

PROPHET, SAGE, HEALER, MESSIAH, AND MARTYR:
TYPES AND IDENTITIES OF JESUS

CRAIG A. EVANS

One of the oft-heard complaints in historical Jesus research in the last half century or so has to do with the diverse portraits of Jesus. According to the popular view, Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God, but in many more-or-less learned books Jesus is presented as a prophet, sage, magician, Pharisee, Essene, or holy man. In more eccentric studies Jesus is presented as an eastern mystic or as an embodiment of some mythical religious construct.

Some critics take this diversity as evidence of the impossibility of the task, either due to the limited historical value of the principal sources or to the subjectivity of the scholars involved. It must be admitted that our sources are not as full and corroborated as we would like, and scholars are humans, after all, and therefore are prone to subjectivity. However, the diversity of scholarly results could also be interpreted as evidence that Jesus functioned and understood himself in more than one category. Indeed, the evidence suggests that this was very probably the case; and there is nothing strange in finding two or more categories. For example, to be regarded as Israel's Messiah does not preclude functions associated with the office of prophet or miracle-working holy man, nor does it preclude identification as a sage or even as a martyr, as Jesus faced the likelihood of his death during his final week in Jerusalem. In short, Jesus could have seen himself as called and empowered in several of these functions and offices.

Having said this, of course, does not mean that Jesus' contemporaries necessarily interpreted Jesus in the light of all of these typologies. Some no doubt thought of Jesus as a Davidic, royal Messiah, who would drive out the Romans and establish Israel's sovereignty. Others may have seen Jesus primarily as a miracle-working healer, while still others may have seen Jesus as a teacher. At the outset of his public ministry, Jesus may well have been viewed as simply a prophet who proclaimed the coming rule of God, a rule in which Jesus himself would play a role hardly beyond that of the one who

proclaimed it. Indeed, I suspect that it was the appeal to the typology of the righteous martyr, whose death will benefit Israel, that motivated Judas Iscariot to betray his master. So long as Jesus proclaimed God's rule, so long as it appeared that Jesus himself might reign over Israel, along with his disciples, Judas was strongly supportive. But talk of suffering and death led this disciple to abandon the cause.

Openness to seeing in Jesus a combination of identities and functions is justified in principle by the recognition that in our sources from late antiquity we in fact find these typologies mixed and diverse. To mention a few examples: The great lawgiver Moses is also a prophet (Deut 18:15–19; 34:10). David the king is a prophet (cf. 11QPs^a XXVII, 2–11, esp. line 11 [David “composed through prophecy”]; Acts 1:16; 4:25; *Epistula Apostolorum* §19 [“the prophecy of the prophet David”], §35; P. Oxy. 5 verso). His son Solomon is a healer and wise man (*T. Sol.* 3.5; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.45–49), as well as prophet (*Tg. Ps* 72:1 [“composed by Solomon, uttered in prophecy”]). Moses and Elijah are sometimes linked in eschatological contexts (Mark 9:4; *Deut. Rab.* 3.17 [on Deut 10:1]; *Pesiq. Rab.* 4.2); the Messiah and Elijah are sometimes linked (Mark 9:11–13; *b. Erubin* 43a–b; *Pesiq. Rab.* 35.3; *Tg. Ps.-J.* Deut 30:4; *Exod. Rab.* 18.12 [on Exod 12:42]); and the Messiah is sometimes linked with Moses (*Frag. Tg.* [and perhaps *Neof.*] Exod 12:42; *Tg. Song* 4:5 “Messiah son of David...like Moses”). Some prophets are workers of miracles (e.g., Elijah and Elisha, and Isaiah).

Some Old Testament figures served more than one function. One thinks of Melchizedek, who is identified as both king and priest (Gen 14:18–24), as well as the great Samuel, who was both priest and prophet (1 Sam 2:35; 3:20) and, until the anointing of Saul the Benjaminite, functioned more or less as Israel's *de facto* king (1 Sam 8:4–9). Jesus himself, though regularly addressed as Rabbi or teacher and sometimes acknowledged as a prophet, at times acted in a quasi-priestly manner, declaring someone clean (Mark 1:41), forgiving sins (Mark 2:5; Luke 7:47–48), pronouncing on offerings and sacrifices (Matt 5:23–24; 23:18–20; Mark 12:32–34), and in demonstrating in the Temple precincts criticizing the ruling priests (Mark 11:15–18, with appeals to Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11, both concerned with Temple matters).

In the discussion that follows I shall consider Jesus under five categories or identities: prophet, sage, healer, messiah, and martyr. I put

them in this sequence, because I think this is how, over time, Jesus was perceived by the general public and by his closest followers.

1. *Jesus as Prophet*

The evidence that Jesus saw himself as a prophet is compelling.¹ It is implicit in his proclamation of the rule of God, call for repentance, and warning of judgment (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; 11:20). Jesus' announcement stands in the tradition of Israel's classic prophets, who likewise proclaimed the rule of God.² Indeed Jesus' proclamation was in all probability based on Isaiah's proclamation, especially as interpreted and paraphrased in the Aramaic-speaking synagogue.³ As did the classic prophets,⁴ as well as John the Baptist (Matt 3:2, 8, 11; par.), Jesus also called on Israel to repent (Matt 11:20–21; 12:41; Mark 6:12; Luke 5:32; 13:3; 15:7, 10).

Direct evidence that Jesus understood himself as a prophet is seen in his declaration: "A prophet is not without honor [οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος], except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4; cf. Matt 13:57; John 4:44).⁵ To be sure, the saying is proverbial, especially in the Greek-speaking

¹ For recent studies, see M. D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); M. Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); D. C. Allison Jr., *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); W. R. Herzog II, *Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

² See Isa 6:5; 33:22; 43:15; 44:6; Jer 8:19; 10:10; Ezek 20:33; cf. Pss 5:2; 44:4; 47:7; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 95:3; 145:1.

³ The proclamation, "Behold your God!" (Isa 40:9), in the Aramaic is rendered, "The kingdom [or rule] of your God is revealed!" See also Isa 52:7 in Hebrew and Aramaic. For more on the "kingdom of God" in Aramaic Isaiah, see B. D. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum*, JSOTSup 23 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 77–81. For analysis of the Old Testament backdrop, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); B. D. Chilton, "The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans, NTTS 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 255–280.

⁴ See Isa 1:27; Jer 5:3; 8:6; 9:5; 26:19; 34:15; Ezek 14:6; 18:30; Zech 1:6; cf. 1 Kgs 8:47–48; 2 Chron 6:37–38.

⁵ The differences in Luke's form of the saying ("Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable [δεκτός] in his own country") are likely redactional, to link Jesus' utterance with the concluding portion of the quotation from Isaiah 61 ("to proclaim the acceptable [δεκτός] day of the Lord." Compare Luke 4:19 with 4:24.

world,⁶ but this hardly argues against the authenticity of the saying. Given the exalted assessment of Jesus in the post-Easter setting, one should hardly expect the creation of sayings in which Jesus is regarded as (only) a prophet, indeed, as a prophet accorded no honor in the very village in which he was raised.⁷

There are other passages that lend further important support. Jesus' lament over obstinate Jerusalem, a lament preserved in Q, with a strong claim to authenticity, implies that Jesus be identified with the prophets rejected by Israel: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt 23:37 = Luke 13:34). The public rumor that Jesus was a prophet (cf. Mark 6:14–15; 8:27–28, "one of the prophets") is also very probable.

There are also two passages in which Jesus is challenged that corroborate further his identity as a prophet. In one passage (Mark 8:11–12) Pharisees request of Jesus "a sign from heaven" (σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), which Jesus refuses: "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." The request for a "sign from heaven" carries with it prophetic implications. One thinks of Isaiah's appeal to Ahaz: "Ask a sign [תִּיָּא / σημεῖον] of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (Isa 7:11; cf. v. 14, "the Lord himself will give you a sign"). Signs are offered in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The association of signs with prophets is almost formalized in the Mosaic law (e.g., Deut 13:1 "If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign [תִּיָּא / σημεῖον]..."). In the second passage, where the question of authority is raised (Mark 11:27–33), Jesus compares himself with John the Baptist, regarded by the Jewish people as a prophet (v. 32). The logic of Jesus' counter-question is that,

⁶ As in Dio Chrysostom, *Disc.* 47.6 ("it is the opinion of all the philosophers that life is difficult in their home country"); Apollonius of Tyana, *Ep.* 44 ("until now my own country alone ignores me"); and others.

⁷ The latter part of the saying, "and among his own kin, and in his own house," may well be a later gloss, perhaps reflecting the experience of the early Christian community. So also in the case of the Thomasine version (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 31: "...physicians do not heal those who know them"), whose latter part is surely secondary, reflecting Lukan influence (cf. Luke 4:23, "Physician, heal yourself"), as well as the esoteric, if not gnostic orientation of the later Syrian context in which *Thomas* was composed.

like John, Jesus is a prophet whose authority derives from heaven and not from humans.

There are other materials, whose antiquity and authenticity are less certain. After Jesus raised the widow's son (Luke 7:11–17), the astounded crowd “glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’” (v. 16). Whereas the first declaration could be authentic, the second is probably a Lukan gloss.⁸ In the story of the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50), Simon the Pharisee is said to suppose: “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner” (v. 39). Although the historicity of the episode is not easy to settle, at least in all of its details, the question of Jesus' prophetic status does reflect what in reference to Jesus was being affirmed by some and denied by others. Undoubtedly many of his followers believed that Jesus was a prophet, while many critics did not. The evangelist Luke presents yet another saying, whose authenticity is difficult to gauge. After receiving a warning from Pharisees, Jesus declares: “Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33).⁹

The saying just considered could well form a body of negative comments about the dismal fate of the prophet to Israel. In one saying (Mark 6:4) Jesus declares that no prophet is without honor except in his home country. In another (Matt 23:37 = Luke 13:34) he laments that Jerusalem kills the prophets; and in a third he asserts that a prophet cannot perish away from Jerusalem (Luke 13:33). The coherence of these three sayings encourages us to view them as authentically reflecting Jesus' self-understanding. He is the prophet who proclaims the rule of God, calls on Israel to repent, and expects rejection at home and especially in Jerusalem.¹⁰

⁸ The Lukan evangelist is fond of the theme of visitation (ἐπισκοπή / ἐπισκέπτομαι); cf. Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44.

⁹ For critical assessments of the origin of this saying, see J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, AB 24A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985) 1028; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 569–70.

¹⁰ Other sayings, in which the prophetic status of Jesus is affirmed, are either secondary creations or glosses composed by the respective evangelists. Among such sayings is the declaration of the crowd, on occasion of the entry into Jerusalem: “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt 21:11). Narrating the activities in the temple precincts, the Matthean evangelist says the ruling priests “feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet” (21:46). In the post-Easter setting,

One must not overlook the mockery that Jesus suffered at the hands of his enemies upon his arrest and interrogation. After the ruling priests and Jewish council condemn Jesus, officers cover his head, strike him, and ask him to “prophesy” (Mark 14:65), that is, demonstrate prophetic clairvoyance by identifying who has struck him, even though he is blindfolded (Matt 26:68 = Luke 22:64). The jeering demands that Jesus prophesy make sense only if Jesus came to them with the reputation of being a prophet.

Some of Jesus’ miracles recall miracles associated with Israel’s prophets. The Lukan evangelist exploits some of this tradition, underscoring points of contact between Jesus and the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Jesus’ appointment of twelve apostles, which surely had to do with the restoration and completion of Israel (i.e., the twelve tribes of Israel), may have brought to the mind of some the altar that Elijah built with twelve stones, “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name’” (1 Kgs 18:31; cf. Exod 28:21; 39:14). What we have here is the employment of typology. Typology also underlies Jesus’ appeal to the “sign of Jonah,” whatever its original meaning, again encourages us to place Jesus in the category of prophet. So also when Jesus warns his impenitent generation of their condemnation by the people of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah (Matt 12:39, 41 = Luke 11:30, 32).

Sayings attributed to Jesus with good claim to authenticity, as well as a number of other sayings and actions, give us every reason to conclude that Jesus understood himself as a prophet.¹¹ This understanding was accepted by his followers and probably a great number of others who were not necessarily counted among his followers, but it was challenged by various critics, opponents, and enemies.

Luke has the disciples say to the risen but not yet recognized Jesus: “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). Three times in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is said to be *a* or *the* prophet (John 4:19; 7:40; 9:17). Even the angry retort, “Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee” (John 7:52), implies that some regarded Jesus as a prophet, even if others did not.

¹¹ Jesus’ prophetic status is probably reflected in the parable of the Vineyard (Mark 12:1–9), where the rejected and murdered son (surely to be understood as Jesus himself) is linked by function to the dishonored servants (surely to be understood as Israel’s rejected and persecuted prophets).

2. *Jesus as Sage (or Rabbi)*

Bruce Chilton and others have identified Jesus as a rabbi or sage.¹² After all, Jesus is called rabbi by his disciples and others (Matt 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8).¹³ The number of occurrences increases if we include instances where Jesus is addressed as “teacher” (that is, διδάσκαλος; cf. Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 35; 12:14, 19; and many more). That “teacher” is understood to be the meaning of rabbi is explicitly stated (John 1:38; 20:16; cf. Matt 23:8; John 3:2).¹⁴ The number of occurrences increases further if we include instances of “master” (ἐπιστάτα), which is a favorite of the Lukan evangelist (cf. 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13).¹⁵

Not only is Jesus addressed as “rabbi” or “teacher,” his closest followers are called “disciples” (μαθηταί),¹⁶ whose Hebrew/Aramaic equivalent is תלמידים,¹⁷ that is, “learners” or “students” (from μαθάνειν and לָמַד, respectively). This language corresponds with the terminology of early rabbinic Judaism, though there is much earlier evidence.¹⁸

The numerous parallels between Jesus’ teaching and the rabbinic tradition, as well as the many points of agreement between Jesus’ interpretation of scripture and the rabbinic tradition, confirm the

¹² B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus’ Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time*, GNS 8 (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984); idem, *Profiles of a Rabbi: Synoptic Opportunities in Reading about Jesus*, BJS 177 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); idem, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography. The Jewish Life and Teaching that Inspired Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); W. E. Phipps, *The Wisdom and Wit of Rabbi Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); B. H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995); idem, *Meet the Rabbi: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007).

¹³ In the Greek gospels we find more than one dozen occurrences of ῥαββί, which transliterates רַבִּי, and twice we find ῥαββουί (Mark 10:51; John 20:16), which transliterates רַבִּנּוּי. There are spelling and pronunciation variations among the Greek and Aramaic forms of this title.

¹⁴ Rabbi literally means “my great one.”

¹⁵ Prior to 70 CE the designation “Rabbi” is informal, even imprecise, and lacks the later connotations of formal training and ordination, which obtain sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

¹⁶ Mark 2:15, 16, 18, 23; 3:7, 9; 4:34; 5:31; and Q: Luke 6:20; 10:23; 12:22; 14:26.27.

¹⁷ For examples, see *m. ’Abot* 1:1, 11; 2:8; 5:12; 6:6.

¹⁸ “This, in turn, is education in the law [ἡ τοῦ νόμου παιδεία], by which we learn [μαθάνομεν] divine matters reverently and human affairs to our advantage” (4 Macc 1:17).

identification of Jesus as a rabbi.¹⁹ Jesus frequented the synagogues of his day, which is consistent with his identity as rabbi and teacher (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:15; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59). In the style of the sages and rabbis of his day, Jesus “sat down” when he taught (Matt 5:1; 26:55; Mark 12:41; Luke 4:20; 5:3; cf. Matt 23:2, where Jesus refers to the scribes and Pharisees who sit on the “seat of Moses” [ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας], as well as the discussion in *b. Meg.* 21a concerning when to sit or stand). Moreover, Jesus’ contemporaries compared him with scribes, who were students of scripture: “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). On occasion Jesus himself refers to reading scripture. He asks Pharisees who criticized his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath: “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry...?” (Mark 2:25; cf. Matt 12:3). In another polemical context, Jesus asks the ruling priests and elders: “Have you not read this scripture: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner...?’” (Mark 12:10). Later he asks the Sadducees, who had raised a question about resurrection: “And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?” (Mark 12:26). In a discussion with a legal expert (νομικός τις), who has asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asks in turn: “What is written in the Law? How do you read?” (Luke 10:26). Jesus’ style of debate accords with what we find in rabbinic literature: “Similarly you read” (e.g., *b. Sabb.* 97a; *b. Ketub.* 111a, 111b); or “How would you read this verse?” (e.g., *b. Ketub.* 81b; *b. Qid.* 22a, 40a, 81b).

Jesus’ interpretation of scripture also coheres with rabbinic interpretation. Rabbinic tradition holds that midrash was pursued following seven rules (or “measurements,” from מִדּוֹת—*middot*) of Hillel the Elder (cf. *t. Sanh.* 7.11; *Baraita R. Ishmael* §1; *’Abot R. Nat.* [A] 37.10).²⁰ Several, perhaps even all, of these rules or close approxima-

¹⁹ R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer*, WUNT 2.7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981; 4th ed., 1994); B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans, “Jesus and Israel’s Scriptures,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Chilton and Evans, 281–335, here 285–298.

²⁰ According to *Sipre Deut.* §2 (on 1:3) even Moses is said to have taught several of these rules.

tions of them were employed by Jesus. Here are examples from three of them:²¹

According to the rule of *qal wa-homer* (lit. “light and heavy,” from קָל וְחוֹמֶר) what is true or applicable in a “light” (or less important) instance is surely true or applicable in a “heavy” (or more important) instance. Such a principle is at work when Jesus assures his disciples (cf. Matt 6:26 = Luke 12:24) that because God cares for the birds (= light), as taught in scripture (cf. Ps 147:9; *Pss. Sol.* 5:8–19), they can be sure that he cares for them (= heavy). A similar saying is attributed to Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar: “Have you ever seen a wild animal or a bird practicing a craft?—yet they have their sustenance without care and were not created for anything else but to serve me? But I was created to serve my Maker. How much more then ought not I to have my sustenance without care? But I have wrought evil, and [so] forfeited my [right to] sustenance [without care]” (*m. Qidd.* 4:14). Although Simeon ben Eleazar applies similar logic, he has drawn a very different inference from the comparison. Adam sinned, therefore humanity must toil for its food. The inference drawn by Jesus may have reflected the belief that with the dawning of the kingdom living conditions could approximate those that existed prior to the fall.²² Other dominical examples are readily at hand: “If God so clothes the grass of the field...” (Matt 6:30 = Luke 12:28; cf. *Mek.* on Exod 16:4 [*Vayassa*’ §3]: “He who has what he will eat today and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow,’ behold, this man lacks faith”); “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...” (Matt 7:11 = Luke 11:13; cf. *y. Seb.* 9.1: “Rabbi Simeon ben

²¹ Some of the examples have been taken from J. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1954), 91–118; A. Finkel, *The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth: A Study of Their Background, Their Halachic and Midrashic Teachings, the Similarities and Differences*, AGSU 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 123–128, 155–175; E. E. Ellis, “Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder, CRINT 2.1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 691–725, esp. 700–702; idem, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, WUNT 54 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 130–132; R. Kasher, “The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature,” in *Mikra*, ed. Mulder, 547–594; H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 21–23. For further discussion of the *middot*, see S. Zeitlin, “Hillel and the Hermeneutical Rules,” *JQR* 54 (1963–64), 161–73.

²² See D. C. Allison Jr. and W. D. Davies, *Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97), 1:648–651; S. T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1987), 132.

Yohai...said: 'A bird apart from heaven will not perish, how much less (the) son of (the) man!"; *Lev. Rab.* 34.14 [on 25:25]: "If this man, who is flesh and blood, cruel and not responsible for [his wife's] maintenance, was filled with compassion for her and gave her [what she needed], how much more should you be filled with compassion for us who are the children of your children, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and are dependent on you for our maintenance!").²³

According to the rule of *gezera sawa* (lit. "an equivalent regulation," from גְּזֵרָה שְׂוָה) one passage may be explained by another, if similar words or phrases are present (*m. Betza* 1:6). When Jesus took action in the Temple precincts, he quoted phrases from Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a 'cave of robbers'" (Mark 11:17).²⁴ What has drawn these two passages together is the word "house," which appears in the quotation drawn from Isa 56:7 and also appears in the part of Jer 7:11 not quoted: "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a cave of robbers in your eyes?" Jeremiah 7 qualifies the positive eschatological expectation expressed in Isaiah 56. The principle of *gezera sawa* may have lain behind Jesus' appeal to the example of David, when accused of violating the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28). As "son of man," to whom the kingdom has been promised (Dan 7:13–14), Jesus may rightfully claim the prerogative assumed by David, to whom the kingdom was also promised,

²³ Cf. Allison and Davies, *Matthew*, 1:656, 683–685; Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 133, 142–143. A similar saying is attributed to Yohanan ben Zakkai in *b. Ber.* 28b. For discussion of the saying attributed to Simeon ben Yohai, see Chilton, *Profiles of a Rabbi*, 91–103.

²⁴ Some interpreters have claimed that Mark 11:15–17 is inauthentic, at least in part, because Jer 7:11 refers to "robbers" (λησταιί), not "thieves" (κλέπται). According to E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 66: "'robber' always means raider, never swindler." Sanders wonders why Jesus would cite a passage that talks about robbers, instead of swindlers. Given what Josephus says about the behavior of the first-century ruling priests (*Ant.* 20.179–181; 20.205–206; for rabbinic criticisms of the ruling priests, see *t. Menah.* 13.18–22; *t. Zebah.* 11.16; *b. Pesah.* 57a), Sanders's objection is hardly persuasive.

when he and his men ate the consecrated bread (1 Sam 21:1–6).²⁵ Examples of *gezera sawa* are common among the rabbis.²⁶

According to the rule of *binyan 'ab mikkatub 'ehad* (lit. “constructing a father [i.e., principal rule] from one [passage],” from בִּינְיָן אֶבְיָן אֶחָד (מִכְּתוּב אֶחָד)) a general principle may be established from one verse or phrase. Other verses, which contain this key phrase, can be viewed as belonging to a family. Jesus’ defense of the resurrection evidently presupposed this rule. Since God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, the revelation at the burning bush, “I am the God of Abraham” (Exod 3:14–15), implies that Abraham is to be resurrected. From this one text and its inference one may further infer, as Jesus did (Mark 12:26),²⁷ the truth of the general resurrection. Similarly,

²⁵ Some interpreters believe that Mark 2:25–26 was created by the early church to justify its violation of the Sabbath and answer the Pharisaic criticism prompted by it. One should then wonder why the early church, perusing scripture for a word of justification to place on the lips of Jesus, should create a saying that contains no actual citation of Scripture (which is what the church usually does), but instead a difficult reference to “Abiathar the high priest,” which the early church will then have to mitigate through omission (cf. Matt 12:4 = Luke 6:4). The retort, “Have you never read,” and an appeal to an Old Testament passage that has nothing to do with Sabbath law reflect a spontaneous *Sitz im Leben Jesu* rather than a later community setting.

P. Sigal (*The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* [Lanham: University Press of America, 1986]) has recently argued that the anonymous Tannaitic interpretation of Exod 31:14 (“‘And you shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you’: This means: the Sabbath is given to you but you are not surrendered to the Sabbath”) may actually derive from Jesus (cf. *Mek.* on Exod 31:12–17 [*Sab.* §1]).

D. M. Cohn-Sherbok (“An Analysis of Jesus’ Arguments concerning the Plucking of Grain on the Sabbath,” *JSNT* 2 [1979]: 31–41) acknowledges that Mark 2:23–28 provides evidence that Jesus was familiar with rabbinic hermeneutics, but he thinks that Jesus’ arguments were “not valid from a rabbinic point of view,” adding that this “misuse of rabbinic reasoning should not surprise us since it bears out the truth of the Gospel in asserting that Jesus was not a skilled casuist in the style of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (40). By describing Jesus’ exegesis as “not valid” and as a “misuse of rabbinic reasoning” Cohn-Sherbok is guilty of anachronism in his use of rabbinic sources. Jesus’ exegesis is “not valid” only when compared to later practice. Such a judgment is without warrant when describing early first-century Jewish exegetical practice. Cohn-Sherbok seems to read later rabbinic practices into the pre-70 CE Pharisees and Sadducees.

²⁶ Although from a later period, the opinion of Rab Ashi illustrates the importance that rabbis attached to *gezera sawa*: “Do not lightly regard a *gezera sawa*, for the cases to which death by stoning applies are essential laws of the Torah, yet Scripture teaches (most of them) by *gezera sawa*” (*b. Ker.* 5a). For more examples, see *b. Pesah.* 66a; *Gen. Rab.* 27.3 (on Gen 6:5); *Pesiq. R.* 4.2.

²⁷ Some interpreters doubt the authenticity of the passage, supposing that it reflects a rabbinic-style argument characteristic of the early church’s dispute with Judaism. This line of reasoning is dubious. First of all, given the common ground

from *נמצא*? (“he is found”) the rabbis deduced that two or three witnesses are always required, since this command precedes a series of examples in Deuteronomy 17 (*Sipre Deut.* §148 [on 17:2]). There are many other examples.²⁸

3. *Jesus as Healer*

The healing dimension of Jesus’ ministry was diverse, including not only healing, but exorcism, and even, in a certain sense, medicine. As recent studies have shown, the lines between miracle, medicine, and magic were not clearly drawn in antiquity.²⁹ How one assessed an unusual deed often depended on one’s assessment of the doer of the deed.

Today many scholars agree that Jesus’ contemporaries viewed him as a worker of miracles. At the very least, it is conceded that Jesus did things and that things happened around him that eyewitnesses regarded as supernatural events. It is rightly recognized that the his-

shared by Christians and Pharisees (both believe in the resurrection) and the fact that it is with the Pharisees that early Christians quarreled, why was the invention of such a dominical saying necessary? And, secondly, if the early church felt it necessary to defend the truth of the general resurrection, how do we account for no allusion to Jesus’ resurrection (which was the real bone of contention between Christians and non-Christians)? There is nothing in this pericope that is specifically Christian and nothing that suggests that it did not originate with Jesus.

²⁸ Among others, see *b. Mak.* 5b; *Sipra Lev.* §209 (on Lev 20:13–16).

²⁹ For a representative sampling of bibliography, see D. E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” *ANRW* II 23.2 (1980): 1507–1557; E. Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus’ Miracles*, *JSNTSup* 231 (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); C. J. Hemer, “Medicine in the New Testament World,” in *Medicine and the Bible* B. Palmer, ed. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), 43–83; J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, *SBT* 2.28 (London: SCM, 1974); H. C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); idem, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in the Roman World* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1985); idem, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, *SNTSMS* 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); M. Labahn and B. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, eds., *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and its Religious Environment*, *LNTS* 306 (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2007); J. J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); J. Scarborough, “Medicine,” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. M. Grant and R. Kitzinger (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1988), 1227–1248; M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); G. Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

torian need not pass judgment with regard to the metaphysical or supernatural causes, nor try to find “scientific” explanations for what Jesus’ contemporaries say they saw or experienced. It is sufficient to inquire into what Jesus did and how people assessed what he did and then evaluate the antiquity and credibility of the sources that report these events.³⁰

In the case of Jesus what we see is that not everyone was favorably impressed. There was no uniform assessment of Jesus’ teaching and his works of power. This is an interesting observation. The degree of ambivalence expressed in the gospels with respect to the miracles of Jesus in my opinion lends additional support to the authenticity of the tradition. One would think that a spurious tradition, generated out of apologetic interests and unchecked gullibility, would present Jesus’ words of power in an unambiguously positive light, as in fact we often see in the later gospels and gospel-like writings, which have no credible link to eyewitness testimony. But in the synoptic gospels the public response to the miracles of Jesus is mixed and often non-committal.

In response to Jesus’ exorcistic activities we are told that people reacted with surprise and astonishment: “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (Mark 1:27). “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:12). Narrating responses such as these may have served some apologetic purposes, but even so they hardly constitute a ringing endorsement of Jesus’ divine credentials and truth of his message.³¹

Other responses are anything but positive. After the wild encounter with the Gerasene demoniac, the locals “beg Jesus to depart” (Mark 5:17). This too hardly serves Christian apologetic interests. After he preaches in Nazareth and presumably performs some works of power (as the full context suggests), residents ask: “Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are

³⁰ For more on this topic, see B. Saler, “Supernatural as a Western Category,” *Ethos* 5 (1977), 21–33; C. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

³¹ See the important study by G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus*, WUNT 2.54 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993; repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).

not his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:2b–3a). The evangelist adds: “And they took offense at him... And he marveled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:3b, 6a).³² In Luke’s longer version of the Nazareth visit, Jesus has the words flung at him: “Physician, heal yourself! Do here what you have done at Capernaum” (Luke 4:23). At the very least these words have the ring of a challenge;³³ they reflect little, if any, faith.

The unenthusiastic response of the people of Nazareth is consistent with reservations expressed by Jesus’ family. The evangelist tells us that on one occasion when a crowd gathered (probably because of healings and exorcisms), “his family, hearing of it, went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is beside himself’” (Mark 3:21). The Greek is not clear: καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν: ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. The RSV translates οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ “his family.” Literally it means “those by him.” It surely does not refer to his disciples. So it refers either to people in the crowd (3:20) or to members of his family. The other problem concerns who is speaking the words, “He is beside himself” (ἐξέστη). Grammatically and contextually one should think that the subject of “they were saying” (ἔλεγον) is οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ. If so, the evangelist seems to be saying that members of Jesus’ family attempted to seize Jesus, for they (members of his family) were saying that Jesus was in a state. But Markan syntax is sometimes less than clear. Here the evangelist may be saying that Jesus’ family attempted to seize him because they (i.e., *people* in the crowd—so the RSV) were saying that Jesus was in a state. In other words, Jesus’ family was in a sense trying to protect Jesus. However the text is understood, readers are left with the impression that Jesus did not enjoy the full support of his family (cf. John 7:5, “even his brothers did not believe in him”). The awkwardness of this material argues strongly for the authenticity of Jesus’ reputation as healer and exorcist.³⁴

³² On the Markan evangelist’s understanding of miracle and faith, see M. E. Glasswell, “The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel,” in *Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History*, ed. C. F. D. Moule (London: Mowbray, 1965), 151–162.

³³ J. Nolland, “Classical and Rabbinical Parallels to ‘Physician, Heal Yourself’ (Lk. IV 23),” *NovT* 21 (1979): 193–209.

³⁴ This diversity of opinion with regard to Jesus’ miracles, along with its ubiquity, virtually guarantees the historicity of Jesus’ reputation as a worker of miracles. I believe this point is quite significant, notwithstanding the objections recently raised

Jesus' reputation as a healer even reaches the ears of the tetrarch of Galilee, Herod Antipas. Although opinions regarding Jesus differed, Herod, along with others, thinks he is perhaps John the Baptist, who had been beheaded, raised from the dead (Mark 6:14–16). Speculation such as this would have meant several things. First, it suggests the reputation of Jesus had grown a great deal. Though not the intention, Herod's opinion pays Jesus a compliment, in that Jesus' power is viewed as so great that it can be explained only in reference to a return from the dead, in which the prophet *redivivus* has brought back power from the immortal realm. Second, the comparison with John is ominous, for one would expect the tetrarch to seek Jesus' life, even as he had taken John's life. This, in fact, is what we are told in Luke (13:31; cf. 23:7–11).

More ominously, we are told that scribes from Jerusalem leveled a pretty serious charge against Jesus, saying: "He is possessed by Beelzebul and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons" (Mark 3:22). Such a charge not only discredits the healings and exorcisms of Jesus, it may also bring into play Mosaic teaching with regard to a false prophet, who, though he performs signs, leads Israel astray, urging the people to worship other gods (Deut 13:1–11). The people are not to listen to such a prophet. Even the prophet's family is to take no pity on him (13:6–9). The false prophet is to be killed (13:10). I am not certain that the accusation in Mark 3:22 carries this connotation, but it is interesting to observe that Jewish criticism of Jesus in the second century and later sometimes alluded to Deuteronomy 13.³⁵

by Eric Eve, "Meier, Miracle and Multiple Attestation," *JSHJ* 3 (2005): 23–45. I have to agree with John Meier's point: "To sum up: the historical fact that Jesus performed extraordinary deeds deemed by himself and others to be miracles is supported most impressively by the criterion of multiple attestation of source and forms and the criterion of coherence. The miracle traditions about Jesus' public ministry are already so widely attested in various sources and literary forms by the end of the first Christian generation that total fabrication by the early church is, practically speaking, impossible." See J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, II: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 630. Eve underestimates the strength of the eyewitness testimony lying behind the New Testament gospels. On this point, see S. Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story*, WUNT 123 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); R. J. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

³⁵ As seen in Justin Martyr, *Dial. Tryph.* 69.7; *b. Sanh.* 43a, 107b. For discussion of the possibility of Deuteronomy 13 lying behind the accusation, see G. N. Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God's People?"

Jesus' healing and exorcistic powers seemed to elicit the most amazement and comment. His actions are explicitly compared to those of the scribes: "And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). The crowd was astonished, because Jesus invoked no authoritative names, uttered no incantations, and employed no paraphernalia. He commanded the evil spirit to depart, and it departed. Thanks to a few eyewitness accounts and the survival of a number of magical texts, we have some idea of what the typical exorcist did, in attempting to cast out an evil spirit. One of the most helpful accounts is provided by Josephus.

According to Josephus (*Ant.* 8.46–49), a certain Eleazar, who employed incantations attributed to king Solomon, could draw out demons through a person's nostrils, through use of the Baaras root (a root further described in *War* 7.180–85) and a ring and seal (δακτύλιον ἔχοντα ὑπὸ τῆ σφραγίδι ῥίζαν) handed down, supposedly given to Solomon by an angel (cf. *T. Sol.* 1:6 δακτυλίδιον ἔχον σφραγίδα). Josephus tells us that Eleazar "in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, tribunes, and a number of soldiers, could free people possessed by demons." He could do this because Solomon had "composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return" (*Ant.* 8.45–46).

The tradition of Solomon as exorcist par excellence was widespread in late antiquity. It begins in the Bible itself where Solomon is described as unsurpassed in knowledge (1 Kgs 4:29–34). His knowledge of proverbs and plants (1 Kgs 4:32–33) contributed to later speculation that he had mastered the secrets of herbs and spells. And with his knowledge of herbs and spells the king had power over spirits. According to the Wisdom of Solomon God gave the monarch knowledge of "the powers of spirits [πνευμάτων βίαις] and the reasonings of men, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots; [he] learned what is both secret and what is manifest" (*Wis* 7:17–21).

in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 164–180. Stanton concludes that "it would be surprising if some opponents did not dub [Jesus] as a false prophet, perhaps even with Deuteronomy 13 in mind" (180). See also P. W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study," *JAAR* 49 (1982): 567–88.

Solomon's power over demonic forces was appealed to for protection, as has been shown by Aramaic and Hebrew incantations dating from the early centuries of the Common Era. It is to this tradition that Josephus refers in mentioning Eleazar.

The tradition of Solomon as master healer and exorcist was well known in Christian circles. Origen refers to those who attempted exorcisms according to the spells written by Solomon (*Comm. Matthew* 33 [on Matt 26:63]). The pseudepigraphal *Testament of Solomon*, probably written by a Greek-speaking Christian in the second or third century, though based on earlier Jewish material, is wholly dedicated to this theme.³⁶

The name of Solomon was invoked in Jewish charms and incantations. In an Aramaic incantation bowl we read: "Bound are the demons...with the bond of 'El Shaddai and with the sealing of King Solomon, son [of David]...Amen..."³⁷ Solomon's name appears in the Aramaic version of Psalm 91, a psalm that in late antiquity was understood as providing protection from demons.³⁸ Even in pagan incantations the name of Solomon is invoked: "I conjure you by the seal [κατὰ τῆς σφραγίδος] that Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah" (*PGM* IV.3007–3086, at lines 39–41). The seal (σφραγίς) mentioned here is that mentioned in Josephus and in *Testament of Solomon*.³⁹

Three gospel passages are particularly interesting in the light of this Solomonic tradition. The first is Jesus' assertion: "Behold, something

³⁶ D. C. Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.42–49," *HTR* 78 (1985): 1–25.

³⁷ From C. H. Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Orientalia* 10 (1991): 116–141, 272–280, at 273–276 (no. 11, lines 17–18).

³⁸ See v. 3, which reads: "For he will deliver you, Solomon my son, from the snare and the obstacle, from death and confusion," and v. 9, which reads: "Solomon answered and said: 'For you are my confidence, O Lord...'" Solomon's name does not appear in the Hebrew or Greek versions of Psalm 91. The demonic orientation of the Aramaic version is seen in vv. 5–6, which read: "Be not afraid of the terror of demons who walk at night, of the arrow of the angel of death that he looses during the day; of the death that walks in darkness, of the band of demons that attacks at noon," and in v. 10, which reads: "The lord of the world responded and thus he said: 'No harm shall happen to you; and no plague or demon shall come near to your tents.'"

³⁹ For more on this topic, see C. C. McCown, "The Christian Tradition as to the Magical Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 2 (1922): 1–24; D. C. Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David," *HTR* 68 (1975): 235–252.

greater than Solomon is here [πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ᾧδε!]” (Matt 12:42). In itself this assertion is astonishing. But more than that, the language of the formula, namely, that someone important is “here” (ᾧδε), is echoed in other incantations, e.g., “Abraham dwells here [ᾧδε]” (P.Rainer gr. 19889). In other words, Jesus’ choice of words may have deliberately echoed the language of incantation. Coherent with Jesus’ comparison of himself with Solomon is a second passage, in which blind Bartimaeus appeals to Jesus for healing, addressing him as “Son of David” (Mark 10:46–52, esp. vv. 47–48). Given Solomon’s reputation as healer, the epithet that the blind man chose may allude to Solomon, son of David, as much as it alludes to David’s messianic descendent.⁴⁰

The third passage concerns the exorcist, outside Jesus’ following, who casts out demons in the name of Jesus (Mark 9:38–40):

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name [ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ἐκβάλλοντα δαιμόνια], and we forbade him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us.”

What is remarkable is that this activity evidently was taking place during the pre-Easter ministry. The probability that this is authentic pre-Easter tradition is seen in the surprising response of Jesus, which stands in tension with early Christian teaching and practice, in which only *Christian* leaders, especially the apostles, have the authority to invoke the name of Jesus for purposes of healing and exorcism. This point is dramatically illustrated in Acts, in the story of the young slave girl with the python spirit (Acts 16:16–18) and in the story of the seven sons of Sceva, the Jewish high priest (Acts 19:13–20). Not just anyone can invoke the name of Jesus, certainly not professional soothsayers and exorcists. Given the probability that we have here the post-Easter Christian perspective, it is more than probable that the

⁴⁰ For more on this passage, see Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David”; J. H. Charlesworth, “Solomon and Jesus: The Son of David in Ante-Markan Traditions (Mk 10:47),” in *Biblical and Humane: A Festschrift for John F. Priest*, ed. L. B. Elder et al., *Homage* 20 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 125–151; idem, “The Son of David: Solomon and Jesus (Mark 10.47),” in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism*, ed. P. Borgen and S. Giversen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), 72–87.

story found in Mark 9 represents genuine pre-Easter tradition.⁴¹ Of course, well after the timeframe of the book of Acts, the name of Jesus is invoked, not only by Christians, but by pagans (e.g., *PGM* IV.3019–3020: “I adjure you by the God of the Hebrews, Jesus”) and even non-Christian Jews (*t. Hullin* 2.22; cf. *b. Sanh.* 43a; *b. Gittin* 57a, ms M).

The implications are extraordinary: Professional exorcists in the time of Jesus invoked his name, much as they invoked the name of Solomon, whose name and reputation in late antiquity were highly regarded. Perhaps others shared Jesus’ opinion, namely, that indeed one greater than Solomon was here.

Before concluding the discussion of Jesus as healer and exorcist, something needs to be said about the mystical or visionary dimension of his life and ministry. In a recent book on the life and spiritual development of Jesus Bruce Chilton has appealed to Jewish *Merkabah* (“Chariot”) mysticism as the probable backdrop of Jesus’ mysticism and access to divine insight and empowerment.⁴² Few know the Jewish world of Jesus as well as Chilton and his book is filled with helpful, clarifying insight, not least his treatment of Jesus’ status as *mamzer*, or one of suspect birth. Although the degree of influence of *Merkabah* mysticism in the development of Jesus has been challenged,⁴³ the significance of the ecstatic and visionary dimension cannot any longer be ignored.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For more on Mark 9:38–40, see G. H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 125–127.

⁴² Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*.

⁴³ See C. L. Quarles, “Jesus as *Merkabah* Mystic,” *JSHJ* 3 (2005): 5–22.

⁴⁴ The question of *Merkabah* mysticism in the time of Jesus is as difficult as it is interesting. There does seem to be evidence of antiquity, as seen in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and here and there in early Christian writings. One thinks of Paul’s ascent into the “third heaven,” where he heard things that cannot be repeated (2 Cor 12:1–7), of those at Colossae who, having entered heaven, have participated in angelic liturgy (Col 2:18), and of the visionary at Qumran, who has acquired learning in heaven and therefore has no equal on earth (4Q491c). For a study on the general topic, see T. Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse*, WUNT 2.142 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). For studies of the possible presence of early *Merkabah* ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the LXX, and Christian tradition, see D. J. Halperin, “*Merkabah* Midrash in the Septuagint,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 351–363; J. M. Baumgarten, “The Qumran Sabbath Shirot and Rabbinic *Merkabah* Traditions,” *RevQ* 13 (1988): 199–213; J. Schaberg, “Mark 14.62: Early Christian *Merkabah* Imagery?” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. J. Marcus and M. Soards, JSNTSup 24 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 69–94; D. Dimant, “The *Merkabah* Vision in Second Ezekiel

Jesus' vision of heaven (Mark 1:10–11; 9:2–8; Luke 10:18–19), identification with the human being, or “son of man,” of Dan 7:13–14 (Mark 2:10), as well as his bold assertion to be seated at the right hand of God himself (Mark 14:61–62), attest this mystical and visionary dimension. Moreover, Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness temptation (Mark 1:12–13; Matt 4:1–11 = Luke 4:1–13) and his declaration, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18), add further documentation to Jesus as healer, exorcist, and mystic.

4. *Jesus as Messiah*

For Jesus the beginning of the messianic trajectory is probably to be traced to his appeal to passages from Isaiah. He is the prophetic herald of good news who is “anointed” with the Spirit of God. His announcement, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), reflects the language of Isa 40:9 and 52:7, which in the Aramaic the text reads: “The kingdom of your God is revealed.” Isaiah's “gospel” (בשרה = εὐαγγέλιον) is understood to be the revelation of the kingdom (or rule) of God.⁴⁵

Jesus is qualified and equipped to proclaim this message, because he is the prophet anointed by the Spirit of the Lord. We see this in the Lukan version of the Nazareth Sermon (Luke 4:16–30), where Isa 61:1–2 is quoted (“the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news”) and is said to be fulfilled “today” (Luke 4:21). Although some critic have expressed reserva-

(4Q385 4),” *RevQ* 14 (1990): 331–48; B. Nitzan, “The Merkabah Descriptions in 4Q Berakhot,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies. Division A: The Bible and its World*, ed. D. Assaf, (1994), 87–94 (Hebrew); and M. G. Abegg Jr., “Who Ascended to Heaven? 4Q491, 4Q427, and the Teacher of Righteousness,” in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. C. A. Evans and P. W. Flint, *Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 61–73. Quarles (“Jesus as *Merkabah* Mystic”) expresses reservations about the conclusions reached in some of these studies.

⁴⁵ The dictional and thematic coherence between Jesus' proclamation and the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah has been adequately clarified and defended by B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time*, GNS 8 (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984); idem, “The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion,” 255–280.

tions about the historicity of this version of Jesus' proclamation in Nazareth (cf. Mark 6:1–6), there is little reason for skepticism with regard to the allusions to Isaiah in Jesus' reply to the imprisoned John the Baptist (Matt 11:2–6 = Luke 7:19–23).⁴⁶ The significance of Jesus' allusion to words and phrases from Isaiah has been greatly clarified by one of the fragmentary scrolls from Qumran.

4Q521 speaks of a "Messiah, whom heaven and earth will obey." The text goes on to describe things expected to take place: God's "Spirit will hover over the poor, and he will renew the faithful with his strength." He will free prisoners, restore the sight of the blind, heal the wounded, make alive the dead, and proclaim good news to the poor. The parallels to Jesus' reply to the imprisoned John the Baptist have been pointed out (Matt 11:5 = Luke 7:22).⁴⁷ Jesus' reply, as in the case of 4Q521, is heavily dependent upon words and phrases drawn from Isa 26:19; 35:5–6; and 61:1–2.⁴⁸ The parallels suggest at the very least that Jesus' reply would have been understood as an implicit claim to a messianic role (though whether principally in a royal or prophetic capacity must be settled on other terms).

⁴⁶ In my opinion, when in Mark's briefer version Jesus declares, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country..." (Mark 6:4), in all probability he has alluded to Isa 61:1, which in the Aramaic says, "The prophet said, 'A spirit of prophecy before the Lord God is upon me...,'" the very text presented in the longer Lukan version (Luke 4:17–19). On the eschatological understanding of Isa 61:1–3 in Jewish late antiquity, see 11Q13.

⁴⁷ For principal literature, see É. Puech, "Une apocalypse messianique (4Q521)," *RevQ* 15 (1992): 475–522; J. D. Tabor and M. O. Wise, "On 'Resurrection' and the Synoptic Gospel Tradition: A Preliminary Study," *JSP* 10 (1992): 150–161; R. Bergmeier, "Beobachtungen zu 4Q521 f 2, ii 1–13," *ZDMG* 145 (1995): 38–48; J. J. Collins, "The Works of the Messiah," *DSD* 1 (1994): 98–112; idem, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 117–122; M. Becker, "4Q521 und die Gesalbten," *RevQ* 18 (1997): 73–96; K.-W. Niebuhr, "Die Werke des eschatologischen Freudenboten (4Q521 und die Jesusüberlieferung)," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, BETL 131 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 637–647; E. Puech, "Some Remarks on 4Q246 and 4Q521 and Qumran Messianism," in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, ed. D. W. Parry and E. Ulrich, STDJ 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 545–565; M. Labahn, "The Significance of Signs in Luke 7:22–23 in the Light of Isaiah 61 and the Messianic Apocalypse," in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. C. A. Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 146–168.

⁴⁸ The authenticity of the exchange between Jesus and John should not be doubted. No plausible explanation can be found for why Christians would invent a conversation between Jesus and John, where the latter openly expresses doubt about the identity and mission of the former.

Recognition as the anointed eschatological prophet does not preclude identification as the messianic “son of David.” As already mentioned, in late antiquity David was viewed as a prophet. Nor does recognition as a healer and exorcist preclude identification as the messianic “son of David,” for David himself, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily (1 Sam 16:13), could drive away evil spirits (1 Sam 16:23), and, as already reviewed above, his famous son Solomon was exorcist par excellence.

Accordingly, we should not be surprised that Jesus, well known prophet, healer, and exorcist, was hailed as “son of David” by blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47–48), and when he entered Jerusalem, mounted on the royal mule (Mark 11:7–11; cf. 1 Kgs 1:32–48), was greeted with the words of Ps 118:25–26, influenced again by the Aramaic interpretive tradition, “Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!” (Mark 11:10).

Jesus’ royal messianic self-understanding is confirmed in his reply to the high priest. Caiaphas asked Jesus directly: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” The epithet “Messiah, Son of God,” is most naturally interpreted as in reference to the anticipated Davidic Messiah (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:1, 7; 89:20, 26–27; 4Q174 I, 11; Rom 1:3–4). Jesus not only affirmed that he is the Messiah, Son of God (as is clear in the words “[Yes,] I am”), he combined Davidic material with his favorite self-designation as “the Son of man” in a conflation of Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13: “you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Both Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 envision scenes of judgment upon God’s enemies.⁴⁹ Thus, in replying the way he did Jesus threatened Caiaphas and his colleagues with judgment, a judgment that will some day be carried out when Jesus sits on the very chariot throne of his heavenly father. The high priest understandably reacted in horror, tearing his garments in response to such blasphemy.

That Roman authority understood the royal implications of Jesus’ claim is seen in his subsequent crucifixion as “king of the Jews” (Mark 15:2, 18, 26), the title reserved for Israel’s ruler appointed by Rome (Josephus, *War* 1.282; *Ant.* 14.36; 15.373, 409). Jesus’ earliest followers understood their master in terms of Davidic messianism as

⁴⁹ See M. Hengel, “‘Sit at My Right Hand!’,” in *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 119–225, esp. 181–189.

well. Jesus' physical descent from David is acknowledged, with surprisingly little emphasis (as seen especially in Rom 1:3), and Jesus is so commonly referred to as Messiah (i.e., "Christ" in Greek) that the title takes on the function of a name.

5. *Jesus as Martyr*

There are several utterances that suggest that Jesus anticipated martyrdom for himself and some of his followers. The obvious place to begin is with Jesus' formal predictions of his suffering and death (e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34, among others).⁵⁰ Of course, many critical scholars claim that these Passion predictions are prophecies after the fact, or what are sometimes called *vaticinia ex eventu* ("prophecies from the event"). It must be admitted that these predictions have a formulaic appearance and contain details (such as being mocked, spat upon, and scourged) that suggest knowledge of what in the end actually happened to Jesus. But even if it is acknowledged that the Passion predictions have been edited in the light of what happened, that does not necessarily mean that Jesus in fact did not anticipate his death, even death specifically by crucifixion. What is the evidence outside the formal Passion predictions that suggests that Jesus really did anticipate suffering and death?

First, Jesus' warning that those who wish to follow him had better be prepared to take up the cross (Mark 8:34). John Dominic Crossan thinks this saying is probably authentic, because of a similar saying credited to a Cynic!⁵¹ This argument is hardly compelling, not least because Jesus was no Cynic. What makes the cross saying likely genuine is that in the end Jesus was unable to take up his cross and carry it to the place of crucifixion. Someone else has to carry it (Mark 15:21). What post-Easter follower of Jesus would invent a saying that reflects an ideal that Jesus himself could not fulfill?

Taking up one's cross would for the first-century inhabitant of the Roman Empire call to mind the condemned person carrying his cross

⁵⁰ H. F. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection: The Provenance, Meaning and Correlation of the Synoptic Predictions*, WUNT 2.20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986).

⁵¹ J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 353. Crossan cites Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.2.10: "If you want to be crucified, just wait. The cross will come."

to the place of execution.⁵² Crucifixion was common enough in Palestine itself (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.295) that we need not think Jesus' saying must have originated later and elsewhere. But the saying is strange nonetheless. In rabbinic parlance a disciple is urged to take up the yoke of Torah, or the yoke of the commandments (e.g. *m. 'Abot* 3:5; *m. Ber.* 2:2); never to take up the cross. Jesus' summons would have struck a somber, if not macabre note in the ears of his audience.

Closely related to Jesus' exhortation and warning regarding the cross are his sayings about the dangers of temptation and the dreadful consequences of causing others to stumble (Mark 9:42–48):

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

The fearsome injuries described (amputated limbs, gouged out eyes) parallel the horrors described in 2 Maccabees 6–7 inflicted upon the faithful who refused to commit apostasy during the pogroms of Antiochus IV. The opening statement, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,” may allude to the steadfast testimony of the righteous elder Eleazar (2 Macc 6:18–31). When asked only to pretend to eat pork and thereby escape torture and death, he refused, saying

“Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life,” he said, “lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. For even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty.”

⁵² M. Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 62: “People were all too aware of what it meant to bear the cross through the city and then to be nailed to it.”

The courageous words of Eleazar cohere with the point that Jesus has made. Jesus warns his followers not to cause “one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,” just as Eleazar tells his tormentors that he will not, through pretense, cause “the young” to “be led astray.” If he does engage in pretense, to avoid the punishment of men (which as we see in 2 Maccabees 7 includes amputated limbs and gouged out eyes), he will “not escape the hands of the Almighty.”⁵³

Second, the questions that Jesus put to James and John about drinking the cup also attest his anticipation of suffering and martyrdom (Mark 10:38–39):

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.”

The entire dialogue smacks of authenticity. When the disciples learn of the request of James and John (to sit on the right and left of Jesus when he rules) they are indignant. The self-interest of the sons of Zebedee and the anger of the other disciples hardly paint a flattering

⁵³ In recent years a great number of studies concerned with martyrdom have appeared, many of them treating the Maccabean martyrs. For a selection of studies, see K. Grayston, “Atonement and Martyrdom,” in *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context: Festschrift M. D. Hooker*, ed. J. Barclay and J. Sweet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 250–263; J. W. van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*, JSJSup 57 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); D. Boyarin, “Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 577–627; J. W. van Henten, “Martyrdom and Martyrdom: Some Remarks about Noble Death in Josephus,” in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Brüssel 1998*, ed. J. U. Kalms, Münsteraner judaistische Studien 4 (Münster: Lit, 1999), 124–141; S. A. Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ in Antioch: Maccabean Martyrdom and Galatians 1 and 2*, SNTSMS 114 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); T. Rajak, “Dying for the Law: The Martyr’s Portrait in Jewish-Greek Literature,” in *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction*, AGJU 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 99–133; P. B. Munoa, “Jesus, the Merkavah, and Martyrdom in Early Christian Tradition,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 303–25; J. W. van Henten and F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); S. M. Passamaneck, “The Jewish Mandate of Martyrdom: Logic and Illogic in the Halakhah,” *HUCA* 74 (2003): 215–241; J. W. van Henten, “Jewish Martyrdom and Jesus’ Death,” in *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament*, ed. J. Frey, WUNT 181 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005): 139–68; K. R. Atkinson, “Taxo’s Martyrdom and the Role of the Nuntius in the Testament of Moses: Implications for Understanding the Role of Other Intermediary Figures,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 453–76.

portrait of Jesus' closest followers. But what is especially interesting is that here again Jesus is not able to fulfill his own words. He asked James and John if they were able to drink the cup that he will drink and they said that they were able. Yet, in prayer in Gethsemane, shortly before his arrest, Jesus fell on his face and begged God to take the cup of suffering from him (Mark 14:33–36). This is not the stuff of pious fiction or post-Easter dogma. It is authentic material, even if awkward and unflattering.

Third, Jesus' widely attested Words of Institution (Mark 14:22–25; 1 Cor 11:23–25; *Did.* 9:1–5), provide further evidence that Jesus anticipated his martyrdom and sought to understand it. His words allude to several important scriptures (Exod 24:8; Jer 31:31; Zech 9:11). In the shedding of his blood, Jesus finds the guarantee of the covenant and the kingdom of God. Luke's addition of "new," as in "the new covenant" (Luke 22:20), may well reflect Christian editing, but in all probability correctly captured the sense of Jesus' words. The "new covenant" hearkens back to the promise of the prophet long ago: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31). The new covenant cannot be established until the blood of God's Son, Israel's Messiah, is shed.

The idea of the saving benefit of a righteous man's death is hardly unusual in the Jewish world, or in the Mediterranean world in general for that matter. There are several expressions of the belief that the death of the righteous will benefit, or even save, God's people (e.g., 1 Macc 6:44; 4 Macc 1:11; 17:21–22; 18:3–4; *T. Moses* 9–10; Ps.-Philo, *L.A.B.* 18:5). Among the most important are traditions associated with the torture and death of the already mentioned Maccabean martyrs, who in the second century BCE bravely opposed the Syrian tyrant Antiochus IV: "If our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants...I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nature...and *through me and my brothers* to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation" (2 Macc 7:33, 37–38, RSV, with emphasis added). Similarly, Jesus

believed that God was angry with his people for having rejected his message. We see this in Jesus' weeping over the city (Luke 19:41–44; Matt 23:37–39 = Luke 13:34–35) and in his ominous allusion to the shepherd in Zech 13:7, whom God would strike down.

6. *Conclusion*

The principal difficulty in attempting to classify or categorize Jesus is that he exhibited characteristics of several categories and the categories themselves overlap. Because Jesus probably exhibited features characteristic of all of them, he was regarded by many—among his following and among those not of his following—as prophet, sage, healer, Messiah, and martyr, including combinations of these categories. That his movement settled on “Messiah” as the title of office and “Son of God” as the personal or metaphysical title strongly suggests that the messianic identity of Jesus took hold early in the tradition, probably in the pre-Easter setting and not after Easter, as one perspective among several competing perspectives. If the latter were the case, one would expect evidence of competing, different interpretations of Jesus. Jesus as Messiah is ubiquitous in the tradition. Indeed, to deny Jesus as the Messiah is to deny the faith (e.g., 1 John 2:22–23).

