is being told in order to enjoy the tale. They must already know the tale so that they can enjoy the rendering of its various episodes, appreciate the innovations, and anticipate the thrills still to come. So every performance is new, but every performance presupposes something old: the tale itself.

For Foley (1991:5), the key lies in the “question of referentiality. Instead of asking ‘what’ is meant by a work of art and its constituting parts, we should begin by asking ‘how’ that work or part conveys whatever meaning can be or is communicated.” This process is metonymic, “a mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole”.

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:160-174) applies Foley’s contribution to Q and concludes: “...in order to understand Q as a libretto that was regularly performed in an early Jesus movement, we must engage in a number of interrelated analytical or investigative exercises” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:174). These include the establishment of the “texts” or “words” of Q that were being performed not as a collection of sayings, but a series of short speeches or discourses on subjects which were of

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concern to the movement. The context for these performances would have been the regular meetings of the community within a renewal movement “...and/or the particular situations of mission or trial in which members frequently found themselves” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:174).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:174) adds:

The speech-registers appropriate to those situations included the general register of the founding prophet addressing the movement for Q as a whole and the particular registers of prophetic proclamation of new deliverance (the kingdom of God / renewal of Israel), Mosaic covenant renewal, mission to expand the renewal movement, encouragement-and-instruction for trial before the authorities, consolation and encouragement in difficult circumstances of poverty, and warning sanctions on discipline and solidarity.

He recommends an exploration of the Judean biblical tradition and any other road marks we may have as to how a popular renewal movement would have understood its tradition in order to reach an understanding of sorts on how the verbal signs and symbols in all of the Q discourses would have resonated metonymically with popular Israelite tradition (1999:174).

Draper (in Horsley & Draper 1999:182, 184) contributed that metonymic referencing is a culturally determined matter, enabling for example a word or phrase to telescope a whole aspect of tradition and culture. He discovered that, despite difficulties and uncertainties, patterns and features of oral performance which have withstood the incarceration of living tradition within text, clearly emerge when segmenting Q into measured verse. Couplets and triplets reveal themselves and stanzas seem to divide into sets of three to five to reflect, with a regularity which excludes any possibility of coincidence, an oral mnemonic patterning aimed at easing both the performance and the reception of the material. “This analysis of

the oral patterns discernible in the Q discourses serves to confirm the impression of a coherent sequence of discourses as the overall structure of Q" (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:188).

Draper (in Horsley & Draper 1999:175-194) examines Q 12:49-59 in this way, immediately discovering within the measured text a residue of oral performance. It consists of three stanzas, each composed of three parallel couplets (with only two exceptions to this rule), constructed on the basis of parataxis and linkage, popular oral devices. He then attempts to reconstruct the register for this text stating his rule of thumb: “"We have already argued that in oral culture, the use of the restrictive code means that the reference is metonymic, *pars pro toto*, to the culture as mediated through a particular social class" (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:191). Thus, in the mention of “*pur elthon balein epi ten gen*”, one hears reverberations of the consequences of covenantal disobedience as spelt out in the prophecies of Jeremiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel (Draper states that the reference to fire being unleashed mainly against Israel occurs sixty times). “In this way, the prophet is an agent in God's unleashing of the fire of judgment” (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:192). Contrarily, in the “*eirene*” or state of blessedness which follows upon covenantal obedience, he hears echoes of Jeremiah 17:58 and in:”[*opsias genomenes*] *legete [eudia purrazei gar ho ouranos kai proisemerion cheimon purrazeigar stugnazzon ho ouranos.*] to prosopon tou ouranou [oida] te [diakrin]ein ton kairon de ou [dynasthe]?” echoes of references to the weather in prophetic oracles such as Amos 8:11, 12; Micah 7:1; Isaiah 45:8; Joel 1:4,11-12; 2:2, 30-32. He remarks on similar metonymic referencing to divine wrath, fire covenant and fruitfulness which can be found in John's teaching in Q 3:7-9, where those failing to bear fruit will be like a tree cut down and thrown into the fire, where the coming one will baptize with Holy Spirit and fire and will sift the wheat and burn the chaff with fire.

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He announces without reserve that he considers Q 12:49-59 to be metonymic reference, not of apocalyptic, but of *prophetic-covenantal* nature (1999:193) and comes to the following illuminating conclusion:

Jesus feels compelled, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to pronounce the fire of God's wrath in judgment because of disobedience to the provisions of the covenant. He makes a reference to a tradition we find also in Mic. 7:6....Jesus sees himself called instead to pronounce judgment with a spirit of power which brings the prophecy to pass (Hos. 12:10; Mic. 3:8). The breach of the covenant declared by Micah concerns oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful. For them the judgment brings confusion and division....Jesus, in his turn, pronounces that the injustice and oppression visited on the poor by their rulers (in Jerusalem? In Sepphoris and Tiberias?) will bring confusion and disaster and understands his word to effect that judgment. He stands squarely within the tradition of covenantal prophecy in Israel.

(Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:193)

Kenneth Bailey (in Dunn 2003:206) reflects on the topic of the oral culture of Middle-Eastern village life, saying that this is as close as we'll get to the oral tradition of the village culture of first-century Galilee. He lists the types of material typically preserved in oral traditioning; pithy proverbs or wisdom-sayings, story riddles, poetry of both the classical and popular type, parables or stories, and lastly and most importantly, well-told accounts of important figures in the history of the village or communities, which prove the rule that central figures will have their stories told. Of further importance is that Bailey explains the capability of the community to control tradition as well as the different levels of control – in poems and proverbs no flexibility is allowed, in parables and recollections of people and events important for the community, some flexibility is permitted; the core can't be changed, but flexibility may exist with regards to detail. And in the case of unimportant material which isn't of any relevance for the

community, that is does not contain wisdom or valuable information, such as jokes or casual news, total flexibility is allowed.

Taking these rules and observations into consideration, Dunn (2003:209-210) has no doubt in his own mind that the oral transmission of the Jesus-tradition was controlled within the mixture of stability and flexibility, fixedness and variability in the elements constituting oral traditioning. Up until the first Jewish revolt (66-73 CE) it was possible for informal oral tradition to function in Palestine and everyone twenty years old and older could have been an “authentic reciter of that tradition.” (Bailey in Dunn 2003:209). Literary editing is absent, for each telling is in itself a complete performance of tradition and not an edition. This means that the transmission of Jesus-tradition consists of a sequence of retellings, each emerging from a common fount of events and teaching and each “...weaving common stock together in different patterns for different contexts” (Dunn 2003:209).

Dunn considered the following to be valuable contributions made by Bailey to the understanding of the Jesus-tradition:

- That oral tradition is flexible with a stable core and constant themes in variations of the same story;
- That communities are concerned with preserving traditions they hold dear and deem valuable for the identity of the community;
- That this control varies according to the value attached to the tradition for the identity of the community;
- That the most fixed and stable element of a story would always be the central core.

Examples of the Jesus-tradition that were examined by Dunn (see 203:210-238) showed the combination of elements of stability and flexibility that “simply cried out to be recognized as typically oral in character” (Dunn

2003:254). Examples of both narrative tradition and teaching seemingly confirm implications drawn from the oral character of its formulation:

- The teaching of Jesus made such an impact on his first hearers that it was recalled, with its key emphases crystallized in the overall theme and/or in particular words and phrases to remain constant in the process of rehearsing and passing on of this teaching in disciple gatherings and churches.
- The variations in the reteaching indicate a readiness to group material differently, to adapt or develop it, and to draw further lessons from it, consistent with the tradition of initial impact made by Jesus himself in the light of the developing circumstances of the churches which treasured the teaching. Once again the point is that the tradition was *living tradition*, celebrated in the communal gatherings of the earliest churches. There was no concern to recall all the exact words of Jesus; in many cases the precise circumstances in which the teaching was given were irrelevant to its continuing value. But neither is there any indication in the material reviewed that these were sayings interjected into the tradition by prophets or free (literary) creation, or that the development of particular teachings subverted their original impact.

The first of these finds support from Crossan (1983:40, 67) "...the basic unit of transmission is never the *ipsissima verba* of an aphoristic saying but, at best and at most, the *ipsissima structura* of an aphoristic core." "In oral sensibility one speaks or writes an aphoristic saying, but one remembers and recalls an aphoristic core." And B B Scott (1989:18-19) adds:

It is futile to seek the original words of a parable. The efforts of those who preserved the parables should not be viewed as the efforts of librarians, archivists, or scribes preserving the past,

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but of storytellers performing a parable's structure. We must distinguish between performance, which exists at the level of *parole*, actual spoken or written language, and structure, which exists at the level of *langue*, an abstract theoretical construction.

On the topic of the second of these, Draper states in support that the idea that some of Jesus' sayings were created in entirely innovative fashion, is not in keeping with the process of oral transmission:

Such entirely innovative 'words of the Risen Jesus' are inherently unlikely. On the other hand, the words of Jesus would have been repeated by himself and his followers on innumerable occasions, always in varying forms, and so it is inappropriate to speak of an original form of a saying (since it would have had no original form but only an original shape' or of *ipsissima verba* (since the words would have changed in each performance even on the lips of Jesus himself).

(Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:183)

#### 4.4.3 Oral transmission

Dunn now expounds his own views and conclusions on this subject. Only in a literary text is there the possibility of an editing process. The dynamics of the repeated oral performances which precede the written text, are entirely different. Whereas Gerhardsson (1961:168) had opted for the "*tantum scimus, quantum memoria tenemus*"-principle, Dunn (2003:203) believes that the operative words are rather "theme and variations" which may make the search for sources, appropriate in researching the origin of a written text, obsolete in the perusal of oral tradition. He adds: "...even talk of 'oral transmission' can mislead such discussions, since it envisages oral performance as intended primarily to transmit (transfer) rather than, say, to celebrate tradition."

At the onset he makes three crucial observations:

- Immediately, upon impact, an initiating word or action of Jesus would have begun the traditioning process. A delayed reaction of years, months, even days, was not an option. Within the word or deed which caused the impact lay the awakenings of the formation of the very same tradition which had created that impact. The reaction of excitement, wonder or surprise would be captured in the initial shared reaction,

...the structure, the identifying elements and the key words (core or climax) would be articulated in oral form in the immediate recognition of the significance of what had been said or happened. Thus established more or less immediately, these features would then be the constants, the stable themes which successive retellings could elaborate around which different performances could build their variations, as judged appropriate in the different circumstances.

(Dunn 2003:240)

- One should heed against the misconception that the above-mentioned impact resulted in various disparate reactions of independent individuals. Tradition forming was the concern of the community and could certainly have contributed to their adhesion as community. In this way the pre-Easter circle of disciples had already formed a “*Bekenntnisgemeinschaft*” ...of committed disciples...who confessed Jesus as the final revealer and interpreter of the word of God” (Dunn 2003:241). In this vein Strecker (in Dunn 2003:241) remarks that the ‘Sitz im Leben’ of a text is usually to be sought in the life of the community, and in its worship and catechetical instruction in particular. In distinction to the literary tradition (*Tradition*), the oral tradition (*Überlieferung*)

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is mainly prescribed for performance in the Christian community  
and is therefore structured accordingly.

This said, Dunn (2003:243) remarks that, “in focusing particular attention on the communal character of the early traditioning process we should not discount the more traditional emphasis on the individual figure of authority respected for his or her own association with Jesus during the days of his mission. “

Contrary to Theissen’s (1978:1) suggestion of the passing on of tradition by “wandering charismatics”, the survival of these traditions have not had to depend upon single evangelistic or missionary proclamations but the communities in question would regularly, at their gatherings, have referred to the tradition which had called them into existence and which was to instruct and guide them. It is owing to its regular and repeated use in preaching that these traditions have been handed down to us.

The implication of this second of his observations is that often, what is yielded by the Jesus tradition, is not necessarily the objective words and deeds of Jesus as much as it is the “consistent and coherent features of the shared impact “ which they had made. What has been handed down to us are examples of the oral retelling of that shared tradition which show to their best advantage the flexibility and elaboration of oral performances. There had surely been a man called Jesus who had left the original impression, the remembered Jesus, but that original impact comes to us not as a pure form or single impact on which the historian can lay his hands. If Jesus told at least some of his parables on more than one occasion, then it only makes sense that there had never been a single original context for these teachings. Kloppenborg (1996:334) aptly speaks of performative diversity existing at the earliest stages of the Jesus tradition. “The remembered Jesus may be a synthesis of the

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several impacts made on and disciple responses made by Jesus' earliest witnesses, but the synthesis was already firm in the first flowering of the tradition" (Dunn 2003:242).

- Another implication is that from the very first moment of impact the traditioning process was taken seriously as formative tradition of the evolving community. So important does Dunn consider it to be that he writes: "To the extent that the shared impact of Jesus, the shared disciple-response, bonded into groups of disciples or adherents those thus responsive to Jesus' mission, to that extent the dynamics of group formation would be operative" (Dunn 2003:242). It seems obvious that the shared memories of the words and deeds of Jesus – already Jesus tradition – would have played an essential part in defining group identity internally and demarcating boundaries over against their fellow Jews.

Kloppenborg (1987:98) speaks of the traditioning process as "...the juxtaposition of originally independent units", a point of view strongly refuted by Dunn (2003:246), who believes there is enough reputable evidence to prove the grouping of sayings very early in the transmission process and adds: "To group similar teachings and episodes would be an obvious mnemonic and didactic device for both teachers and taught, storytellers and regular hearers, more or less from the beginning."

From Mark and Q, texts with a definite oral character, Dunn (2003:210-252) studies numerous examples of first narrative and subsequently teaching tradition and notes three elements in the narratives and teachings he examined (Dunn 2003:254), all of which are on par with his original theories which preceded the study of the texts:

- Meticulous attention was given to the preservation of what Jesus had done and said as the new disciples and seedling

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communities celebrated the core tradition which constituted their identity. For it was the impact of these – the life and message of Jesus – that had formed and shaped their faith and communities.

- Stories and teachings were remembered which derived from and were identified by the focal points in particular words or phrases usually originating from Jesus himself.
- Any variations and developments were characteristic of the variations within oral performance and were not linear or cumulative in character. No attempt was made to preserve any literalistic historicity of detail, nor was there a flooding of the tradition with Jewish wisdom sayings or prophetic utterances. No knowledge we have of prophetic activity in the early church can substantiate the assumption that prophecy within the earliest churches would have added substantial material to the Jesus-tradition. On the contrary, the first churches would have been on the look-out to stamp any sign of prophecy out of character with the Jesus-tradition already in their possession.

This leads him to conclude that what we are dealing with here is not merely the top layer or last edition in a series of inscrutable layers, but “...the living tradition of Christian celebration which takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus” (Dunn 2003:254). *This means that it is possible to encounter a remembered Jesus in the impact that his words and deeds had made on the first disciples as that was “translated” into oral tradition and passed on by the enactment in oral performances within the earliest circles of disciples and churches, “...to be enshrined in due course in the written Synoptic tradition”* (Dunn 2003:254). After the initial impact, when we read in Mark 3:14 that the twelve were chosen as emissaries to go and preach and to be an extension of himself in his mission, the self-evident answer to the question of what they would have

preached would be the teaching given them by Jesus as well as instruction by Jesus in what to say.

#### **4.5 Historical context: A backdrop**

Dunn gives recognition to the Liberal Quest for its attempt to portray Jesus against the backdrop of his historical context. At the beginning of the twentieth century the *religionsgeschichtliche* school superponated constructively with this idea. The sociological quest takes us a step further in understanding Jesus against his backdrop and through the social attitudes and behaviour of his time. The interaction of the Jesus-movement with Jewish society in Palestine was studied by Gerd Theissen (1992:33-59) and Dunn gives him the credit for having made the first attempt to study the texts of the New Testament from a sociological perspective.

Investigations of this kind have increased our chances of seeing a clearer reflection of Jesus and have provided us with much essential information of which the preceding and following are but a few.

The bulk of Jesus' teaching had been in Aramaic but due to extensive penetration of Greek into first-century Palestine, he is likely to have known at least some Greek and may even on some occasions have spoken it. Piously brought up by his parents and educated in the Torah at the local village (Nazarene) assembly or synagogue, he was first and foremost a Jew. Whether he could read or not does not influence the plausibility of his knowledge of and familiarity with Scripture even as the son of an artisan. One can assume that pilgrimages were made at least to Jerusalem for the great feasts or the preparation for his transition to manhood. As a Jew he would have been familiar with the Temple and its functionaries, as well as with the priests who served locally as teachers and magistrates. He would have known the requirements for tithing and purity, probably said Shema as a daily obligation, prayed two or three times a day and as an adult would have observed the Sabbath, attended the synagogue and given every seventh day over to the study of the laws and customs. He would have known Pharisees and been familiar with their fervour to interpret the Torah

for their time, would have known of the Essenes and would have been aware of their history of tension with the Samaritans.

The context of Jesus, the artisan from a Galilean village, whose land was under foreign – Roman – dominion, as well as the context of his mission, has to be taken into account on historical, social, political, geographical, and especially national and religious level within Judaism if a full understanding is to be reached. All of these have as starting point the acknowledgement that Jesus was a Jew. Dunn examines what this implies, starting with his milieu and primary context, Judaism, the unity and diversity of second Temple Judaism, the factionalism and political realities which all point to a multiplex context, as well as what was meant by the terms “Jew” and “Judaism”.

#### **4.5.1 Judaism**

An earlier generation of scholarship, Jewish as well as Christian, had envisioned a “normative Judaism” such as that represented in the rabbinic tradition of, for example, the Mishnah and the Talmuds as early as the first century. Although scholars were aware of the Jewish pseudepigrapha which date back as early as and even earlier than the second century BCE, as well as of Philo who died, according to general consensus, in about 50 CE, it was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-twentieth century which truly challenged their assumptions. For among them were Jewish documents which predate and were as such untouched by Christianity. Their content, according to scholars such as Stegemann (1998:104-118), carry definite sectarian overtones in a type of Judaism which flourished in the heart of Israel. This find has had some notable consequences in the study of Judaism; there followed a resurgence of interest in the pseudepigrapha as similarly representative of different forms of Judaism, the extent of Pharisaic influence in first century Israel has been challenged by Neusner (1973, 1971) and Sanders (1992), and “...the sharpness of any distinction between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Hellenistic Judaism’

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has been considerably blurred. Kraft and Nickelsburg (1986:2) write: “Whereas rabbinic Judaism is dominated by an identifiable perspective that holds together many otherwise diverse elements, early Judaism appears to encompass almost unlimited diversity and variety – indeed, it might be more appropriate to speak of early Judaisms”. The pluriformity of Judaism in the first century seems established, but Dunn (2003:257) points out the need for studying the self- and inter-perspection of these different forms.

Dunn (2003:258, 259) similarly warns against superimposing temporal connotations upon Judaism because of the manifold risks involved and concludes: “All this potential perplexity points up the need to proceed cautiously if we are to avoid the danger of imposing categories and grids which might distort the evidence more than display it. “

Summarily defining Judaism in its earliest form, Dunn ventures (2003:262):

...the term “Judaism” describes the system of religion and way of life within which diaspora Jews lived so as to maintain their distinctive identity, and also the national and religious identity which was given its more definitive character by vigorous resistance to the assimilating and syncretistic influences of wider Hellenism.

He reiterates his warning to the scholar about treading lightly when using the term “Judaism”:

The very term itself makes it difficult for us to gain an insider’s view of Judaism at the time of Jesus. And if we want to see Jesus and earliest Christianity in context, that is, in some sense “within Judaism” or emerging from “within Judaism”, we will have to be conscious of the strong nationalist overtones in the term’s early use, and of the degree to which national and religious identity were fused in one word – including not only

differentiation from but also a certain hostility to the other nations and their religious practices.

(Dunn 2003:264, 265)

#### **4.5.2 “Jew”, “Israel”**

People originating from Judea (*Ioudaia*) would have, early on, been referred to as “Judeans” (*Ioudaioi*) and later as “Jews”. However, because Judea was a temple state, religious and ethnic identity became inter-dependent and worshippers of the God of the Jerusalem temple were referred to as “Jews”. Kuhn (in Dunn 2003:261, 263) clarifies any confusion by saying that “Israel” was used in self-designation, while “Jews” was the term preferred by outsiders. Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 26, 32 illustrate the veracity of his analysis in the “king of the Jews” used by Pilate, in contrast with the “king of Israel” used by the high priests. Similarly Paul, when depicting the whole of humanity in texts such as Romans 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28, speaks of “Jews and Greeks”, while referring to himself as an “Israelite” (Rm 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22). It is interesting to note that, in Acts 21:39 and 22:3, according to Luke, the gentile evangelist, Paul says: “I am a Jew” in addressing both the Jerusalem crowd and the Roman tribune.

It seems advisable to speak of second-Temple Judaism as the Judaism spanning the more or less 600 years since the reconstruction of the Temple, that is from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the year 70 CE when it was once again destroyed, a Judaism centred around and focused on the Jerusalem Temple. It is imperative for the researcher to grasp the comprehensiveness of Judaism, firstly as a religion, but also as a national ideology, integrated to mark out a people distinctive among other nations and religions and encompassing the totality of life – family life, education, the law of the land, social relationships, economics and politics. A sense of the definitive character it obtained by vehement resistance to the assimilating and syncretistic influences of wider Hellenism, and of the

implied differentiation and even hostility towards other nations and to their religious practices, further completes the picture.

In an investigation into the diversity of Judaism and its constituting groups and elements, Dunn chooses as starting point the writings of Josephus, who is as close a witness as is available. When Josephus speaks of “four philosophies” or “sects”, he implies that these were the only groupings among the Jews worthy of his attention:<sup>48</sup>

- **Pharisees**

Because of Christian bias as well as uncritical use by Jewish and Christian scholars alike of later rabbinic traditions which were retrojected as evidence of the practices and belief-systems of first-century Pharisees, certain assumptions had been made which were later found to have been untrue. This meant that less is known about these, “...the principal forerunners of subsequently prevailing Judaism” (Dunn 2003:266) than had previously been assumed.

Christian bias led to their having been perceived as the chief proclaimers of a rigid legalism which stood in sharp contrast to the gracious character of the Christian message. Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism sien Dunn 267) put paid to this misconception, whereas Neusner (Rabbinic Traditions) addressed the fallacy of retrojections by removing layer after layer to finally expose the layers which may be traced back to the first century “with the greatest confidence” (Dunn 2003:267).

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<sup>48</sup> Saldarini (1988:127) warns, however that the question of the exact nature of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes as historical groups, is a far more complicated matter than Josephus’ characterization gives credit to. He adds the grouping of “Scribe” to the list (see Saldarini 1988:273-276), saying they were found in great numbers among the bureaucracy, but also among the Pharisees and in villages, that they played a role in the preservation of prophecy, wisdom writing and the Pentateuch and that: “[I]n the Talmudic period the roles of wise man and scribe... were assimilated to the title of rabbi...”.

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From the statement by Josephus that the Pharisees had handed down various traditions “to the people” he deduces that an exclusivism existed as the result of concerns for the holiness of the people. What, according to Dunn, is definitely and characteristically known about them, is their concern with meticulous, scrupulous, exact observance of the law of their fathers and the development of a distinctive halakhic Torah interpretation, the traditions of their fathers – the so-called oral law.

That the Pharisees had wielded substantial political and social influence is maintained by Dunn, but disputed by Saldarini (see below) and Sanders (1992:395-412). He concedes that they had exercised some political influence at the time of Jesus, but concludes from the evidence that the political power they enjoyed during the reign of Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE) had waned but not disappeared, leaving them “a moderate but usually ineffective opposition”. Having said this, some of them had been involved in the uprisings prior to the death of Herod the Great, that of Judas the Galilean in 6 BCE and the outbreak of the revolt of 66CE (Sanders 1992:380-95).

Anthony Saldarini (1988:274) has drawn the attention to the wide chasm which existed between the two major classes in agrarian societies, in contrast to modern industrial societies where a middle class bridges the gap. There was a large peasant class which produced food and a small elite governing class protecting the peasants from outside aggression and living off the agricultural surplus provided by them. The “retainers” were “people who had left the peasantry but did not have an independent place and power in society, townspeople serving the needs of the elite as soldiers, educators, religious functionaries, entertainers, skilled artisans, et cetera. These functionaries ensured a well-functioning society. Saldarini finds the Pharisees and scribes in their midst and has gained the support of scholars such as Borg and Horsley in his

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argument that the Pharisees as part of this “retainer” class in Jewish society, had served the needs of the ruler and the governing classes and were consequently to some degree dependent upon the rich and powerful (Saldarini 1988:36, 38-48, 295-97).

The communities in both the villages and the “upper reaches of society” (Saldarini 1988:73) were held together by intricate webs of familial and political relationships which controlled religion, economics, education, culture, ethical norms and all other aspects of society. Leaders in the community were the elders and heads of prominent, land-owning families. “They were representatives to the government, patrons of those in need, intercessors (brokers) for the weak with the powerful, judges in disputes and leaders in religious affairs” (Saldarini 1988:73, 74).

There existed between those of unequal status at all levels of society a patron-client relationship based on the exchange of favours in informal, implicitly accepted understandings. Both classes formed corporate societies which could simply be social clubs, or complex movements to reform society. Among these, political interest groups, attempting to control or influence the direction and leadership of society religiously, socially and politically, were prominent. The Pharisees seem to have been such a group, their efforts meeting with various degrees of success according to political circumstances and at times had a partly independent power base through their influence on the people. Some Pharisees and Sadducees were part of the governing classes, they were interested in religious and political power and were always a factor in society at large, but they were a minor factor, one of a large number of groups and forces within the complex network of Judaist society in Judea. (Although Josephus places the Pharisees with the leadership in Jerusalem, Mark locates them in Galilee on all occasions except one.)

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In Mark, for instance, they stand for a certain kind of community while Jesus throws down the gauntlet by attacking this community with its purity regulations concerning washing, food and Sabbath practice. He seeks to widen the borders of the community and loosen its requirements for membership. In doing so Jesus effectively created a new community over which they exercised no control, which could not but provoke their outrage and animosity. Jesus, coming from a lower-class family of artisans without the social standing, honour and influence to command respect as a teacher (Mk 6:2-3) engages in battle with the Pharisees, recognized leaders in the Galilean community, with high standing and influence, if not power, with the people and other community leaders. Their dispute is not religious by nature, but rather a vying for control over the community and Mark (6:4) explains that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country, among his own kin, in his own house.

- **Sadducees**

They can be distinguished from the Pharisees by their rejection of the oral law and purity. There existed a substantial overlap between members of this grouping and the aristocratic families from which the high-priests came and who exercised control over the Temple and because Judea was a temple-state, this also meant exercising control over the political, religious, economic and social spheres of their day inasmuch as they were permitted to by Rome and the Herods. From this Dunn deduces that the Judaism of Jesus' time was fraught with socio-political-religious complexities, that the high-priestly faction was the only one which could realistically have been involved in Jesus' crucifixion, that their prominence and power before 270 CE bear indisputable evidence to the importance of the Temple in first-century Judaism.

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Saldarini (1988:304, 305) reminds us that the sources are unanimous in testifying that the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, afterlife and judgment. These ideas entered Judaism only in the second century BCE and in time came to dominate in religious thought over the next four centuries. The Sadducees upheld the traditional Biblical view and if, as indeed it seems, they were predominantly from the governing class, by reputation strictly conservative in a traditional society, they would not look kindly upon change and innovation. Though they believed in God's covenant and his care for Israel, they did not believe in his apocalyptic intervention. Over against the Pharisees and the new customs they were developing, the Sadducees wanted to uphold the status quo and "...keep the focus on the nation (and potential kingdom) of Israel in this world, not in the next" (1988:304).

- **Essenes**

Josephus bore witness to the fact that the occupants of Qumran had been one of many groupings of this "sect" and that they occupied a wide terrain, moreover, that only some of the scrolls are representative of Qumran's own beliefs. Saldarini (1988: 98,109, 124-125) remarks on them that they are consistently presented by sources as an ascetic, atypical and eremitic grouping. He considers the Essenes to be the closest to the modern idea of a sect because they (and especially the Qumran group) withdrew from society in protest and had an active conflict with the religious authorities of society. They were introversionist, and often revolutionist, withdrawing into a purified community and awaiting divine intervention which would destroy the evil social order.

- **The “Fourth Philosophy”**

A distinctive grouping with Pinehas and the Maccabees as figures to emulate, striving for zealous and committed piety and with a self-understanding of their identity as the elect people of God having been singled out among the nations as their fundamental and defining characteristic.

#### **4.6 From backdrop to view: How to proceed?**

Funk (1996:165) would use parables as starting blocks: “In the beginning was the parable”, “[t]he parables and aphorisms form the bedrock of the tradition. They represent the point of view of Jesus himself”. He calls them : “...a significant speech form characteristic of Jesus” and says: “The parable as Jesus used it is virtually unknown to the Old Testament, and it was rarely successfully imitated in Christian lore” (Funk 1996:136). He has equal appreciation for the aphorisms – subversive adages or epigrams which contradict or undermine folk wisdom as economically as possible - as road marks to navigating the route to the historical Jesus. The fact that Jesus made use of these speech forms shows that his wisdom ran contrary to proverbial folklore and sensibilities and that he strove to replace old perceptions with new ones. The Jesus Seminar used the parables as base and sorted through the aphorisms in search of the techniques used by Jesus in the creation of the parables, for example hyperbole and paradox.

Benedict Viviano (in Dunn 2003:331) builds upon the thirty-one sayings in Mark and Q which overlap to reach what Dunn calls a “surprisingly complete picture”.

Crossan’s (1995:xi) chosen starting point is where three independent vectors cross, “like three giant searchlights coming together on a single object in the night sky”.

These vectors are:

- A (“rather broadly conceived” - Dunn 2003:331) cross-cultural anthropology,
- Greco-Roman and especially Jewish history,
- and literary or textual analysis (“...plus his idiosyncratic stratification of the totality of Jesus tradition” - Dunn 2003:331).

Wright (1996:79) reads elements of the Jesus-tradition against his meta-narrative of Israel in exile and restoration. He works with the concept of a “large hypothesis” or serious historical hypothesis within which all the details of the Jesus tradition may find their place, a whole which influences the parts most satisfactorily.

Lee Keck (1971:33) observes: “Instead of the *distinctive* Jesus we ought rather to seek the *characteristic* Jesus.” Dunn (2003:332) believes these to be words of wisdom, also preferring to look first at the broad picture or the “characteristic Jesus” rather than the dissimilar Jesus to prevent becoming bogged down and lost at the outset in a quagmire of details over individual disputed sayings (see also Telford 1994:50, 52, 57). The oral traditions holds more of the same obstacles for him: “[W]hat we are looking at in the Jesus tradition, and what we are looking for through the Jesus tradition, is one whose mission was remembered for a number of features, each illustrated by stories and teaching and performed in the disciple circles and church gatherings, though not yet (properly speaking) ‘documented’ (the literary paradigm)” (Dunn 2003:332). He reasons that any feature which is characteristic within the Jesus-tradition and relatively distinctive of it, is likely to go back to it and reflect the original impact made by the teaching and actions of Jesus on at least many of his first followers which drew them into and formed their community with other disciples and was celebrated (with kerygmatic traditions of the cross and resurrection) in the gathering of the first generation of Christianity.

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There was, however, development within the tradition, although there is a different process to this development, with flexibility as well as stability forming part of the oral paradigm. How important Dunn considers this aspect to be, is reflected in his statement: "...the Synoptic tradition demands no less by way of explanation of its lasting shape" (Dunn 2003:333). It is essential for scholars to recognize the living character of the process and he issues a warning not to think in terms of literary relationships between static entities (Dunn 2003:334). He adapts Schweitzer's (1906:299) well-known metaphor, saying that the task of tracing the history of the Jesus-tradition is not best conceptualised as an endless journey through countless stations at which one has to stop and change (the different layers of tradition), but rather as a continuous run of performances of some classic where performers and interpretation change even though it is the same classic being performed, thus lending continuity throughout the performances. That still audible impact of word and act is what gives the remembered Jesus historical substance (Dunn 2003:334). If one accedes to this, then a remarkably full portrayal begins to take shape in a remarkably short time.

#### **4.6.1 Can a picture truly emerge?**

One of the strongholds of his argumentation is that it is imperative for the researcher to bear in mind that what is offered the reader in the synoptic tradition is the *remembered* Jesus – not merely as people chose to remember him, but the very impact of his words and deeds as it shaped their memories and continued to reverberate in their gatherings. *Therein lies his contribution; that he does not envision retrieving Jesus, the historical person, behind the gospels, but is optimistic about detecting the earliest impact made by Jesus upon the people he called to discipleship.* This impact, in his opinion, had from the very first translated itself into the community tradition thus bearing evidence not only of the impact made by Jesus, but of the effect he had had on his followers.

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Willi Marxsen's (1992:92) succinct "Christian faith began with the event of being moved by Jesus" expresses how powerful this initial impact had probably been while Stephen Patterson (1998:56) reminds his readers that different people experiencing first hand the impact of Jesus had different reactions to it: "[H]ow did some people find such ultimate goodness in Jesus, while others experienced him quite differently?" John Dominic Crossan (1994:199-200) remarks on the diverse nature of this impact and the response it evoked, saying that any plausible historical reconstruction of Jesus has to take into account that these vary from "Let's worship him" to "Let's execute him". The fact remains however that a response, no matter what the nature thereof, was always evoked.

Patterson (1998:9, 10) expresses profound thoughts on this matter:

Jesus was...an "event" for many people. They experienced him as meaningful for their lives....I want to ask what we can know about the historical Jesus, what he did and said, the stories he told, the people he gathered around him, that really meant something to people. ...Who was Jesus? Who is God? For the earliest Christians, these questions became the same question. They were linked, not through abstract speculation about Jesus' inner nature or because of prodigious displays of the miraculous. They were linked simply in the experiences people had of Jesus that moved them to a clearer idea of who God is – so clear that they could give themselves over to this theological vision and allow it to determine who they would become if they chose to live faithfully to it....I wish... to clarify why it was that early Christians made their claims about Jesus in the first place.

Patterson urges the scholar to bear in mind that when the followers of Jesus confessed their faith, or cried "Behold, the Son of God," it was a direct response to his words and deeds which they experienced in their lives and which moved them deeply. Their responses of faith did not replace his words or acts and substitute something new in their place,

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“Rather, they elevated what they had experienced in Jesus to a new kind of status: a claim about who God is, a *theological claim*” (Patterson 1998:47, 53). “An existential approach to Christology takes this basic experience as the foundation of Christian faith” (Patterson 1998:54).

Jesus was, moreover, firmly embedded in the cultural, political, sociological and economic world of the times in which he lived and Dunn warns against questing for a Jesus who was not a Jew nor the founder of Christianity. Of early Christianity we glean some information from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 24:5 speaks of the first followers of Jesus as “Nazarenes”. Only later did they come to be known as Christians. Sociological and socio-anthropological studies have shown that groups such as these would almost certainly have had foundation stories to announce to others and reiterate internally why they came into existence and what their name (whether “Nazarenes” or “Christians”) means (Dunn 2003:175).

Dunn (2003:132, 133) points out that hermeneutical tension exists between faith and history when talking historically about Jesus. In researching the “historical Jesus” the idea is encountered that behind the texts there exists an historical man, the real Jesus, who differs from the Christ of dogma and the Jesus of the Gospels and who can be discovered by historical research, which will simultaneously enable us to criticize the latter two. He, however, maintains that the Jesus who had inspired the faith event in the gospels, who had inspired the disciples to paint pictures of him, is also the Jesus in these pictures and that apart from the picture of him as perceived through the eyes of faith, there exists no other “neutral” picture, no perception untouched by faith, as though evangelists had traced stories of Jesus through folk songs and tales. The truth, according to him, is that we have *no historical Jesus, only an historical Christ*. Patterson (1998:56) writes: “...for some, this experience of him was redemptive, liberating, empowering. And for some, this experience of Jesus gave meaning to their lives in a way that only something ultimately real and authentic can do, and they gave themselves over to it. These were the first Christians.” He explains:

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One should remember...that all of these early followers were Jewish, as was Jesus himself. None of them had any notion of starting a new religion that would one day stand over against Judaism. Such thinking would not enter into the followership of Jesus until many generations after his death. In using the term "Christian" to describe these early followers of Jesus, I intend to designate persons for whom Jesus became an experience of God. I also intend to suggest that these earliest followers of Jesus were indeed the first "Christians....it did not take a resurrection to call forth such faith in Jesus. For some, it would have happened the day they met Jesus; for others, never at all, in spite of the resurrection proclamation.

(Patterson 1998:56)

*A gross oversight in Dunn's opinion is that scholars have been asking how faith sculpted final forms while neglecting to ask how it inspired the beginning, thinking that tradition came into existence post-Easter, as though his words impacted upon people only after his death, causing them to become disciples only on Easter Sunday, and that it was the product of an already developed faith. The traditions underlying the gospels already started with the encounters between Jesus and those who became his disciples through these very encounters. The hearing and witnessing of the first disciples was already an hermeneutical act, they were already caught in the hermeneutical circle and the exegetes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century merely continue this dialogue.*

*What we have in the texts is the impact Jesus made, what he was remembered as doing or saying and not Jesus himself (Dunn 2003:131). "We do not escape the fact that we know Jesus only as the disciples remembered him." And the words of Keck (2000:20): "...the perception of Jesus that he catalysed is part of who Jesus was" are reassuring. The impulse behind the records is the sayings of Jesus as they were heard and received, the actions of Jesus as they were witnessed and retained in memory and all of these as reflected on thereafter – the faith-creating word*

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or event-shaping faith – as retained and rehearsed by the faith and thus creating and being created. This means that tradition began with the initial impact of Jesus' words and deeds and continued to influence intermediate retellers of tradition till it crystallized in the gospel accounts. What we have, therefore, is not so much what Jesus did or said, but what was remembered. Other than in the case of Paul the narratives begin, not with Jesus, but with the remembered Jesus of the disciples. For Dunn this provides the solution to the gulf that exists between history and faith. In the historical moment of the creation of the Jesus-tradition, we have historical faith.

The synoptic tradition bears witness to the continuity between pre-Easter memory and post-Easter proclamation – a continuity of faith. And because Jesus impacted differently on different individuals, there existed a diversity of faith from the very first. The synoptics, however, also tell of an overall homogeneity of impression made by Jesus on those who first created and then transmitted tradition. Dodd (1971:21-22) confirms this, writing that the first three gospels offer a body of sayings that show on the whole so great a consistency, coherence, and withal a manner, style and content so distinctive, that no reasonable critic should doubt, whatever reservations he may have about individual sayings, that what we have here, reflects the thought of a single, unique teacher.

And Schillebeeckx (1979:51) adds: "...this pluralism which at rock bottom is 'held together' by Jesus as he lived on earth and was apprehended by other people".

The consistency of the disciple-response lends consistency to the tradition. But the circle of discipleship was not homogenous from the very beginning and within the homogeneity of the overall response there also exists a diversity of faith-responses which have been united through Jesus and the faith of the disciples in him. Other responses exist that fell short of discipleship or that understood discipleship differently or that stopped short of Good Friday. These he also takes into account as sources to be

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examined although the emphasis for him should always fall upon the gospels.

To summarize then: Just as Wright and Borg he marries faith and history in researching the remembered Jesus. Faith is of the utmost importance for understanding the life and mission of Jesus. Equally important is history, *but for informing and not proving faith*. Omitting the element of faith from this process is to proceed unhistorically. The challenge would thus be to attempt historically to reveal the character of the impact that Jesus had made, the effect he had had on those who were responsible for the first formulations that were passed down to us. The faith of these people has to be taken into account and the faith-dimension has to be acknowledged and reckoned with as being integral to the Jesus-tradition if a responsible account of Jesus' life and mission is to be constructed.

#### **4.7 Jesus: His image revealed**

Any legitimate image of Jesus would have to include aspects of, among other themes, the Kingdom of God, his disciples, the nature of discipleship and the ones for whom he intended his message.

##### **4.7.1 The Kingdom of God**

That the kingdom of God is a central theme in the preaching of Jesus, is one of the least disputed, or indeed disputable, facts in the study of Jesus. The numerous occurrences of the phrase “*basileia tou theou*” in the evangelist’s renditions of the words of Jesus – thirteen times in Mark, nine times in q/Q, twenty-eight times in Matthean Sondergut, twelve times in Lukan Sondergut – tell a story in itself. Despite probable retellings and redaction, “...we may be ...confident that such retelling and redaction reflected an awareness, on the part of both the tridents and their audiences, that the kingdom had been a prominent theme of Jesus’ preaching” (Dunn 2003:385).

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After a thorough investigation of all the passages making mention of the kingdom, Dunn (2003:393-396) concludes that the range of usages imply a larger picture which he believes to be a threefold vision of Israel's most fundamental convictions:

- God is one and the sole ruler of all creation - Israel's monotheistic faith and creation theology.
- God is our/my King – the affirmation that out of all the peoples Israel was God's elect.
- God's royal rule will be manifested to all – a diverse and diffuse expectation, the following aspects of which may have been rife in Israel within Second Temple Judaism:
  - The scattered Israelites would be returned to the promised land and the twelve tribes reunited as God's people.
  - Renewed and abundant prosperity, the removal of defects or disabilities, a restoration of paradise.
  - A messianic figure or divine agent in a messianic age, sometimes coupled with a messianic banquet.
  - A renewed covenant.
  - The building of a new temple.
  - The return of Yahweh to Zion, brought to renewed attention by Wright.
  - Israel's vindication among the nations.
  - A climactic period of tribulation.
  - Cosmic disturbances.
  - The defeat of Satan.
  - Final judgment.
  - Resurrection, explicitly in evidence only in the latter half of the Second Temple period.
  - Sheol/Hades, the abode of the dead, now a place of retribution for the wicked.

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Dunn considers the answers to three questions to penetrate to the heart of the hermeneutical problem of perceiving how these texts were heard in the first century and are heard today and therefore to be essential for a true understanding of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. These questions are whether one should think in terms of a *single* larger story, what is meant by “eschatological”, and whether we should understand the kingdom to be a literal concept, a symbol, a metaphor or none of these.

Looking briefly at two of many images drawn by other scholars on the theme of the kingdom, much can be learnt and many pitfalls avoided when striving to reveal the truest image possible:

J D Crossan’s grand narrative, abstracted from cross-cultural anthropology, is one of a peasant society exploited and oppressed by and exhibiting resistance to the ruling classes. Within this framework Jesus preached the kingdom, a kingdom which may once, in the time of Jesus have been understood in apocalyptic terms, but which achieves the best fit in sapiential terms: The sapiential kingdom looks to the present rather than the future....One enters that Kingdom by wisdom or goodness, by virtue, justice, or freedom. It is a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future” (Crossan 1991:292). He speaks of a “Brokerless Kingdom” of egalitarianism on behalf of the totality of Mediterranean peasantry, which stood in stark contrast to the highly brokered Roman empire. This kingdom with its theology of unbrokered access was symbolized most clearly in Jesus’ practice of welcoming at his table and eating with all and sundry. He bases his conviction that at “...the heart of the original Jesus movement a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material resources” existed and that “open commensality” was practised, upon passages such as Luke 10:7, the Gospel of Thomas 14:2; Mark 6:10 and at the heart of the matter the parable in Luke 14:16b-24. The open commensality has nothing sentimental about it. Crossan says; “Generous almsgiving may even be the

conscience's last great refuge against the terror of open commensality”  
 (Crossan 1991:341; see also pp 225,226,261-264, 341-344)<sup>49</sup>.

Freyne (1997:64) writes: “If one were to follow Crossan’s methodology to its logical conclusion...it would be difficult to locate Jesus anywhere, certainly not in Galilee”. The main gist of Dunn’s own critique is that Crossan’s treatment of Judaism is very limited and his analysis of the conditions in lower Galilee very restricted. Dunn (2003:471) points out that there were national and religious factors and not merely social and economic factors operative in Jewish society. Of these factors it was mainly and arguably the national and religious factors which provided the dominant narrative by which even Jewish peasants made sense of their lives.

Dunn (2003:472).further comments:

...during the ministry of Jesus, there is little indication of escalating unrest – injustice, oppression, and complaint no doubt, but the impression of a moving escalator of heightening protest again owes more to a larger generalisation read into the particularities of Jesus’ historical situation with too little care for the particularities themselves.

He also questions the wisdom of using diaspora Greek and Jewish literature to the exclusion of all other literature for the illustration and documentation of his sapiential kingdom theory, considering that a kingdom theme in these sources is noted by its absence, which leads to the conclusion that Crossan is promoting his Tendenz of a non-apocalyptic kingdom.

Wright places great emphasis on the necessity of a grand narrative in pursuit of the quest, criticizing his predecessors for “pseudo-atomistic work on apparently isolated fragments” and identifying “the real task, still

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<sup>49</sup> See 4.7.2 below.

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awaiting all students of Jesus” as “that of major hypothesis and serious verification” (Wright 1996:33). He adds: “All the current New Questers point, despite themselves, to the correct solution: the scholar must work with a large hypothesis, and must appeal, ultimately, to the large picture of how everything fits together as the justification for smaller-scale decisions. That is the real criterion that operates the system whereby, in dealing with gospel pericopae, many are called but few are chosen” (Wright 1996:79). Wright is convinced that Jesus’ contemporaries still believed Israel to have been in exile to which Jesus’ answer was that “the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel”, thereby summoning up “the entire narrative of Israel’s new exodus, her final return from exile” (Wright 1996:244).

Dunn (2003:473, 474) identifies the problems associated with Wright’s confident choice of “exile and restoration” (2003:245) as grand narrative or “controlling story” as, firstly, an exaggeration of the importance of the theme of the return from exile in Palestinian Judaism, saying that no real evidence suggested that those actually living in the land considered themselves to be exiles.

Such a hypothesis hardly squares with the amazing hymn of praise to Simon the High Priest in ben Sira 50 (422) or with the confidence that the purification of altar and temple attested the restoration of Israel’s heritage (2 Macc 2:17). And the Sadducean priests responsible for the twice daily *Tamid* offering on the Temple presumably did not think of themselves as still in exile.

(Dunn 2003:473)

Secondly there was no single comprehensive grand narrative controlling the consciousness of Jesus’ contemporaries, but rather a number of motifs, such as the removal of defects and disabilities, the imagery of the great feast, an eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, the meek inheriting the

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land, suffering, the defeat of Satan and the final judgment in the spectrum of Jewish expectation addressed in the teachings of Jesus (Dunn 2003:475).

And thirdly “the most serious weakness of Wright’s grand hypothesis is his inability to demonstrate that the narrative of return from exile was a controlling factor in Jesus’ own teaching” (Dunn 2003:475).

#### **4.7.2 Jesus’ banquet: An open invitation**

Much has been made in scholarship of Jesus’ open table-fellowship. Crossan (1994:66-74) uses the term “commensality”, referring to the Latin “mensa” for “table”, and says that in the “anthropology of eating” (see 1994:68) the rules of the table and eating were like maps in the miniature for rules regarding whom to associate and socialize with. Jesus, on the other hand, insisted upon an open commensality at the table supplanting the discrimination, hierarchy and exclusivity with its radical symbolic egalitarianism and absolute equality. “The Kingdom of God as a process of open commensality, of a nondiscriminating table depicting in miniature a nondiscriminating society, clashes fundamentally with honor and shame, those basic values of ancient Mediterranean culture and society” (Crossan 1994:70).

Jesus vehemently opposed a supposed righteousness that called for division. Jesus demonstrated this with his open fellowship at his table, welcoming those who, as a rule, were thought to be unsuitable table companions. He did not call for segregation or turn his back on Israel in spite of rejection, but envisioned his people living as Israel should before their God, envisioned them to be Israel in the way God wanted them to be - in short, “...a community bonded by ‘brotherly love’, distinguished by its openness to the marginalized, characterized by members putting themselves out for one another as one would for a beloved sister or brother and not by hierarchy, priestly craft, or power-play” (Dunn 2003:610).

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Crossan (1994:99-101) has developed a theory which starts with Jesus' relationship with his family. He does not believe that they doubted his power and importance, his message or his mission, but that they were critical of the way in which he was wielding and implementing it. Any normal Mediterranean family would know that in a case such as this Jesus should have settled down at home to start a healing cult right there in Nazareth. He would then be the patron, his family the brokers and clients would be attracted via word-of-mouth to come for healing. Instead Jesus took to the road, healing whoever needed it along the way, and generally not behaving as he should have or was expected to by people cherishing hopes of a family brokerage.

Citing Mark 1:16-38, Crossan (1994:100) refers to the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Peter's house whereto the whole city and its sick flocked. He says that, once again, one would expect Peter's house to become a place of brokerage and Peter the broker, with all those who sought healing at his door. But Jesus spoke to Peter and said: "*Agomen allaxou eis tas exomenas komopoleis hina kai exei kyrusso eis touto gar ekselthon.*"

Matthew omits the incident from his gospel and Luke changes the answer of Jesus. In Crossan's opinion the "entire day is a Markan creation opposing Jesus to Peter and showing their, from Mark's point of view, incompatible visions of mission. I take from it only its opposition of itinerary and brokerage and its usefulness for seeing what is radical about itinerary" (1994:100-101).

He explains his theory further (1994:101):

The equal sharing of spiritual and material gifts, of miracle and table, cannot be centered in one place because that very hierarchy of place, of here over there...symbolically destroys the radical egalitarianism it announces. Radical egalitarianism denies the processes of patronage, brokerage, and clientage, and demands itinerary as its programmatic symbolization.

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Neither Jesus nor his followers are supposed to settle down in one place and establish there a brokered presence....But, for Jesus, the Kingdom of God is a community of radical or unbrokered equality in which individuals are in direct contact with one another and with God, unmediated by established brokers or fixed locations.

#### **4.7.3 Discipleship**

Jesus left a lasting impression on his disciples with regards to what discipleship entailed for him – that God, the beneficent provider, the One who forgives unpayable debts, should be to his followers the essence of their lives, their king and their Father. “Life was to be lived out of reverence for, fear before, trust in, and whole-hearted love for God” (Dunn 2003:608).

To give God first priority in this way would mean sacrificing any ambitions for social promotion or affluence, enduring rejection, suffering and the disruption or even renunciation of family life. In all of this the coming kingdom is a ubiquitous presupposition and they should live in its light. His message was directed to Israel, and in the light of the coming kingdom, urged a return to their God, just as had the message of the prophets of old. The values laid down in the Torah and emphasized by the prophets were the values he called for, with strong emphasis on the prominence given by God to the poor.

This prominence given by God to the poor is the clear message of Isaiah 61:1. Dunn writes elsewhere (2003:516): “Of all the prophecies which may have influenced Jesus, Isa. 61:1 stands out.” It reverberates in the remembered words of Jesus in reply to the question of John the Baptist (Mt 11:5/Lk 7:22), in the opening sequence of the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-6/Lk 6:20b-21), in Luke’s portrayal of Jesus reading the passage – for even while “explicitly claiming its fulfilment (Lk 4:16-21)...we can still be confident that his elaboration was based on a strong remembrance of Jesus making clear allusion to the passage on more than one occasion”

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(Dunn 2003:517) – and its parallel in Mark 6:1-6a upon which it elaborated, and climaxing in the good news being proclaimed to the poor in Matthew 11:5/Luke 7:22. “At or near the top of any list which Jesus himself might have drawn up were clearly ‘the poor’” (Dunn 2003:517).

But who did this man calling people to discipleship think he was? And was he, as has so often been believed “...conscious of divine identity and personal pre-existence...” (Dunn 2003:616)? In most of the twentieth century scholars were to deny the possibility of having any real idea as to the self-consciousness of any historical person and his theory that the only Jesus available to us is the remembered Jesus, apparently supports their denial. He does, however, accede that his theory is not necessarily a cul de sac for finding Jesus’ self-understanding. “For the clearer the impression made, the clearer the object making the impression” (Dunn 2003:616).

This issue had been “...the concern of the nineteenth-century Liberals, as characterized by Schleiermacher’s conception of Jesus’ ‘God-consciousness’ and by the preoccupation with Jesus’ ‘messianic consciousness’” (Dunn 2003:616). And when scholars characterize Jesus as “charismatic vagrant” (Theissen), or “Mediterranean Jewish peasant” (Crossan 1991) or Rabbi Jesus” (Chilton 2000), the question of what these characterizations imply of Jesus’ self-understanding has to be asked.

Wright (1996:639) boldly states:

*He saw his journey to Jerusalem as the symbol and embodiment of YHWH’s return to Zion. It was a new encoding, in an acted narrative, of the widespread and well-known biblical prophecies....The action was prophetic; it was messianic; and it was something more, consonant with both of those but going beyond, into an area where there is no obviously suitable adjective. Jesus was hinting, for those with ears to hear, that he was riding over the Mount of Olives, celebrating the coming kingdom, and warning Jerusalem that it*

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would mean judgment for those who rejected him and his way of peace, so YHWH was returning to his people, his city and his Temple.

Wright sees a young Jewish prophet narrating a story about YHWH's return to Zion in the dual role of Judge and Redeemer, symbolically acting out his narration of the Temple's final destruction and the celebration of the final exodus by riding into the city while weeping. Like the symbolic actions of prophets of the past, this was meant to convey the message of his vocation, namely that just so God would return and redeem his people as he had promised in Israel's scriptures.

Dunn (2003:616) says that characterisations such as these cannot fail to imply hints of the self-awareness of Jesus pertaining to what he was about. He thinks it probable that Jesus deliberately moulded his mission to resemble those of the classic prophets and highly likely that Jesus often acted in a way resembling not the sign-prophets to which Josephus referred, but the great prophets. The various "prophetic actions" attributed to him, such as the choice of the twelve, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, his entry into Jerusalem, his symbolic Temple action and the last supper all contribute to this impression.

Even if only a few sayings of Jesus were handed down as they were originally received, some of these may still resonate something of his self-awareness or self-understanding. But to start off with, the question would be how he was perceived by others. And "...here too we can claim to be tracing and filling in the contours of the impact made by Jesus. Not least will it be of importance to ask how Jesus himself reacted to these possible role models and to any attempts to identify him with them" (Dunn 2003:615).

## 4.8 The Image - Stirring Memories of...

### 4.8.1 Messiah

The title of “Messiah” or “Messias” or “Christos” was bestowed on him within a space of more or less twenty years after his death and was attached to his name so often that in the end it functioned as a personal name. It was not a priestly type of messiahship that would have been attached to him, for sufficient evidence regarding his descent would have made it obvious that no priestly lines could be traced therein and no subsequent writers saw fit to create such a lineage in order to make the title fit. Royal Messiahship seems to be a far more acceptable title in the understanding of Jesus but the questions to ask would be whether the issue of messiahship was raised in the lifetime of Jesus and if it was, to what extent? And can we deduce from the tradition how he reacted to it? Dunn believes and motivates his belief that there is a high historical probability that the issue of Jesus’ messiahship was the legal and decisive factor or excuse for Jesus’ execution, that he was crucified as messianic pretender. Several incidents in the mission and life of Jesus that are firmly grounded in the earliest memories and that raise the question of whether Jesus was the expected Royal Messiah and Dunn believes all of this cannot merely be relegated to the file of post-Easter belief.

Did Jesus see himself as royal Messiah? Dunn says that, at least in the region of Lake Galilee, a popular conception was that of the royal messiah who would come and echo in his deeds the great events of Israel’s first liberation from slavery and their entry into Canaan, so fulfilling their prophetic hope of a new and prosperous age under a king from the lineage of David. It stands to reason that Pilate would be anxious to crucify such a king for reasons political and military. Van Aarde (2003:453) finds in the Gospel of Matthew a Jesus sent by God from Egypt - reminiscent of Moses - a saviour in the mould of Joshua, the successor to Moses, to save Israel. He came in the guise of a Joshua-like figure combining in his office and

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mission “the new/second Moses” and royal, Davidic Messiah sent to “heal”, that is, liberate God’s people from political stress.

But there is a clear implication to be found in the words of Jesus that he reacted against this role being used to typify his mission probably seeing it as false and misleading. Dunn looks at his response to Peter’s confession in Mark 8:30. The command to silence is followed by the expressed conviction that his mission would meet with rejection and suffering in the end. Indeed, the expectation of suffering features strongly in Jesus’ teaching in its entirety. The messiah Peter confesses is the royal messiah in accordance with the popular understanding of the Davidic Messiah as a mighty warrior, but Jesus quells this expectation because his own understanding of his role differed radically from this. He tries to redirect Peter into seeing his role more as he saw it himself. This is all an indication, not of a *messianic secret*, but a *messianic misunderstanding*.

Another point which he raises in his discussion of this issue and which has pertinence here is the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple. Neither of these events were of course intended as a military coup to seize the throne of Herod the Great but were meant as a prophetic protest in which the Temple is recognized as the hub of God’s involvement with his people, as well as an enactment of the necessity for the Temple to fulfil its eschatological role, with Jesus the self-conscious actor in the enfolding eschatological drama.

He concludes that Jesus never used this title for himself and never welcomed its application to himself by others. He rejected the dominant understanding of the time that the Royal Messiah was a military power in the mode of Herod the Great and when the disciples wanted to claim their share in this type of power and privilege, he points out that that is the incorrect model for discipleship. But was this understanding the only way of interpreting the prophetic texts of Israel? “The fact that the first Christians took over the title ‘Messiah’ so speedily and completely, suggests that there were other strands of Israel’s expectation which had ‘messianic

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potential” (Dunn 2003:653). The disciples saw him as Messiah, son of David during his mission, but their concept of messiahship is radically transformed by the Easter-events, thus substituting the traditional content of the title with a new one provided by the law, the prophets and the psalms. They built upon pointers in the teachings of Jesus about eschatological reversal and suffering but that does not mean that Jesus believed and taught his role to be that of suffering Royal Messiah. “Much the more interesting possibility was that Jesus might be considered a prophet. For in terms of eschatological expectation, the role of prophet was almost as prominent as that of royal Messiah and more widespread than the hope of an anointed priest” (Dunn 2003:655).

#### **4.8.2 Prophet**

Three prophetic figures feature in Jewish eschatological expectation, namely:

- The “returning Elijah” stemming from Malachi 4:5-6 and mirrored in Sirach 48:9-10. This expectation shines through several formulations in the gospels, such as Luke 1:17, Mark 9:11-12/Matthew 17:10-11, Matthew 11:14 and John 1:21. Of considerable interest also is the association of Elijah with Enoch, both of whom did not die, but were transported to heaven.
- A prophet like Moses with Deuteronomy 18:15,18 as basis. It is surprising that this prophecy does not feature at all prominently in Jewish expectation. An allusion to it in one of Qumran’s testimony collections was picked up and made to bear on Jesus in earliest Christianity (Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).
- Thirdly there was a somewhat vague and maybe even overlapping expectation regarding an “eschatological prophet” with as basis Isaiah 61:1-3.

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But the different strands of expectation often merged and the eschatological hopes for an anointed one were on the whole relatively anomalous.

Dunn has no doubts that Jesus had been regarded as a prophet during his mission, pronouncing the testimony bearing witness to this both widespread and consistent. Passages such as Mark 6:15 and 8:28, 29 bear witness to the widespread range of rumours regarding Jesus which were most likely circulated within Palestine and not to some evasive messianic secret.

There are numerous attestations to be found that the question of whether Jesus was a, or even “the” prophet (e.g. Jn 6:14; 7:40, 52) arose among those whose interest was aroused by the reports of Jesus’ mission. His miracles seem to have echoed those of Elijah and Elisha and significance may even be attached to the negative attestation of his being taunted as a failed prophet in Mark 14:65 and Matthew 26:68.

John the Baptist is commonly assumed to have been perceived as a prophet and therefore speculation about whether Jesus could also be seen in this way, would quite naturally abound, especially since the prophetic office still seems to have been in evidence at the time of Jesus. Proof of this is seen in the prophetic examples cited by Josephus from the two decades leading up to the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem, namely Theudas and “the Egyptian”.

Dunn (2003:658) furthermore cites the examples within “firm if confusing tradition that Jesus was asked for a ‘sign,’” applying to the tradition his method of sifting out elaborations and editorial work and retaining the stable core. The tradition he refers to is Matthew 12:38-42; Matthew 16:1-2, 4; Mark 8:11-12 and Luke 11:16, 29-32. But over and above the clear memory that Jesus was asked for a sign, “...a less clear, or elaborated, memory of his response has also been preserved: that he resisted the implication that he was that sort of prophet and may have referred

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enigmatically to Jonah and (probably) Jonah’s success in his preaching to the notoriously wicked city of Nineveh” (Dunn 2003:660).

The logical sequitur to the question of how others perceived Jesus, would be to ask how he perceived himself. In answer Dunn cites Mark 6:4 and Matthew 13:57, as well as Luke 4:24, The Gospel of Thomas 31 and John 4:44 – all versions of the same proverb depicting the welcome received by the prophet in his home village. The ample attestation suggests that the memory of his response to the lack of welcome he himself had received in Nazareth had been firmly rooted within early-Christian tradition and that Jesus indeed saw the nature of this reception to have been in line with the nature of similar receptions, equally cold, received by the prophets of the past. However, the references are to “a prophet” not “the prophet”. Dunn adds that because the post-Easter believers had regarded Jesus as more than a prophet, there is no cause to doubt the veracity of this relatively lowly self-estimate. Similar considerations make a probability of even the solely attested Luke 13:33 where Jesus answers in reply to a Pharisee that no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

Schweitzer believed that eschatology was the key to the public ministry of Jesus in its entirety and not merely in his teaching, that Jesus had been a man obsessed with eschatology who fanatically foresaw that the end was at hand and the kingdom of God on the brink of manifestation, that he increasingly saw himself as end-time agent whose death would trigger the final intervention of God (Schweitzer 1906:348-349). Dunn argued that the dogmatic tone set by the use of the word *dei* echoes Jesus’ own sense of the divine necessity determining his course and once again one has the sense of an undetermined prophet standing in a line of prophets rejected.

Jesus’ use of “the programmatic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 to inform his own mission” (Dunn 2002:662) is noteworthy and it is probable that these passages provided him with both instruction and inspiration.

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Dunn looks at several other passages which, he believes, paint a broader picture although the evidence they provide may not be as explicit. These are the texts in which Jesus is remembered as having said that he came or was sent, the implication seemingly being that he was sent by God. Dunn poses the question whether they may be seen as expressions of a prophetic commissioning on the part of Jesus. The texts to which he refers are Mark 2:17, Luke 19:10; Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:49; Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28; Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48; Matthew 10:40, Matthew 15:24, John 13:20 and Matthew 18:20.

Dunn (2003:663, 664) observes:

Finally we should note the possibility that Jesus may have shaped his mission self-consciously in terms of classic prophetic priorities, particularly 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. And there are various suggestions in the Jesus tradition that Jesus was remembered as exercising both prophetic insight (notably Luke 7:39) and prophetic foresight. No doubt much of all this was elaborated in the many retellings of such episodes, and much that was remembered began in the eye of the beholder. But that there were some such memories remains likely, and that in itself is significant.

Dunn believes the evangelists to have regarded the category of prophet as insufficient for describing Jesus so that climaxing opinion of him regarded him as more than a prophet. However, he points out the possibility that in

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doing so they may have been building on covert suggestions within the tradition itself, as is evident in texts such as Luke 24:19-27 and John 6:30-33, 49-51.

Thus the reference to Isaiah 61:1-3 may stake a claim for more than merely another prophet, implying instead the (eschatological) prophet. Underlying Mark 12:1-9, the parable of the vineyard tenants, is the rejection of the prophets. The parable culminates in the mission of the son of the owner, suggesting a category more intimately linked with the owner.

Similarly, when Jesus uses the phrase “I was sent” but also “I came” it suggests a surpassing of normal prophetic commissioning, just as his usage of “I say to you” transcends the normal prophetic formula of “thus says the Lord”. Referring to Matthew 11:6/Luke 7:23 he writes:

This chimes in with the sense of eschatological newness which comes through in several of Jesus’ sayings: something greater was happening than the repetition of prophetic hope; something greater than the prophet Jonah, whom Jesus may have ...offered as a sign....Which in turn strengthens the implication...that Jesus saw himself, at least as proclaimer of the kingdom, to be part of the eschatological newness which he proclaimed and its offensiveness.

(Dunn 2003:665)

There are, of course also the reports of Jesus’ transfiguration and Dunn remarks on the significance of both the men appearing in Jesus’ company and discoursing with him, being prophets and not royal figures. He points out that an echo of Deuteronomy 18:15 is “generally detected” (Dunn 2002:665) in the command of the heavenly voice. For him it clearly implies that Jesus was a prophet in the mould of Moses, but that his glory overreaches even that of the two most illustrious prophets in the history of Israel. This is evident in the luminosity of his appearance (exceeding that of Moses in Ex 34:29-30) and the interpretative voice speaking in his

transcendental experience as opposed to the “gentle whisper” heard by Elijah in 1Kings 19:12.

Dunn (2003:666) has no hesitation in stating that the theme itself originated in very early perceptions of Jesus’ mission, including comments that Jesus was recalled as himself making. However, he explains that if anything, it was more likely these perceptions which gave rise to the story than vice-versa. In summary Dunn believes there need be little doubt that Jesus was regarded as a prophet by many, that he saw himself in the tradition of the prophets, and that he probably also that he claimed an eschatological significance for his mission (and therefore also for himself) which transcended the older prophetic categories.

He agrees with Sanders (1993:238) who writes:

He regarded himself as having full authority to speak and act on behalf of God. Sinners who followed him, but who may or may not have returned to the Mosaic law, would have a place in God’s kingdom. From the point of view of those who were not persuaded, he was arrogant and attributed to himself a degree of authority that was most inappropriate. From the point of view of his followers and sympathizers he offered an immediate and direct route to God’s mercy, establishing a relationship that would culminate when the kingdom fully came. 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 organization, not even by scripture....He said, in effect, “Give up everything you have and follow me, because I am God’s agent.”

Jesus’ reputation as exorcist and healer forms such an integral part of tradition concerning him that it cannot but be taken seriously. In the Gospel of Mark alone thirteen accounts of healing miracles, of which exorcisms

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form the largest part by far, are to be found and in Acts 10:38 the essence of who Jesus was and what he stood for is summed up as follows: "...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Dunn 2003:670).

Dunn's criterion that different accounts may vary in the more trivial details thereof but will have a stable core where the essentials are concerned, leads him to deduce from the evidence that these stories of miracle and healing had been told as miracles from the first which is the only satisfactory explanation of how Jesus' reputation as exorcist and healer became so firmly fixed and so widespread so quickly. He reminds us once again of the stronghold of his theory as it applies here, namely that in history there are no objective facts, only interpreted data, no objective Jesus who, like an artefact, waits to be uncovered by clearing away the layers of tradition. All we have is the remembered Jesus. In this case we have what witnesses saw, namely miracles understood as having been brought about by divine power flowing through Jesus - not ordinary events which were later interpreted as miracles. This would imply, Dunn (2003:673) writes, that "[t]he first 'historical fact' was a miracle – because that was how the event was experienced, as a miracle, by the followers of Jesus who witnessed it" and then transformed it into oral accounts which were circulated among Jesus' followers (and more widely).

The impact and scope of the reputation that Jesus attained as healer and exorcist would be well nigh impossible to explain. He agrees with Strauss (1972:40) that removing the element of miracle would eliminate the very reason why the story was told in the first place. He points out, however, that Jesus definitely seems to have come across as a doer of extraordinary deeds and not a *Magos* who would, for example, name a power source initiating exorcism (I adjure you by ...).

Vermes (2003:8) writes in this regard that Jesus' contemporaries had not ascribed physical and mental disease to natural causes as much as to

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divine punishment for sin instigated by the devil in the case of physical disorders and to direct demonic possession in the case of mental disorders. When an exorcist therefore expurgates a victim of these evil spirits, he “was believed to be acting as God’s agent in the work of liberation, healing and pardon”. With direct reference to Jesus he explains his views: “Jesus was an exorcist, but not a professional one: he did not use incantations...or foul-smelling substances....Instead, Jesus confronted with great authority and dignity the demoniacs...and commanded the devil to depart”.

He calls Jesus a Galilean Hasid and reminds his reader that “[b]esides healing the flesh and exorcizing the mind, the holy man had one other task to perform: the forgiveness of sin” (Vermes 2003:9) and that:

[i]n the somewhat elastic, but extraordinarily perceptive religious terminology of Jesus and the spiritual men of his age, ‘to heal’, ‘to expel demons’ and ‘to forgive sins’ were interchangeable synonyms. Indeed, the language and behaviour of Jesus is reminiscent of holy men of ages even earlier than his own, and it need cause little surprise to read in Matthew that he was known as ‘the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee’ (Matt. 21.11), and that Galilean admirers believed he might be one of the biblical prophets, or Jeremiah, or Elijah *redivivus* (Matt 16.14). In fact, it could be advanced that, if he modelled himself on anyone at all, it was precisely on Elijah and Elisha....

(Vermes 2003:10)

But for Dunn the whole *raison d'être* of these “extraordinary deeds” is the eschatological significance Jesus seems to have attached to them, the exorcisms in particular seeming to signify the defeat of Satan. Passages such as Matthew 12:27-28 and Luke 11:19-20 seem to signify that he “laid claim to a plenitude of power which, by implication, other exorcists did not experience” (Dunn 2003:694).

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Jesus laying claim to a special anointing by the Spirit (Isa 61:1) is therefore confident that his exorcistic ministry is manifestly of God. And as his mission is so manifestly of God, he can condemn Galilean villages (“this generation”) as all the more culpable because he is of God. Matthew 11:5-6, an eschatological blessing, reinforces that thought (Dunn 2003:695).

It would appear that Jesus saw his mission as embodying eschatological blessings and himself as the decisive agent in the realisation of eschatological hopes. “We are unlikely to appreciate Jesus’ kingdom teaching and mission as a whole unless we are willing to recognize that Jesus claimed (was remembered as claiming) a distinctive eschatological empowering for his mission as evidenced particularly in his healings and exorcisms” (Dunn 2003:696).

Dunn once again refers to the claim of unmediated authority implicit in the mission of Jesus proclaiming God’s rule as imminent and already being enacted in the present. Other typical prophets would use the formula: “Thus says the Lord...” whereas Jesus would use “I say to you...”. Other typical prophets would use “I was sent...” whereas Jesus would use “I came...”. Similarly his formula of “Amen, I say to you...” transcends all that was typically prophetic just as in exorcism his “I command...” conveys unquestionable authority which puts the usual “I adjure you by...” in the pale.

“Tradition enshrines the possibility” that Jesus explicitly claimed to be the *salaam* of God, his eschatological emissary and representative (see Dunn 2003:703). Dunn believes that, in spite of the thoroughly Jewish character of his mission, Jesus claimed for it a degree of distinctiveness and that his audience and disciples struggled to find words with which best to describe what they were seeing and hearing.

#### 4.8.2.1 Apocalyptic and / or / nor eschatology: Confusion at the crossroads

Stephen J Patterson (1998:164) writes that New Testament scholarship has, for almost a century, presented a unified front on at least one theory, namely that the beginnings of New Testament theology are firmly rooted in eschatological thinking. He ascribes this to the emphasis on “last” things and the end of the world in the teachings of Jesus as presented in synoptic gospels:

Eschatology comes from the Greek words *eschatos*, which means “last,” and *logia*, which means “speech.” Eschatology is literally “talk about last things.” In theology, eschatology has come to be associated with the doctrine of the end times, when, according to traditional church doctrine, God will bring history and the world as we know it to an end. *But it can also have a more general meaning. Eschatology can also refer to any decisive moment when former ways and older ideas give way to something new.* When New Testament scholars use it to speak of Christian origins they are usually using it in the first sense: beliefs about the impending end of the world, the eschaton.

(Patterson 1998:164; emphasis mine)

Van Aarde (2001:1166) expresses the opinion that theologians writing on the topic of eschatology often fail to take into account the difference in time frame between the Mediterranean and the modern Western world and refers to the work of Malina (in Vann Aarde 2001:1166) in this regard. One needs to take into account that the first-century Mediterranean world was focused on the present, while our world, according to him, is future oriented.

The term “eschatology” is interpreted by Van Aarde (2001:1168) as theological rumination on the end of heaven and earth as God’s creation

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when this order would be replaced by God's transcendental world, and the corrupt present would be replaced by the perfect, divine utopia (see Crossan in Van Aarde 2001:1168).

The way in which these last things, according to these evangelists, were expected to happen, was through imminent violent, cataclysmic catastrophe. These expectations had manifested in eschatological strands in the gospels, but when they were not fulfilled, the eschatological strands became an embarrassment.

Building upon a solid foundation of scholarship, Van Aarde writes that apocalyptic is no longer seen as solely a literary genre, but that it is currently also recognized as a socio-religious and cultural phenomenon. He adds that a knowledge of the dynamics of the altered state of consciousness<sup>50</sup> facilitates an understanding of apocalyptic thought processes.

A certain perspective on apocalyptic would define it as the imminent end to all, pre-empted by catastrophe of cosmic proportions. This catastrophe is expressed in symbolic language employing references to portentous events such as earthquakes, meteorites, eclipses during broad daylight. In this way researchers are of the opinion that Jesus expected the heavenly kingdom to become a reality in the near future, supplanting the mundane order.

Van Aarde (2001:1169) expresses the meaning that "Kingdom of God" is embedded in ethical eschatology, sometimes also referred to as social apocalyptic. He reminds the reader, however, that ethics in Biblical times cannot be viewed as disjunct from religious persuasions.

He sums up Jesus' use of "ethical apocalyptic by saying that Jesus had encoded his Kingdom message in parables and miraculous healings and

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<sup>50</sup> See Van Aarde (2001:1166) for a quotation of the definition of altered states of consciousness by E Bourguignon .

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by means of words, deeds and his very existence. Within the context of “ethical apocalyptic” Jesus undermined systemic violence perpetrated by those wielding (demonic) power in Rome, Sepphoris, Tiberias and Jerusalem as imperial strongholds of emperor, Herodian family and the Sadokite elite and against marginalized peasants.

The relationship between “apocalyptic” on the one hand and “eschatology” on the other, is clarified by Van Aarde’s (2001:1169) explanation that, just like ascetism, apocalyptic can be seen as one of the various eschatologies of the first-century Mediterranean world.

When we combine these terms into “apocalyptic eschatology” social-scientific and cultural-anthropological perspectives yield fruits as to the understanding of the conglomerated term. Studies of this nature undertaken by researchers take seriously the challenge to acknowledge and respect in their work the distance which exists between ancient and modern contexts. Van Aarde quotes the definition of Hanson (in Van Aarde 2001:1167): “Apocalyptic eschatology, therefore, is neither a genre (apocalypse) nor a social-religious movement (apocalypticism) but a religious perspective which views divine plans in relation to historical realities in a particular way.”

Patterson traces the steps of scholarship on eschatology and apocalypticism back to its starting line and finds its first advocate in Johannes Weiss “who argued that the new empire of which the historical Jesus actually spoke was to be an apocalyptic event, that is, one which God would usher in through the agency of an emissary, the Son of Man, whose return, flying in on clouds of glory, would be marked by great violence, tribulation, struggle, and ultimately judgment for all” (in Patterson 1998:165, 166).

Through the work of Schweitzer and others, Weiss’ apocalyptic theory and variations on it have become major themes in New Testament scholarship, to the extent that Patterson speaks of a consensus among scholars on

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Jesus as apocalyptic prophet. Patterson points out that those in support of it have found their motivation in Mark, considered to be the oldest of the canonical gospels, who paints a picture of Jesus “as thoroughly steeped in and motivated by Jewish apocalyptic” (Patterson 1998:171), as well as in Q “the earliest identifiable document in the Gospel tradition.”

These seemed to be solid sources on which to base such a consensus, but under the onslaught of new developments in this field, the said consensus has started to crumble. Patterson sees as a major part of the onslaught the “widely accepted” (1998:172) work of Kloppenborg which diverted the intention of Q from apocalyptic to wisdom. Opposition has also come from the Jesus Seminar which has credited no apocalyptic sayings with red print, as well as from the views of scholars such as Marcus Borg, who pleaded the case for a non-eschatological Jesus (in Patterson 1998:170). And John Dominic Crossan (in Patterson 1998:170) substituted the apocalyptic Jesus for “a radically countercultural social critic, who proclaimed immediate access to an unbrokered reign of God for persons marginalized from the conventional means to humane living”.

Answering his own question of what the collapse of the apocalyptic hypothesis would mean for Christian theology, Patterson envisions an abandonment of “the temporal-theological dualism which claims the present for the imperfect, inevitably flawed realm of human activity, while relegating the future to the transcendent realm of God’s absolute sovereignty” (1998:179). Two quotations sum up Patterson’s (1998:181) views on the outlook of a theology without apocalyptic:

Jesus saw clearly the pain and brutality of the world in which he lived and dared to construct in word and deed a new world coming into being. In this sense Jesus’ preaching may be said to have an eschatological dimension, even though it was not apocalyptic. This is not mere special pleading or a vain attempt to rescue the visionary aspects of eschatology without the offense of apocalyptic. Apocalyptic was but one form of

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 eschatology in the ancient world. In the violent and catastrophic days of the Jewish war it was this form of eschatology that Mark deemed most appropriate to giving expression to Christian hope. But before Mark, before Q, or even Paul, there was Jesus and his eschatological vision of the Empire of God.

Over against the Roman Empire Jesus offered this Empire of God, not fully present as yet, nor a future apocalyptic reality upon which one must wait. Rather is this Empire in its essence a potentiality, and best described in the parables of Jesus. Its potential is realized there where an active decision is made to live out of its “audaciously presumed reality.” This Empire of God differs vastly from the options open to the scholar at the end of the nineteenth century. When Jesus spoke of the future, he did not envision an apocalyptic one in which God would violently overthrow God’s enemies or ours.

...Jesus preached an Empire of God whose presence was not guaranteed, and perhaps could not ever be. It depends on one’s decision to live out of its reality in an act of faithfulness. But in precisely this sense Christian theology must be thought of as fundamentally eschatological. It is indeed about bringing something to an end and beginning something new....The Empire as “eschaton,” as “end,” means the end of life lived out of the realities of sin, injustice, violence, shame and pain. But it also has an “end” – that is, a goal. It is not a distant goal....The Empire of God is reached day in and day out, in the everyday decisions one makes to live faithfully to God.

(Patterson 1998:183, 184)

Dunn (2003:401, 478-484) has indicated the confusion present and past in terms of “apocalyptic” on the one hand and “eschatology” on the other. He briefly defines “apocalyptic” as follows: “[I]t can be used to indicate insight given by revelation and visions of heavenly realities now as well as in the

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(near) future" (2003:478). He adds that the "cosmic convulsions" which are usually imagined when thinking about the term and Jesus' use of it, occurs only once, in Mark 13:24-25, and that the idea of "divine intervention" is more implicit than explicit. He refers to Goppelt (in Dunn 2003:478) who distances Jesus from "apocalypticism" but is certain that Jesus announced the imminent end of the world and asks: "[D]oes the Jesus tradition not attribute to Jesus also a future and final eschatological expectation, including God's kingdom to come in a way not experienced hitherto, God's final triumph over evil, final judgment of the nations, a state of affairs imagined as a great feast, and resurrection from the dead to angelic existence?" (2003:478).

In terms of "eschatology" Dunn believes the Spirit to be a common denominator between Christian eschatology and that of Jesus. For Paul the experience of the Spirit had to be understood as the "first instalment" (Dunn 2003:479) of the kingdom, the full inheritance of which was still outstanding. Jesus' own anointing and the empowering of his ministry by the Spirit may have "convinced him that God's longed-for (final) manifestation of his royal rule was already in evidence and that its full manifestation could therefore not long be delayed" (Dunn 2003:479). Jesus had expressed hopes that this eschatological hope would be realised imminently, with or without apocalyptic elements, but his hope was not fulfilled and the course of events proved him wrong, revealing, according to some, the humanness of Jesus.

Dunn believes that in all of this too little attention has been paid to the character of Jewish prophetic hope, which "learned to live with the failure of prophecy without denigrating the prophecies themselves" (Dunn 2003:480). On the same page he refers to the interesting statement of Robert Carroll that the dissonance resulting from failed promises gave rise to hermeneutics, including even the transition from prophecy to apocalypse. Dunn adds that it similarly gave rise to renewed prophecies: "The point is this: within Jewish prophetic/apocalyptic tradition there was some sort of recognition that the partial fulfilment of a hope did not nullify or falsify that

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hope. Instead the earlier hope became the basis and springboard for a fresh articulation of the same hope” (Dunn 2003:481). Moreover, one should not interpret the understanding of time which informs eschatology to be a linear one<sup>51</sup>.

H L Ellison ([1952] 1977:19) remarks that, in terms of prophecy and its seeming non-fulfilment, it is better to speak of “suspended” rather than “unfulfilled” ([1952] 1977:14). Of interest here are also his further remarks:

While the foretelling of the true prophet may normally be expected to come to pass (Deut. 18:21f), that does not necessarily establish his credentials (Deut. 13:1ff). Ultimately it is the spiritual quality of his message which shows whether a man is a prophet or not. In any case the foretelling of the future is never merely to show that God knows the future, or to satisfy man’s idle curiosity; there is normally a revelation of God attached to it. We can know the character of God better now, if we know what He will do in the future. And as the future becomes present we can interpret God’s activity the better for its having been foretold.

He concludes that Jesus saw himself not just as a prophet, but as the eschatological prophet referred to in Isaiah 61:1-3; not just as a healer or exorcist, but as emissary of God, who, when witnessed in action, leaves the onlooker with a sense of plenitude of eschatological power evidenced in both exorcisms and healings that is still perceptible in their memories as captured in the sources available. His disciples remember an exclusiveness in his claim to eschatological anointing by the Spirit of God which, in his own words, marked him off from other healers and exorcists including John the Baptist, whom Dunn names as his mentor); not just a teacher but as one who could claim an immediacy of apprehension of God’s will and an unequalled authority for teaching it. He understands

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<sup>51</sup> See Dunn (2003:483) on the flexibility in the use of “end” in this regard.

Jesus' offices of prophet, healer and teacher to be bound together by and subsidiary to his main kingdom-objective.

When, later on, we discuss prophecy in depth and at length, we are reminded of the uniquely intimate bond there has always existed between God and his prophets, the sense of their entering into another plane of reality in which the presence and voice of God is experienced and heard more clearly than the mundane. That in Jesus this bond was experienced with a heretofore and hence unknown level of intensity, is expressed by Dunn in his remarks regarding the sonship of Jesus. He writes that there exists sufficient evidence that Jesus' *Abba* prayer was so cherished among the first believers because it was remembered as having been his own trademark form of prayer, used consistently and unvaryingly in his address to God (for his motivation of this conclusion see Dunn 2002:710-718). His use of *Abba* in this characteristic and distinctive way indicates that his prayer was heard as expressing a

...profound sense of and confidence in his relationship with God as his Father, and ...that Jesus was also recalled as alluding to this relationship on a few occasions during his mission. We can deduce further, without any strain, that this sense of sonship must have been ...crucial, even central, to Jesus' own self-understanding and...the source of the immediacy of authority with which he proclaimed the kingdom of God, in both its eschatological immanence and imminence.

(Dunn 2002:724)

Jesus seems never to have made the immediacy of his relationship with God the subject of overt instruction nor to have expected the disciples to acquiesce that he was the son of God. Neither was it a covert part of the instruction to be revealed at an advanced stage of initiation. It does appear however, that his aim was to guide them to a similar sense of sonship with

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God, as is seen mainly when he encourages them to pray as he did and to live out this relationship as he did.

At the end of his chapter on the self-understanding of Jesus, Dunn summarizes in a nutshell:

...we can begin to speak more firmly of the man who was remembered as one who above all took on the role of eschatological spokesman for God. And from that we can deduce, without strain, something of Jesus' own self-understanding regarding that role – his conviction of being God's eschatological agent at the climax of God's purposes for Israel, his sense of intimate sonship before God and of the dependence of his disciples on him, and his probably strong hope for final acknowledgment as the man who was playing the decisive role in bringing the kingdom to fulfilment and consummation.

(Dunn 2003:762)

#### **4.8.3 Sage**

Funk (1996:143) writes: “[T]he earliest sources portray Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, a sage” and Keck (2000:83) agrees: “[H]e was not a healer who found he had something to say but a teacher who found it necessary to heal.”

Marcus Borg (1994:69-95) classifies Jesus as sage in no uncertain terms:

Wisdom is one of the most important concepts for an understanding of what the New Testament says about Jesus. It is central for two reasons. On the one hand, Jesus was a teacher of wisdom. This is the strongest consensus among today's Jesus scholars. Whatever else can be said about the pre-Easter Jesus, he was a teacher of wisdom – a sage, as

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teachers of wisdom are called.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the New Testament also presents Jesus as the embodiment or incarnation of divine wisdom, and in the next we shall look at him as “the wisdom of God”

(Borg 1994:69)

He distinguishes between two types of wisdom and two types of sages. The first of these is conventional wisdom, the most common type with conventional sages as its teachers, a mainstream wisdom voicing what people already know inherently, such as what the truth is and how to live according to this wisdom. The second is a subversive and alternative type of wisdom which questions and undermines the first and shows its initiates an alternative path. “Its teachers are subversive sages, and they include some of the most famous figures of religious history” (Borg 1994:70). On this path he finds Jesus: “The transformation from secondhand religion to firsthand religion, from living in accord with what one has heard to life centered in the Spirit, is central to the alternative wisdom of Jesus and also to the Jewish tradition in which he stood” (Borg 1994:88) and he concludes in a paragraph essential to his understanding of who Jesus was:

The gospel of Jesus – the good news of Jesus’ own message – is that there is a way of being that moves beyond both secular and religious conventional wisdom. The path of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up (whether to culture or to God) to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-pre-occupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God.

(Borg 1994:88)

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<sup>52</sup> He bases his argument on two streams of scholarship which converge to show consensus on this topic, namely one on the oral forms of Jesus’ teaching which has argued for an early tradition layer in Q which is “dominated by wisdom forms” (Borg 1994:88) and the other on the Gospel of Thomas which has also been classified as a wisdom document. He states that scholars don’t disagree on whether Jesus was a teacher of wisdom, but on which other strokes of the paintbrush should be added to complete the picture of Jesus.

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Wright (1996:311) welcomes the emphasis which, in recent years, has been placed on Jesus as sage or teacher of conventional wisdom, such as has been chronicled by Borg. He agrees with Borg that Jesus offered his contemporaries an alternative route to the one offered by conventional wisdom, one on which he himself walked, setting an example for others to follow:

[T]o recognize that Jesus stood within the ‘wisdom’ traditions of Israel (and her neighbours) in no way means abandoning the view that he used this broad stream of thought and style to drive home his message about YHWH’s call to Israel at the critical moment in her history. Wisdom and prophecy, and wisdom and apocalyptic, do not cancel each other out, but rather belong together. Prophet and apocalyptic 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.

Dunn considers the labels of “subversive sage” or “transformative sage” not inappropriate for Jesus, nor can be denied that his teachings had a distinct political edge to them. He had no fixed ethical system, but allowed his ethics to flow from his instinctual detection of the human element in each situation.

#### **4.9 Jesus’ last days**

When discussing the crucifixion, Dunn (2003:765-824) feels himself to be on firm ground as all sources dealing with the subject agree that the climax to Jesus’ mission had been a final visit to Jerusalem where he had been executed. Dunn (2003:765, 766) regards the reports of the events leading up to and surrounding the crucifixion as a prime and extended example of the stable essential core of the oral traditioning pattern as formulated initially by eyewitness participants, leaving little room for doubting the historicity thereof.

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Dunn (2003:769) believes the Synoptics to be clearly implying that if a single incident can be identified as having directly led to the arrest of Jesus, it would have to be his “prophetic sign” in the Temple. All three are in agreement that the authority claimed by Jesus had to be directly challenged as a symptomatic response in the ever-widening chasm between Jesus and the scribes.

The questions of why Jesus went to Jerusalem and whether he anticipated his own death are asked more readily than answered. The reader is reminded of Dunn’s argumentation leading to the conclusion that Jesus in all likelihood had seen himself as standing in the tradition of the prophets of Israel and maybe even at the climax thereof. The fate of Israel’s prophets and their suffering had become proverbial and Jesus, in donning the mantle of prophetic emissary of God, must have been fully aware that a prophet’s rejection, suffering and martyrdom was at the very least a probability. Add to that the expectation that the righteous could expect to suffer and even die for putting God’s will before everything else and that Jesus had most certainly been aware of the fate that John the Baptist had suffered at the hands of Antipas, and the second question seems to have been answered.

Two acts of prophetic symbolism enacted by Jesus, namely the Temple action in which he must have been deliberately throwing down the gauntlet to the Temple authorities (and especially if he had provoked those in charge of the Temple by predicting its destruction and replacement), as well as the bread broken and shared as a symbol of himself and the wine poured into a communal cup, clearly denote “...that Jesus did anticipate rejection for his message in Jerusalem, to share the fate of the prophets, to suffer as a man in the hands of men, to drink the cup of suffering and be fully caught up in the final tribulation” (Dunn 2003:805).

In another answer to this question Jesus echoes the metaphor used by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” It was John who applied the metaphor of the

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baptism to the great tribulation which he anticipated and which would envelop his hearers. Jesus is remembered as taking up and applying this metaphor deliberately and in the same way. However, he adds a transformative interpretation to it when he applies it to himself, suggesting that he himself would not be dispensing the judgment, but would have to endure it.

Jesus is remembered in the earliest formulated memories of his mission as giving his anticipated (and increasingly feared) death a certain meaning as a planned and integral part of this mission; it was God's will that he should suffer just as the other faithful and righteous before him had suffered and maybe he hoped that his suffering would end Israel's suffering. Suffering would be part of the reconstitution of Israel called for in the escalating eschatological crisis and he as the chosen one was called upon to take it upon himself. And if God was planning on renewing the covenant with his people, presumably a covenant sacrifice would be needed. Exodus 24:8 reads "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" Jesus possibly saw those around him (the "for you" in Lk 22:20 is presumed by Dunn to have had in mind the twelve as representatives of the eschatological Israel) as constituting the renewal of God's covenant with Israel and maybe he foresaw the promise of a renewed covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 being finally fulfilled. Dunn opts for the possibility that Jesus saw his death less as a sin offering than as the required covenantal sacrifice and that he may have met his death more willingly because he saw it as the sacrifice necessary for bringing into effect the long-promised covenant.

#### **4.10 In conclusion**

"*Prophet* was a category which Jesus seems to have fitted well, and found congenial to characterize much of his mission which is clearly remembered as fully alive to the traditional fate of the prophet to be rejected..." (Dunn 2003:889). He was also remembered as a healer and exorcist – many

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experienced miraculous healings and happenings in his company - and often hailed as a teacher – he launched scathing attacks on the contemporary system of religious and social values through his parables and aphorisms.

The Jesus of memory aimed to bring the good news to the poor and to call sinners in a reaffirmation of Israel's constitutional priorities, to encourage and bring to realisation a society in which any unnecessary and hurtful boundaries between its members are eradicated. He lived on in memory as one who frequently pronounced that many age-old prophetic hopes are on the point of fulfilment:

The Baptist's onesided emphasis on imminent and purgative judgment Jesus supplemented (not entirely replaced) with the complimentary emphasis, drawn largely from the same prophet Isaiah), of divine grace to the physically, socially, and religiously disabled. In the *liberation* he saw his exorcistic ministry bringing to demoniacs and in the *healing* (and forgiveness) he saw his ministry bringing (through the trust exercised) to those who were ill...clear signs that God was exercising his rule in the here and now. It was presumably such repeated experiences which confirmed for Jesus that his hope for the fuller (final) coming of God's kingdom could not be long delayed. God's royal rule had drawn near.

(Dunn 2003:887)

In closing he once again emphasizes that there is no other Jesus to be found than the *remembered* Jesus. The Jesus tradition of the Gospels confirms that remembering Jesus had been a matter of concern within earliest Christianity and the process of engraving within the collective memory occurred by reuse and regular repetition in the oral mode of the original and immediate impact made by Jesus. The initial formative impact had not been Easter faith, nor was the impulse to formulate tradition only experienced in the post-Easter period. The original impression of what

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Jesus had said and done in the pre-Easter call to faith, and which had drawn his first disciples into discipleship, had been translated into the words of the eyewitnesses. “In that key sense, the Jesus tradition *is* Jesus remembered” (Dunn 2003:882).

Many scholars from far and wide using different maps, reading different signposts and taking different directions at the crossroads, speeding along congested Autobahnen or meandering roads less trodden, have arrived at the same view: The clear view of a prophet. But in this view they have been guided less by an accurate mental picture of what the prophetic office with its age-old history as recorded in the Israelite tradition entailed and whether the words, actions and fate of Jesus matched up to it, than by an intuitive recognition and classification.

It is reminiscent of a family travelling to the seaside with great anticipation who suddenly, rounding a corner, shout in unison: “The Sea!” Maybe a similar expectation, a prior conditioning, leads one to expect in anticipation the image of a typical prophet or maybe even of The Prophet when rounding the corner on whichever Strasse or alley one chose in one’s research. Or maybe, just as there is something about the ocean that leaves no doubt in the mind of the traveller that he has reached his destination, so similarly, may there be something in the very being of the man Jesus, even in repose, which embodies the essence of being God’s prophet.

If it is the latter, it is good, because an in-depth look at the prophetic phenomenon almost reads like a blueprint of the mission of Jesus. One knows, however, that a prophet was steered, not by some pre-conceived notion of what was expected of them if they wanted to meet the job-description, but by the internal rudder of God’s will and I think that, if one were to meet a true prophet, one would know. If it is the former, it is also good, for having travelled for some way on the Dunn-meander, one comes to realise that the memories transmitted by word of mouth and captured, though sometimes fleetingly, in the sources available to us, leaves little doubt in a variety of scholarly minds that a major part of the initial impact of

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Jesus as remembered by his followers and opponents alike, was that of prophet.

However, an in-depth look at what we know about the prophets and prophetic modus operandi from tradition, can only enrich our understanding of Jesus as prophet, his actions, the ways he chose to encode his message, as well as what drove him, and make the view clearer and more detailed.

**COMPARING AND ASSESSING THE JOURNEYS****5.1 M Borg**

Although I haven't dedicated a full chapter to his views on the subject, Borg has been a conversation partner for so big a part of all the previous chapters that I feel justified in including a summary of his work here.

Borg, at the end of his journey, discovers a multi-faceted pre-Easter Jesus; he is a Spirit person<sup>53</sup>, teacher of wisdom, movement founder, exorcist and healer, and last but not least, social prophet (Borg & Wright 1999:60). These facets combine to give us a complete picture of a Jewish mystic. He describes Jesus in the various facets of his ministry as follows:

**5.1.1 Jesus the Spirit person:**

Borg uses this term as interchangeable with that of "Jewish mystic", yet it also forms part of the five-part spectrum comprising the picture of Jewish mystic and indeed is prerequisite for the other four. For Jesus, God was a known, experienced reality, One to whom he had direct access as opposed to hearsay evidence. There is an intimacy in his knowing of God which reminds one of the same quality in the two archetypal prophets of the Old Testament, namely Moses and Elijah and is shown in the uncommon way he addresses God as *Abba*. Borg (1998:242) cites part of Matthew 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22, saying: "...[a] Q text reports that Jesus spoke of the intimate knowing that occurs between father and son and uses this analogy to speak of Jesus' own experience of God: 'No one knows the son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the son.'" Like Dunn, Borg (1998:242) believes that, as Q material, its credentials are excellent, that in

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 6.

language and content it belongs within a pre-Easter Palestinian milieu, and that it can therefore very likely be attributed to Jesus.

Borg (1998:243) adds that Jesus understood the nature of God to be one of cosmic generosity and compassion, as being gracious, nourishing and all-encompassing, in line with the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition which was his own tradition. Furthermore he had insight into God's vision of what He wanted his people to be and therefore his "...basic 'program' for the internal reform of Israel – 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate' – flowed out of knowledge of God which he, as a Spirit person, was given in his own internal experience" (Borg 1998:243).

### **5.1.2 Jesus the sage**

The authority of a teacher of wisdom depended largely upon the clarity of expression in his teachings. In terms of perspicacity, Jesus' parables and aphoristic sayings know no equal. Usually a sage is a person of advanced years who, through observation and rumination have reached a level of sagacity which allows them to share their keen reflections with students or an audience. In the case of Jesus, however, his youth is counterbalanced by his spiritual experience and the subsequent mystical perception of himself and the world.

His wisdom was subversive and alternative in nature leading beyond convention, his aphorisms and parables inviting his audience into a different way of viewing the world, God and themselves, an alternative way of living and centering - in short - into a life in the Spirit.

### **5.1.3 Jesus as healer and exorcist**

As a "doer of mighty deeds" (Josephus in Borg & Wright 1999:66) he performed "paranormal healings and exorcisms as history remembered" (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:66). The fact that more healing stories are told about Jesus than about any other figure in Jewish tradition, bears

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testimony to his exceptional healing abilities. His healings and exorcisms symbolised the coming of the kingdom of God and a time of salvation and formed a central part of his ministry program and, together with sharing a meal, formed part of what he commissioned his followers to do when they were sent out on their mission. “The two practices involved a sharing of spiritual and material resources, even as they challenged the established religious and social world of Jesus’ day. In particular, healing as practiced by Jesus and his itinerant followers pointed to an unbrokered relationship to God, apart from institutional mediation” (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:67, 68). In this he is in agreement with John Dominic Crossan who writes about “...Jesus’ invocation of the kingdom of God not as an apocalyptic event in the imminent future but as a mode of life in the immediate present...My wager is that *magic and meal* or *miracle and table* ...is the heart of Jesus’ program” (Crossan 1991:304) and adds:

The equal sharing of spiritual and material gifts, of miracle and table, cannot be centered in one place because that very hierarchy of place, of here over there, of this place over other places, symbolically destroys the radical egalitarianism it announces. Radical egalitarianism denies the processes of patronage, brokerage, and clientage, and demands itinerancy as its programmatic symbolization...But, for Jesus, the Kingdom of God is a community of radical or unbrokered equality in which individuals are in direct contact with one another and with God, unmediated by any established brokers or fixed locations.

(Crossan 1994: 101)

#### **5.1.4 Jesus as prophet**

Being in essence a Spirit person cultivated within Jesus a sense of mission which led him to assume the role of prophet. Following in the footsteps of the gospel-writers who imply that he was thought of as a prophet and may have seen himself as one (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:72), Borg

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compares him with the social prophets of ancient Israel who incisively delivered stringent critique upon the social-political order of their day as a result of their direct communion with the “*mysterium tremendum*”.

Jesus’ actions were subversive; he ignored table-fellowship taboos and Sabbath conventions, targeted Jerusalem and the Temple in his indictment of the corporate direction of his people and radically rewrote their future expectations. Through his own table-fellowship with its open invitation to all and sundry, he included those pronounced anathema, enacting a breakdown of holiness as separation. Jesus opposed the gathering momentum of a potentially militant resistance to Rome, advocating instead the way of peace which meant for him not some abstract notion but a practical reality encompassing political peace. It would be incorrect to label him non-political because regarding his society and people whom he loved passionately. He was intensely political in his concern about their institutions and historical dynamic, but his political attitude towards Rome was based “...on the conviction that in the political affairs of the world the judging activity of God was at work” (Borg 1998:246).

As a prophet Jesus was summoning his people to once again reshape as a nation their attitudes and institutions to conform to the “inclusive compassion of God” (Borg 1998:246) and to dare to meet an uncertain future in which all that was certain was God’s ultimate vindication of his people. His summons entailed risks, but he sought to steer his people from a course which could only end in catastrophe. Apparently anticipating his own death as a result of his prophetic actions and ministry, he went to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover in order to deliver a climactic appeal to his people at the centre of their corporate life.

Borg (in Borg & Wright 1999:73) concludes: “I am convinced,...that it was Jesus’ activity as a social prophet that accounted for his execution. According to the synoptic gospels, his prophetic act of overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the temple court was the trigger for his arrest. His prophetic vocation was that important to him.”

### **5.1.5 Jesus as movement initiator**

All of the above combined to gain Jesus a following and a movement that germinated, grew and gathered momentum around him because of his miracles, his wisdom, his prophecy and his trademark inclusive meal practice, but the movement he initiated was only institutionalised some time after his death.

## **5.2 NT Wright**

### **5.2.1 A summary of Wright's route**

We know about Jesus in two ways: through history and faith. The elimination of either or the separation of both from each other would be wrong and impoverishing to the understanding of the whole.

Just as the historian examines every scrap of evidence as a source, so he too uses all available material. Wright finds the theory that in New Testament research the problem of the literary relationship between the gospels has to be solved before attempting to find the way back from the sources to Jesus “notoriously complex” (Wright, in Borg & Wright 1999:20). Questions of relationships between sources, the sources they might have used, a three-stage development in source material, including oral traditions and their shaping, their solidifying into literary sources and the collection and editing of these last pose, to his mind, questions which would be wonderful if answered or even answerable, but seeing that they’re not, they aren’t.

Wright (in Borg & Wright 1999:22) views all these questions in the wider context of the beginning of Christianity; why it began and why it assumed the shape it did. His three criteria are: Does it make sense of the data as they stand, “Does it have an appropriate level of simplicity, or even elegance? Does it shed light on areas of research other than the one it was designed to cover?”

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Along a road mapped by this method he discovers a first-century Jewish monotheism subscribed to by people who believed their god to be the only one, the one who elected them to be his chosen people. Wright (in Borg & Wright 1999:32) likewise discovers a first-century Jewish eschatology (“the belief that history is going somewhere, that something will happen to put it right” [Wright, in Borg & Wright 1999:32]) claiming that the one god of his chosen people would soon act within history and vindicate his elect and establish peace and justice once and for all. Although God’s people had returned from exile as God’s punishment for their sins, foreigners were still their overlords and this meant that the punishment was continuing. The great promises of forgiveness given by the great prophets of old had not yet come to fruition. They anticipated their future liberation in language reminiscent of the return from exile, seeing this hope as the new exodus.

In steps Jesus, the first-century Palestinian Jew, announcing in the manner, language and demeanour of a prophet, that YHWH, the God of Israel, was now, at last, becoming king, for the arrival of his kingdom in this world was imminent. This kingdom would be a place distinguished by the fact that God ruled, or would soon rule. In a world where theology and politics, piety and revolution went hand in hand, the hope for God’s kingdom was not merely political. Therefore this new kingdom would bring a new kind of religion, a new spiritual experience, a new code of mores. For it was about the story of Israel having reached its climax and moving towards its decisive moment in time.

The kingdom Jesus announced looked somewhat different from the one expected and the enemy was not Rome, but the one behind Rome. The final battle before the kingdom would break in upon the world, had already been inaugurated in and through the person and work of Jesus with all his emphasis on prophetic symbolism. It challenged the power and policies of Herod, Caiaphas and Rome itself, it challenged the militant aspirations of the revolutionaries within the ranks of Israel, it challenged all the injustices and oppression endemic within its own society, a society resting on the

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laurels of its own purity and isolating outsiders in sharp distinction, perpetuating the injustice.

Jesus invited his audience to become kingdom people, God's people who had truly returned from exile by repentance and faith in his gospel. They must relinquish all revolutionary ideas and buy into Jesus' counter-agenda, turning the other cheek and going the extra mile, losing their lives to gain it, and all of this in a newly constituted community where debts would be written off and sins forgiven. He welcomed sinners into fellowship with himself as members of the kingdom he was announcing, offering forgiveness of sins out on the street, without sacrifice or temple. He challenged people to live as the new covenant people in forgiveness and prayer, to abolish barriers against those on the outside and oppression to those on the inside so that God, through them, may fulfil his long-cherished intentions for his world.

In announcing all of this Jesus was misunderstood by his followers and attacked from all sides. But this Jesus - the prophet - had a strong sense of vocation, a profound awareness of drawing strength and guidance from the one he called "Abba", a deep consciousness of the role that was his to perform. However, his vocation was a dangerous one and being the light of the world meant for those following him political danger, even death. In spite of this, they received the reassurance that their faith in the God they worshipped would carry them through present tribulations and into the new day that would dawn.

For those unwilling to follow him, dire consequences await: for the nation, Jerusalem, the temple.

Jesus' agendas culminated in a clash of his own positive kingdom-symbols with those embracing the symbols of Torah, Temple, Jerusalem, Sabbath, et cetera. In these skirmishes he saw his kingdom-program, inaugurated by him, moving towards fulfilment.

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If Jesus' inevitable death accomplished the kingdom of God in some obscure way, then his message widened in impact to embrace the whole world.

### **5.2.2 Assessment: Wright's journey in retrospect**

Wright works with a grand narrative, a large hypothesis in which judgment on smaller-scale issues must be made according to how they fit into the large picture. But what constitutes the controlling story can be problematic, as pointed out by Dunn (2003:473). He identifies this as exile and restoration which is contentious in a number of ways (cf. Dunn 2003:473-477 who concludes that one “should heed postmodernism’s warning against uncritical dependence on grand narratives, against the superimposition of a unitary meta-narrative on much more complex data.”

My own concerns with his work is that he too readily dismisses the possibility of achieving any results from looking critically at the sources, their ancestry and their interdependence, and especially at and behind the Gospel of Mark. The work of Horsley has shown that it is indeed possible, plausible and scientific to do so and the results of such a study inspire much more confidence that, what is learnt from the investigation, brings one close to the actual intention of Jesus. When travelling with Wright in search of a clear view of Jesus, one can't help feeling that Jesus, instead of being found at the destination of the journey, has been a fellow-passenger all along, nor can one help wondering at times what the whole point of the journey was.

## **5.3 R A Horsley**

### **5.3.1 A summary of Horsley's route**

In our investigation into the work of Horsley, we have concentrated especially on his theories as expounded in his examination of Q, not as

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consisting of isolated sayings, but as a sequence of discourses united by a common theme, and understood within its Jewish matrix.

The main gist of Horsley's argument is that Q has to be understood as oral-derived literature. He refers to previous analyses of Q, all of which have condensed composition and writing into one action which would then supposedly have required "literary (that is, scribal) technology, knowledge confined in antiquity to an elite of perhaps five percent of the population" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:294). Q would, according to these analyses, be seen as the result of the kind of scribal activity endemic to Near Eastern scribal schools, a collection of material shuffled into a relatively well-organized form, complete with "clearly constructed arguments and with a degree of topical organization that places it among the best organized ancient sayings collections....Q, then, is far from unreflective, unsystematic oral tradition" (referring to Kloppenborg, in Horsley & Draper 1999:294).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:293-295) distances himself from these conclusions, voicing his opinion that, even when acknowledging the complexity and organization in this source (as he indeed does with appreciation), no scribal activity had been employed in the formation of Q. He reminds scholars that even before the recent revival of interest in oral performance and transmissioning, it had been shown that oral tradition is anything but unreflective or unsystematic and that, on the contrary, it can be complex and highly sophisticated. Horsley's (in Horsley & Draper 1999:294) conclusion is therefore that the composition of Q is an oral one, with scribal technology only employed for the conversion of the composition into writing.

An assumption integral to his proposal is that it is essential for an oral text to resonate with its audience in order to ensure its continued performance. In Horsley's opinion this implies that the content of Q would deliver upon inspection, clues as to the context of the hearers and performers. "The key to determining the situation of the people who heard and resonated to the

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text recited or performed is its register, analysed according to its key features in the communication context: its field (what is happening), its tenor (between whom), as well as its mode" (Horsley, in Horsley &Draper 1999:295).

If one heeds the cues of the registers within the Q discourses, one should be able to attune to the general communication contexts such as covenant renewal and prayer. So, for instance, does he find clear Mosaic covenantal register in Q 6:20-49 in which the performer conveys Jesus' enactment of covenant renewal between God and the people, newly appropriating blessings and curses to communicate God's deliverance, while reformulating and reinforcing the traditional socio-economic covenantal relationships.

Horsley deems it necessary to employ a realistic historical sociology when striving for a clear view of Jesus in Q, avoiding the pitfalls of depoliticising Jesus and his mission. In the teaching of Jesus, as in that of the political prophets Elijah and Elisha, religion and politics should not be treated as two disjunct fields of interest, and as proof should be regarded the fact that he was executed as political agitator or criminal, charges of which Horsley believes him not to have been entirely innocent.

The Q discourses are not exclusively addressed to the poor, but also address typical local village interactions and the "rather mundane exchanges" (1999:297) of village community life, realigning them to Mosaic covenantal principles. Involved referencing to covenantal principles suggest an audience familiar with, indeed well-versed in, Israelite tradition, their circumstances claiming immediacy with them, and therefore most probably villagers.

There is, moreover, according to Horsley, an enactment of the renewal of Israel, carrying distinct socio-economic overtones aimed at community life, to be found in the covenant renewal discourse. Part and parcel of this renewal is guidance directed at the ordinary people, mainly villagers, in

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their stance over against the very powerful and rich Jerusalem rulers and their scribal-Pharisaic representatives, their “retainers”. The renewal of Israel through its people, and the Q-people in particular, was underway and targeted as opponents these Jerusalem rulers and their representatives who stand under the wrath and condemnation of God for their exploitation of his people and the violence against his prophets. For latent to overt conflict on historical political and social planes, compounded in Galilee by regional differences, was part and parcel of the cultural heritage of Jesus’ audience. Horsley’s comment on the conclusion of the discourse found in Q 7:18-35 reveals an important part of his understanding of Jesus’ role as portrayed in Q: “[T]his generation,’ caricatured as contentious and pretentious children, stands in opposition to the amazing fulfilment of the people’s longings for deliverance in the new age, the kingdom of God. In spite of these attacks on John and Jesus, the prophets of the fulfilment now underway, (God’s) wisdom will be vindicated by its children” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:299).

Applying the principle mentioned above, namely that only what resonates with and is essential to the community will survive in oral transmission, to the exhortation of Jesus to fearless confession before those who have the jurisdiction to have them executed, Horsley states that, had the threat of execution not been an actual one, the tradition of this saying would not have survived.

He also focuses attention on the Q performers as speaking for Jesus (or John) and about Jesus, bringing to life once more what he had taught. They have lately come to be understood as coming from a Jesus movement parallel to but dissimilar to the Pauline mission and the movement or community connected with Mark. Performing regularly before the same communities, they encouraged their audience to boldly seek the kingdom of God while envisioning relief from their economic pressures and the basic necessities for life: “seek the kingdom of God and these things will be given you.” They were, repeatedly, in every performance, cast in a prophetic role, serving in a prophetic office.

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The Jesus he finds in Q is not the exalted Lord. He finds no indication of interest in Jesus' death or resurrection. Neither is he influenced by the wisdom tradition or to be found, as some in the past have claimed to find him, within the context of Gentile Cynic popular philosophy. Instead he finds a Jesus declaring himself to be the prophet fulfilling the longings of the people previously articulated by the prophets, enacting the role of a prophet like Moses (who had communicated with God, led his people to deliverance and founded the covenantal people of Israel), with the renewal of the covenant as his focus. In his mission discourse, commissioning envoys to ensure the continuation of his renewal program, he assumes the mantle of Elijah, the most prominent and revered prophet from the northern Israelite tribes, whose focus had similarly been the renewal of Israel.

The kingdom announced by Jesus was not the end of the world or a cosmic cataclysm as anticipated in the older apocalyptic eschatology, but a political metaphor, a symbol of the restoration of society according to covenantal principles.

As oracular prophet Jesus was the receiver and deliverer or pronouncer of a revelation from the Lord, but there was also another type of prophet; one with a much broader range of office. These prophets not only delivered revelatory oracles of the will and action of God, but founded and led movements of renewal as well. Moses, as leader of the exodus and covenant mediator had been the great prototype, setting the example for a series of later liberators (*sophetim*) and prophets (*nabi'im*), beginning with Joshua. Probably the pinnacle functionary in this prophetic archetype was Elijah who, with his successor Elisha, led a renewal movement against oppressive domestic rule.

Jesus and the Q performers reciting his speeches not only pronounce condemnation of rulers and their representatives for their oppression of the people but also deliver encouragement and admonition to the people to work in cooperation and solidarity, trusting the renewal process that

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God is initiating in the kingdom and maintaining their commitment and solidarity in the movement even under threat of persecution and death.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:307, 308)

Horsley (1999:309) understands the Q Jesus to have the distinguishing traits of all leadership functions mentioned by Paul (1 Cor 12:27-28): “Q’s Jesus was an ‘apostle’ of God, a ‘prophet’ receiving and declaring the will of God, a ‘teacher’ of the people in the movement, and a healer and performer of deeds of power (exorcisms), as well as an organizer of a movement.” In Q, as in the *Didache* and Acts 13:12, Jesus’ role of prophet and teacher fit together seamlessly.

### **5.3.2 Assessment: Horsley’s journey in retrospect**

Horsley, forging his way along the Wredestrasse to sources behind the Markan gospel, does so with commendable scholarly thoroughness and objectivity. He offers a refreshing view of Jesus behind the Gospel of Mark. His insights into the oral traditioning process and his treatment of Q as a series of discourses rather than isolated sayings offer various fresh slants to the view and one senses in his work a genuine commitment to listening to the voice of Q. His warning that Jesus’ teaching should be seen within the religious-social-economic context of his day should be heeded and when he finds a prophetic rather than sapiential Jesus in Q, one has the satisfaction of knowing that the route he travelled to discover this view is a legitimate one.

However, although he pleads for emphasis on both political and religious aspects of the teaching of Jesus, he seems at times to do to a certain extent the opposite of what he accuses previous generations of scholarship to have done – approach Jesus with theological presuppositions – when the socio-political aspects of his own theories seem to encroach slightly on his understanding of Q’s Jesus. This could lead to an impoverished

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understanding of his mission and the kingdom he announced, although this “criticism” holds much less water for his work on Q than for his previous studies on a wider range of sources, which may indicate that this had indeed been the slant in Q.

Although he offers a much more detailed comparison with and examination of the offices of the various notable prophets of tradition than Wright, he would similarly benefit from a detailed study into the prophetic phenomenon. One wonders, for instance, given the nature of the prophetic office in which the prophet is completely at God’s disposal, whether it is necessary to distinguish between oracular prophets and the leaders of movements, for if God deemed it necessary, the oracular prophet would lead a movement as part of the oracle he delivered.

Which brings us to an important part of our understanding of prophecy and of Jesus as prophet in particular. Is a prophet, while claiming God’s calling and authority and indeed maybe under the illusion that he is in direct communication with God, in actual fact on his own mission? But more on this topic later in Chapter 6.

## **5.4 J D G Dunn**

### **5.4.1 A summary of Dunn’s route**

I suspect that many a scholar will henceforth be following the Dunn-meander en route to a clear view of Jesus, finding it, like me, well worth the effort. It has been mapped out well by him, is easily navigated, and when it reaches its destination the beholder feels himself on much firmer ground while admiring the view.

His major contribution is the insight that the synoptic evangelists have not falsified, but on the contrary preserved, the memory of Jesus, presenting even the reader of the twenty-first century with the possibility of an encounter with Jesus. There is solid attestation for the importance attached

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to remembering Jesus and learning about him from responsible teachers.

He dismisses as misleading the suppositions that prophecy within the earliest churches would have expanded significantly the original Jesus tradition, saying that, on the contrary, the first churches would have been on red alert to stamp out any trace of false prophecy or any prophetic utterance out of harmony with the Jesus tradition.

He emphasises orality, with its mixture of stable and flexible elements, as one of the major keys to understanding the traditioning process which has handed down to us the tradition regarding Jesus. He refers to the statement made by RF Person (in Dunn 2003:254), namely that scribes understood their task to be the re-presentation of the dynamic tradition of their communities, before presenting his show-stopping comment that, rather than assuming the literary co-dependence of the synoptic gospels, as in the two-source hypothesis, one should look into an at least partial oral explanation for the variations and similarities between them:

[T]he degree of variation between clearly parallel traditions and the inconsequential character of so much of the variations have hardly encouraged an explanation in terms of literary dependence (on Mark or Q) or of literary editing. Rather, the combination of stability and flexibility positively cried out to be recognized as typically oral in character. That probably implies in at least some cases that the variation was due to knowledge and use of the same tradition in oral mode, as part of the community tradition familiar to Matthew and Luke. And even if a pericope was derived from Mark or Q, the retelling by Matthew or Luke is itself better described as in oral mode, maintaining the character of an oral retelling more than of a literary editing.

(Dunn 2003:254)

This implies that Matthew and Luke would have known many of these oral traditions independently of their knowledge of written traditions, including

Mark and Q. In the stabilities within the tradition he discovers its identity and in the dissimilarities its vitality.

He finds evidence of a concern among the disciples and within the churches, relating to both narratives and teaching, for the words and deeds of Jesus to be remembered as their central identity-defining component. This concern is focused in particular themes, words and phrases, usually uttered by Jesus himself, which show no evidence of linear or cumulative variations and developments, but are clearly the variations characteristic of oral performance. He reports finding neither penchant for detailed literalistic historicity nor flooding of tradition with Jewish wisdom material or prophetic utterances or embellishments in the material he examined.

He pleads for an adaptation of the default settings inherent in the age-old literary mindset of the modern reader to allow for a paradigm better suited in its flexibility to accommodate the complexities of the Jesus tradition.

He sees the oral traditioning process as starting almost from the very beginning, definitely before the first Easter, and maintained through to and even beyond the writing down of the tradition in the form of the synoptic gospels. Jesus' initial impact, or indeed series of impacts, ignited the formation of the tradition, which was in its turn the formative and constitutive factor in the establishment of the community / church. This tradition was preserved and celebrated through repeated community or liturgical performances and probably reviewed for apologetic or catechetical purposes. From this basis he comes to the conclusion that the gospels present us with the living tradition of Christian celebration which transports the reader with surprising immediacy to the very heart of the first memories of Jesus.

Dunn acknowledges that, given the nature of the synoptic traditions, he can offer as little in the way of positive proof for his theories as the proponents of the Markan priority, "...but my conviction remains that the shape and verbal variations of most of the Synoptic traditions are better explained by

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such an oral hypothesis than exclusively in terms of literary dependence” (Dunn 2003:336).

Following the trail laid by oral transmission of the Jesus tradition, he discovers the view of a Jesus uninterested in laying claim to any title as such, rejecting at least one title awarded him by others, someone clearly without the intention of making any claims as to his own status in the execution of his mission. His use of the “non-title” “son of man” seems to merely express his hope for vindication. But when he alludes to his own role within his mission, it is a mere by-product of the single central element in his teaching: the Kingdom of God. “[H]is role was a role in relation to that, rather than an assertion of his own status as such. Evidently, it was his proclamation of the kingdom which was important; the identity of the proclaimer was a secondary matter” (2003:761, 762).

As to the question of who the receivers of God’s Kingdom would be, it seems that Jesus did not envision a mission to the Gentiles, but if his program of unreserved neighbourly love to all and sundry which he required his disciples to follow was anything to go by, he seemingly took it for granted that they would be included in the kingdom. Jesus called as many as would hear him and seemed in particular “to include those whom most others, or the main opinion-formers in particular, regarded and treated as outside the realm of covenant grace. Not just the poor, in line with the deeply rooted priorities of Torah and prophet, but also, surprisingly, ‘sinners’, who ought to be disapproved of by the faithful...” (Dunn 2003:540). Here he differed from his prophetic predecessors, but he did expect the renewal of Israel in the near future and anticipated it in the circle of discipleship which he assembled around him.

Dunn (2003:610, 611) speaks of circles of discipleship, such as those of the innermost twelve and a wider circle including the women who followed him, which overlap and intertwine, preventing any hard and fast distinction between disciples and followers. Jesus expected these disciples of his to live in the light of the coming kingdom, not as living an *Interimsethik*, but

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...rather as the character of kingdom life, lived already here and now in anticipation of God's ordering of society when his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Not as living in a spiritual world...but as living in a sacramental universe, where the signs of God's providential care are everywhere to be recognized, learned from, and received with thankfulness. Not as a closed society, determined by rules and excluding boundaries, but as a community which seeks above all else God's priorities, in which forgiveness is experienced, which is often surprised by grace, and which knows well how to celebrate God's goodness in the openness of table-fellowship and love of neighbour.

(Dunn 2003:610, 611)

He believes that the tradition proves impractical any clear boundaries between disciples and followers, all of whom had to meet with a series of other requirements as well, some of which are:

- They were subjects of the king and had to acknowledge Him as such.
- They were children of the Father and should trust in Him and his generosity for their very existence with child-like faith. God is trustworthy and they should know that He will sustain them in the face of crises and be willing to return to a position of dependence.
- The implicit trust expected from the disciples is conveyed through prayer to the King who is simultaneously Father.
- Jesus chose an immediate group of followers so that they may assist and share in his mission. They were disciples of Jesus, following him in reaction to his calling, just as Elijah had called Elisha. This implied that they were to learn what the teacher, Jesus taught, that they were to be sent out by him to be fishers of men (Mk 1:17), to preach the exact same message that was characteristic of his own preaching, namely that God's kingdom had drawn nigh, and to exorcise demons with authority.

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- Jesus depicted his role as that of servant and expected his close circle of disciples to join him in this servitude.
- They should be prepared to follow him through the suffering which surely lies ahead for him and them.
- They hunger for what is right.
- Love for one's neighbour and forgiveness sums up the motivational force for relations with others in Jesus' teaching.
- But the characteristic of discipleship that was most distinctive of his mission and most prominent in the social self-understanding he encouraged in his disciples, was those of open table-fellowship and the absence of boundaries. These were characteristic of the good news of the kingdom he was promoting, which was noted for its concern for others in their various disabilities

Therefore the conduct required from Jesus' disciples is not their guaranteed entry-ticket into the Kingdom, nor *Interimsethik*, but a quality of life appropriate for those who anticipate with gladness its manifestation and strive to live already in its light. The teaching of Jesus does not yield a systematic ethical program, nor does one find in it, according to Dunn, economic policies to reconstruct society in the local community and make it more just as we have seen Horsley do. But while saying that it offers no blueprint for a complete social order, it does clearly reflect the social divisions and economic hardship of the time. The rich are admonished in no uncertain terms to open their eyes to the danger their wealth holds and to give amply to the poor.

Jesus was seen to fit the role of prophet. There are indications that he drew on Isaiah 61:1-3 as agenda for his mission and that he deliberately shaped his mission to coincide with that of the classical prophets of old. He did so particularly in championing the cause of the poor and sinner in the face of the lack of importance on the scale of priorities and the unconcern and lack of empathy on the part of establishment. He clearly is under the impression of a prophetic commissioning from God. There is clear memory of

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prophetic insight and foresight in the tradition and his actions were clearly reminiscent of, not the sign prophets, but the great prophets. Scholarship (referred to in Dunn 2003:664) has drawn attention to some of these actions such as his choice of twelve followers, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, his entry into Jerusalem, the symbolic Temple-action and the last supper.

There are, moreover, indications that Jesus understood his own mission to transcend that of prophet. Dunn (2003:666) sums up: “[T]here need be little doubt that Jesus was regarded as a prophet by many, that he saw himself in the tradition of the prophets, and probably also that he claimed a(n eschatological) significance for his mission (and thus himself) which transcends the older prophetic categories.”

As sage or teacher he is remembered as speaking regularly with a confident assertion of personal authority, placing great emphasis on both his teaching and his expectation that his disciples place similar emphasis on it. Jesus claims direct authority from God, maybe coinciding with his proclamation of God’s rule, so that his authority emanated from his proclamation of its imminence as well as from his enactment of God’s reign in the here and now. Dunn (2003:703) refers to Dodd’s observation that Jesus’ formulaic “I say to you”, “I came”, “Amen, I say to you” and “I command” transcends the usual prophetic formulae of “Thus saith the Lord”, “I was sent” and “I adjure you by”.

Jesus expressed a profound sense of and confidence in his relationship with God as his Father and so we can safely deduce that this was a crucial element in his self-understanding and the immediacy of authority with which he proclaimed the kingdom of his Father, “in both its eschatological immanence and imminence” (Dunn 2003:724). He did not make this belief of his a subject of explicit instruction, nor did he expect his disciples to entertain this belief in regards to him. Indications are that he tried to instil a similar sense of kinship in the disciples to God as their Father and so

praying as he did and living, as they indeed seemed to do, with the sense of a shared sonship before God.

The righteous would suffer, indeed anyone placing God's will before all else could anticipate suffering or death. Jesus expected to share in the fate of the prophets; their rejection and even martyrdom in Jerusalem. He anticipated the rejection of "his message in Jerusalem, to suffer as a man in the hands of men, to drink the cup of suffering and be fully caught up in the final tribulation" (Dunn 2003:805). John the Baptist had already lost his life, therefore the mounting hostility against him and his mission could hardly have come as a surprise. But there is a strong indication that Jesus saw the climax to his mission as the climax to God's eschatological purpose:

Jesus (and his disciples) would suffer the final tribulation through which God's kingly purpose would achieve its goal; the kingdom would come. His death would introduce that final climactic period, to be followed shortly ("after three days") by the general resurrection, the implementation of the new covenant, and the coming of the kingdom.

(Dunn 2003:824)

#### **5.4.2 Horsley and Dunn: Comparing notes on the journey**

Horsley and Dunn are in agreement in deeming orality to be a vital, very real and prominent part of the traditioning process. For Horsley this is true especially with regards to Q, as a source by nature nebulous and elusive, but emerging in a new and useful way when examined through the lens of orality. The possibility of an orally performed Q led Horsley to the main thrust of his argumentation namely that Q was community tradition repeatedly performed before a community in conflict, with whom the material resonated in their social and historical contexts.

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With this, Dunn is in agreement, similarly stressing the importance of the concept of the performance of tradition. According to him, what scholars should be looking for in the Jesus tradition is the Jesus who was remembered for a number of features, which were all illustrated by narratives and teaching, performed in the circles of disciples and church gatherings. Dunn (2003:334) compares it to the continuous run of the performances of some classic where the performers and interpretation may change, but it is the same classic being performed throughout in what he terms “continuity through performance”. This continuity throughout the performance of the words and deeds of Jesus and the impact they made on the audience from the first is for him still audible and gives the remembered Jesus historical substance (Dunn 2002:334). The performed narratives and teaching had not yet been properly documented into the literary paradigm and the living character of this process of performance, remembering and passing on of Jesus tradition had to substitute thinking in terms of literary relationships between static entities. Paying careful attention to the principal resonating contexts for the mission of Jesus and understanding the socio-political-economic context for it is likewise imperative for Dunn in research.<sup>54</sup>

Both authors agree that because the subject matter of the sayings would have superponated constructively with the community it would therefore have immediately acquired a social and historical context. It is precisely because of the immediacy of these contexts that it is of such importance to take contexts into serious considerations. Dunn gives recognition to and approves of the views of Horsley and Draper on the subject of metonymic referencing context reception; they had applied the theory of JM Foley (referring to metonymy and metonymic reference which means that a part,

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<sup>54</sup> It is of considerable interest to note that the troubadours, purported to have originated in the 11<sup>th</sup> century as the equivalent of mere wandering minstrels. Their origins are, however much earlier, and their covert function of travelling from land to land, from one castle and court to another, linking together the adherents of a secret society of mystic teaching, hidden by their overt function of entertainment through song. The words of their songs were symbolical, understood only by the initiated and the songs continued even though discovery meant death. The continuing value and power of oral performances up until as late as the twelfth century has been greatly underestimated.

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by reference, evokes the whole) and concluded that phraseology well-known from tradition as well as standard narrative patterns provide ways for a poet to convey meaning by tapping into a “traditional reservoir” (see Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:160-166).

They contributed that oral texts imply an audience who presides over the background knowledge which enables them to respond as the source or performer of the text expects them to do, to signals encoded in the text, thereby bridging any gaps of indeterminacy there might exist in the text and so contributing to the creation of a consistency in the traditioning process. Horsley coined the phrase: “Performance is the enabling event, tradition the enabling referent” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:8). Dunn finds it apt and refers furthermore to the results of Horsley’s application of the work of Foley to Q, so that Q, as seen through this lens, seems to be the transcript of one performance among many of an oral text, of a libretto that was performed regularly in the early Jesus-movement and with the metonymic context of reception being Israelite (and not Judean) cultural tradition.

Oral traditioning likewise lends impetus to the mainstay of Dunn’s work, namely the remembered Jesus whose words and deeds impacted deeply on his followers, imprinting themselves on the memories of his followers and continuing to echo in their gatherings. Their collective memories served the passing on of tradition which had from the beginning been part of church founding and the bearing of witness which was part and parcel of being a follower of Jesus for expansion of the movement and the “sending out” of emissaries were matters of the gravest importance. Once again he is in agreement with Horsley who emphasized in his study of Q the importance of the “sending out” motif and the repeated underlining of its fervent urgency as well as the urge to expand the movement. When Dunn speaks of the necessity of memorising a solid base of Jesus-tradition, Horsley’s theory of repeated performances to facilitate retention springs to mind. Neither doubted that the material, though emerging from community life, was carefully structured and rigidly controlled.

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On an important matter, however, they seem to diverge from one another. Part of the main thrust of Horsley's work is that Jesus through his words and actions performed covenant renewal and that each repeated performance was a renewal of the covenant in itself. Dunn says Jesus was observant of the law and far from setting himself over against it, to do the will of God had still been the primary goal in his teachings and actions and he had dug deep into it to discern the divine rationale or justice in its particular *miswot*. It seems to Dunn that Jesus, rather than renewing the covenant, refused to go down the road of speaking out on issues of the law and halakhah which had become test cases of obedience and loyalty to the covenant and that his standing before God did not depend on particular interpretations or applications of the Torah. So where the renewal of the covenant constitutes almost the heartbeat of Horsley's contribution, Dunn seems to think that, although Jesus subscribed to both, he appeared to sit loosely towards issues of law and covenant in what he taught about standing before God. However, when Dunn speaks of Jesus' death, he interprets it as a covenantal sacrifice rather than as a sin offering, saying that if God was planning to renew his covenant with Israel, he would take it upon himself to be the sacrifice needed therefore. He refers to the metaphor of the baptism by fire used first by John the Baptist but given a new twist in meaning by Jesus when he said that he would have to suffer this baptism, no dispensing judgment, but enduring it.

Horsley, however, assumes this same metaphor as used in Q to mean that Jesus, who was more than merely an oracular prophet, would, as John had depicted him from the beginning of his ministry, baptise with the fire of judgment and the Spirit of renewal, burning chaff and gathering grain in a sweeping renewal of the covenant as the new Moses.

On issues of the Kingdom of God their views are similar, but with each tingeing his views with slight differences in nuancing. Dunn says Jesus does not lay out a pattern of conduct necessary to gain one entry into the Kingdom, an Interimsethik (Schweitzer) required only in the meantime before God's kingdom arrives, but instead a quality of kingdom life with a

character of living appropriate for those who are looking for the coming of the Kingdom and who seek to live already in its light.

In Horsley's work he speaks of making the Kingdom a social reality in the dire traits in which the people of the community are trapped and adds that the performances include prayers for the realization of the Kingdom. Jesus commissions prophetic envoys to expand his program of announcing the kingdom and healing to the village communities to bring about renewal. His exorcisms are portrayed as the new exodus and a manifestation of the kingdom. He, as well as the Q-performers enacting his words, pass judgment on the rulers and their agents for their oppressive and unjust treatment of the people, but their audiences are encouraged to hold on to the hope of the renewal and reversal of fortunes that the kingdom would bring and to work together in peace and solidarity in the meantime, remaining committed to the movement even in the face of persecution or death.

#### **5.4.3 Assessment: Dunn's work in retrospect**

It is difficult to attempt an assessment bordering remotely on anything critical when one has been as willing and appreciative a passenger of Dunn's on his meander as I have been. I have great appreciation for his thoroughness and sound reasoning and for once I have felt myself to be searching for a view of Jesus without the fear of being sucked down by the bog of the treacherous marshland of uncertain and unreliable tradition in the sources available.

Maybe it is this absence of uncertainty which causes one to doubt the relief his theories bring, and suspect them of offering solutions too simple and facile to be true. Can it really be possible to pay so little attention to sifting through layers of tradition to try and discern *ipsissima verba* from later interpretation and embellishment? Is it really unnecessary to ask, for instance in the Gospel of Mark, which material has to be attributed to the evangelist's own later theologising? My suspicion is that, although I

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completely endorse Dunn's argumentation in this regard, the editorial work of the evangelists might have to be taken more seriously. Having said that, I can envision how his theories have opened up a much wider scope of vision against which to attempt a sighting of Jesus than has previously been imagined in critical scholarship.

Once again I harbour the suspicion that too little has been made of the office of prophet and what it entails in the light of the huge corpus of Israelite tradition on the lives of the great prophets of old. If Jesus had indeed, as Dunn suggests, seen himself as prophet in the tradition of these prophets, their lives and offices could offer much more in lieu of indicators as to the meaning attached by Jesus to his mission.

Dunn refers to the tradition of the words of Jesus in Mark 9:37/Luke 9:48 and Matthew 10:40 stating that whoever receives or rejects him, receives or rejects the one by whom he was sent. He subsequently remarks: "The thought is the familiar one of the prophet as speaking for God" (Dunn 2003:663).

This brings me to the question I posed earlier in my assessment of the work of Horsley, namely whether the prophet is really an emissary of God or whether he merely perceives and believes himself to be one. Was Jesus deluding himself in thinking that he was fulfilling a God-given task? One supposes this question to be a difficult one to answer if one is to remain objective and critical, but at the same time essential to one's understanding of the role of the prophet, and of Jesus in particular. Scholarship seems to sidestep the issue or deny it outright, but I think it is essential to the understanding of the message of the prophets to decide whether they were merely following their own rudder or whether there were divine hands at the tiller. Can God indeed call people to deliver his message and did He do so in the lives of the prophets and of Jesus? Was Jesus sent by God, and not necessarily as his son, Christ or Messiah, but as prophetic messenger in the sense in which it is explained in the following chapter - a life completely in service of, guided by and absorbed into the will of God that he was

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called to execute. For the starting point of true prophecy is God and his will and message and not the program or convictions of the prophet. And the union between them is not mysticism, but a reality in the Father-child relationship between God and his people, the livewire of all the words and actions of the prophet, such as is obvious in the life, prayer and death of Jesus in all its prophetic symbolism and obedience.

## **PROPHETIC ICONS: THE PROPHETIC PHENOMENON**

What is the essence of a prophet? What meaning is conveyed by the word προφήτης? How would one know a person to be a prophet should you encounter such a person in the street? But more importantly: Does the meaning of this word in any way express or capture the mission and passion of Jesus and his seismic influence of which we still feel the tremors today?

H L Ellison's statement (1977:14) that a prophet stands to God as Aaron stood to Moses sheds some light on the subject. He refers to Deuteronomy 13: 1, 2 and 18:21, 22 to remind the reader that, while foretelling would most certainly come to pass in the mission of the true prophet, this does not necessarily establish his credentials.

Maybe an investigation into the typical breeding ground for the ancient Israelite prophetic phenomenon would be a suitable starting point when seeking to answer these questions.

### **6.1 Status quo typical for prophetic intervention**

Victor Matthews (2001:1), echoing the sentiments of Dunn (2003a,b) when he speaks of “default settings” and of Craffert and Botha (2005), writes:

Examining any text in the Hebrew Bible from a socio-historical perspective requires an understanding that this material has a particular place in history. Writers reflect their own period even when they are editing a narrative originating from an earlier time. Similarly, when prophets speak, they do so within the social and historical context of their own time. They are primarily concerned with current events, not future happenings. Therefore, as we explore the social world of the

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Hebrew prophets, we must first recognize that these persons...spoke within their own time, to an audience with a frame of reference very different from ours.

He reminds us that the world of the prophets and their audiences, even when revolving around urban centers such as Jerusalem, Bethel and Samaria, had been agriculturally based, as is evident in the large number of pastoral and agricultural images employed by the prophets:

The life was not an easy one: the Mediterranean climate with which these people had to contend brought rain only during the winter months...and the land they occupied was hilly, badly eroded, and rocky. Thus their lives were hard, often short, and too often dominated by forces beyond their control. In addition, political and economic forces from outside their immediate area added to the pressures of their daily existence. Because we do not share these everyday aspects of ancient existence, one of the greatest challenges for modern readers has been to become acquainted with the social and historical forces that played such an important role in the lives of the prophets and their audiences.

(Matthews 2001:1, 2)

Are there certain situations or conditions in the state of Israel's affairs that make typical breeding ground for prophecy? This certainly seems to be the case. The following circumstances seem mostly to prevail:

- It is usually when some eventuality looms in the skies of international historical and political occurrences and the people of the covenant are drawn into this Spiel that prophets appear to interpret the coming threat to Israel. This is the action of God placing them under siege as punishment for their rebellion and unfaithfulness, God using the arena of world history to vent his wrath on their recalcitrance.

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- Prophecy also steps into times of gross social and economic injustice. For generation upon generation Israel had lived as farmers in the country within the social arrangement of the tribal orders. Now urbanisation was taking place and rich landowners were rapidly gaining control of the nation's purse strings. Soon they were the capitalists and the country dwellers pawns in their hands, weighed down by heavy tax burdens, treated unmercifully and marginalized to the extent that they were forced to relinquish their freedom and become slaves. The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" (Is 33:14, 15). From Isaiah 58 I select a number of verses to illustrate:

- "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.... (3b).
- Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen; to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (6, 7).
- In Amos 8:4-6 we read: Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" - skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.
- Israel had forever been tempted to dabble in the religions of all neighbouring peoples and whomever she came into contact with. At times when syncretism was threatening to obliterate Yahwism

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a prophet would step in to show God's people the error of their ways. The most dramatic example of this being of course Elijah and the prophets of Baal on the mountain in 1 Kings 18.

Passages such as Isaiah 57 and Jeremiah 10:1-9 also bear witness to this and Jeremiah 19:4, 5 reads:

For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal - something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

- Israel had also been trying her hand at forming alliances and considered herself adept at political strategising to the extent that God's protection and council had started to seem redundant: Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt (Hs 12:1). Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless - now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria (Hs 7:11).

All of these are reminiscent of the times of Jesus, fecund for prophetic intervention. The social injustices as spelt out clearly by Horsley (chapter 3 above), the abnormal circumstances, “eschatological and politico-religious fever” close to the “point of eruption”, the “hotbed of nationalist ferment” with which Vermes (2003:11) sketches of first-century Galilee, the religious marginalization of the people of God all indicate the perfect breeding ground for God’s messenger to appear.

## 6.2 The prophet

*“Prophet, n. Inspired teacher, revealer or interpreter of God’s will;...person revealing unexpected gifts...; spokesman, advocate; one who foretells events,...”* (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1961).

Lindblom (1973:1) accurately sums up the phenomenon of prophecy:

The special gift of a prophet is his ability to experience the divine in an original way and to receive revelations from the divine world. The prophet belongs entirely to God; his paramount task is to listen to and obey his God. In every respect he has given himself up to his God and stands unreservedly at His disposal. There are *homines religiosi* to whom religious experiences as such are the essence of their religious life. Personal communion with God, prayer, devotion, moral submission to the divine will are the principal traits in their religious attitude.

In Micah 3:8 we read another apt definition: “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” and Weber (in Petersen [ed] 1987:111) sheds the following light on the subject: “The religious problem-complex of prophets of prophets and priests is the womb from which nonsacerdotal philosophy emanated, wherever it developed”.

If, in New Testament times, a search had been made for any true prophets in the style and tradition of the great prophets of old among the people of Israel, would anybody have been found to meet with all of the requirements? John the Baptist perhaps, or maybe Jesus? What follows is a study into the phenomenon of prophecy against the backdrop of which, with the wisdom of hindsight, we can study these prominent New Testament figures to see whether they could rightfully don the prophetic mantle.

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The prophets of the Old Testament - thorn-in-the-flesh, dangerously subversive, influential, controversial, people of moral purpose who were the bane of many a king, who had a hotline to the God who had called him to his service and therefore held sway with the nation. Kings consulted them, wouldn't make any strategic moves without seeking their council, were severely punished if they did, sometimes hated both prophet and his council and massacred hundreds of them. No one is sure when or how exactly they appeared for the first time in Israel, these strange men, often wearing a tonsure and clothed in peculiar garments made of skins (marking of a special degree of holiness) or later a hairy mantle and loin cloth of leather, reminiscent of the garments worn by John the Baptist.

For more than three centuries Israel had the voices of prophets publicly announcing and preaching what they had to say, delivering messages for all and sundry to hear, appearing where people were gathered together or in places such as the sanctuaries where audiences were bound to be found, bringing them the guidance of their God, reminding them that neither allies nor calculated strategising but only faith in Yahweh could bring salvation.

H L Ellison writes: "The prophet is not defined or explained in the Old Testament; he is taken for granted. This is because he has existed from the very first (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21 R.V.), and has not been confined to Israel, e.g. Balaam (Num.22:5), the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:19).

...Amos makes it clear that the prophets of Israel are a special gift of God (Amos 2:11) without real parallel among the Canaanites" ([1952] 1977:13).

The monarchic period in Israel was the time in which prophecy flourished and classical prophecy continued flourishing well into post-exilic times. And then the voice of the prophets dies down and is not heard again until two figures appear in the New Testament looking and acting remarkably like prophets; one in the desert, the other walking the dusty roads of Galilee. What became of prophets and prophecy and were these two figures indeed prophets?

To the first of these questions Lindblom provides a possible answer:

In the time of the Maccabees prophets were rare or non-existent. In the early Christian church they came into existence again. Everywhere the history of prophecy shows periods of vitality and periods of decline. A rich cultic life is not unfavourable for prophetic phenomena, but the dominance of doctrine and law suppresses the prophetic spirit. The Torah-religion and the learned activity of the scribes during the last pre-Christian centuries did not stimulate vigorous prophetic activity.

(Lindblom 1973:218)

Each and every prophet was a child of his time. He was aware of standing at a specific time-junction with the events of his day cradling his message. The message he delivered was aimed at restoring faith in the God of Israel among the people of Israel at the specific time and in the specific situation in which he found himself. Thus while we shall investigate certain traits common among prophets in general, we must simultaneously realise that each prophet and his message is unique and has many time-specific "Sondergut" which need to be taken into account against the backdrop of the place he occupied on the time-line of his people's history.

According to Max Weber (in Petersen [ed] 1987:110, 111), "[t]he conflict between empirical reality and the conception of the world as a meaningful totality, which is based on a religious postulate, produces the strongest tensions in man's inner life as well as in his external relationship to the world" and he believes that this is where prophecy steps in to play an important role:

To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this

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meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern....Moreover, it always contains the important religious conception of the world as a cosmos which is challenged to produce somehow a “meaningful,” ordered totality, the particular manifestations of which are to be measured and evaluated according to this requirement.

(Weber, in Petersen [ed] 1987:110, 111)

Lindblom (1973:34) points out that it is generally characteristic of inspiration that ideas, images, emotions and impulses arise spontaneously in the mind of the prophet independently of reflection or meditation so that he perceives them to be emanating not from himself, but from a power from another realm. It would appear however that this mode of inspiration was in the later prophets complimented by reflection and meditation, rendering prophecy not a stagnant phenomenon but an art evolving and being refined by these messengers of God who gradually came to be what, for the profundity of their contemplations and teachings, may be called skilled theologians.

The prophets had as foundation and common ground an unbelievably rich treasure of tradition. In the long and varied history of Israel many different accounts of God's interaction with his people had been born. In times when Yahwism seemed to be on a rapid decline and the people of Israel merely still going through the motions in an almost superstitious holding on to the old institutions as the last vestiges of their bond with Yahweh, the prophets would use their knowledge of these nearly forgotten traditions in surprisingly different, varied and innovative ways to resuscitate that which was so unique to the people of Israel; her existence in covenant with God. In their zeal for reformation they would often uproot tradition forcefully from its context and reapply it arbitrarily, stressing that the old laws and ordinances had lost nothing in its potency and immediacy but on the contrary had intensified. So extreme and radical was the effect of their

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methods that Yahwism usually not only resuscitated but erupted.

Reminding Israel of whence she came was however not their only aim.

Preparation for a radically new action of God in the near future was of even greater portent.

Their message was dire, for Israel the elect, shocking. God was closing the book of the history of his involvement with them, the end chapter telling of doom and gloom as Yahweh rides out in wrath against his children, using foreign peoples as the executioners of his punishment of their sins.

But they are also the harbingers of good tidings for Yahweh stands ready to open a new book, a book of salvation, to alleviate the sentence of death passed onto his people. When there are no strongholds left, God's message of consolation and love brings hope and promise of renewal to the people in exile. How may a prophet be distinguished from common man? How did the people of Israel know that a prophet was among them? The following are a few of the qualities and traits which seem to have been characteristic of prophets through the ages:

### **6.3 The phenomenon “prophecy”: Conveyer of the word**

In the words of Von Rad (1972:73): "...God's thoughts and designs began their historical fulfilment at the point at which they became words on the lips of the prophet." "Interdependence", "inseperable", "absolute authority", "driving force in history of Israel" - all of these spring to mind when we think of the relationship between and partnership of the prophet and the word of God.

In Jeremiah 1:6 we read that the prophet felt himself ill-equipped to execute the task that lay before him. God, however, supplies him with what is needed to be a successful prophet: "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your

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mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jr 1:9, 10). The implication is clearly that the words of the Lord are all that are needed to enable him to do all of the latter. It is interesting to note the statistics which Von Rad (1972:66) gives regarding prophet and word of God, namely that the phrase "the Word of Yahweh" occurs 241 times in the Old Testament and in 221 (92%) of these it is used in relation to a prophetic oracle. The typical phrase: "The word of Yahweh came to..." occurs 123 times.

"Word" was not to Israel a static concept or mere utterance of thought or emotion, but was seen to be a dynamic force possessing creative power. Not only in Israel was this believed to have been true but ancient eastern cultures applied the dynamism of the word in cultic life for spells, exorcisms, blessings and curses. In ancient Babylon and Egypt the word was seen as possessing physical and cosmic capabilities and in the time of Jesus, the concept that certain spiritual words give eternal life was not uncommon to Jewish spirituality. The above-mentioned phrase: "The word of Yahweh came to..." (which occurs so repeatedly in a book such as Jeremiah that it eventually falls on the ear like a line from a chorus) carries in itself a blueprint of what was seen by tradition, prophet and people alike to be the quintessence of the word-of-God-phenomenon. The use of this particular verb with this particular noun is one which, outside of the Bible, falls strangely on the ear and is rarely if ever used in this way in present time. It conveys something of the almost personal character that this "word" displays, but also of the dynamic power it is seen to possess. The word and therefore by implication the prophet as its conveyor / vessel / servant / illustrator / partner / dependant is seen as the power generator, the driving force behind the history of Israel.

We see proof of this in the particular emphasis placed on the naming of people and creatures, as well as in their re-naming when their circumstances change and their old names no longer capture the essence of their being. It is almost as though part of their being is contained within

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their name and they are incomplete without it. In Ruth 1 it is of interest to note how the meanings of the names of Mahlon and Chilion foretell their early deaths and we read in verse 20and 21 that Naomi asks people to call her "Mara" instead of "Naomi" for God had made her life bitter.

If human words carried this much import, how much did the word of Yahweh not carry? We read that the word of God does not return to Him without accomplishing that for which it had been sent out:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

(Is 55:10-11)

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

(Is 40:8)

There is no better example of this however than the whole of Genesis 1 which serves to illustrate in a way unrivalled for its effect the perception of the creative power of God's word. Here priestly tradition relates how it transforms chaos into order, formless void into a creation worthy of God's approval. The beautiful, rhythmic repetition of "And God said...","And it was so", "And God saw that it was good" imprints the supreme creative dunamism of this Word forever onto the mind of the reader.

As unthinkable as it is to refer to the spirit of Yahweh with an indefinite "a" instead of a definite "the", just as unthinkable would it be to refer to the word of Yahweh in this way. It seems as though the word was also thought to contain in it the essence of whence it came.

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The prophet as a vessel containing the word of God must have commanded awesome respect and even fear from their audience and the prophets themselves must have been acutely aware of the gravity of this message that they were carrying, as being the divine word in all its omnipotence. To prophet and audience alike Gods Word had absolute and unquestionable authority. Therefore the prophet, as carrier of this word, had the same kind of power and authority.

It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of creative power ascribed to the Word, which might easily and erroneously be regarded as remains of archaic magical beliefs, does not wane with time and increased theological reflection, but on the contrary waxes even upon - or maybe *especially* upon - the most sophisticated and ground-breaking thereof.

It would appear that the Word becomes *raison d' être* for the prophet and to the extent that he views it as sustenance. In Deuteronomy the words: "They are not just idle words for you - they are your life." (Dt 32:47a) and "...man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3b) are attributed to Moses. In Amos (8:11b,12) we read: "...not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it."

Ezekiel was ordered to eat the scroll which was offered to him:

Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am

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 giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it and it tasted  
 as sweet as honey in my mouth.

(Ezk 2:8b-3:3)

Jeremiah speaks of the joy derived from the word and how he gorges upon it like a starving man. In Jeremiah 15:16a we read: "When your words came, I ate them: they were my joy and my heart's delight". Von Rad (1972:70) refers to this last example saying:

When he speaks of eating the divine words, we should not take this in too spiritual a way and regard it as metaphor and hyperbole: it is perfectly possible that a prophet even felt physically dependent on the word and so, in a sense, was kept alive by it....Later on we shall have to consider how the entry of the message into their physical life brought an important change in the self-understanding of these later prophets. (We may ask whether this entry of the word into a prophet's bodily life is not meant to approximate what the writer of the Fourth gospel says about the word becoming flesh).

(Von Rad 1972:70)

When the prophet bows down before the absolute authority of *the Word*, when he applies fair means and foul and all in his power to bring it to the people in the best way possible, he seems to take for granted that the receptors would alike bow down to this awesome authority, as though all and sundry, either through personal experience or through knowledge handed over through tradition, knew of its unquestionable creative / destructive power. The prophet as carrier of this word must therefore have been regarded with awe and reverence by some and with hatred and fear by others as the harbinger of tidings that would change their lives and circumstances drastically.

#### 6.4 Symbolic actions

When a prophet bowed down before the word of Yahweh, he not only surrendered his words into its service but his whole life and even to some extent the lives of his family. They were sometimes under order to perform symbolic actions to convey the message of Yahweh, actions that seem to the modern reader to be totally bizarre and which heaped additional suffering on the shoulders of the man of God. The demands that these actions made on the lives of the prophets are sometimes so far-reaching that one cannot but wonder at their obedience and commitment.

Ezekiel was said to have been ordered to lie on first his left side for 390 days and then on his right for forty, thus carrying the sins of the people first of Israel and then of Judah. While obeying this command he had to cook his food on fire made with human excrement to symbolise the impure food that they would have to eat while in diaspora. He had to shave his hair and beard with a sharpened sword, weigh the shaved hair and divide it by three. Each third then had to meet with a different fate to symbolise different fates the people would meet with.

In Ezekiel 21:6, 7 we read:

Therefore groan, son of man! Groan before them with broken heart and bitter grief. And when they ask you, "Why are you groaning?" you shall say, "Because of the news that is coming. Every heart will melt and every hand go limp; every spirit will become faint and every knee become as weak as water.

Isaiah 20:2-44 reads:

...at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah son of Amos. He said to him, "Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet." And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. Then the Lord said, "Just as my servant Isaiah

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has gone around stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old with buttocks bared - to Egypt's shame.

But perhaps Ezekiel 24:15-18 best of all serves as illustration:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners." So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.

Hosea 1 also tells of an order for symbolic action which not only involved the prophet. Hosea is told to take an "...adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness " to signify the unfaithfulness of the land. His children's names, "Jezreel", "Lo-Ruhama" and "Lo-Ammi", were all prescriptions from the Lord, chosen to highlight for the Israelites some aspect of their deteriorating relationship with their covenant-God.

All of this aided and abetted the prophet in delivering his message in a way that was sure to shock his audience into hearing and understanding. The symbolic actions were sometimes accompanied by a verbal message, but sometimes stood alone as self-explanatory. It was also a phenomenon not unknown to the prophet's contemporaries, because it was a practice not used exclusively by the prophets. Cult, rite, dance and sacral medicine alike could make effective use of this means of conveying a message of unrivalled visual impact.

## 6.5 Visions

Prophets were people upon whom the divine had lain claim and were "... entirely devoted, soul and body, to the divinity. They are inspired personalities who have the power to receive divine revelations." (Lindblom 1973:6). Unlike mystics, prophets did not seek contact with the deity but visions came upon them, or more accurately and more frequently, overcame them.

Lindblom (1973:181) says that the great prophets never sought revelatory experiences through ecstatic exercises. Although there were prophetic schools of teaching, their object was knowledge of Yahweh (*da'at Yahweh*) and the preservation of prophetic revelations. The presupposition in prophecy was always that Yahweh sent His word and that the sovereign Lord did this when it pleased Him. The passive state of the prophet and dynamic action of the divine possession are clearly illustrated by passages such as Ezekiel 40:1: "...the hand of the Lord was upon me and He took me there," and Ezekiel 37:1: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley."

In Daniel we read of some form of preparation, for example in Daniel 10:2, 3: "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over."

The inspiration which they experienced had a tendency to develop into real ecstasy. Lindblom (1973:4) explains that, in religious ecstasy, the consciousness is completely saturated with the presence of God and with ideas and feelings emanating from the divine sphere. The soul of the ecstatic is lifted up and transported into the exalted region of divine revelation, and the "lower world" with its sensations momentarily disappears.

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Ecstasy never comes alone. Lindblom (1973:50, 51).explains that all ecstasies are expected to have the faculty of miracle working and the prophets of ancient Israel were no exception. To illustrate he list powers that could be expected of the prophet:

- A prophet can ensure that a meagre supply does not run out.
- With the barest minimum of provisions he provides a meal for a multitude of people.
- At his command a little oil in a flask fills many vessels.
- He resurrects the dead.
- He renders poisonous food innocuous.
- He has the power to cleanse bad water, making it sound.
- He can defy the forces of nature to make iron float on water.
- On his word, men are struck with leprosy and blindness.
- He prays to God and fire comes down from heaven.
- Even his dead body has a wonderful effect and is imbued with power. Everything that belonged to him was, so to speak, charged with power. Even his clothes possessed power, for example Elijah's mantle.

But although all of these may suggest mysterious forces working through the prophets, it was God who stood behind them and worked through them and the importance of prophetic prayer and personal intercession cannot be over-emphasized.

Lindblom (1973:48-50) further distinguishes between orgiastic and passive or lethargic ecstasy. Of collective, contagious orgiastic ecstasy he mentions I Samuel 10:5-8, 19:22-24 and 1 Kings 22 as examples. He likewise classifies 1 Kings 18:46 where Elijah runs ahead of Ahab's chariot from Mount Carmel to Jezreel as orgiastic ecstasy.

John J Pilch (2003:708-720) investgates the possibility that Tascodrugite practices during prayer could induce altered states of consciousness. The

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Church Father Epiphanius describes in his *Panarion* (in Pilch 2003:708, 709) a practice common among the Tascodrugite sect of putting their forefinger on their one nostril while praying. Pilch (2003:709-711) describes the physiological and psychological effects of circadian and ultradian rhythms, as well as of the nasal cycle. He investigates the link between the olfactory faculties and trance and reports on several South African rock paintings ostensibly depicting a hand raised to the nose as technique for facilitating or inducing trance and experiencing altered states of consciousness.

Based on this information Pilch (2003:716, 717) concludes that Jesus in the Garden, as reported on in Luke 22:43-44 (which in turn drew upon Mark) assumed a posture which could stimulate the nasal cycle. He writes: Luke's source in this scene is Mark who reports that "Jesus fell on the ground" (Mk 14:35; also Mt 26:39 even more explicitly: 'he fell on his face and prayed' – again a supine position with the possibility of blocking the left nostril" (Pilch 2003:716). He elaborates that the sweat like drops of blood could have been a nose-bleed that sometimes accompanies intense trance. As further proof he maintains that Luke was no stranger to trance, reporting more than twenty in the Acts of the Apostles.

A couple of thoughts on his theories would be:

- The evidence seems rather diaphanous to allow for such a conclusion. If one were merely to subject this conclusion to the test of memory and impression and ask if anyone familiar with the Jesus of the sources available to us would describe him as a person who experienced or induced trances, the answer would probably lead away from the conclusion.
- What ecstatic practices the early church indulged in or were reported on in Acts are not of great value in determining the praxis of Jesus.

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- The scholar searches in vain for Jesus among those who sought or induced trance-like states in an active fashion. It is clear in prophetic scholarship that the prophet of repute and refinement was the one who was overcome by ecstasy in a passive state. There can be little doubt that Jesus represented the pinnacle of his practice, a man who is remembered vividly as gaining access to the divine through prayer. There are two totally diverging and disjunct ecstatic paths; the one seeking stimulant trance and ecstasy, of which no-one can seriously suspect Jesus on the grounds of any firm evidence; the other quieting the mind and being overcome by depressant ecstasy or altered states of consciousness. The latter of the two is the result of either prayer or meditation and the road less trodden because it guarantees no quick fixes or histrionic results. It is, however, a perfectly logical and cerebral path: The brain is known to be a pattern-former, like water coursing through and eroding soil, and regular prayer or meditation or slow baroque music facilitates access to the alpha rhythms of the brain and the sub-conscious (which is more powerful than the conscious), both facilitating openness to passive altered states of consciousness.<sup>55</sup>
- It is clear from the quotations of the work of Epiphanius that the Tascodrugite sect and their practices were held in no great esteem by the Church Father. Surely if this practice had been the wont of the professed Lord of the Church the sentiment regarding it would have been different.

2 Kings 8:7-11 is cited as example of a passive trance and Lindblom (1973:49) concludes: "Throughout the world prophetic persons are reputed to be endowed with the gift of clairvoyance, thought-reading and telepathy. It is something like this that is attributed to Elisha in this story." He adds that foreseeing, foretelling and clairvoyance were ascribed to the prophets of the earliest phase of Old Testament prophecy.

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<sup>55</sup> See Grové (1994).

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This is a far cry from the frenzied ecstasies, chanting and self- or substance-induced trances we read of in mystical practices. Divine response is, in the case of the prophets, like the answer to a prayer. Neither is there ever any mystical unification with the godhead.

There is, however, the essentially theological sense of the prophet, servant of God, in submission before the Divine, surrendering to the commission lain upon him. This brought with it an intensification in his sensory perception and an empathic awareness of the divine emotions in this temporary state of consciousness:

He became in a strange way detached from himself and his own personal likes and dislikes, and was drawn into the emotions of the deity himself. It was not only the knowledge of God's designs in history that was communicated to him, but also the feelings in God's heart, wrath, love, sorrow, revulsion and even doubt as to what to do and how to do it. Something of Yahweh's own emotion passed over into the prophet's psyche and filled it to bursting point.

(Von Rad 1972:42)

Furthermore we find in the words of the prophets no exhortation or encouragement to the people to seek this kind of experience of God, a fact which enhances the uniqueness of the experience and office of the prophet - emissary of God.

## **6.6 Suffering**

Being a prophet involved totally abandoning one's being into the hands of God to become an instrument in conveying his message. God's calling lay hold of the personal life of the prophet to such an extent that it all but disappeared. Lindblom (1973:2) writes:

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As one compelled by the divine power, the prophet lives under a divine constraint. He has lost the freedom of the ordinary man and is forced to follow the orders of the deity. He must say what has been given him to say and go where he is commanded to go. Few things are so characteristic of the prophets, wherever we meet them in the world of religion, as the feeling of being under a superhuman and supernatural constraint.

It is as though he underwent a total change of personality through his calling. It changed his way of interacting with people. His life became ever more focused on God so that he almost seemed to be more aware of the presence and conversation of God than that of the people around him. His feet clearly walked a different path to that of his fellow-humans; the path of God's will and vision for his people. This already becomes clear when we look at the lives of Moses and Elijah.

From the very first we come to realize that being a prophet entailed suffering. The prophet may have suffered because the way ahead seemed to be more than he felt humanly equipped to deal with. It was possible that the message he had to deliver was one that filled him with horror and dismay or that was contrary to his own personal beliefs and aspirations, or that his person and message met with animosity to the extent that he was seen as a threat to his own people and shunned by them, or even that he met with bodily harm at their hands or the hands of their leaders. He saw his people suffering when the punishment God announced through him broke over them. He understood something of the sorrow of Yahweh over his recalcitrant people: "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" (Jr 8:21, 22).

So characteristic is suffering of the office of prophecy that the phrase "the fate of the prophets"/ "*Prophetenschicksal*" has been coined.

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As servant of the Almighty he became agent, and if necessary, martyr, in the cause of the justice required by Him/Her who sent his/her prophet in among his/her people to execute his/her will.

But above all he was a man who stood in complete isolation before God. In pre-exilic times in particular he was the sole conveyer of God's message. He alone bore the burden of carrying the revelation of God to his people. Not only must a mere human have buckled under such responsibility, isolation as well as under the magnitude of the knowledge imparted to him, but he was forced to defend his exceptional exclusivity in the eyes of the people. And if God deemed it necessary, martyrdom could lie at the end of this road for him.

To highlight the desolation, despair and danger faced by just one of the prophets, we recall a few passages from the book of Jeremiah:

- “Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me” (Jr 15:10).
  
- “Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?” (Jr 15:18).
  
- “But when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard,...arrested him and said, ‘You are deserting to the Babylonians.’ ‘That's not true!’ Jeremiah said. ‘I am not deserting to the Babylonians.’ But Irijah would not listen to him; instead, he arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned....Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained a long time” (Jr 37:13-16).

- “So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud (Jr 38:6).

The whole of Lamentations (see especially 33:1-20) bears witness to the torment which formed part of the lives of these men of God. This selection of phrases abstracted from Lamentations, speaks for itself:

- “From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones.” “This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears.”
- “No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit.”
- “See, O Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed....”

However, it was probably Baruch the scribe, who opened our eyes to the fact that suffering had become one of the dimensions of the prophet's witness-bearing as much as was words and symbolic actions. Von Rad ascribes this to what he calls a critical phase in the existence of prophecy in the time of Jeremiah who walked his own "Via Dolorosa" and says: "There was more to being a prophet than mere speaking. Not only the prophet's lips, but his whole being were absorbed in the service of prophecy. Consequently, when the prophet's life entered the vale of deep suffering and abandonment by God, this became a unique kind of witness-bearing" (Von Rad 1972:18).

Interesting is the personal interaction between prophet and God in times of suffering (cf. Jr 15; Hab). When the prophet unburdens before the One by whom he was sent, he receives answers, though the answers are seldom what he wants to hear.

Von Rad (1972:50) also states that the prophet had a certain freedom in his calling and what it demanded of him, a choice which, when executed,

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means that he has withstood the testing of God. It seems however that it was this very "choice", if choice it indeed be, which caused the prophet the most internal conflict and spiritual turmoil of all. Lindblom (1973:45) captures something of the torment they suffered:

They are servitors of God, runners carrying the letters of a mighty lord, messengers from a great king, mouthpieces by which God seeks, instruments by means of which God acts. To fail or desert would be a crime, but also something that brings its own revenge in both the external and the inner life. It happens that they feel tempted to slip away, but immediately they begin to yield to this temptation they become victims of anguish and agony, pains and torments. Then they turn back, submit to the yoke and begin to walk the ordered way again.

### **6.7 The prophetic message – valid for ever?**

The messages conveyed by the prophets were without question situation-specific. They were meant for that specific moment in time, which usually entailed some kind of crisis on a national scale. They addressed the issues of the days of the prophet and spoke to the people, kings, priests and other contemporary prophets.

However, later generations show no qualms of conscience in using the words of earlier prophets, shaping them and adding to them to make them speak anew in a different time and circumstances.

It seems *sine qua non* to the users thereof that the validity of prophetic utterances should transcend their own time. Moreover Von Rad speaks of a real sense of continuity in this type of 'exegesis' as though God speaks the same words to the same people in different episodes of the same history. He cites as example the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11 being taken up and added to by Paul in his letter to the Romans 15:12 to make it applicable to the world of the Gentiles.

## 6.8 The prophetic message: Divine wrath, divine love

Israel the ingrate, Israel the recalcitrant, Israel the whore, the disobedient - this was what Israel the elect had become; the prophets were not known for their tact. They pointed out that the fact of her election was no mitigating circumstance as they had believed. On the contrary: Time and time again they would take the old divine law out from under the dust-covers where Israel had conveniently stashed it and apply it to the gross social injustices, the economic malpractices, the misappropriation of the cult and Israel's placing faith in her feeble attempts at militarising and strategizing in politics instead of in God.

Judgment would break because they had severed their relationship with God. It would mean destruction and exile and would bring an end to many things, the cult amongst others. "Moreover, the devastating force and finality of the prophetic pronouncement of judgment can never have had a cultic antecedent, for it envisaged the end of all cult itself" (Von Rad 1972:148).

In times when the prophets pronounce the wrath of Yahweh on his people, it is common for them to use the image of God as judge, for example: "The Lord takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people...." (Is 3:13, 14a). However, the love of God for his rebellious child always emerges to overshadow all pronouncements of wrath. Clear as the latter rings fiercely and inexorably from the words of the prophets, clearer still are the breathtakingly tender declarations of divine love that speaks through these servants of Jahweh. God the omnipotent, who whistles for those empires before whom Israel trembles, as though they were flies or bees and they obey, stoops down in pity before his beloved child. Examples abound: Isaiah 30:18-21, 26; Isaiah 35, Isaiah 41:1-16, Isaiah 43:1-7, Zephaniah 3:17-20, Hosea 11:3-5, 8.

The prophets often used the imagery of a father or shepherd to depict God and of a vineyard to depict his people:

- He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.  
(Is 40:11).
- A son honours his father and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me?  
(Ml 1:6a).
- When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.  
(Hs 11:1).
- It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize that it was I who healed them.  
(Hs11:3).
- I myself said. "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation." I thought you would call me "Father" and not turn away from following me.  
(Jr 3:19).
- Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars;  
(Hs 10:1a).

## **6.9 Speaking with divine authority**

The calling of a prophet by God bestows a huge amount of creditability and divine authority upon him. The divine calling is therefore usually reported on in descriptive detail to portray the metamorphic profundity of the experience but also to convey to the prophetic audience the validity and legitimacy of his office.

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Lindblom (1973:46) writes that the prophet obtains an inner certitude of a religio-ethical nature that he is chosen by God to mediate his/her message to men and elected to perform a particular task given him from above. In this case the call is often experienced in a mysterious nature by means of, for example, auditions and visions.

The prophets often "clothed" themselves in the authority of God by adopting the "messenger-formula" (Von Rad 1972:18) in a way reminiscent of the angelic messengers of God. In these instances it is as though the personality of the prophet evacuates his body to allow God to use his body as vessel through which to speak his message.

Lindblom (1973:112, 113) quotes Amos 3:7 when speaking of the prophetic consciousness: "Surely, the Lord Yahweh does nothing without revealing His *sôd*... to His servants the prophets." and adds: "Thus the words of the prophets are words which they have heard directly from Yahweh. So great is the privilege of the true prophets, so high their mission, that Yahweh does nothing at all that He has not first revealed to the prophets."

### **6.10 The prophetic formula**

In the earlier stages of prophecy one might be pardoned for thinking that the emphasis seems to fall on the miraculous deeds of the prophets and that their words and utterances seem to have been of lesser importance seeing that so much of the former and so little of the latter are reported to us. The scarcity of teachings from the mouths of the earlier prophets could however be merely the result of its being lost in the oral transmission thereof.

The revelation received by the prophet often determines the literary form into which the prophetic message is cast: Revelations received in the revelatory state of mind are of various kinds. Nearly all formal stylistic categories occur. We encounter messages communicated in specific situations as well as forms ranging from exhortations, admonitions,

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denunciations and predictions to prayers, poetry, songs of praise and dogmatic expositions. Sometimes thoughts and ideas are revealed, sometimes things are seen or heard. The former experience may be described as an intellectual illumination within the soul, the latter as visual and auditory revelation (Lindblom 1973:36).

Lindblom (1973:42, 43), in distinguishing between different types of revelation, says about a type which he calls "revelatory fancies" or "literary visions": "Revelatory fancies which form a coherent tale and demand to be interpreted in detail may be called 'revelatory allegories'". And we find a parable in the real sense of the word in 2 Samuel 12:1-4.

In the times of prophets like Amos groups of followers / students / disciples attached themselves to prophets and they, or scribes, or the prophets themselves wrote down prophetic utterances. Now the emphasis seems to shift more towards their words than their deeds, although whichever way a prophet chose to express the god-given message is always of the greatest import.

Prophets used whatever literary forms they deemed suitable to their purpose of shocking their audience into awareness and obedience; dirges, popular songs, cultic hymns, salvific oracles and sacrificial prescriptions formerly only heard from the mouths of priests, formulae used exclusively by teachers of wisdom, legal declarations from courts of justice.

All of these were used with no regard whatsoever as to the time-honoured sanctity or the incongruous mixture of sacred and profane. Whatever served the message was employed with callous authority which seemed to say that the prophet as mouth-piece of God transcended previous taboos, authorities and sanctities of Israel's cultic, legal and monarchic institutions.

Von Rad draws attention to the fact that either the prophets themselves or their disciples assembled their oracles and hymns in "divans" (Von Rad 1972:21). He is of the opinion that the possibility of the oracular series of

sayings in Isaiah 5:8-24 being a unit is just as slight as this being the case in Matthew 23:13-34. It has to be an editorial grouping-together of sayings.

### **6.11 Prophet and Spirit**

Lindblom (1973:179) explains the symbiosis between prophet and Spirit as follows:

...the prophet is filled with the spirit or anointed with the spirit.

Two features in the conception of the spirit must be kept in mind: first, the spirit does not come from within the human soul; it comes from outside, surprisingly, wonderfully, impressively -'the spirit fell upon' the prophet; secondly, the spirit was never thought of as an independent power... but always as a power emanating or rather sent from Yahweh.

In 2 Kings 2:9 we read that Elijah grants Elisha one favour before he leaves him. At a request from Elisha he conditionally grants him to receive his share of the *ruach* which would make Elisha his successor when Elijah leaves him. He makes it clear that it is not in his (Elijah's) power to command the spirit but that it is the spirit who makes the choice in the matter of the prophet's successor.

The "Spirit of Yahweh" is a *sine qua non* in the make-up of a prophet, a prerequisite which in later years seemingly faded into obscurity as prophecy evolved into something akin to preaching.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 must surely serve as the classic example of the prophet-spirit-symbiosis, while Ezekiel 8:33 and 11:1,5, amongst many other examples in this book, illustrate how the Spirit of God transported the prophet to where God wanted him and, akin to the word of God, equipped him for the task ahead:

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He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem,...

(Ezk 8:3a)

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and he told me to say: "This is what the Lord says:....

(Ezk 11:5a)

The following passage from Isaiah further illustrates this symbiosis: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...." (Is 61:1). Joel 2:28, 29 tells of things that are expected to come to pass with the arrival of the Day of the Lord; that everyone will receive the spirit - indeed it will be poured out on them - that some will proclaim Yahweh's message, others have dreams, yet others see visions. In Numbers 11:23-30 we read the interesting account of how some of the Spirit of Yahweh was taken away from Moses to be given to the seventy leaders, causing them to " ...shout like prophets." Moses is then said to remark: "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" Testimony not only of the Spirit of God rendering people prophets but also, once again, of prophecy at times being almost too much to bear for the human bent under the weight of the responsibility of this burden, so that he may come to wish that others may bear it for him.

The verses from Isaiah which find their echo in Revelations, pay homage to the workings of the Spirit:

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of council and of power,

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the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord –  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

(Is 11:2, 3a)

### 6.12 “I”

When a prophet used this personal pronoun, it was laden with meaning and implication. His use of this pronoun was also closely related to the indwelling of the Spirit. Spells of "becoming silent", or prayer, or passive meditation, or contemplation before God induced an emptying out of the self and an overwhelming awareness of unity with God. Amidst all the suffering, the awareness of the charisma taking possession of their being seemed to have been intoxicating and exhilarating beyond belief, causing an exuberance of spirit in them and eliciting strangely compulsive behaviour reminiscent of that of an addict. They were aware that it transformed their very being and set them apart from the rest of humanity.

### 6.13 Disciples

The classical prophets seem as a rule to have been surrounded by a group of followers, friends or disciples. These circles of *benê hannebî’im* may have been a continuation of the earlier prophetic guilds. The earlier *benê hannebî’im* were trained mainly in the arts of ecstasy and the delivery of oracles, but in the times of the classical prophets this made way for the training in matters considered to be of more importance for that particular time. They surrounded the prophet to listen to him (Is 50: 4), learn from him and receive instruction in the *da’at Yahweh*. The prophet might choose to share with them what was imparted to him and they were instructed what to do with this knowledge; keep it to themselves perhaps (Is 8:16), or preserve it by memorising it or by writing it down.

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Everything received by the prophet in a form perceived by him to be a revelation was considered to be word of God and thus precious. Moreover it was considered to be not the property of the prophet alone, but of all men. It was of the utmost importance that everything had to be preserved, made known and handed down to later generations.

Oracles were sometimes delivered by the prophets in the form of poetry or dirges which, once heard, were easy to remember, sometimes hard to forget. However lengthy discourses or private and personal instructions or disclosures in the intimacy of the prophetic circle were another matter altogether. The prophet himself sometimes wrote down a divine message, indeed was sometimes instructed to (Is 30:8, Jr 30:2, Hab 2:2), some had a secretary, such as Jeremiah, to write down what was uttered by the prophet, but the disciples of the prophets played an extremely important role in preserving for posterity the words of their masters. They memorized an astounding number of speeches and information so that they might accurately be passed on from generation to generation and Lindblom (1973:159) is of the opinion that a large quantity of the prophetic utterances have been preserved for us in their original form.

#### **6.14 Guardian of God's people**

"I have made you a tester of metals and my people the ore, that you may observe and test their ways." (Jr 6:27) "A prophet, being a man of God, was expected to see through a person, find out his secret sins, and then bring punishment upon him" (Lindblom 1973:61).

Not only did prophets impart visions to the people of God, but it was also seemingly understood that they were to act as guardians over them. Here visions could have been of no avail. Prophets must therefore have had wisdom beyond mere human understanding, a profound insight into human nature, unshaken integrity in matters of wisdom, intellectual and theological versatility enabling them to stand guard over all spheres of life, as well as a

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deeply grounded knowledge of and insight into the laws of God, religious tradition and the history of Israel; in short, men whose proximity to God lent them a totally new way of interacting with people. But apart from having to act as watchman over his people, separating good from evil, "scrutinizing and investigating" and being answerable in all of this to Yahweh if he failed, (Ezk 3:17-27, 33:7-9), Lindblom (1973:204, 205) adds that the prophet also had to intercede for his people with Yahweh. Although the patriarchs counted among the great intercessors of the Old Testament, he says that the prophets are unrivalled in this respect and names them intercessors par excellence. He cites as examples Amos 7:2-6, Hosea 9:14, Isaiah 22:4, 37:4, adding that Isaiah had felt for his people the depth of compassion which had always been a condition for intercession and naming Jeremiah supreme intercessor among the prophets.

The prophets made liberal and frequent use of quotations from tradition in order to illustrate their point and they did this with an ease and dexterity which illustrates keen understanding of their time as well as the extent to which the traditions formed part of their frame of reference. "The frequent quotations which the prophets wove into their utterances and used to characterize their audience and its way of thinking and to hammer home its collective guilt, were one of the fruits of their acute observation of mankind" (Von Rad 1972:55). They did not hesitate to draw caricatures, make sweeping statements and drop all pretence of objectivity in order to expose the evil of the ways of the people.

What was it that they expected from their people, who were first and foremost God's people, God's partners in covenant?

- Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.  
Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord,....

(Is 55:6, 7a)

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- This is what the Lord says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

(Is 56:1, 2)

- And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant...

(Is 56:6)

- But you must return to your God: maintain love and justice and wait for your God always.

(Hs 12:6)

In brief thus a renewed call for the essence of all the old laws to be upheld. The prophetic word, being teachings about the will and nature of God, is also sometimes called "prophetic torah". In this respect the great prophets arrogated to themselves the function of the priests, who were the real custodians of torah and also were regarded by the prophets as authentic transmitters of torah.....In controversy with the priests they accused them of having mismanaged and neglected their important task and yet claimed to be the true imparters of the torah of Yahweh (Lindblom1973:156,157).

Later on it is as though a despondency drops onto the prophets with the realisation that it is impossible for these people to do what God wants them to do. In Isaiah 32:15,16 it seems that the Spirit is seen as prerequisite for justice and righteousness to live among his people: "...till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Justice will dwell in the desert and

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righteousness live in the fertile field.”

## 6.15 Aspects of the phenomenon “prophecy”

### 6.15.1 Eschatology

“Eschatology” in the sense of the study of all pertaining to the strict sense of the *eschaton* as the end of history, the world and mankind as we know it, is absent in Old Testament prophecy. If one wishes to apply the term to the teaching of the prophets, it must be done in an adapted sense, taking into account the general character of their thought instead of indiscriminately seeking eschatological traits in the nature of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic.

This would include the idea of the two ages – “this age” and “the age to come” - instead of the end of all things. Prophetic expressions such as the typical “on that day” and “at the end of the days” do not refer to the passing away of this world and the creation of a new one, but rather to a time when the existing would undergo a transformation so complete that in all appearance a new epoch seems to have dawned. In this sense can one speak of an eschatological dimension in the teachings of the prophets of the Old Testament, providing one bears in mind that normal historical events may also be described as of such portent that they simulate events of an eschatological nature.

Lindblom (1973:362) distinguishes between a “positive” eschatology, which speaks of the new age which would dawn, a “negative” eschatology which speaks only of the end, a “national” one referring to the whole Israelite nation, a “universal” one referring to all of mankind, one of salvation (*Heilseschatologie*) and one of misfortune (*Unheilseschatologie*).

But even when “eschatology” is awarded this broader scope of meaning it isn’t as essential a part of prophecy as has often been surmised. The prophets were first and foremost emissaries with messages for their own

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time, calling their people to repentance and denouncing their sins. Certain characteristic traits within the prophetic utterances such as the typical oracular style with its “elements of obscurity and mysteriousness” may have given rise to the exaggerated importance attached to eschatology in prophecy (see Lindblom 1973:362, 363).

The element of eschatology which is present and even characteristic contributes to the urgency of the prophetic message. Israel had for long been resting on their laurels as having been God's chosen people and thus escaping his wrath. Although they had drifted away from Yahweh through passive negligence and even actively turned their backs on the God of the covenant, they still looked toward the old saving institutions which reminded them that they were the invincible people of the covenant and lulled them into a false sense of security.

When the prophets came to the people of Israel as messengers of the Divine, they still stood within the Israelite election traditions (Hosea e.g. within the Exodus-election tradition, Isaiah within the David-Zion tradition) but they introduced through their messages a trademark element; something totally unique and hitherto unknown. For the prophets did not merely look towards the past to remind them of the covenant and their God's saving acts in history and to exhort them on these grounds to return to God and all would be well. On the contrary - they reminded Israel of the scorn and disdain with which they had treated both covenant and Yahweh and uprooted all false securities by proclaiming God's wrath and judgment not over the *gojim*, but over his people. They foretold the day of Yahweh which would bring with it an act of destruction of cosmic import (e.g. Zph 1:14-18). This day would signify an amputation from all that went before, a complete break with the savings traditions of the past and the festering, cangrenous limb that the people of the covenant, Israel the elect, had become.

One could almost speak of a post-election state so complete was the break that God announced through his servants the prophets. This was the first

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act of the eschatological drama that the prophets outlined to what must have been a profoundly shocked, even disbelieving people. Then would dawn the day of the Lord when Yahweh would enter into battle with cosmic consequences. Of this day Amos says:

Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.

(Am 5:18)

In Joel we read:

Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

(Jl 1:15)

and:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

(Jl 2:1, 2a)

and in Jeremiah:

How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.

(Jr 30:7)

The second act of this drama would be when Yahweh created an existence so new that nothing that went before could have hinted at it:

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Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

(Is 65:17, 18. See also 19-25)

Von Rad (1972:91) aptly describes this “day of the Lord”: “It is as if Israel and all her religious assets are thrown back to a point of vacuum, a vacuum which the prophets must first create by preaching judgment and sweeping away all false security and then fill with their message of the new thing”. Von Rad here also points out that although there would be no continuum with the era they pronounced as having come to an end, there would be certain similarities: Hosiah announced how the new elect would enter into a promised land, Isaiah announced a new David and a new Zion, Jeremiah a new covenant and Deutero-Isaiah a new exodus. Because the break with the past was so complete, God had to re-enact his former deeds.

With the institutions of the old era becoming increasingly obsolete and devoid of the salvific powers ascribed to them by a people who had lost all contact with the God to whom they pointed, Israel would have to brace themselves to let go their superstitious hold on these and take a leap in faith to the salvation offered in the future action of God. Through this action God would be known not only as the God of Israel, but of the whole world.

There are also widespread prophetic rumours of the “Day of Yahweh” which, according to widespread expectation would bring war in its train. This seems to suggest a concept firmly rooted in eschatological tradition, but in actual fact this term is also applied to past events. It seems to be the case that this term is in no way eschatological by nature, but rather part of the firm grounding of the prophets in the old Yahwist tradition.

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However, in the opinion of Von Rad (1972:99), the prophets also believed that Yahweh's final uprising against his foes would take the same form as it had done in the days of old. He believes it to be beyond question that the prophetic vision of the concept of Yahweh's intervention in war became greatly intensified. For this war would leave no nation, not even Israel herself, nor yet the fixed orders of creation unscathed. Von Rad (1972:99) reports on the universal proportions this coming day has assumed and on how the event has been expanded into a phenomenon of cosmic significance.

### **6.15.2 Wisdom**

A much less discernible trait in prophecy is wisdom in its formal, structured nature. The essence of wisdom – the fear of God – underlies all the prophetic teachings, but mere remnants of the formal teachings of the old Wisdom schools are to be found. In Amos 7:7-9 in the vision of the plumb-line, the question and the prophet's answer form a stylised feature which is repeated in the vision of the basket of ripe fruit in Amos 8, as well as in three visions in Jeremiah (Jr 1; 24:1-3) and one in Zechariah 5:1, 2.

Lindblom (1973:126) finds this reminiscent of the didactic practices in the old schools of wisdom "...where we can suppose the teacher to have been in the habit of pointing to an object in nature and connecting it with his instruction about spiritual matters in order to illustrate and elucidate them."

Traces of the ideologies and terminology used by the Wisdom school is also to be found in Jeremiah. In for instance Jeremiah 17:5-8, 9, 10, 11 the images of a tree planted by the water as symbol of the righteous man, the deceitful heart and the partridge are suggestive of the Wisdom teachings. Similarly the typical wisdom phrase "receive correction" (*lakah musar*) appears frequently in the Book of Jeremiah. "The fact that reminiscences of Wisdom are spread over the whole book suggests that Jeremiah himself as well as his disciples had special connections with the Wisdom school" (Lindblom 1973:238).

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If the conclusion to the Book of Hosea was not the work of a later copyist it is possible that the final redactor belonged to the Wisdom circles: “Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them” (Hs 14:9).

This seems to imply that, over and above the general grounding of the prophets in matters of wisdom albeit less than in that of the law, certain prophets, to a much greater extent than the others, show definite strains of influencing by the thoughts and terminologies of the schools of Wisdom.

### **6.16 Venturing outside of theology: Sociology**

In 1913 William Foxwell Albright (in Long 1996:153,154) writes to his mother of his new discovery that biblical criticism is intimately linked to the social gospel or “new Social Movement”. The key to this insight, according to Albright, is the hermeneutical construal of the biblical prophets. He sees, on the one hand, the conservative who view the prophets as merely religious preachers, leaving no room for social reform. But on the other hand there are those, with whom he avidly aligns himself, who see the prophets as primarily social reformers whose inspired and ardent words had been smothered under blankets of eschatology, optimism and other such things. But he believed that the prophets had tackled social injustice with ungloved hands in remorseless logic and “bolts.”

Bainbridge writes from a sociological perspective that a religious movement is an organized attempt by a number of people to cause or prevent change in a religious organization or in religious aspects of life - they are collective human attempts to create or to block change (Bainbridge 1997:3). Both of these possibilities fit in with what Jesus set about to accomplish and form a suitable introduction to a foray into what light sociology might cast on the life and work of Jesus.

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Max Weber connects charismatic authority particularly with the kind of people he calls prophets and defines a prophet as a person who binds his followers into a personal allegiance to himself as bearer of some mission or new revelation. Dorothy Emmet (in Petersen 1987:14) warns however, that this definition is restrictive and indicative rather of messianic or millenarian preachers or religious revolutionaries than prophets, and that it excludes many who are generally known as prophets, for instance the Hebrew prophets.

When Weber, a sociologist, holds up the mirror of his discipline to reflect the phenomenon of prophecy, it reveals a wide range of figures from various religions and cultures, all meeting the requirements that sociology sets for someone to qualify as prophet.

One of these prophetic figures is Jesus. His definition of “prophet” is as follows: “...a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment” (Weber 1966:46). He claims authority on the grounds of personal revelation and charisma and exerts his power through his personal gifts. They are often skilled in divination, magical healing and counselling and render their services unremunerated. At the heart of his mission lies doctrine or commandment and in the case of Hebrew prophecy, a unique concern for social reform with religion at its root. Weber (1966:51) maintains, however, that

...their primary concern was with foreign politics, chiefly because it constituted the theatre of their god's activity. The Israelite prophets were concerned with social and other types of injustice as a violation of the Mosaic code primarily in order to explain god's wrath, and not in order to institute a program of social reform....Finally, Jesus was not at all interested in social reform as such.

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He ascribes the distinctive character of prophecy to "...the pressure of relatively contiguous great centers of rigid social organization upon less developed neighboring peoples. The latter tended to see in their own continuous peril from the bellicosity of terrible nations the anger and grace of a heavenly king" (Weber 1966:58). Thus the release of Israel from bondage in Egypt and their subsequent establishment of a secular monarchy had been declared a declension from Yahweh, their true monarch. In this way the great political powers and kings of the day in Hebrew prophecy first became rods of God's wrath on Israel to destroy them and subsequently, as the direct result of divine intervention on their behalf, release Israel from exile to return to their land.

The figure of the prophet has times of marked association with the teacher of ethics who, having been endowed with a new or revived understanding of ancient wisdom, has gathered around his person a group of disciples who regard him as revered master and with whom he shares an uncommonly strong bond, while he gives counselling on matters private and public and moulds ethical ways of life. Similarly, if the mission of the prophet meets with success, will he win permanent helpers called apostles, disciples or followers as their "personal devotees"?

Weber (1966:55) distinguishes two types of prophets, namely "ethical prophets" who, "[P]reaching as one who has received a commission from god, ...demands obedience as an ethical duty" and the "exemplary prophet" who demonstrates the way to religious salvation by means of personal example. But regardless which type of prophet, Weber (1966:58,59) says that

...prophetic revelation involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers ...a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be

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 oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern.

It was, according to him, common for tension to exist between prophets and the representatives of the priestly tradition. “To what degree the prophet would succeed in fulfilling his mission, or would become a martyr, depended on the outcome of the struggle for power, which in some instances, e.g., in Israel, was determined by the international situation” (Weber 1966:66).

He writes that all the prophets put to good use the prestige of their prophetic charisma among the laity as opposed to the charisma held by the “technicians of the routine cults” (Weber 1966:66). To the priesthood it fell to codify either the victorious new doctrine or the old one which had prevailed despite the attack by the new one and this produced canonical writings – the revelations and traditions themselves - and dogmas – the priestly interpretations of their meaning. Collections of prophetic religious revelations may be oral or scriptural in nature and in the end usually closes sacred collections against secular or unwelcome additions from groups competing with the prophet to gain a majority following among members of the community. In this process a decline or petrifaction of the original prophecy is unavoidable.

Two influences, namely the power of the prophetic charisma and the hyperbolic tendencies of the masses, influenced the work of the priests in their systematisation. Weber (1966:78, 79) writes:

The prophet himself is normally a righteous lay preacher of sovereign independence whose aim is to supplant the traditional ritualistic religious grace of the ecclesiastical type by organizing life on the basis of ultimate ethical principles. The laity’s acceptance of the prophet, however, is generally based on the fact that he possesses a certain charisma. This usually means that he is a magician, in fact much greater and more

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powerful than other magicians, and indeed that he possesses unsurpassed power over demons and even over death itself. It usually means that he has the power to raise the dead, and possibly that he himself may rise from the grave. In short, he is able to do things which other magicians are unable to accomplish. It does not matter that the prophet attempts to deny such imputed powers, for after his death this development proceeds without and beyond him. If he is to continue to live on in some manner among large numbers of the laity, he must himself become the object of a cult, which means he must become the incarnation of a god.

Thus a sociological phenomenon develops around a charismatic figure such as a prophet much like a pebble tossed into a pond, creating ever widening circles; first giving rise to a charismatic movement which later solidifies into an institutional church. The teachings of the charismatic figure is experienced and received by his followers, solidified in tradition, interpreted and codified.

Malina (1984:55-62) first puts Weber's charismatic leader under the spotlight. Weber (in Malina (1984:56) has endowed him with the type of charisma which entails a quality of extraordinariness which is ascribed to and consequently recognized in this person by a collectivity of people sharing "an emotional form of communal relationship" (Weber, in Malina 1984:56).

Next Malina (1984:56) dissects Weber's definition and use of the term "leadership": "Leadership is dependent upon an achievement on behalf of a group in need of some quality, activity or object at a given time and place." This means that "leadership" becomes a sort of crisis management, a role dependent upon a set of variables, not least of these being the need of a specific group, rather than a quality inherent in the individual. Malina (1984:56) sums up the Weberian charismatic leader: "[A] great man of authoritarian bent who is dedicated exclusively to radical change on the

basis of his own personal virtuosity...in a situation of social crisis, especially one of political and/or normative vacuum.

When Malina (1984:61) examines the life and role of Jesus as possible charismatic leader, he finds a “first century reputational, legitimate leader and the very antithesis of Weber’s charismatic leader.” Malina (1984:56) expresses the opinion that the initial phase of Jesus’ career as Jewish symbol was “role based” – the “excited expressions of honor” elicited by Jesus preceded any claims to power on his part and therefore Malina assumes that any successful healer and teacher would have been venerated as Jesus was. But, writes Malina (1984:61), it does not remain a “role based” career: “Jesus’ honorable ‘passive’ role in interacting with people, his ‘disinterestedness’ in power, and his inevitable accumulation of honor stand out all the more clearly. In this sense the second phase of Jesus’ veneration was ‘performance based,’ and significantly, God’s performance with Jesus passive.”

Malina (1984:61) sets Jesus as embodiment of a great reputational, legitimate leader, who affirms the traditional values and structures of his society by repudiating personal power, over against Weber’s charismatic leader who, according to Malina (1984:61), “exudes confidence in his extraordinary abilities, thrives on power and glorification and, lacking ties to the established social order, seeks to effect its radical change.”

Thus Jesus, according to Malina, had been the great, reputational leader. In antithesis, according to Weber, he had been the charismatic at the centre of the sociological phenomenon of the type of movement which develops around such a leader and in the Gospel of Mark we have an early phase of the interpretative phase of memories being transformed into tradition. In the latter option he is already interpreted as having been a prophet, but this need not be the case. Had Jesus in actual fact been a prophet or had he been remembered and interpreted in this way while in reality being a visionary of a different kind?

## 6.17 Spirit persons

Geza Vermes, in a quote from the Berakoth in the Babylonian Talmud, tells of a miraculous deed by Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, a compatriot of Jesus:

When a boy fell ill, he was summoned to pray for the boy. He duly arrived, went to the upper room and prayed for the boy. When he came down again he told the gathering that they may go, because the fever had left the boy. When they asked him whether he was a prophet, he replied: “I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet’s son, but this is how I am blessed: if my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that the sick man is favoured; if not, I know that the disease is fatal” (*bBer34b*, in Vermes 2003:7).

This answer of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa gives rise to the question that if he, who through his miraculous act of healing had immediately been perceived by the crowd to have been a prophet, denied being one, as what else may he then be classified? Reputed to have been a healer and sufficiently renowned for this reputation to be immediately summoned in the case of illness, he was clearly endowed with the spiritual gift of healing. Were other categories of spirit-endowed people in existence and if so, what were they?

Marcus Borg calls Hanina ben Dosa one of the best-known “spirit persons” at the time of Jesus (Borg [1994:42, 43]). The conclusions reached by Borg on “Spirit persons” seem to supply answers to questions such as these. He writes that, in the time of Jesus, a number of Jewish “holy men” or “Spirit persons” made their appearance. “Spirit persons” or visionaries such as these had been, are in touch with and communicate intimately with “the holy” or “the sacred” through means such as prayer and fasting, so that they experience temporarily an altered state of consciousness. These may take on different forms: There may be the experience of entering into a different dimension of reality (this is the typical shamanistic experience). Alternatively, as is expressed in the words: “The Spirit came over me” there is the experience of being overcome by an out-of-the-ordinary reality. There may be the experience of nature or something in nature changing shape to allow “the holy” to radiate through it. Or the person might even be

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transported spatially by the Spirit. “Mystics, as I use the term, are people who have decisive and typically frequent firsthand religious experiences of the sacred” (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:60).

William James (1902:380, 381) describes four defining characteristics of mystical experiences, of which the first two are more marked:

- *Ineffability*: These experiences defy expression and the subject has to resort to metaphor in order to describe it.
- *Noetic quality*: Borg follows James in emphasizing that the visionaries are more than mere conductors of divine power; they experience “states of knowing” of the primordial power. “They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time” (James 1902:380, 381).
- *Transciency*: These experiences cannot be sustained for long, half an hour to at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit.
- *Passivity*: Spiritual practices may help achieve them, but they are beyond the control of the subject - “...the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance” (James 1902:381).

Borg (1998:88) adds to these that the experience transforms the being and seeing of the mystic. He sees the world as if bathed in the radiant presence of God, he is free from conventional anxieties and inhibitions and he is able to relate to the world in great compassion. So intimate is this communion that it is as though the borders between the own being and God disappear and the two merge indistinguishably. Because of this direct relationship it is as though they conduct power from this sacred world into the mundane by means such as miracles, and especially healings and exorcisms. As a result of the communion they experience with the sacred, they are

endowed with power and speak with authority and a numinous presence when acting as mediators for “the holy” and as delegates for the tribe.

Essential to a Spirit person’s experience is the “breaking of plane,” frequently expressed as movement in a vertical direction. This involves both alteration of consciousness and movement in a new dimension, often symbolized by a “celestial pole” which permits mystical ascent to the heavens. As such, a Spirit person’s experience is one form of mystical experience, a union or communion with God, or even with “god beyond god,” i.e., with Reality-Itself, that which lies behind all conceptualizations, including all conceptions of God. Those who have such experiences speak of them as ineffable, incapable of being described precisely, for the experience is beyond thought....

(Borg 1998:240)

Borg distinguishes between visionary experiences with “eyes closed” and with “eyes open”. “Eyes closed” mystical states, also referred to as introvertive mysticism, involves a deep sense of communion with “the holy” and often occurs in states of deep meditation or contemplation. In “eyes open” visionary experiences or extroverted mysticism the person sees what everybody else does, but everything looks different, exquisite, luminous, suffused with light. “Moreover, the boundary between self and world, which defines our ordinary subject-object state of consciousness, becomes soft, indeed, less pronounced than a deep sense of connectedness and reunion” (Borg & Wright 1999:61). A quality they all seem to share is that they form some kind of portal or channel through which the power or wisdom of God may enter the world (Borg 1994:48).

All of this he feels justified in applying to Jesus, saying that the most crucial fact about Jesus is that he was a “spirit person”, a mediator for the holy, one of the people in the history of mankind for whom the Spirit had been an experiential reality (Borg 1994:46, 47) and if he had to describe Jesus with

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as much brevity as possible, the term “Jewish mystic” would comprise half of that description (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:53).

In applying this term to Jesus, Borg identifies five facets of Jewish mysticism that could all be applied to Jesus, namely that of Spirit person, healer and exorcist, wisdom teacher or sage, social prophet and movement initiator. He adds that in his understanding, these terms all apply to the pre-Easter Jesus. The following is a brief description of what he understands to be the identifying traits of these five subdivisions of Jewish mysticism:

- About the term “Spirit person” enough has already been said. In my understanding of Borg’s theory, he sees being a Spirit person as a prerequisite for the other facets.
- Not all Spirit persons become healers and exorcists but some channel the power of God by means of healing or exorcism (Borg 1994:48).
- A sage, or teacher of wisdom was an important feature in traditional cultures. There are two categories of sages:
  - Teachers of conventional wisdom hand on received traditions or conventions of a community or group, maybe elaborating on it here and there.
  - Teachers of alternative or subversive wisdom, grounded in their personal experience of the sacred and challenging the conventional wisdom of their day.
- “The type is most clearly found in the social prophets of ancient Israel. They were known for their direct experience of the sacred and for their radical critique of the social-political order. They were God-intoxicated advocates of social justice....Those who know the immediacy of God are typically on the side of the marginalized” (Borg & Wright 1999:71).

- The movement initiator brought about a movement of renewal or revival, challenging and overstepping the social boundaries of their time.

Among all five these categories of “Spirit Persons” a vast number of scholars choose that of the prophet to typify Jesus. Why do they choose this category? If not all visionaries were prophets, is it possible that Jesus might have been another type of charismatic figure and what, in the behaviour and words of Jesus, allowed people to classify him as prophet? When did this interpretation take place? The source generally taken to represent our earliest available and extant Jesus-material, the Gospel of Mark, already seems to portray him as prophet. What kind of Spirit person could the pre-Easter visionary Jesus, the Jesus behind the Gospel of Mark have been?

On the surface there seems to have been so many similarities between Jesus and the traditional role of the prophet that it is easy to understand why he had been so interpreted. If, furthermore, people had been expecting a prophet to come in some kind of salvific role, the public meaning of those harbouring the expectation could easily have wanted to see Jesus in the role of this long-awaited prophet. A look at the different types of prophets, true and false, as well as at the expectations of the people in the time of Jesus might aid us in answering these questions and in trying to determine whether Jesus displayed some or all of the characteristics which might classify him as prophet.

### **6.18 Prophets: Messengers from God or Ventriloquists for kings?**

The researcher reading the writings of Josephus can have little doubt in his mind that prophecy was a phenomenon to be found among the Israelites at the time of Jesus. For the study of this phenomenon it is important to distinguish between the different types of prophets who operated at the time, to understand something of the reactions their various messages met

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with and to know what kind of prophet was expected by the people and which were seen as the true and which the false messengers of God.

Like many other scholars, Horsley and Hanson (1985:135) deduce from the evidence available to them that Jesus was perceived to have been a prophet and they refer to Mark 6:15-16 as evidence. Several reports by Josephus, whom they dub a hostile witness, lead them further to conclude that Jesus had not been the only prophetic figure of his time but that a number of figures fitting the prophetic mould made their appearance among the people round about that time. Even given the animosity of Josephus as witness and the fragmentary nature of other sources, one may safely assume that they could be divided into two distinct groups: "The principal function of the one, the oracular prophet, was to pronounce the impending judgment or redemption by God. The characteristic feature of the other, the action prophet, was to inspire and lead a popular movement to vigorous participation in an anticipated redemptive action by God" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:135).

Van Aarde (1994:149) adds to the description of the latter type that they moreover envisioned participating in and contributing to God's coming judgment to be executed on the unjust.

Both of these prophetic types as social forms are distinctive to Jewish society. To understand why prophecy diverged into separate types and how prophetic prototypes from biblical history, as well as the continuation of prophetic traditions in the postexilic period may have influenced popular prophets and prophetic movements in the time of Jesus, it would therefore be helpful to study "...the distinctively Jewish historical traditions out of which they responded to their situation" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:136). So Horsley and Hanson suspect that the oracular contemporaries of Jesus who went about announcing either judgment or redemption through their prophecies, perpetuated the archetype for this form of prophecy established by prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, prophets featured in the Israelite traditions which were reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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Likewise the activist prophets expecting God's new redemptive intervention were at the very least familiar with the great liberation movements of old, led by Moses, Joshua and the judges, alive in the memories of the people they led and their descendants. The two authors even speculate that they may be a revival of older prophetic movements such as those of Elijah and Elisha.

A distinctive feature of Ancient Israel was their lack of a secular government institution and their adherence to the covenant of Yahweh as their only governing and cohesive element. Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:137) qualifies: "For the independent Israelites, Yahweh was their true and only king. All of them, individually and collectively, were directly responsible to God as servants of the divine King."

But in times of political crisis "the Spirit of Yahweh" would take hold of certain charismatic leaders who would exhort Israel to revive their Yahwism and would summon the peasant militia. To the people of Israel Yahweh Himself seemed to be acting on their behalf, liberating them and defending their liberty, through the responses of these leaders to times of crisis. They were known as "*shofetim*" (judges) and combined the offices of being God's messenger announcing what action Yahweh would be taking (messenger) and of being the leader of the people of God following God's chosen course of action in obedience to defuse a crisis through religio-political intervention (action). Their authority was situation-bound and not hereditary and several examples of these *shofetim* are to be found in the book of Judges and during the 200+ years of Israel's existence prior to the rise of the monarchy. The most prominent examples of these movements within biblical tradition were of course Moses and Joshua who, through their visions and direct communication of God's will in liberation of and conquests on behalf of Israel, became prototypes for the rest. Horsley and Hanson (1985:138) remind their readers of the declaration of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

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It was the rise of the monarchy that split up the prophetic offices. Samuel was the last charismatic *shofet* to combine the offices of messenger for the divine, and political and military leader. The king now assumed military and political leadership and Nathan the prophet, for instance, was messenger of Yahweh only. By the time the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries such as Amos, Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah came into office, the prophet's sole function was that of messenger conveying to the people the word of Yahweh in oracular form.

Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:138, 139) writes, however, that the covenantal traditions and social forms of early Israel were not immediately and completely suppressed by the monarchy. “The biblical narratives about Elijah and his successor Elisha are proof that prophets as both messengers and leaders of movements continued long into the monarchical period of the northern kingdom of Israel, if not in the kingdom of Judah” (Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1985:138,139).

After standing in Yahweh’s heavenly council, these prophets were sent to deliver oracles to the people and their king, conveying the will of God. Often, such as in the cases of Elijah and Elisha, they had the unenviable task of pronouncing judgment and sentence on king and court for breach of covenant, mostly the result of having been swayed in their loyalty to Yahweh by foreign cultural and religious influences. The kings of Israel and Judah were infamous for the way in which they flouted the will of Yahweh and their recalcitrance led to popular prophetic resistance movements aiming to restore a monarchy which ruled according to the will of Yahweh and to purge Israel of the existing one.

Even though by now the monarchy provided both institutionalised government and political-military leadership, from time to time some prophets still acted as “leaders” of these resistance movements “with a popular social base and a distinctive social form” (Horsley & Hanson 1985:140). There were prophetic groups or guilds or “sons of the prophets” living in or around major towns such as Gilgal and Jericho under the

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leadership of a prominent figure such as Elijah or Elisha. In the time of these two prophets the prophetic guilds had developed into popular movements. These movements opposed the monarchy which had become oppressive and regularly violated the Mosaic covenant, killing and persecuting the prophets of Yahweh and supplanting them with the prophets of Baal in the case of Ahab and Jezebel. In these troubled times symbolic prophetic acts are reminiscent of earlier times of liberation under leadership of Moses and Joshua. So, to name one example, does Elijah withdraw into the wilderness to Mount Sinai-Horeb, the mountain of revelation, where he is strengthened and receives "...a prophetic commission to return to his people as agent of revolution against an oppressive regime" (Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1985:140):

At the time of Elijah and Elisha, however, the prophets also performed one of the traditional functions of the judge (*shophet*) in communicating Yahweh's redemptive action, his protection of his people against foreign invasion and domination....An important component of such prophecy was the vision of Yahweh's heavenly armies.

(Horsley & Hanson 1985:139)

So strong was the revolutionary element in the prophecy at this time that their actions culminated in overt revolution led by Jehu who, as military commander, was later anointed new king by the prophets.

Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:141) reports:

What began as a movement led by the prophets gave rise to a popular messianic movement led by the prophetically anointed Jehu. However, it is significant that it was not the new messiah Jehu but Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12) and Elisha (2 Kings 13:14) who were associated closely with the heavenly armies and the great saving acts by which Yahweh liberated his people anew.

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The abovementioned oracular prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries whose oracles are found in the Bible, were the messengers of Yahweh and his covenant, interpreting the significance of the actions of Yahweh, but not gathering or leading groups or movements. They were also the spokespersons for the peasantry and the socio-economic covenantal decrees which protected their interests and were therefore well-versed in the Mosaic covenant which, as in the days of the *shofetim*, continued to "...inform and determine social relations among the peasantry..." Horsley and Hanson describe their utterances as "...fragments of 'covenant lawsuits'" with Yahweh residing as both prosecutor and judge, accusing and sentencing people and kings for their breach of covenant (Horsley & Hanson 1985:141, 142). Failure to maintain the egalitarian economic and social relations, justice and trust demanded by the covenant and blatant exploitation of the poor and weak by the powerful were rife. The prophets were compelled to oppose the ruling classes and pronounce judgment over their people and the monarchs. Their oracles of punishment and judgment were often accompanied by desperate pleas for a change of heart and dramatic, attention-grabbing symbolic actions by which they, according to their own point of view, conveyed Yahweh's continuous attempts to redeem and care for his people, just as He had liberated them from slavery in Egypt.

The brunt of the judgment was mostly intended for Jerusalem, the temple (Zion) and the expensive military forces, and for kings, princes, priests, the wealthy and the "powerful", with utterances of judgment escalating in vehemence towards the end of the classical prophetic period. One can't feign surprise, therefore, at the animosity, hatred even, for and suppression and persecution of the prophets by kings and ruling parties. But covenantal digressions by the ruling classes did not spell hopelessness for the future of the people in a cause-effect relationship and even when judgment is announced over the former, the latter would still be protected by God in, for example, a military siege.

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There is little information to be found on the social status of these prophets. That they were not professional court or cultic prophets is certain and their heated defence of the common against exploitation by the privileged, gives rise to the suspicion that they were probably themselves peasants and at the very least spokespersons for the peasantry.

There were, on the other hand, also professional prophets who were attached to the court or temple cult without any apparent base among the people and they were known to pronounce oracles of salvation and victory for king, capital city and temple. The authors warn, however, that the paucity of oracles of salvation among the classical prophets did not mean that all favourable prophecy should be regarded as false, but that the criterion for discerning between true and false prophecy should be whether it offers a covenantal interpretation of socio-economic conditions and political and military events. Admittedly this would tip the scales of veracity towards the popular prophets rather than the official cult or court prophets.

When Israel was defeated and exiled by their enemies and Jerusalem and its temple laid waste, it did not spell the end of prophecy but rather confirmed and underlined the oracles of judgment which had been uttered by pre-exilic prophets. The need arose among God's people for an interpretation of the new situation in which they found themselves; had Yahweh deserted them or was He still their covenant God? There simultaneously arose an expectation of a figure who would liberate them, but with the failure of the monarchy, people looked to a prophetic rather than a kingly figure as the means of their salvation.

During the exilic period there seems to have been no actual prophetic movement, but the authors mean that this might be ascribed to the extreme lack of evidence for this period in general. But during this period the biblical narratives such as the Priestly edition of Moses and the Deuteronomic history (from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings) were given their final form and this ensured that Yahweh's great acts of salvation, such as the exodus (which to a great extent had become the symbolic prototype of purification,

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renewal and God's renewed acts of redemption), the trek through the wilderness and the conquest of the holy land and the holy wars under leadership of the judges, lived on in the memory of the Judean society from the Persian period onward. Moses seems to be depicted herein as the prophetic prototype of a future leader who was to become messenger of Yahweh and would liberate his people. These memories spoke of Yahweh's care for the people in the past, reminded them that He had given them freedom and a land of their own and once again exhorted the people of Yahweh to make loyalty to the covenant the basis of their lives. In the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE these memories had become the roots of a national anticipation of God's acts of liberation in the future and "...a fundamental pattern of Judean historical-eschatological thinking" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:150, 151). On the topic of this historical-eschatological thinking pattern, Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:151) gives what he calls a "significant illustration of this pattern", namely the familiar opening oracle of Second Isaiah, "in the wilderness prepare the way of Yahweh" (Is 40:3-5). He reveals that this text which became a focal point for the "Essene exodus to the wilderness at Qumran, as well as for the early Christian understanding of the role of John the Baptist" (Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1985:151).

In this period, covenantal traditions and Mosaic law was once again impressed upon the hearts and minds of the people in the "reforms" under Ezra and subsequent generations of official scribes. Furthermore, prophets were needed to interpret the altered circumstances of the people of God under foreign dominion from Yahweh's point of view for the people and the prophetic lore of the activity of prophets that stepped into these postexilic times up to late second temple times, offer much of importance in the way of prototypes for the two types of prophets functioning in the time of Jesus. Ancient rabbi's and scribes from at least the first century C.E. had professed that true prophecy had ceased with Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Josephus, Pharisee and historian had shared this view and so had the emerging "canonical" thinking regarding which prophetic books were to be included in the Hebrew Bible.

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This gave rise to speculation that the vacuum left by the absence of prophecy was filled by expectations of an eschatological prophet who would appear at the end of time and apocalyptic visions of judgment and salvation. Apocalyptic visions and visionary literature appear to have sprung out of traditional Israelite prophecy and to have been a development of the classical prophetic experience and had as common breeding ground extreme social-historical circumstances which were addressed by the prophets in announcing that Yahweh still cared for and acted on behalf of the just in these times, just as He had in the past. On the basis of this prophetic conviction arose the action prophets and the oracular prophets of the first century. These prophetic types seem to have been a new development in Jewish community life at the time of Jesus given the fact that hardly any prophetic activity, of this kind in any case, was to be found among the Pharisees or Essenes.

According to Horsley and Hanson, however, the line of oracular prophets had continued unbroken. In the post-exilic crisis the oracles of the classical prophets was collected and adapted by their loyal disciples or prophetic schools. But this was not the total extent of prophecy in this time. Some postexilic prophets continued to attach themselves to the restored temple while others were more popularly based and independent of, if not in direct opposition to, the newly established order. Of the latter we know little, records having been kept by respectable scribal circles which would blanch at reporting on these disreputable figures. They were branded as rustics, despised and refused recognition as prophets but ironically stood more directly in the line of prophets such as Elijah and Micah than their respectable contemporaries. The popular prophets in their turn ridiculed the other prophets as seen in Zechariah 13:2-6 where there is referred to spiritually inspired prophets in their hairy mantles in a derogatory fashion. Although oracles of judgment continued unabated, they did not form the majority, but took second place to oracles of liberation, comfort and new redemption called for by the situation. A messenger was needed to convey the will of God, perhaps re-establish God's rule in the community. It is therefore, as remarked earlier, not surprising that hope veered away from a

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royal figure with the destruction of the monarchy while some hope settled on a prophetic messenger as harbinger of judgment and restoration on the grounds of Yahweh's promise to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."

Despite this and a few other references, little evidence exists that expectations of an eschatological prophet featured very prominently in Jewish society prior to the time of Jesus.

There seems to have been considerable prophetic activity, mainly the interpretation of traditional biblical prophecies, in the late second temple period based on material from the literate groups but hardly any evidence exists of significant expectation of either a prophetic figure or deliverer that fits the mould of the oracular or action types of the prophets of biblical traditions.

Essene prophets mentioned by Josephus were seers who made predictions and neither led any movements nor delivered any oracles. This said, however, Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:157) indicates the importance for the current research of examining, at close quarters,

...the origin of the group itself – a type of exodus to the wilderness – may be significant for our survey of prophetic movements. It may be argued that Qumran provides the first instance of a prophetic movement since Elijah-Elisha and the "sons of the prophets". One might even claim that the Essenes constitute a prophetic movement among the literate strata nearly 200 years prior to the emergence of such movements among the Jewish peasantry....Qumran does show, however, that the typological pattern of interpretation and action – as was God's great act of deliverance in the past, so will be the great new act of deliverance – was very much alive in Jewish society at the time. It also indicates that the memory of the older tradition of liberating movements led by a Moses or a

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Joshua was still vital among the people, even if there apparently had been no prophetic movements since Elijah-Elisha.

In Jesus' time, though few among the peasantry would have been able to read the Scripture, traditions and traditional forms were very much alive among them, and although they were far more spontaneous in their experience of the Spirit and far less restricted by scriptural tradition in their prophetic activities, this spontaneous popular prophecy was by no means formless. "Indeed, during the first century C.E. the memory of ancient prophetic movements of liberation informed new prophetic movements, and traditional oracular prophecy was revived among the people" (Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1985:160). Prophecy was more than just the fulfilment of an expectation – it was prophecy in the very essence of the word and in the time of Jesus continued and revived the two types of popular prophecy known from biblical history as the principal traditional prophetic forms.

From the time of Jesus "...there is plenty of evidence that a strong apocalyptic mood pervaded the society during this period of acute distress and tension" (Horsley, in Horsley & Hanson 1985:171). Josephus is hostile witness to the fact that action prophets of the time led movements of peasants in symbolic and active anticipation of God's acts of salvation, often into the wilderness where it was alleged that God would reveal to them signs of imminent liberation and where signs and wonders according to divine plan would be manifested. These actions had a distinct apocalyptic flavour; prophets and their followers believing that they "...were about to participate in the divine transformation of a world gone awry into a society of justice, willed and ruled by God" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:161). Large numbers of people abandoned their day- to-day lives to follow their charismatic leaders out into the desert, their minds filled with memories of God's salvific and redemptive acts of the past and with their own salvation and liberation which would surely unfold in analogy with God's liberating interventions in the history of Israel, to purify, prepare and renew themselves and their covenant with Yahweh who had not, after all,

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abandoned his people. A mystery, his eschatological plan of redemption, was about to be made known through the popular prophets, to whom Yahweh had entrusted the knowledge of his plan.

Of course prophets proclaiming to the people liberation from oppression and a restoration of their freedom and attracting such numbers as followers, would have met with animosity from the oppressive regime and Horsley and Hanson report anxiety on the part of Felix, the Roman governor, to match that of Josephus, about the possible disruption of the Roman imperial order. Under the Samaritans a prophetic figure emerged although he had help from several ringleaders and led a movement intending to ascend the holy Mount Gerezim to retrieve the sacred vessels left there by Moses. This seems to indicate that he was considered to have been the eschatological counterpart of Moses.

Pontius Pilate aggressively quelled the movement with sizeable military force, not merely dispersing crowds, but attacking and killing them and executing ringleaders. Round about 45 CE, about a decade later than the previous incident, Theudas, claiming to be a prophet, led a movement of people with their possessions to the River Jordan where the river was to divide at his command in symbolic motion to let his followers through in a reverse conquest, retreat to cleanse and purify in the wilderness or new exodus. The events leading up to this were Caligula's resolution to erect a statue of himself in the temple, the exorbitant taxes levied by Agrippa I and his declaring himself to be divine later on. However, Fadus, the governor of Judea, sent a cavalry attack against them in a surprise attack which left many dead, others captured alive and Theudas himself beheaded and his head carried off to Jerusalem as stern warning to other aspiring prophetic movement-leaders. This latter incident is mentioned in Acts and remembered alongside that of Judas of Galilee as one of the two most significant analogies to the growing "Jesus movement". Suffice it to say that leaders took swift and brutal action to annihilate these movements and their leaders.

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One may find the pattern of interpreting and anticipating history by means of symbolic action as early as Second Isaiah in Jewish tradition, where the liberation from Babylonian captivity was interpreted as the new exodus and journey through the wilderness (Is 40:1-11; 51:9-11). This historical-eschatological typology had now become a prominent feature in prophecy, the symbolic enactment of great historical acts of salvation and liberation in anticipation of new eschatological acts by action prophets as leaders of a movement and their followers and remained prominent in the early Christian movement and later apocalyptic literature.

During the first century and just before and during the great revolt in particular, a number of oracular prophets appeared who shared a number of distinctive characteristics with the biblical prophets and may therefore be considered as continuing along the line of “the long-standing Israelite-Jewish tradition of oracular prophets” (Horsley & Hanson 1985:172). These oracular prophets, in the manner of their predecessors, delivered messages from God to his people, preaching repentance and pronouncing judgment especially during times of crisis. The only two examples of this type of prophet recorded for posterity are John the Baptist and Jesus ben Hananiah. Of the latter, Josephus provides a fairly lengthy description. Striking similarities between his situation and modus operandi and that of the biblical prophets are:

- The socio-political situation was deceptively favourable and peace and prosperity seemed to reign, just as when Amos had pronounced judgment in the northern kingdom of Israel in ancient times.
- Like both Amos and Jeremiah the prophet knew better.
- Again like Amos and Jeremiah he takes his message of doom straight to the temple precincts.
- “His subsequent behaviour, as he continues his dirge on the doomed city, recalls that of Jeremiah uttering his warnings or that

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of Jeremiah with the yoke around his neck before the impending Babylonian siege of the holy city" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:174).

- Like Jeremiah he was thrown into prison and abused.
- His message of judgment and lament is reminiscent of that of the classical prophets on the city.

Jesus ben Hananiah baffled the Roman governor but the Jewish ruling group were well aware of the threat to the established order posed by this prophet and his message. Josephus mentions attempts to silence him only by Jerusalem's aristocratic ruling group and not by Judean peasant groups and their leaders who took control of the city and led the resistance to the Roman siege.

John the Baptist is attested to in Q, the Gospel of Mark and Lukan *Sondergut*, and as lengthily in Josephus. His similarities with biblical oracular prophets are his stationing in the wilderness as symbolic place of purification and renewal, his hairy garment and girdle like those of Elijah and biblical prophets in general and his message of imminent and inevitable eschatological judgment like the prophetic messages at least since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He exhorted his followers to bear fruits befitting their conversion and baptism and, just like Amos and Jeremiah, the fruits he called for were not in any sense of a vague spiritual nature, but had to do with very concrete economic and social justice. Because of his passion for a just society, for simple justice for the common people, his message by its very nature targeted the aristocracy of his time. Furthermore, when he called for repentance, what he had in mind was a complete rededication to covenantal social practices, symbolised by the rite of baptism which became so typical of him, and being in essence the means "...by which persons passed into the eschatologically reconstituted community of Israel which would survive God's judgment" (Horsley & Hanson 1985:178). Therefore it is obvious that his message sits anything but loose to the politics of his day and is addressed to the whole nation while the "vipers" he refers to may be the priestly aristocracy and gentry who rely for their

salvation on their sacred lineage and sacral position as they did in Jeremiah.

It is important to realise that his actions weren't interpreted to have been that of an Elijah-*redivivus* or a forerunner of the Messiah; these perceptions may be ascribed to much later traditions found in the gospels. Nor do we have any indication that he saw himself as such.

As with Jesus ben Hananiah he was rightly perceived as a challenge to the authority and power of the priestly aristocracy which was considered by the people to be both oppressive and illegitimate. His prophecy impacted in such a direct fashion on the politics of his day that he was perceived as a threat to the regime whose message may lead to a revolutionary uprising by the people. As such Herod Antipas had him arrested and executed much as ruling groups of bygone days had been killed or efforts been made to silence Uriah, Amos or Jeremiah. The conflict between John the Baptist and Herod Antipas is also mentioned in the conversation of Jesus with the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders in Mark 11:27-33. John's condemnation of the marriage of Herod Antipas to Herodias is of course directly related to the stipulations of the Mosaic law. But what actually sealed John's fate was, as pointed out by Josephus, the fact that John's condemnation of this marriage had the potential to incite the inhabitants of Petrea to avenge the fate of Arrestas (Herod's first wife). It was essential for John to be silenced. Horsley (in Horsley & Hanson 1985:181) writes:

Not surprisingly, the popular prophets who announced imminent divine deliverance were concentrated just before and during the great revolt. Josephus claims that there were many prophets at this time bidding the people to "await help from God." Originating in apocalyptic visions, the messages delivered by these prophets held out hope for the people suffering under increasing oppression prior to the rebellion, or

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for those struggling against overwhelming odds once the  
Romans brought their massive forces to suppress the revolt.

Interestingly most of these prophetic movements occurred just before or during the Jewish revolt and coincided with the escalation in apocalyptic expectation among the people. Many a prophetic vision was accepted without question by the people, and even during the siege of Jerusalem many prophets came to the fore.

**CHAPTER 7****CONCLUSION****7.1 Was Jesus a prophet? Different routes, one destination**

At the outset, we took note of current research which detects similarities in the Jesus tradition between Jesus and the classical prophets. We set ourselves the task, however, of examining this research to determine whether it has taken into account all that needs to be considered in this respect.

The three models of research which we chose to examine, all reach the same conclusion, namely that Jesus was a prophet. They have all three travelled along different routes, consulting different maps, yet all three have reached a destination from which a clear view of Jesus as a prophet has emerged.

**7.2 N T Wright**

Wright was our first navigator on the road to attempt a sighting of the Jesus of history. Wright attempted through his research to determine the impressions of the average Galilean contemporaries of Jesus as they watched him walking the dusty roads, challenging certain aspects of the Jewish worldview in no uncertain terms, spreading word of the coming kingdom of the god of Israel and celebrating and manifesting this said kingdom through open table-fellowship. Wright (1996:150) offers two arguments in favour of Jesus as prophet before even starting out on his journey:

- The model of Jesus as prophet offers the amenity of being able to function as springboard for further study and of gathering in a multitude of other features of Jesus' life which might otherwise have remained in the wings.
- In what Wright (1996:150) considers to be “one of the strongest arguments for the prophetic portrait” he maintains this portrait to be the one that

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makes the best sense within the contexts of Judaism in general, of popular movements in particular, and most particularly of John the Baptist.

Through his extensive endeavours, Wright has reached the conclusion that, based on the evidence, Jesus had been perceived by friend and foe alike, by the villagers who saw and listened to him, as prophet. His speech and actions had for them evoked and contemporised pictures stored in collective and individual memories of traditional prophets even while surpassing it. Through his mighty works this prophet Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of Israel's god with the welcome and warning announced by the double-edged sword of his word. These are indicators of the praxis of a prophet ranked at least as high as Elijah or Elisha. In his kingdom programme he threw down the gauntlet before Israel and its sacred cows, the cherished symbols the names of which were engraved in the palms of their hands. To reduce the view enjoyed upon reaching Wright's destination to a pocket-sized snapshot: All evidence, according to Wright (1996:150), points to the probability that Jesus was seen as and saw himself as a prophet. Jesus' praxis and worldview typify him as a prophet bearing an urgent eschatological, or, to be more specific, apocalyptic, message for Israel and fulfilling through the movement he was initiating the divinely ordained destiny of Israel..

We may reiterate what we surmised in the beginning: That Jesus saw himself as prophet called to announce the word of Israel's god to his recalcitrant people and assemble them around him as the true people of YHWH is a probability, but Wright (1996:196) finds himself open to the further possibility that he saw himself as the prophet of Deuteronomy, the prophet to end all prophecies, the prophet through whose work the history of Israel would reach its climax.

In his foray into the Jewish contemporary mindset of Jesus and his contemporaries, he discovered that, for a first-century Jew, and in particular for a Jew who believed himself to be a prophet, his interpretation of what his god and the god of his people is doing at a given moment in history, would be of supreme importance. Wright (1996:462) encountered a Jesus convinced of the necessity, as part of his role, of engaging in battle with the Satan. This would mean launching

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an attack on Israel's idolatrous nationalism under the guise of allegiance to the reign of YHWH. Jesus stood at the ready as protagonist of the kingdom of Israel's god to do battle against the antagonists, in particular the Pharisees and the chief priests. Jesus had to fulfil his vocation in the face of their resistance, opposition and overt rejection of his message and its validity. His prophetic role was in no way made easier by the ambiguity of his disciples, the co-protagonists who sometimes wavered and joined ranks with the antagonists, or fled from them. Neither was his burden in any way lightened by the stubborn and militant resistance of the antagonists, which was intensified by their clinging to the fortress of their cherished, god-given national and cultural symbols that had become the major stakes in the endorsement of their power.

### **7.3 R A Horsley**

Horsley (1999:1) examines Q. As the curtain rises, the focus is all on the figure of Jesus, as Q's minimalist décor, omitting tales of miracle, redirects all attention to him. The audience avidly awaits the words spoken by the great prophet and are not disappointed.

The Gospel of Mark, dubbed the oldest gospel account by a lavish portion of scholarship, has its own theological propensity, and it is therefore, according to Horsley (1999:1) imperative to search behind this gospel for a historical source from which to construct the life of Jesus. Behind Mark lay the other brainchild of the two-source theory, Q. Horsley (1999:1) writes: "Q seemed like a godsend of a whole collection of seemingly reliable sayings readily available as source materials in the quest for the historical Jesus."

Horsley has turned the pages of this prophet's portfolio in Q, reminiscing on his performances in the leading roles of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, or just the prophets of ancient times in the sweeping scope of the genre.

Travelling the road with Horsley, one has been made aware of the unmapped footpaths of oral performance which had preceded Horsley's Q-route. Horsley's

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careful navigation has shown that repeated oral enactment of Q ensured its transmission and yielded a prophet, firmly embedded within his Jewish culture, dedicating himself to the Mosaic covenantal tradition and its renewal, the latter in a way reminiscent of the prophet Elijah.

In his interpretation of the information yielded by Q as source, Horsley has emphasised throughout the importance of employing a realistic historical sociology and has avoided depoliticising Jesus and his mission. He has found in the Q discourses a resemblance between Jesus and political prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. These prophets had in their offices effectively illustrated the merger between politics and religion which was the order of their day, a tendency displayed with similar savoir faire by Jesus. Q diligently paints a picture of Jesus as another prophet in the firing line of persecuted and executed prophets of the past.

Horsley's scrutiny of the Q discourses has revealed a Jesus declaring himself the prophet who, through his mission, is fulfilling the longings of his people as they had been so voiced by prophets of the past, a prophet enacting the role of Moses, a prophet who had interacted closely with God, who had led his people to freedom and who had established a covenantal relationship between Israel and God.

The apocalyptic vision of the prophetic Jesus of Q is not the cataclysmic termination of the present order, but God's kingdom announced by means of a political metaphor, a symbolic realignment of society according to the principles of the covenant.

The Q prophet discovered by Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:226) had an intense social consciousness: "The Q covenant renewal, addressed to ordinary people, proclaims the kingdom of God for the poor and is concerned with the solidarity and survival of the village community."

#### 7.4 J D G Dunn

We quoted at the starting line of our journey with Dunn, his confident statement (Dunn 2003:657): “Little doubt need be entertained that Jesus was seen in the role of a prophet during his mission. The testimony of the Jesus tradition is both quite widespread and consistent across its breadth.” The veracity of this statement has been proven along the way.

Dunn (2003:662, 663), like Horsley’s Q source, finds evidence of texts indicating Jesus as prophet, standing in a long line of rejected prophets. Dunn’s memory theory serves him with a recollection of Jesus ostensibly drawing on texts in Isaiah to inform his own mission, conscious of the full weight of his prophetic commissioning. An image burned within the minds of his followers and audiences is that of Jesus ostensibly self-consciously shaping his mission in the mould of the classic prophets even in the finest detail of the end of his life which united him with his predecessors in *Prophetenschicksal*.

Meandering with Dunn (2003:664) one may take in the sights of Jesus engaged in activities that are clearly prophetic: Jesus’ choosing his twelve disciples, partaking of meals in the company of tax-collectors and sinners, healings and exorcising those suffering illness and possession, entering Jerusalem while bemoaning its fate and that of the prophets, overthrowing the tables in the Temple and partaking of the last supper. Dunn is convinced that Jesus repeatedly conducted himself in a manner strongly reminiscent of the great prophets of the past (see Dunn 2003:664) and his prophetic insight and foresight are well-established in memory.

Dunn (2003:666) indicates however, that all of this is true not only in the accustomed sense of the word, but in the superlative sense of prophetic significance. He has shown that the scholar can assume with relative certainty Jesus’ self-perception as a prophet standing in the tradition of the prophets; a prophet divinely endowed with an eschatological significance in his mission (and thus himself) which transcended the older prophetic categories” (Dunn 2003:666).

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We have set out on these various journeys hoping to determine why scholars from many and various persuasions reach the same destination: The discovery of the prophetic aspect of the visage of Jesus. This we have clearly achieved by means of the routes chosen by the three scholars in question.

Our next step was to compare the view of Jesus as prophet with that of other prophets and to view them collectively against the backdrop of scholarship on the topic of the prophetic phenomenon. This has proven to be a highly rewarding enterprise and one which has shed much light on the person and passion of Jesus.

In closing: With the sources in hand as map-books or tour-guides, one walks down memory lane to encounter Jesus performing miracles, acts of healing or exorcisms, one hears him talking, teaching, encouraging and reprimanding, one sees him fleeing the ever-enclosing crowds in search of solitary communion with God. And one realises that there is hardly a word that has been written in chapter 5 which is not, in some way, reminiscent of Jesus:

- The time in which he lived was fecund for prophetic intervention – social and economic injustice was rife, syncretism, exclusivism and alliances to benefit personal favour and position seem to have been the order of the day.
- Jesus, in the firm conviction, nay knowledge, of being the emissary of his Father, was in complete surrender to the divine will and unreservedly at God's disposal.
- He was filled with power and authority to the extent that scholars suspect in him a consciousness of being more than a prophet. However, a closer look at prophecy reveals that his

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consciousness of divine authority does not in fact supersede that of the true prophet.

- One would encounter difficulty in arguing against the evidence pointing to his being thorn-in-the-flesh, subversive and influential.
- If collective memory serves us correctly, further evidence that he was remembered as a prophet would be the circle of disciples he gathered around him like numerous other prophets before him.
- He was a conveyor of the Word of God, in its fullest and richest sense of that Word being endowed with creative power. To such an extent did he identify with the Word entrusted to him, that, in the memories that crystallized into the Gospel of John, he was the Word that became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
- Like the prophets of antiquity, he employed everything at his disposal, including his own life and its termination, in the effort to successfully convey God's message. Not least of these means were his signature parable style-form and symbolic acts. His symbolic acts include the choosing of twelve disciples, the entry into Jerusalem and the temple action, but symbolism can be read into many more of his actions, such as his exorcisms.
- He suffered a great deal, through his crucifixion, but also through the rejection, suspicion and alienation with which he was confronted in his ministry. His life as well as his death aligned him with the fact of prophetic suffering and the often terminal fate of the emissary of God.
- The double-edged sword of the message he conveyed from God – encompassing divine love and divine wrath - was profoundly pertinent to the time in which he lived. It has, however, in the

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tradition of the evergreen quality of the prophetic message, transcended Jesus' own time and is equally fresh and topical in the year 2005.

- His message carried the stamp of the divine authority of which he felt himself acutely aware to the extent that one is reminded of the angelic messengers in the Old Testament. Just as they had seemed to be interchangeable with the persona of the God they represented, so one senses sometimes a shifting of dimensions in the presence of Jesus so that the man seems to make way for/ be trans-substantiated by the One who sent him and clothed him in authority.
- In this way the personal pronoun “I” on the lips of Jesus, just as on the lips of prophets from time immemorial, was heavily laden with meaning and implication.
- Amidst his suffering his communion in prayer with his Father sustained him. It set him apart so that his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray and it strengthened him for whatever lay ahead in his service of God.
- The Gospel of Luke especially attests to the way in which Jesus is remembered as isolating himself in prayer before going out to the people to whom he was sent. Solitary periods of prayer seemed to empower and prepare him for singular acts of power, but, as with the ancient prophets, the power was not given for him to relish in, but to use in servitude of God and his people whom He sought to address through his emissary, guardian of God’s people.

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- In whichever way one chooses to interpret “eschatology” and “wisdom”, they seem to be ubiquitous features in prophecy and no less so in the teaching of Jesus.

All this said, however, it has in the past been difficult and it is difficult now (perhaps even more so now for lack of a true frame of reference or modern analogy) to capture the essence of prophecy amidst the changing shape it seems to assume. What kind of a prophet was Jesus, if indeed he was one. What was his aim, what did he think he was doing and accomplishing? Was he trying to establish a kingdom, and if he was, how would this kingdom look?

My conclusion is that Jesus was remembered as, and indeed was, a prophet – a prophet of the true kind – a prophet of God, the prophet in whom God is ambient. He was the kind of prophet who exists within two dimensions; the first being the mundane dimension, the one visible to all, the second the dimension circumfused by the divine, present in the here and now but visible to none but the prophets. The last of these is dominant in the lives of the prophets – the greater reality.

What kind of a prophet was Jesus? The kind called by God, the kind God needed him to be at that specific time-juncture. What was his aim? His aim was God’s aim, his will to do, not his own will, but to let God’s will be done. The prophet needs no teacher, because he is instructed by God in what to do.

The true prophet deflects attention away from himself to God, “the One who sent me”. If this is true of the words and actions of Jesus, it is as though the crucifix points upwards like an arrow in his death with all its symbolic implications as he shares the fate of the

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prophets: “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you...” (Ex 24:8).<sup>56</sup>

I believe that Jesus was perceived as the pinnacle of prophecy, the one who was plunged into the deepest depths and was exalted to the highest heights for God’s cause.

The point of origin, *raison d'être* and final word in prophecy, and especially in the life of Jesus, is God’s will. This implies that the scholar who, like Borg, Wright, Horsley, Dunn and many others, see shades of prophecy in what he said and did and how he died, will ultimately, in their quest to fully understand its implications, have to decide whether they believe that God sends prophets, and sent Jesus in particular, to align people to God’s will.

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<sup>56</sup> See Dunn (2003:8).

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