

3-26-2010

The Christology of Jesus' Disciples

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DOI: 10.25148/etd.FI10041631

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Michael Zolondek

2010

To: Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Michael Zolondek, and entitled The Christology of Jesus' Disciples, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

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The question of whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and if so in what sense, is one of the most important in historical Jesus research. Although many factors play a role in answering this question, one has been neglected for far too long: the Christology of Jesus' disciples. This thesis provides a much needed analysis of the disciples' view of Jesus. Numerous Gospel passages are evaluated using criteria, such as the criterion of multiple independent attestation and the criterion of embarrassment, to determine their historicity. These passages are then studied against the background of Second Temple Judaism to determine how the disciples viewed Jesus. The analysis demonstrates that from the time Jesus' disciples first began following him they believed he was the Messiah. Ultimately, this conclusion strongly reinforces the view that Jesus made a messianic claim for himself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
II. METHODOLOGY	4
III. JOHN THE BAPTIST	6
The Coming One	6
The Baptist's Expectations for the Coming One	9
The Identity of the Coming One	19
IV. FROM THE BAPTIST TO JESUS	30
V. PETER'S MESSIANIC CONFESSION	35
VI. JAMES AND JOHN'S REQUEST	43
VII. AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION	53
VIII. CONCLUSION	55
IX. SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS	56
X. FUTURE RESEARCH	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

I. Introduction and Background

Virtually every comprehensive book or commentary on the historical Jesus will at some point address the question of whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and if so in what sense.¹ William Wrede, in his monumental work *The Messianic Secret*, put forth the most influential challenge to the Gospels' reports that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. He did so by identifying the so-called "messianic secret" motif in Mark. He observed that at the crucial juncture in the Gospel narrative when Jesus was proclaimed as the Messiah, he ordered that his messiahship not be disclosed.² According to Wrede, this was evidence that Jesus never made a messianic claim and was not believed to be the Messiah during his earthly ministry; it was only after Jesus' resurrection that the disciples came to regard Jesus as the Messiah.³ However, because Jesus' disciples only came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah after the resurrection, the early Church needed to explain why Jesus' messiahship was never revealed during his earthly ministry. This was accomplished by creating traditions in which Jesus' messiahship was indeed revealed, only secretly.⁴ This was the messianic secret.

The impact of Wrede's study was immense. As William Baird notes, "After the publication of Wrede's *Messianic Secret*, study of the life of Jesus could never be the

¹ From this point forward this question will be referred to as "the messianic question."

² E.g., Mark 1.23-25, 34; 3.11-12; 8.27-30; 9.9.

³ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge; James Clarke, 1971), 216, 236.

⁴ Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 229-230.

same.”⁵ However, Wrede’s line of argumentation had serious deficiencies. Wrede himself only a few years after his *Messianic Secret* was published wrote in a letter, “I am more inclined than ever before to believe that Jesus considered himself chosen as Messiah.”⁶ Albert Schweitzer would come to put together a comprehensive refutation Wrede’s work.⁷ The most powerful argument Schweitzer made, and which continues to be made today, against Wrede is that nowhere in the Jewish literature of Jesus’ day is the Messiah expected to die and resurrect.⁸ Resurrection would mean nothing at all in terms of messiahship if the disciples had not believed Jesus was the messiah prior to his resurrection or if Jesus had never claimed to be the Messiah. Therefore, Jesus’ disciples had to have believed he was the Messiah prior to his death and resurrection or Jesus had to have made a messianic claim for himself during his ministry, or both, if one is to account for the early Christians’ belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

⁵ William Baird, *History of New Testament Research Volume 2: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 147. Wrede’s hypothesis was embraced by Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most influential scholars of the 20th century: “it must remain questionable whether Jesus held himself for the Messiah at all and did not rather first become Messiah in the faith of the community” (“Study of the Synoptic Gospels” in *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research*, trans. Frederick C Grant [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962], 71); In his *History of Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marshall (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 347,

Bultmann states that we “can leave for the present undecided the question whether the theory of the Messianic secret is to be explained as apologetic...or as a veiling of the fact that faith in Jesus’ Messiahship begins from belief in his resurrection. I hold the second view to be right, and Wrede thought the same.”

⁶ Baird, *New Testament Research*, 149n.40.

⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. William Montgomery (Dover Edition; New York: Dover, 2005), 328-349.

⁸ N. A. Dahl, “The Crucified Messiah,” in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, ed. Donald H. Juel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 38; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2002 [1979]), p. 177; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 540; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 626-627.

Although many scholars have concluded that the disciples had to have regarded Jesus as the Messiah prior to his resurrection, debate concerning the messianic question continues. Many scholars continue to deny that Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah.⁹ Others have argued that Jesus did in fact consider himself to be the Messiah, even if he redefined that role in some way.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the words and deeds of Jesus often take center stage when scholars attempt to answer the messianic question. There are, however, other issues that are also considered by scholars when addressing this question. Among those other issues are the various messianic beliefs in Jesus day, his social context, and his interactions with others. All of these issues, and many more, play a role, to a greater or lesser extent, in scholars' determinations as to whether Jesus viewed his role in history as being that of the Messiah. This paper is concerned with one of those issues that often play a lesser role in answering the messianic question: the belief held by the inner circle of the 12, henceforth referred to simply as the disciples, that Jesus was the Messiah.

Many scholars will at some point consider the disciples' view of Jesus in their work. As stated previously, most have concluded that sometime prior to his resurrection Jesus' disciples regarded him as the Messiah. However, these discussions regarding how

⁹ Gunther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 172; Erich Dinkler, "Peter's Confession and the Satan Saying: The Problem of Jesus' Messiahship" in *The Future of Our Religious Past*, ed. James M. Robinson (Chatham: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), 169-202; Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM, 1973), 154; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 147; Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 234, 244-259, esp. 257; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 653-654.

¹⁰ Martin Hengel, "Jesus, The Messiah of Israel" in *Studies in Early Christology* (London: SCM, 1995), 1-72; Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 174-202; Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 263-278; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 477-539.

the disciples viewed Jesus are often brief, and a comprehensive analysis of who the disciples believed Jesus to be is lacking. This paper will provide this much needed analysis of the disciples' view of Jesus, and it will consider the implications that analysis has on the messianic question itself. In the end, one finds that Jesus' disciples regarded Jesus as the royal Davidic Messiah, and that such a belief presupposes that messianic words and deeds were spoken and performed by Jesus. To offer a detailed answer to the messianic question in light of these conclusions would require much more space than I have to dedicate here. Therefore, only a brief answer will be provided in the section of this paper dealing with my future research.

II. Methodology

Because this paper is concerned with the messianic beliefs of Jesus' disciples, its analysis will be limited to those traditions in which this belief is found. Therefore, a tradition like that found in John 6:1-15, although revealing a messianic view of Jesus on the part of a large crowd, will not be discussed. Moreover, this paper is not intended to explore whether Jesus' believed himself to be the Messiah. Thus, his words and deeds which often play a central role in answering the messianic question, such as the triumphal entry or the cleansing of the Temple, will likewise not be addressed here.

A significant amount of space will be devoted to questions concerning the historicity and interpretation of the traditions examined in this paper. If one bases one's conclusions on certain traditions but does not address the objections to their historicity, then that person's conclusions may be regarded as weak. Likewise, if one's conclusions are dependent upon a specific reading of those traditions, then one must offer arguments as to why one reading should be preferred over another. Therefore, my methodology

involves a critical use of the various criteria employed in historical Jesus research without favoring any one of them. Take, for instance, the criterion of multiple independent attestation which would indicate that a pericope is historical because it has been integrated into two or more sources independently of one another. Thus, if a tradition is found in both Q as well as Mark, i.e., in multiple independent sources, this tradition has an initial claim to authenticity. However, an over reliance on this particular criterion can create problems. Crossan's work an excellent example of this. Because he seeks only to treat traditions that fit the criterion of multiple independent attestation, he ignores important traditions that warrant serious claim to attention based on other considerations and would offer valuable information about the historical Jesus.

In this paper I will not only be working with the criterion of multiple attestation, but I will also make use of the criterion of dissimilarity and the criterion of embarrassment. Scholars have pointed out that when a tradition "cannot be derived either from Judaism at the time of Jesus or from the early Church after him,"¹¹ i.e., it is dissimilar to both, it is likely to be reliable. Likewise, if a pericope is embarrassing to Jesus or those who were leaders in the early Church, it is said to fit the criterion of embarrassment and therefore is unlikely to have been created by the early Church.

Furthermore, setting the various traditions that I will be analyzing in the context of Second Temple Judaism is a necessary task if one is to put forth credible interpretations of any given pericope. One of the major problems of the 19th century quest for the historical Jesus was that it did not take this task seriously, and therefore it

¹¹ John P. Meier, "Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 129.

produced a Jesus that was not recognizably Jewish. Second Temple Jewish texts and ideas will therefore play a significant role in my interpretation of the traditions analyzed here.

III. John the Baptist

Many scholars have found that a good starting point for studying the historical Jesus is John the Baptist.¹² What has not been so apparent is that John the Baptist is an equally good starting point for analyzing the disciples' view of Jesus. There is a consensus among scholars today that the Gospels do provide valuable historical information about the Baptist. Most all agree that John was active around the Jordan River, issued a call to repent, warned of a coming judgment, and baptized. However, the portions of the Baptist's preaching that will reveal the most about the disciples' view of Jesus are those that are most hotly debated: the identity of the one that John expected to come after him and the Baptist's expectations for this coming one.

The Coming One

As noted by Robert L. Webb, "According to the [New Testament], a central feature of John's eschatological proclamation was the announcement of the imminent arrival of an expected figure."¹³ The Synoptic Gospels report the Baptist's description of the coming figure as follows:

¹² Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Bradford & Dickens, 1947), 239-258; Witherington, *Christology*, 33-54; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 339.

¹³ Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-historical Study* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 261.

Mark 1.7-8:

He [John] proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴

Matt. 3.11-12:

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Luke 3.16-17:

John answered all of them by saying, “baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

There is strong evidence for the historicity of each element of this announcement.

It is highly improbable that the Baptist’s claim that “one who is more powerful than I is coming” was a creation of the early Church. Firstly, “one who is coming” or “coming one” is not a title used to refer to Jesus in the early Church.¹⁵ In fact, it is difficult to demonstrate that it was even a title in the time of Jesus,¹⁶ even though it was used to “designat[e] a messianic functionary.”¹⁷ Secondly, as noted by Witherington, “the setting

¹⁴ All biblical citations and quotations in English are from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁵ Witherington, *Christology*, 42; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 202; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 281-282.

¹⁶ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 202; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 270.

¹⁷ Michael F. Bird, *Are You the One Who is to Come? The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids; Baker, 2009), 102, 113.

of the story, had it been created by the early church, would surely have placed a different title than the vague ‘coming one’ on John’s lips.”¹⁸ There were, after all, many who “‘came after’ John, and of those who had political or religious leadership it could be said that they were ‘mightier’ and ‘more worthy’ than John.”¹⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars of all persuasions have concluded that the Baptist spoke of a coming one.²⁰

The fact that Josephus does not mention the Baptist’s expectation of a coming one does not deter scholars from reaching this conclusion. It is regularly noted that Josephus had an aversion to messianic fervor, claimants, and movement.²¹ Furthermore, as Webb correctly observes:

Josephus’ account indicates that the people around John were excited to a fever pitch and ready to do anything and that this led Herod to fear *στασις*. Such a response by the people strongly suggests that John was preaching more than the rather general ethical message Josephus attributes to him. Thus, while Josephus does not mention John’s preaching of an expected figure, his account of the social dynamics surrounding John’s ministry indicates that some such message may have been involved. Therefore, Josephus’ lack of reference to an expected figure cannot be used to argue for the non-historicity of the Evangelists’ accounts.²²

With confidence in the authenticity of the Baptist’s announcement of a coming one, one can move on and attempt to discover who the Baptist believed this figure would be.

¹⁸ Witherington, *Christology*, 42.

¹⁹ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 267-268; cf. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 202.

²⁰ Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 117; Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 54, 165; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 201-202; Gerd Ludemann, *Jesus After Two Thousand Years: What He Really Said and Did* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2001), 8, 130; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369.

²¹ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 268-269.

²² *Ibid.*, 268-269; cf. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 200; Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 129.

The Baptist's Expectations for the Coming One

Scholars have identified various figures as the Baptist's coming one. The figures that have been suggested are God, the angelic prince Michael/Melchizedek, the human-like figure/the Son of Man, Elijah *redivivus*, the Aaronic Messiah, and the Davidic Messiah.²³ In order to identify the coming one as one, if any, of these figures, one must first determine what the Baptist's expectations for this figure were.

It is difficult to doubt that the Baptist declared that this coming one would be mightier than he was. The Gospels report that the Baptist believed himself to be unworthy "to stoop down and untie the thong of [the coming one's] sandals."²⁴ "[This] statement in John's proclamation concerning his unworthiness," notes Webb, "is found in all layers of the tradition."²⁵ Indeed, it is probable that this saying has triple independent attestation. Mark and Q provide the first two independent attestations, and the third comes from the Gospel of John, who most likely was not taking over his report from the Synoptics. Raymond Brown tests the theory that the fourth Evangelist borrowed from the Synoptics when he quotes the Baptist as saying "the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal"²⁶ with the following results:

²³ This list is taken from Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 222-254. It is the most comprehensive list I have found of possible figures for the Baptist's coming one and offers a detailed description of those figures. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369-371, lists four figures with only brief descriptions, and John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (ABRL; 3 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994), vol. 2, 34-35, simply names some figures that have been suggested without any detailed description at all. William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7* (London: T&T Clark, 2004 [1988]), 312-314, provides a list similar to Webb's but not nearly as comprehensive or detailed.

²⁴ Mark 1.7.

²⁵ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 271; cf. Theissen 201.

²⁶ John 1.27.

First, John has features in common with Acts as opposed to the other Gospels, namely, the use of “sandal” in the singular, the use of “worthy (*axios*) instead of “fit” (*hikanos*), a failure to describe the one to come as “mightier than I.” Yet, in using *opiso mou* for “after me,” John agrees with Mark and Matthew against Acts with its *met’ eme*. In speaking of unfastening the straps of the sandal, John is closest to Luke, for all the others have variations....In not mentioning a baptism with fire, John is closest to Mark, against Matthew and Luke. In using the phrase *en hydati*, John is closest to Matthew, against Mark and Luke (*hydati*). Mark puts the two types of baptism in immediately antithetic or contrasting parallelism, whereas Matthew and Luke separate the two baptisms by intermediary lines; John goes even further in separating them by a number of verses. *From this evidence it should be quite clear how difficult and complicated it is to seek to explain John’s form of the saying as a borrowing from the Synoptic Gospels.*²⁷

With this triple independent attestation, one has very strong evidence that the Baptist did not believe he was worthy to untie this coming figure’s sandals.²⁸

Furthermore, one must keep in mind that John saw his role as a preparatory one.

All four Gospels quote Isa. 40.3 in their reports of the Baptist:

Mark 1.1-13:

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight.’”

Matt. 3.3:

This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

²⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (AB vol. 29; London: G. Chapman, 1966), 52 (my emphasis).

²⁸ Even if it only had double attestation, this would still be significant evidence for the historicity of the Baptist’s statement of his unworthiness.

Luke 3.3-4:

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

John 1.19-23:

And they asked him [John the Baptist], “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

The connection between the Baptist and Isa. 40.3 likely has multiple independent attestation as well. C. H. Dodd, and Brown following him, argue that it is found independently in Mark and John, and Joseph Fitzmyer notes the possibility of a third independent attestation in Q.²⁹ Nevertheless, if one concluded that this passage was only singly attested, there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. As is often noted, in light of the Dead Sea Sect’s use of this same passage for explaining why they “segregated” themselves from the “men of sin” and lived in the desert,³⁰ and in light of John’s desert location, “it is perfectly plausible that John the Baptist did use the text of himself.”³¹ In

²⁹ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 252; Brown, *John I-XII*, 51; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 452.

³⁰ 1QS 8.13-16.

³¹ Brown, *John I-XII*, 50; cf. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 253, “Yet in view of a passage from the *Manual of Discipline* in the ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ it is by no means unlikely that the Baptist should have deliberately set himself to fill the role of the Voice.”; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 108, argues, “In the case of John the Baptist it is probably that Isa. 40 is not only a subsequent interpretation of his life in the wilderness but also motivated this.” Later on page 206 he reasserts that “in the case of the scriptural citations we can imagine that John the Baptist already related Isa. 40.3 to his mission. Its central role in the

fact, Dodd suggests that the fourth Evangelist “may be closer to the facts than the Synoptics” in placing this quotation on the lips of the Baptist himself.³² Lastly, as I will demonstrate below, the Baptist warned that the repentance to which he called the people was a decisive factor in the coming judgment and restoration that would be carried out by the one to come. Isa. 40.3 describes this preparatory role excellently. Thus, the coming one about whom the Baptist spoke and for whom the Baptist was a preparatory figure should be understood as being mightier than the Baptist himself.

What, however, did the Baptist expect this mightier coming one to do? According to all the Gospels, the Baptist contrasted his water baptism with the baptism of the coming one. However, the Gospels seem to lack agreement about the nature of the coming one’s baptism. According to Mark, the Baptist stated, “I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”³³ The Gospel of John likewise states that the one to come will baptize only with “the Holy Spirit.”³⁴ According to Q, however, the Baptist proclaimed, “I baptize you [[in]] water, but the one to come after me is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to [[take off]]. He will baptize you in [[holy]] spirit and fire.”³⁵ Because of these variations debate has arisen as to whether the Baptist

writings of the Qumran community also indicates that this text was understood as a task for the end-time, namely to prepare for God’s coming in the wilderness (1QS VIII, 13-16; IX. 19f.)”

³² Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 252-253.

³³ Mark 1.8.

³⁴ John 1.33.

³⁵ Q 3.16b. “Double square brackets are used in the reconstructed text of Q to enclose reconstructions that are probable but not certain, {C}” (James McConkey Robinson, Paul H. Hoffman, and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000], lxxxii.

spoke of a baptism of fire alone, Holy Spirit alone, both fire and Holy Spirit, or fire and wind, as well as how any one of these options should be interpreted.³⁶

The first option has the least support. There is simply no text that supports a fire only baptism; “it is a purely hypothetical construction,” as James Dunn correctly points out.³⁷ Moreover, it is unlikely that the addition of “with the Holy Spirit” was an addition of the early Church. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus baptize with the Holy Spirit. One must wait until Acts before a connection between Jesus and a Spirit baptism is made. When this connection is finally made in Acts, it lacks “the vital link,” as Dunn puts it, “in the transformation of fire-baptism into Spirit-baptism.”³⁸ “Luke does not regard Pentecost as a baptism in fire (or even in Spirit-and-fire),” Dunn continues, “for in Acts i 5 the logion is in its Markan form, and in ii 3 the tongues seen are only *like* fire.”³⁹ Moreover, as will be demonstrated below, the “fire” baptism about which the Baptist speaks is one of punitive judgment. This is in line with the Baptist’s use of fire imagery elsewhere; fire consumes the barren trees and the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire. Therefore, “the fire in the baptism logion, coming as it does between and closely linked to the other references, can hardly be so different as to lack the same element of punitive

³⁶ See the helpful summaries provided by James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism,” *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 3 (Apr., 1972), 81-83; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 473-474; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 204.

³⁷ Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire,” 84; cf. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 204, make an interesting point: “The pure baptism by fire is a reconstruction without support in the sources, which moreover could lead to the paradoxical conclusion that the baptism of John which preserves for eternal life would in the last resort be superior to the baptism of the stronger one, which destroys those who have not repented!”

³⁸ Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire,” 84.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 272-273. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 473, correctly observes that “the addition of ‘and with fire’” in Luke 3.16 actually “stands in contrast to the Lucan formulation in Acts 1:5, 11:16.”

destruction....and since the Christian fulfilment (Pentecost) could hardly be understood as an act of divine judgment the logion was preserved only in its Markan form.”⁴⁰

Therefore, the hypothesis that the Baptist originally claimed that the one to come would baptize with fire only should be abandoned.

The theory that the Baptist preached of a coming Spirit-only baptism likewise has little support. Fitzmyer correctly observes that “the addition of ‘and with fire’” in Luke 3.16 actually “stands in contrast to the Lucan formulation in Acts 1:5, 11:16,” and “there is no evidence that Luke has added [“and with fire”] here as ‘a Christian *peshar*-ing’ of the Marcan text in light of Pentecostal fulfillment (Acts 2:3,19), *pace* E. E. Ellis, *Gospel of Luke*, 90.”⁴¹ Furthermore, as noted above, the fire baptism in the Baptist’s preaching is one of destructive judgment. In light of this fact, Dunn once again offers an excellent analysis:

It is most improbable that Matthew or Luke transformed an earlier tradition [i.e., that in Mark’s Gospel] in which John’s preaching accorded so neatly with later Christian theology, by introducing a whole new hitherto unknown dimension to John’s preaching. On the contrary, the Q tradition matches its Jewish context so well and its picture of the Coming One is at such odds with the Christian picture of Jesus that it is almost impossible to deny the substantial authenticity of the Q tradition.”⁴²

Thus, it is just as difficult, if not more difficult, to conclude that the Baptist spoke of a Spirit-only baptism.

Ernest Best’s arguments against the presence of a “Spirit-baptism” in the Baptist’s preaching in favor of a baptism of “wind” and fire are unconvincing, as his arguments

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 473.

⁴² Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire,” 85.

contain serious flaws. Assuming that the Baptist's coming one was the Messiah, Best contends, "There is a wide expectation that the Holy Spirit is an eschatological gift but it is not directly connected to the person of the Messiah. It is unlikely that John made this connection: it must be attributed to the primitive Church."⁴³ However, Best gives no reason whatsoever as to why it is unlikely that the Baptist made this connection. Both Dunn and Webb have noted that even if no one had yet made such an explicit connection, "all the elements were present in the [Old Testament] and evidenced in Second Temple Jewish Literature," and thus at some point the connection was very likely going to be made.⁴⁴

Best also neglects an important aspect of the Baptist's preaching. He claims that the association with the Spirit is difficult because the Baptist's words are "directed to Israel and he threatens that the moment of punishment will come when the Messiah appears, whose winnowing fan is in his hand and who will burn the chaff with fire (Matt. iii 12; Luke iii 17)."⁴⁵ Yet, Best has omitted a very significant portion of this verse. For prior to burning the chaff, the coming one "will gather his wheat into the granary."⁴⁶ Keeping in mind that "John was not simply a preacher of hell-fire and brimstone" but

⁴³ Ernest Best, "Spirit-Baptism," *Novum Testamentum* 4, no. 3 (Oct., 1960), 236.

⁴⁴ Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire," 91: "What we can say with rather more assurance is that the step of fusing the two thoughts, of an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit and a Spirit-anointed Messiah, was hardly a very great one and was bound to be made sooner or later; and also that even if the Qumran reading of Isa. lii 14 f. and I QS iv 21 do not really take the final step, these passages seem at least to bring the ideas into juxtaposition. The tiny step which remains is one which the Baptist may well have taken on the basis of his own inspiration and conviction."; cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 274: "The distance between the two ideas, the outpouring of the spirit in the last times and a spirit-anointed messianic figure, was not great and they were bound to be bridged sooner or later: The spirit-anointed figure would be the one to bestow the expected spirit."

⁴⁵ Best, "Spirit-Baptism," 237.

⁴⁶ Luke 3:17/Matt. 3.12.

instead preached “‘a baptism of repentance *for the remission of sins*’ (Mark I 4; Luke iii 3)....John can hardly have promised those who responded to his preaching a further baptism which was solely retributive and destructive.”⁴⁷ Therefore, it follows that the wheat that was to be gathered into the granary represented those who had responded to the Baptist’s call to repentance and would not experience the destructive judgment.

Lastly, Best’s claim that the Baptist’s message was that the coming one would baptize with “wind” and fire should likewise be rejected. This claim is based on the assumption that the coming one’s baptism was solely one of judgment.⁴⁸ This, as noted above, is highly problematic. Furthermore, although wind is associated with judgment in the Hebrew Bible,⁴⁹ it lacks the strong eschatological overtones associated with the Spirit.⁵⁰ Best, moreover, overemphasizes the importance of the imagery of wind in Luke 3.17/Matt. 3.12. According to Best, “John’s original statement with its double reference to wind-baptism and fire-baptism originally concerned eschatological judgement in which the wind would separate the chaff from the grain and the chaff would be burned with fire.”⁵¹ Yet, the emphasis in the farming imagery used by the Baptist is not the wind separating the wheat and chaff, but the coming figure clearing his threshing-floor and the

⁴⁷ Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire,” 84-85. He goes on to note that “Its [the baptism’s] effect would then presumably depend on the condition of its recipients: the repentant would experience a purgative, refining, but ultimately merciful judgment; the impenitent, the stiff-necked and hard of heart, would be broken and destroyed” (Ibid.).

⁴⁸ Best, “Spirit-Baptism,” 240.

⁴⁹ See “Spirit-Baptism,” 240, for the references offered by Best.

⁵⁰ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 276.

⁵¹ Best, “Spirit-Baptism,” 240.

destination of the wheat and chaff.⁵² In fact, Webb has offered convincing arguments that the winnowing process is not being referred to at all by the Baptist, but rather the clearing of the threshing-floor. “[I]t is interesting to note,” writes Webb, “that it is *not the grain* which is the object of cleansing in John’s description, but rather *the threshing-floor* (ἄλων).”⁵³ As the central premises of Best’s argument are severely flawed, there is no reason to accept his conclusion that the Baptist preached a fire and wind baptism of judgment.

Luke and Matthew therefore preserve the Baptist’s historical expectation of this figure, i.e., that “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” However, there is still the necessary task of determining what such a baptism entailed.

There is, of course, debate concerning how the Baptist understood baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire.⁵⁴ One of the first issues to be debated is whether the Baptist expected one baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, or two baptisms, one with the Holy Spirit and one with fire. For the purposes of this paper, that debate is not of great concern.⁵⁵ What is important to point out here is that the Baptist expected the coming one to bring both judgment and restoration. Scholars who would limit the coming baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire as a wholly destructive event or a wholly restorative event are ignoring significant evidence to the contrary.

⁵² Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 295-300; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 148.

⁵³ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 296 (emphasis original).

⁵⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 473-474.

⁵⁵ The purpose here is to demonstrate that the Baptist expected a baptism that included judgment and restoration. Judgment and restoration can be included in one baptism (Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire,” 86) or two (Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 289-292).

As noted above, the Baptist's preaching was not completely negative. His message of repentance in preparation of the coming one indicates that those who responded to his call for repentance would experience something positive. However, the Baptist also warned of an impending judgment should one refuse to repent.⁵⁶ In addition to the imagery of the axe being laid at the root, the Baptist has clearly employed fire as an image for the destruction of the wicked.⁵⁷ This is in line with fire imagery used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature to describe judgment.⁵⁸ Fitzmyer, however, seeing the baptism with Holy Spirit and fire as a solely restorative event, has argued that "one could appeal to a number of OT passages in which both God's Spirit and fire play...a role [of purification and refinement]: Isa 4:4-5; 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25-26; Mal 3:2b-3."⁵⁹ However, one must note that in only two of the verses cited by Fitzmyer (Isa. 4.4-5; Mal. 3.2b-3) is fire, or something like refinement by fire, mentioned, and these two prophetic books themselves use fire imagery elsewhere to denote judgment.⁶⁰ Moreover, in the eschatological scenes cited by Fitzmyer, the refinement is limited; there is still a group of the wicked, i.e., the unrepentant, facing eschatological judgment and destruction, which is described with fire imagery.⁶¹ Thus, it is more likely that the fire in the coming one's baptism is a destructive judgment directed against the unrepentant, and

⁵⁶ Luke 3.7-9/Matt. 3.8-10.

⁵⁷ Luke 3.17/Matt. 3.10.

⁵⁸ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 226.

⁵⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 474.

⁶⁰ Isa. 1.31; 30.27; Mal. 4.1.

⁶¹ Mal. 4.1; 1QS 4.20-21; cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 293.

not refinement of “those persons who would accept [the baptism].”⁶² Once again, the imagery of a farmer on his threshing-floor offers strong support for seeing the coming baptism as one of judgment *and* restoration.⁶³ The one to come will gather the wheat into the granary (restoration) but burn the chaff (destructive judgment).

In light of the evidence, I find Webb’s summary fully supported by the evidence: “[T]he data from our NT sources which are historically reliable and so may be used in our investigations,” concludes Webb:

include John’s expectation and proclamation of a figure whose description involved the following elements: (1) he is coming; (2) he is mightier than John; (3) John was unworthy to be even his servant; (4) he will baptize with a holy spirit and fire; (5) his ministry includes both judgment and restoration which is portrayed in terms of a farmer working at the threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into the granary and burning the chaff.⁶⁴

With this description of the coming one and his ministry, one may now turn to the task of identifying this figure, if this is indeed possible.

The Identity of the Coming One

Many have noted that God appears to fit the Baptist’s description well.⁶⁵

However, God is unlikely to be the figure about whom the Baptist preached. As

⁶² Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 474.

⁶³ Webb notes that this saying “is almost universally regarded as authentic to John. It employs Palestinian farming techniques for its imagery and applies them in a manner consistent with similar usage in the OT” (*John the Baptizer*, 277). He goes on to point out that despite the fact that “the pericope concerning the farmer at the threshing floor is dependent upon Q alone. I am aware of no one who rejects the authenticity of this saying” (*Ibid.*, 277n.47).

⁶⁴ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 277.

⁶⁵ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 201; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 33-34; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 313; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 283.

numerous scholars have observed, “Probably decisive here, however, is the consideration that the talk of ‘one stronger than me’, and of being unworthy to untie his sandals (Mark 1.7 pars.), is really appropriate only to a comparison between two comparable figures. It is difficult to imagine John so trivializing the relation between God and a human being.”⁶⁶ John H. Hughes has argued that these arguments “are not so impressive as they might at first appear.”⁶⁷ “In the first instance,” Hughes objects, “the very fact that God is not referred to explicitly would have done much to avoid the possibility of John giving offence through making a comparison between himself and the Deity.”⁶⁸ Yet, if the Baptist and those around him would have so easily identified the coming one as God based on the Baptist’s description of the coming one, as Hughes implies throughout his article, then how else would Hughes expect the Baptist to refer to God? One would certainly not expect the Baptist to refer to God by name. Hughes goes on to contest that it is “entirely possible” that the Baptist made this comparison, “or rather contrast,” between himself and God, given that the Baptist was attempting to emphasize “the substantial difference between his own water baptism and God’s baptism with holy spirit and fire.”⁶⁹ However, as Webb observes, “the contrast is already quite clear from the descriptions of the two baptisms, as well as the use of the emphatic pronouns ἐγὼ...αὐτός as well as the contrasting conjunctions μὲν...δέ (Q3.16; Mk 1.7-8). Also, however the statement is

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369; cf. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 202; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 34; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 313; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 284.

⁶⁷ John H. Hughes, John the Baptist: The Forerunner of God Himself, *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 3 (Jul. 1972), 196.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 197.

mitigated, it is in fact a comparison between the *persons* of John and the expected figure, not just their baptisms.”⁷⁰

Hughes, secondly, argues that Ps. 60.8 and Ps. 108.9 demonstrate that describing God as wearing sandals is appropriate. However, the Baptist’s saying is not merely descriptive of the coming one’s footwear; it is an “evaluative statement of his own unworthiness to perform an action with respect to this figure’s sandals.”⁷¹ Thus, Hughes ultimately fails to deal with these arguments, and they continue to reveal the weakness of his hypothesis that God should be identified as the Baptist’s coming one.

Luke 7.18-23/Matt. 11.2-6 further supports the conclusion that the Baptist’s expected figure was not God. Here it is written:

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the

⁷⁰ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 285 (emphasis original); cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 34, whose analysis is worth quoting in detail: “To be sure, in the OT and intertestamental literature, God is *the* stronger one, indeed the Almighty. But it makes no sense whatsoever for John to stress that God is ‘the one stronger than I,’ especially with regard to the final judgment. Who would have thought otherwise? Liturgy and preaching can certainly employ veiled references or solemn circumlocutions for God. But for John to use ‘the one stronger than I’ as a veiled name for the God he has directly and plainly referred to just a few verses ago (at least in the Q material in Matt. 3:9 par.) seems downright silly....The interpretation of the stronger one as God threatens to border on the nonsensical when the sentence continues with the affirmation that John is not worthy to untie the strap on the sandals of the stronger one. Granted, the OT does at times use the metaphor of God’s shoe (Pss. 60:10; 108:10), though the metaphor is rare and occurs in an entirely different context (the subjugation of enemy territory). A metaphor presenting John untying God’s shoelaces seems to go beyond the bounds of any OT example. More to the point, it is an incredibly contorted way of proclaiming the mind-boggling truism that God is superior to John. Finally, to place in parallelism two acts of baptizing, John’s and the stronger one’s, is extremely strange if the stronger one is God. Why would there be any need to stress that whatever God does, including baptism (an odd action on God’s part), would be superior to John’s action in the same vein? Hence it is likely that ‘the stronger one’ does contain a veiled reference to some figure in the eschatological drama other than God.”

⁷¹ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 284. Webb continues, “The evaluation of John’s unworthiness to perform such an action loses some of its significance if it is an action which it is impossible for him to actually do.”

lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.”⁷² Some scholars would argue that this pericope, too, is a creation of the early Church. Bultmann argued that “in all probability the Baptist’s question is a community product and belongs to those passages in which the Baptist is called as a witness to the Messiahship of Jesus.”⁷³ However, Kummel has correctly observed that the Baptist is not, in fact, a witness to Jesus’ messiahship in this passage. To the contrary, “The Baptist here appears in no way as a witness to Christ, but as an uncertain questioner, which contradicts the tendency of the early Church to make him such a witness.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, the Gospels say nothing of the Baptist’s reaction to Jesus’ answer. Thus, not only does the Baptist approach Jesus as a questioner, but he is never made to affirm Jesus’ answer or messiahship. Noting this, Dunn contends that had “the question been contrived in subsequent Christian apologetic we might well have expected the episode to close with the report of the Baptist’s acceptance of Jesus’ answer.”⁷⁵

Moreover, as previously stated, it is frequently noted that “the one who is to come,” or some form of “the coming one,” might not have been a title in Jesus’ day, and certainly was not a title for Jesus in the early Church. It is therefore puzzling when the Jesus Seminar argues:

⁷² I have used Matthew’s version here rather than Luke’s because most scholars regard it as the more original version.

⁷³ Bultmann, *History*, 23.

⁷⁴ Kummel, qtd. in Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 24; cf. William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18* (London: T&T Clark 2004 [1991]), 244. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, 244-246, provide numerous arguments in favor of this tradition.

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 447.

As it is represented in Q, the structure of the exchange is a Christian ploy: John's followers are made to play the straight man to Jesus by asking an innocent question to which Christians can give an unequivocal reply: 'Yes, Jesus is the Coming One' (understood by Christians as the expected messiah). For his part, John the Baptist is pictured as uncertain about the status of Jesus, contrary to the way his testimony to Jesus is presented in the Gospel of John (1:29-34).⁷⁶

They, firstly, do not address the aforementioned point in favor of this tradition's authenticity, i.e., it does not depict the Baptist as in any way a witness to Jesus, even though they make note of this fact. Secondly, the question as to why the Church should have gone out of its way to create a saying in which they can say, "Yes, Jesus is the Coming One," is left unanswered by the Jesus Seminar. There is no evidence that declaring this in the early Church would have been equal to saying, "Jesus is the Messiah." Thirdly, the Baptist's conception of the coming figure in no way found its fulfillment in Jesus or his ministry, nor in Jesus' answer to the Baptist.⁷⁷ The Baptist preached of a coming judge who would bring punishment and redemption, though the Baptist clearly puts an emphasis on the impending judgment.⁷⁸ Jesus responds only with talk of the great eschatological blessings being brought about through his ministry.⁷⁹ Moreover, it is difficult to see Jesus' answer as the result Christian apologetics either. "[I]t is intriguing to note," Meier writes, "how, in this apophthegm, the great scandal that could keep one from believing in Jesus is not his rejection by Israel and its leaders, and

⁷⁶ Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 47.

⁷⁷ Witherington, *Christology*, 43. As Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, 244, note, "Mt 11.2-6 would scarcely score points against followers of John."

⁷⁸ Luke 3.7-9, 16-17/Matt. 3.7-12.

⁷⁹ Luke 7.22/Matt. 11.4-5; cf. Witherington, *Christology*, 43.

certainly not his crucifixion, but rather his success. The church's kerygma of cross and resurrection has left no mark on this text."⁸⁰ The central aspects of the Baptist's coming one, and the basis of the Church's belief in Jesus as the Messiah, are simply not present in Jesus' response. These are all strong indications that this pericope is historical.

When all the evidence is taken into consideration, i.e., the Baptist's comparison between himself and the coming figure, the talk of the coming one wearing sandals, and the fact that the Baptist could consider Jesus as a possible fulfillment of this role, it is highly unlikely that the coming one should be identified as God.

Once God is removed as a possibility, it seems clear that the expected figure was the Davidic Messiah despite the reservations of some scholars.⁸¹ Recall, the figures that have been suggested as the Baptist's expected figure have been God, the angelic prince Michael/Melchizedek, the human-like figure/the Son of Man, Elijah *redivivus*, the Aaronic Messiah, and the Davidic Messiah. Webb has provided a thorough analysis of each of these figures in light of the Baptist's description of the coming one.⁸² On the basis of the texts in which these figures are described, one finds that each one of these figures has, to a greater and lesser extent, aspects in common with the description of the coming one.⁸³ However, several of these figures can be excluded from consideration as the coming one quite easily, and among those left the most logical choice would be the royal Davidic Messiah.

⁸⁰ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 136.

⁸¹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 34-35; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 371; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 287-288.

⁸² Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 222-254.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Based on the above analysis of Luke 7.18-23/Matt. 11.2-6, it is difficult to argue that the coming one was an angelic or heavenly figure. The Baptist was looking for a human agent, not an angelic being.⁸⁴ The suggestion that the Baptist's coming one was an angelic or heavenly figure is also confronted with the problem of what to do with the Baptist's statement that he is not worthy to loose this figure's sandals and his comparison of himself with this coming one. Furthermore, as Webb himself notes, the angelic figures in general "are not figures of judgment and restoration in the same sense as the other figures we are considering here [i.e., God, the Davidic Messiah, and the Aaronic Messiah], because they are portrayed primarily as agents carrying out God's instructions, and thus the judgment and/or restoration is considered to be God's judgment and/or restoration."⁸⁵ Webb goes on to note that in the texts dealing with the particular "angelic prince Michael/Melchizedek," this angel's activity is still quite different than God's or the Messiahs' he previously discussed.⁸⁶ Thus, although Webb concludes that "Melchizedek is a figure of judgment and restoration," he is careful to point out that "the focus of that judgment is neither upon Israel nor their human enemies, but upon their angelic enemies."⁸⁷ This is not at all the case with the Baptist's coming one. Lastly, one must bear in mind that the Melchizedek text, and most likely the figure of Melchizedek, is messianic. Florentino Garcia Martinez argues for interpreting Melchizedek as a

⁸⁴ Dunn concludes, "That the question could be posed in regard to Jesus presumably confirms the unlikelihood that John had in mind God or the Son of Man." (371). Dunn views the Son of Man as a heavenly figure.

⁸⁵ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 239.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

“heavenly Messiah.”⁸⁸ “My reasoning is very simple,” Garcia Martinez tells the reader, “the basic functions that 11QMelch attributes to Melchizedek are messianic functions; so we can call the protagonist to whom these functions are attributed a ‘messiah’ even though the text does not use the word ‘anointed.’”⁸⁹ Even Fitzmyer, who rejects the claim that the opening verses of Isa. 61 are explicitly messianic and who argues that 11QMelch “shows that the term [משיח] could be used for others than kings and priests,” concludes that the figure in 11QMelch is “probably a messianic figure such as Dan 9:25 envisaged, but not necessarily ‘the Davidic Messiah’!”⁹⁰ Those scholars who would make a distinction between Melchizedek and the “anointed” figure described in lines 15-19 view the figure described in lines 15-19 as the messianic figure rather than Melchizedek.⁹¹ Although the arguments that an angelic or heavenly figure could not be the coming one are convincing, even if Melchizedek were the coming one, it would be difficult to escape the messianic nature of this figure.

The problems with identifying Melchizedek as the Baptist’s coming one are the essentially the same problems that confront one who would identify the coming one as

⁸⁸ Florentino Garcia Martinez, *Qumranica Minora: Thematic Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 102.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 102; cf. Rainer Riesner, “Jesus, the Primitive Community, and the Essene Quarter of Jerusalem,” in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 216; Paul Rainbow, “Melchizedek as a Messiah at Qumran,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997), 179-194, who argues that Melchizedek is not an angelic figure at all, but rather another term used to refer to the human Davidic Messiah.

⁹⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 98n.68.

⁹¹ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 530-531; Wright, *Victory*, 530.

the Son of Man. Firstly, many have argued that the Son of Man is a heavenly figure,⁹² and it has been demonstrated that a heavenly figure cannot be a candidate for the Baptist's coming one. Secondly, the Son of Man figure is, like Melchizedek, identified as a messianic figure. In particular scholars have pointed out that at the time of the Baptist, the characteristics of the Davidic Messiah are transferred to this heavenly Son of Man and that the Son of Man is clearly identified as the Messiah.⁹³ Therefore, as with Melchizedek, if one wants to identify an angelic or heavenly figure as the coming one, then one must also accept that this figure is messianic, most likely in the mold of the earthly Davidic Messiah.

Elijah *redivivus* appears just as unlikely of a candidate for the Baptist's coming one. As demonstrated above, the Baptist viewed his role as a preparatory one; there would be a figure to come after him who would be mightier than he and who would bring the decisive destructive judgment and restoration. Yet, this preparatory role is precisely the role attributed to Elijah *redivivus*.⁹⁴ In the end, despite his hesitation Webb concludes that "there is little evidence for most of the criteria for which we are searching."⁹⁵ Thus, the coming one cannot be identified as Elijah *redivivus*.

⁹² John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 177-182; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 370; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 243; Fitzmyer, *One to Come*, 86.

⁹³ Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 182-187; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 246n.103.

⁹⁴ Mal. 3.1, 5; 4.5-6; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 313: "Against (5) [i.e., the hypothesis that the coming one is Elijah], the notion of the forerunner of a forerunner is perhaps not a happy one."

⁹⁵ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 254. The criteria about which Webb is speaking are the 5 characteristics of the coming one he lists on page 277.

There is little support for the conclusion that the Aaronic Messiah was the figure the Baptist had in mind. There is scant evidence that the Aaronic Messiah was a figure of judgment as the coming one is.⁹⁶ Moreover, it should be noted that the priestly/Aaronic Messiah was taking on a different role than the Davidic Messiah, and that the Davidic Messiah's role traditionally involved the type of judgment and restoration associated with the coming one. It would not make much sense to have two messiahs who each bring a decisive judgment and restoration. One must also note that the most important roles associated with Aaronic Messiah seem to be those fulfilled once the messianic age is inaugurated, e.g., in the messianic banquet.⁹⁷ If the Aaronic Messiah were the Baptist's coming one, it is odd that the Baptist would emphasize a coming judgment and restoration that might not have even been associated with this Messiah, but have nothing to say about the sorts of administrative activities that were so explicitly associated with the Aaronic Messiah.

The coming one should therefore be identified as the Davidic Messiah.⁹⁸ It is clear that the Baptist's description of the coming one aligns very well with the description of the Davidic Messiah.⁹⁹ I find it odd that Webb, Meier, and Dunn are unwilling to take this last step and identify the coming one as the Davidic Messiah. Each of them excludes God and an angelic or heavenly figure from contention because of Luke 7.18-32/Matt.

⁹⁶ Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 237.

⁹⁷ 1QSa 2.11-21.

⁹⁸ After considering numerous figures, Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 313-314, conclude that the Baptist's coming one is most likely the Davidic Messiah.

⁹⁹ See the descriptions of the David Messiah and the relevant texts in Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 617-622.

11.2-6 and the Baptist's comparisons with the coming figure. According to their own interpretations the only figures that then remain are Elijah *redivivus*, the Aaronic Messiah, and the Davidic Messiah. All of them note that the role of Elijah *redivivus* was one of preparation,¹⁰⁰ and at least Webb and Dunn go on to explain that it therefore becomes difficult to identify Elijah *redivivus* as the Baptist's coming figure.¹⁰¹ I find it difficult to believe that if pressed, Webb, Meier, and Dunn would not conclude that the coming one was indeed the Davidic Messiah. Furthermore, the popularity of the Baptist's movement would also seem to suggest that he preached about the imminent arrival of the Davidic Messiah. Although there was diversity in the messianic expectation of the Baptist's day, "the most prominent and widespread of the various expressions of that hope" was the royal Davidic Messiah, especially among "the unlettered masses."¹⁰² I see no reason why one should hesitate to conclude that the Baptist preached about the coming of the Davidic Messiah,¹⁰³ and as Davies and Allison note, "if Jn 1.26 implies that the Baptist believed in a hidden Messiah (so Dodd, *Tradition*, pp. 266-9; Brown *John I*, pp. 52-54), this would clinch the argument."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 34-35; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 370-371; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 250-254.

¹⁰¹ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 370-371; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 254.

¹⁰² Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 621-622; Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 68, 95, 122. Given the messianic nature of all the various figures discussed above, especially the human figures, those who would express hesitation in identifying this figure must at least acknowledge that the figure was *messianic*. Therefore, it is not a matter whether or not the Baptist preached about a coming messiah, but *which* Messiah.

¹⁰³ At the very least, given the messianic nature of the other possible figures, one must conclude that the Baptist preached about a Messiah. Once again, though, the evidence is clear that it was the Davidic Messiah.

¹⁰⁴ I have not and will not be devoting space to discuss the claim that the Baptist believed he was the Messiah. First of all, I have not encountered a source that argues such a claim in great detail while engaging

IV. From the Baptist to Jesus¹⁰⁵

In light of the Baptist's preaching, the Gospel of John's report that some of his disciples left him to follow Jesus becomes significant. According to the fourth Gospel:

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you come to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see

with the relevant literature on John the Baptist. Secondly, this claim would require one to disregard virtually all the evidence laid out above, which I see little reason to do.

¹⁰⁵ In this section I will be regularly referring to John the Baptist as well as the Gospel of John. In order to avoid confusion I will continue my practice of using "the Baptist" to refer to John the Baptist, and I will use "John" or some other designation to refer to the author of the Gospel of John.

heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”¹⁰⁶

When one leaves aside the more controversial aspects of this passage, e.g., the “lamb of God” statement or Jesus’ Son of Man response to Nathanael, one finds that this passage offers some profound insights about how the first disciples of Jesus viewed him.

Firstly, it is difficult to doubt the fourth Gospel’s report that some of John the Baptist’s disciples left him to follow Jesus. It would certainly make sense given the connection between the Baptist and Jesus at the start of Jesus’ ministry, and the continuing references to the Baptist in Jesus’ preaching.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, however one wishes to deal with the apparent differences between the Synoptics’ and John’s accounts of the call of the first disciples, including whether or not there is “strictly speaking” a “call” in John’s Gospel, it is clear that “[p]sychologically it may well be that some such contact as is here recorded is almost the necessary prelude to the far-reaching call narrated by the Synoptists, with its requirement that the called abandon everything for Jesus.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, Brown has pointed to Luke and suggested that the Synoptic account of the call was considered embarrassing. Brown notes that “Luke seems embarrassed as to why these men should follow Jesus on first contact, and he changes the Marcan order of the material in order to make the scene more reasonable.”¹⁰⁹ He therefore concludes,

¹⁰⁶ John 1.35-51.

¹⁰⁷ John 3.22-4.3; Luke 7. 18-23/Matt. 11.2-6; Luke 7.24-35/ Matt 11.7-11; Luke 7.31-35/Matt. 11.16-19; Luke 16.16/ Matt. 11.12-13. Witherington offers an insightful analysis of these traditions in *Christology*, 47-56.

¹⁰⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 155.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *John I-XII*, 77.

“John’s information is quite plausible, as the very awkwardness of the Synoptic account might indicate.”¹¹⁰

When Luke is read alongside Acts, one finds even more evidence that Jesus’ first disciples were some of those who left John and joined Jesus’ movement. Reading Luke one might believe that Jesus called the first disciples only subsequent to his return to Galilee after having been baptized by John. However, when one reads Acts one discovers that Luke is aware that “the first disciples actually had joined Jesus at the time of his baptism.”¹¹¹ The reader of Acts is informed that one of the requirements for the person who was chosen to replace Judas was that he had to have been “one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, *beginning from the baptism of John* until the day when he was taken up from us.”¹¹² “Since this observation does not match Luke’s own account in the Gospel,” argues Brown, “there is every reason to take it seriously.”¹¹³

Ludemann, however, still expresses doubts about John’s account:

The report that the first disciples of Jesus were former adherents of the Baptist is sometimes regarded as a historically reliable tradition; it is said that this report is too offensive to have been invented. But we should note that the evangelist – even more strongly than the Synoptists – pursues the interest of emphasizing the inferiority of John to Jesus (cf. 1.6-8; 1.19-34; 3.22-30; 5.33f.). It is in keeping with this purpose that the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Acts 1.21-22 (my emphasis).

¹¹³ Brown, *John I-XII*, 77.

Baptist has to yield his disciples to Jesus (cf. 3.30: ‘he must increase, but I must decrease’).¹¹⁴

Firstly, offensiveness is but one reason among the several noted above for accepting John’s report as being historically reliable. Secondly, the Baptist’s reported statement in John 3.30, “he must increase, but I must decrease,” should not be so easily and completely discarded simply because it might be in line with the Gospel writer’s interests. In fact, because the Baptist was preaching about the coming Davidic Messiah who would be mightier than he was, a role for which he considered Jesus a contender, John may indeed have picked up on an historical tradition in which the Baptist welcomed Jesus’ success.¹¹⁵ However, even if there is no historical data at all underlying the Baptist’s words here in John 3.30, and even if John has a tendency to show Jesus’ superiority and has created John 3.30 to demonstrate it, this should not cause one to suppose John 1.35-51 was created wholesale by John in order fulfill John 3.30 or demonstrate Jesus’ superiority. On the basis of the apparent embarrassment of Luke and his statements in Acts noted above, which has led to a widespread agreement that Jesus’ first disciples were adherents of the Baptist,¹¹⁶ it is far more likely that John has used historical traditions in John 1.35-51 and has pointed back to these historical traditions in John 3.30 in order to emphasize the Baptist’s inferiority to and approval of Jesus.

¹¹⁴ Ludemann, *Jesus*, 431.

¹¹⁵ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 301.

¹¹⁶ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 300; Brown, *John I-XII*, 77-78; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 47; Morris, *John*, 155; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978 [1955]), 179; Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 367; Theissen, *Historical Jesus*, 36; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 351.

Therefore, one is left with little reason to doubt that Jesus' first and closest followers were former adherents of the Baptist.

Keeping in mind the Baptist's preaching and expectation of the coming of the Davidic Messiah, the dialogues between Andrew and Peter and Philip and Nathanael reveal why these disciples left the Baptist to follow Jesus: they had identified Jesus as the Davidic Messiah about whom the Baptist preached. This dialogue not only indicates that the disciples identified Jesus as the Baptist's Messiah, but it also reveals that this identification was not made arbitrarily. Whether or not Dodd has accurately identified a hidden Messiah theme in the preaching of the Baptist, it is clear that the Messiah about whom the Baptist preached would have to be identified. Thus, one finds a very plausible historical scenario when one reads that Andrew, one of the two disciples of John who spent a day with Jesus, goes to his brother Peter and tells him, "We have found the Messiah"¹¹⁷ and when Philip likewise tells Nathanael, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote,"¹¹⁸ i.e., the Messiah.¹¹⁹ Nathanael's "scornful" response,¹²⁰ "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" which probably stems from an authentic tradition given its offensiveness, indicates that whatever they learned about Jesus, these disciples of the Baptist came to believe that they had found the Messiah of the Baptist's preaching.¹²¹ As observed by Dodd, those who left the Baptist

¹¹⁷ John 1.41.

¹¹⁸ John 1.45.

¹¹⁹ Barrett, *St. John*, 184.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 301.

“did not feel that they were thereby deserting their former teacher, but that they were pursuing the natural course pointed out to them both by his own attitude and the logic of events.”¹²²

Considering all the evidence, one can confidently conclude that the historical nucleus of John 1:35-51 included at least the following: the Baptist preached about a coming Messiah. His disciples, after either learning about or spending time with Jesus, identified him as the Messiah about whom John preached, even if at first some felt his distasteful origins precluded him from such a role. Therefore, they left the Baptist to follow Jesus in his ministry.¹²³ Whatever theological development John might have engaged in, he provides the historian with the important fact that some of the Baptist’s disciples began to follow Jesus because they believed he was the Messiah who would judge Israel’s enemies and restore the kingdom to Israel.

V. Peter’s Messianic Confession

Peter’s messianic confession in Mark 8.27-30 is probably the place in the Gospels where the disciples’ messianic hope for Jesus comes through most clearly. Mark reports:

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.¹²⁴

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ At the very least the evidence should compel one at least to agree with Dodd when he states that John has presented “a dramatic and symbolic picture of the total process” (*Historical Tradition*, 301).

¹²⁴ Mark 8.27-30.

Since at least the time of Wrede and up until the present, this confession has been viewed with suspicion. As mentioned in the introduction, Wrede and those who followed him argued that Peter's confession could not be authentic because the early Church came to think of Jesus as the Messiah only after the resurrection.¹²⁵ Today, however, it is widely accepted that the disciples' belief that Jesus was the Messiah had to have preceded the resurrection, as the resurrection alone would not have led the disciples to identify Jesus as the Messiah.¹²⁶ In fact, one often encounters the argument that this pre-Easter messianic hope for Jesus is what led to the creation of such traditions as the passion predictions or the Emmaus story.¹²⁷ It was because the disciples hoped for the messianic redemption of Israel that with "Jesus' death, their hopes had also been crucified. They had to be taught by the risen Christ that the Messiah had to suffer (Luke 24.26)."¹²⁸ Thus, Wrede's line of argumentation is untenable.

Whatever the disciples' pre-Easter hopes might have been, many continue to argue that Peter's confession is a later Church creation. It is suggested that "this story functions as a kind of authorization story for Peter...henceforth hold[ing] pre-eminent position among the disciples,"¹²⁹ and that it is meant to serve as "a model for others

¹²⁵ Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 216, 236, 239; cf. Bultmann, *History*, 257, 347.

¹²⁶ Dahl, 'The Crucified Messiah', 38; Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2002 [1979]), 177; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 540; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 626-627.

¹²⁷ See, e.g., Erich Dinkler, "Peter's Confession," 185; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 428-429; Ludemann, *Jesus*, 411.

¹²⁸ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 428.

¹²⁹ Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 104, 303.

(compare the statements of faith made by Peter and Mary in John 6:68-69; 11:27).”¹³⁰

These arguments likewise cannot be maintained upon closer examination of Peter’s confession.

It is quite clear, first of all, that according to Mark’s report, Peter’s view of the Messiah is uninformed by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Peter’s confession is not that of the early Church. Rather, the text presents Peter as expressing the more common first-century Jewish understanding of the Messiah, i.e., the Messiah who would defeat the pagans and restore Israel.¹³¹ Moreover, in Mark 8:27-30 Peter’s confession is followed by Jesus’ teaching that, as the Messiah, he will be put to death. Peter completely rejects this because for Peter it is unthinkable that Jesus, being the Messiah, would be killed.¹³² Jesus then denounces Peter’s rejection of this messianic mission of suffering and death as satanic and in opposition to God’s will. This progression does not indicate that Peter grasped Jesus’ role as the suffering Messiah whose death would bring redemption, i.e., the post-Easter confession. On the contrary, it portrays Peter as having completely misunderstood Jesus’ messiahship.¹³³ As William Lane correctly observes, “It was the incongruity between ‘Messiah’ (Ch. 8:29) and Jesus’ affirmation which accounts for

¹³⁰ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), 75.

¹³¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 774-775; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 249-252; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 648-649.

¹³² Edwards, *Gospel of Mark*, 255 observes: ‘True to his heritage, Peter recoils at the thought of a suffering Messiah. Given the popular stereotype of a triumphant Messiah, it is natural and understandable that Peter should feel obliged to correct Jesus.’

¹³³ Edwards, *Gospel of Mark*, 249; Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 330: ‘The problem lies in the wide range of content which could be found in that title [i.e., Christ], depending on what background you brought to it. It will become clear immediately that what Peter (and presumably the other disciples) read into the term was quite different from how Jesus himself understood it.’

[Peter's] reaction.”¹³⁴ Therefore, if this story had been created in order to provide a model of a faith statement and/or to give Peter authority, one would have to conclude that this model and/or authority was based not on an accurate post-Easter understanding of Jesus' messiahship, but rather on a misconceived pre-Easter understanding of it.

This conclusion is quite improbable. It is difficult to see why Mark, or whoever the originator of this tradition was, would have created it with the intention of establishing Peter's authority and presenting a model for others when just a few sentences later in the reported dialogue Jesus calls Peter Satan because of his misconception of Jesus' messiahship. Geza Vermes, seeing in these verses a denial of the messianic title by Jesus, offers a relevant and accurate analysis of Peter's mindset:

As the Marcan narrative stands, not only did Jesus abstain from approving Peter's words, but he possibly dissociated himself from them. His immediate reference to the future suffering was, in fact, seen by the angry Peter as a definite rejection of his Messianic creed. “At this Peter took him by the arm and began to rebuke him,” only to receive the shattering rejoinder, “Away with you, Satan!”¹³⁵

Joel Marcus has presented a very different interpretation of these verses, arguing that in them one finds Jesus' acceptance and redefinition of the messianic title, but it is his description of Peter that is likewise noteworthy:

[Peter] now plunges to a nadir of obtuseness by taking Jesus aside, as though to instruct him...and “rebuking” him for his prophecy of doom (8:32b). He thus sets himself up against the revealed will of God (*dei* = “it was necessary”); no wonder

¹³⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 298; cf. Edwards, *Gospel of Mark*, 255; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16* (AB 27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 613.

¹³⁵ Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 147.

Jesus responds by calling him by the name of Satan, the adversary to the divine purpose (8:33).¹³⁶

Though I disagree with some of J. P. Meier's assessment regarding Mark 8.27-33, he is correct when he insists that treating "Mark's presentation of Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi necessarily entails treating as well the aftermath of that confession in Mark 8:30-33."¹³⁷ When this aftermath, described above by Vermes and Marcus, is taken into consideration, any suggestion that this confession was created in order to establish authority for Peter or present a model statement of faith becomes difficult to defend. It likewise indicates that one should reject the argument that this story was created in order to assert Jesus' messiahship. As noted by Michael Bird:

One can imagine the trial scene in 14:61-62 as comprising a creative effort to get Jesus to affirm his messianic identity, especially when posed in the simple question-answer format. However, to have Jesus initiate a nonmessianic question that eventually receives a messianic answer and then to have that answer qualified, the qualification rejected by a venerated apostle, and the same apostle scandalously rebuked and shamed – all this seems to be a rather convoluted path for a makeshift christological confession pressed into a pre-Easter context. There were simpler ways of expressing Jesus's messiahship by Mark or by the originators of the tradition if they had wanted to do so.¹³⁸

In contrast to the argument that Mark has created Peter's confession in order to establish Peter's authority and provide a statement of faith, Theodore Weeden has argued that Mark 8.27-33 is part of a "carefully formulated polemical device created by the

¹³⁶ Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 613.

¹³⁷ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (ABRL; 3 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 2001), vol. 3, 235-236.

¹³⁸ Bird, *Are You the One*, 119.

evangelist to disgrace and debunk the disciples.”¹³⁹ According to Weeden, the christological dispute in Mark’s community was so fierce that “Mark felt he could settle it only by dramatizing the two sides through his presentation of the interaction between Jesus and the disciples. Thus, Jesus represents one point of view and the disciples the other.”¹⁴⁰ Weeden therefore posits that the confession and passion prediction are intended to reveal Peter’s and the disciples’ misconception of Jesus’ Messiahship. Thus, although the confession indicates that

Peter has disclosed the ultimate insight: Jesus is the Christ...with the interchange between Peter and Jesus after the confession (8:30-33) it now becomes evident that, while identifying Jesus as the Christ, the disciples do not have the same understanding of the nature of messiahship as Jesus claims for himself. Whatever Peter’s concept of messiahship is, it is not Jesus’ concept.¹⁴¹

Weeden’s hypothesis, however, should not lead one to conclude that Peter’s confession is inauthentic. Firstly, Weeden’s observation that Mark 8.27-33 is embarrassing for Peter and the disciples does not count against its historicity even if one accepts Weeden’s argument that Mark was out to malign the disciples. If Mark were out to embarrass the disciples, there is no reason he could not have utilized historical traditions in order to do so. In fact, Mark should prefer to use historical traditions rather than invent them. Using a well-known historical tradition would allow Mark to achieve his goal of embarrassing the

¹³⁹ Theodore J. Weeden, “The Heresy that Necessitated Mark’s Gospel,” in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William Telford (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 91.

¹⁴⁰ Weeden, “The Heresy,” 91. It is not necessary to offer a detailed summary or refutation of Weeden’s analysis of this christological dispute here. As I will argue below, Weeden’s claim that Mark was out to disgrace the disciples does not require one to view Mk 8.27-33 as inauthentic.

¹⁴¹ Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 33.

disciples far easier than creating traditions that were unknown to his and other communities.¹⁴²

In light of the evidence, more and more scholars have acknowledged that Peter's confession is historical.¹⁴³ Even those who doubt the historicity of the controversial passion prediction that follows Peter's confession, and who would ascribe much of Mark 8.27-33 to Mark's redactional activity, still propose keeping Peter's confession as an authentic part of the tradition and argue that Jesus' rebuke of Peter as Satan should be attached to the confession.¹⁴⁴ According to Lüdemann:

The starting point of the analysis of the tradition is that the addressing of Peter as Satan must go back to a tradition which is to be called reliable. For this "diabolizing" of the respected disciple cannot be derived from the community... And the occasion for this form of address, Peter's messianic expectation, is likely to be historical... At all events a controversy took place over whether Jesus was the (political) Messiah (who would drive the Romans from the land and restore the kingdom of David, cf. PsSol 17).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ultimately, however, the nature of both Jesus' and Peter's rebukes are not satisfactorily explained on the theory of a polemic against Peter and the disciples. See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, pp. 236-237: "Some would prefer to see this rebuke as a creation of an anti-Peter faction in the early church rather than an outburst from an exasperated Jesus, but I do not find this approach persuasive. Admittedly, Peter was involved in various disputes in the first-generation church, notably with Paul and James (Gal 2:11-14). Yet even Paul's polemical remarks in Galatians – which must be balanced against his implicit recognition of Peter's importance – do not descend to the depths of calling Peter Satanic. The truly unbridled polemics against Peter must await later Gnostic literature. Hence I think it probable that Jesus' fiery rebuke to Peter as Satan is historical."

¹⁴³ Dinkler, "Peter's Confession," 169-202; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 772-773; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 539; Lüdemann, *Jesus*, 56-57; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 648-649.

¹⁴⁴ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 539; Lüdemann, *Jesus*, 56. Dinkler points out that the severity of and context in which this rebuke is found in both Mark and Matthew suggest that the Satan-saying could not have been redactional material originating from negative attitudes toward Peter ("Peter's Confession," 174-175).

¹⁴⁵ Lüdemann, *Jesus*, 56-57.

He and others follow Erich Dinkler and go on to conclude that “Jesus resolutely rejects this [messianic] expectation and demonizes his first disciple.”¹⁴⁶ According to Dinkler both Peter’s confession and the Satan-saying are historical. However, he argues that the Satan-saying originally followed Peter’s confession, with Mk 8.30-33a being “post-Easter insertions.”¹⁴⁷ The conclusion of this argument, and that which Dinkler sought to prove in his essay, is that this tradition originally contained Jesus’ outright rejection of the title of Messiah. This conclusion, although extremely flawed, will not be addressed here. What is important to note at this point, and for the purpose of this paper, is that there is little reason to doubt the historicity of Peter’s confession.

Before moving away from this pericope, it should be noted that Peter’s confession should not be read as representing only Peter’s opinion. As both France and Edwards observe, Jesus’ response in verse 33 is directed at the 12 and not just Peter.¹⁴⁸ France insists that this “indicat[es] that they, too, were party to the misunderstanding which Peter has voiced. It seems likely, therefore, that we are to understand Peter to be more a spokesman for the group than the originator of a purely personal insight which would have taken the other disciples by surprise.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ludemann, *Jesus*, 57; cf. Dinkler, “Peter’s Confession,” 169-202; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 772-773; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 538-539.

¹⁴⁷ Dinkler, “Peter’s Confession,” 188.

¹⁴⁸ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 329; Edwards, *Gospel of Mark*, 249.

¹⁴⁹ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 329. For Peter as the spokesman for the group, see Mark 9.5; 10.28; 11.21; 14.37.

VI. James and John's Request

Mark 10.35-45 and parallels provide even more insight into the disciples' views of Jesus. Here is the scene as it is reported in the Synoptics:¹⁵⁰

Mark 10.35-45:

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then 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; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Matt. 20:20-28:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and

¹⁵⁰ This passage is not found in John.

said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Luke 22:24-30:

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

A number of objections have been raised against the historicity of this passage. The aforementioned hypothesis put forth by Weeden that Mark was out to trash the disciples might at first sight count against the authenticity of James and John’s question. Some further argue that verse 38 is “a manifest *vaticinium ex eventu*,” and that this undermines the credibility of the passage as a whole.¹⁵¹ Thus, Ludemann suggests, “Underlying this is the historical fact that the two sons of Zebedee suffered martyrdom.”¹⁵² Finally, some have claimed that this passage is “laden” with later Church theology, and therefore

¹⁵¹ Bultmann, *History*, 24.

¹⁵² Ludemann, *Jesus*, 72; cf. Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 94-95.

should be considered a creation of the early Church.¹⁵³ However, each one of these objections falls apart under close scrutiny.

Firstly, the weaknesses of Weeden's hypothesis have already been noted above. Yet, there is an even greater weakness when his theory is applied to this particular passage. Casey has provided evidence that suggests that there are underlying Semitic elements in this passage and that these indicate a pre-Markan tradition.¹⁵⁴ Bultmann himself regards James and John's question as part of a pre-Markan tradition,¹⁵⁵ and though the Jesus Seminar routinely refers to this as a Markan composition in *The Five Gospels*, their terminology changes significantly in *The Acts of Jesus*. In the latter, they declare that the "narrative setting...should also be designated black as a creation of Mark or someone in the oral tradition before him."¹⁵⁶ They go on to argue, "In the second part [i.e., vss. 41-45], Mark gathers *additional sayings related to the basic theme in part one* [i.e., vss. 35-40, which includes James and John's request]."¹⁵⁷ Thus, a key argument against the historicity of James and John's question that they put forth in *The Five Gospels* is undermined, and they essentially contradict themselves and confirm the authenticity of James and John's question; for in *The Five Gospels*, they argue, "One might suppose that a story about two prominent disciples attempting to grab power is not likely to have been invented after Easter, *were it not for the fact that, throughout his*

¹⁵³ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (Society for New Testament Monograph Series 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193-218.

¹⁵⁵ Bultmann, *History*, 144.

¹⁵⁶ Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 118 (my emphasis).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

gospel, Mark depicts the disciples as obtuse and unsupportive of Jesus.”¹⁵⁸ Given that we have good reason to believe Mark did not create James and John’s request, it is “not likely,” to use the Seminar’s words, to have been invented in the early Church. Meier notes this flaw in reasoning and asks, “James was the first of the Twelve – as far as we know – to suffer martyrdom....Are we to suppose that the early church – and even Bultmann views the core of the tradition as pre-Markan – went out of its way to invent a negative picture of the protomartyr of the Twelve? Did early church tradition even before Mark revel in presenting notable disciples in a bad light?”¹⁵⁹

Secondly, there is no evidence that verse 38 is a *vaticinium ex eventu*. Those who argue that this verse is a *vaticinium ex eventu* do so with reference to James’ martyrdom only. Note, for example, Ludemann’s remarks once more, “Underlying this is the historical fact that the two sons of Zebedee suffered martyrdom. For the martyrdom of James cf. Acts 12.2. As John the son of Zebedee was still alive at the time of the Apostolic Council around AD 48 (Paul mentions him in Gal. 2.9 as one of the three pillars), he did not suffer martyrdom with his brother, as is sometimes asserted.”¹⁶⁰ The Jesus Seminar’s words are also noteworthy: “Mark also knew, as he wrote this passage, that James had been martyred by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2).”¹⁶¹ Yet, nowhere do these scholars explain how they know John was also martyred, which would be necessary in

¹⁵⁸ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95.

¹⁵⁹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 217; cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1959), 439; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 147; Bird, *Are You the One*, 106.

¹⁶⁰ Ludeman, *Jesus*, 72.

¹⁶¹ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95.

order to declare this verse a *vaticinium ex eventu*. Upon further investigation, one finds that the conclusion that John was martyred is based primarily on Philip of Side's (5th cent.) claim that "Papias says in his second book that John the Theologian and James his brother were killed by Jews."¹⁶² However, it is regularly noted that Philip "was a notoriously pretentious and careless writer."¹⁶³ Moreover, the more reliable Irenaeus not only makes no mention of John suffering martyrdom, he states that John lived well into old age in Asia.¹⁶⁴ Likewise, Eusebius, "who had read Papias," makes no mention of John's martyrdom.¹⁶⁵ There is, therefore, no basis on which to declare this verse a *vaticinium ex eventu*, and no reason to question the passage as a whole because of this.¹⁶⁶

Thirdly, to claim that this passage is "laden with Christian theological meaning"¹⁶⁷ is simply overstating the facts. There is no mention of resurrection, prophecy fulfillment, or a second coming, all of which were central to Christian theology. The lack of any mention of a second coming is particularly interesting given that seats to Jesus' left and right in Jesus' "glory," or "kingdom" in Matthew, are what the brothers

¹⁶² Codex Baroccianus 142, *Ecclesiastical History*.

¹⁶³ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1904), 95, where he provides examples of Philip's inaccuracy. Taylor, *Mark*, 442, notes the "unreliability of Philip of Side as a historian and the doubt whether he or the epitomizer has correctly reported the Papias statement." Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 219, 264n.52.

¹⁶⁴ *Adversus Haereses* 2.22.5.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, *Mark*, 442.

¹⁶⁶ A. S. Peake quite bluntly notes the irony of these scholars using such questionable evidence, "But the 'critical myth' of John the apostle's early death rests on evidence so flimsy that it 'would have provided derision if it had been adduced in favour of a conservative conclusion'" (A. S. Peake, *Holborn Review* 19 [1928], p. 394) qtd by F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised edition, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 233.

¹⁶⁷ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95.

are asking for and the passage concludes with a Son of Man statement. One should expect the early Church to include some of these elements had it created this passage.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, contrary to what some would claim,¹⁶⁹ the evidence suggests that verse 45, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many,” finds a better *sitz im leben* in the life and ministry of Jesus than in the early Church. The verse itself is “thoroughly Semitic”;¹⁷⁰ it does not contain Pauline atonement language;¹⁷¹ the sayings concerning the cup, the baptism, and being a ransom for others all have parallels in Second Temple Jewish literature;¹⁷² and lastly, as Stuhlmacher has argued, this passage is difficult to trace to the theology of the Last Supper.¹⁷³ In regard to this last point, Mark 10:45 lacks “the key word *lutron*, nor do we find in [the Last Supper traditions] *anti pollon*, but rather *hyper* or *peri pollon*.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 217.

¹⁶⁹ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95; Ludemann, *Jesus*, 72.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, *Mark*, 444; Witherington, *Christology*, 253; Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 193-218.

¹⁷¹ Taylor, *Mark*, 445: “In view of the widespread assumption that the saying reflects Pauline influence, it is important to note that Paul does not use this terminology.”; Witherington, *Christology*, 253: “Furthermore, it is not true that *lutron* is a Pauline word.”; Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 209: “It also makes Pauline derivation especially unlikely. Moreover, it is notorious that Paul never uses ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, and he never uses λῦτρον either.”

¹⁷² Taylor, *Mark*, 440-441, 444; Witherington, *Christology*, 252; Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 213-216; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 218.

¹⁷³ Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Messianic Son of Man: Jesus’ Claim to Deity,” in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, ed. James D.G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 340.

¹⁷⁴ Witherington, *Christology*, 253.

Therefore, “There is no real foundation for a derivation of Mark 10:45 from the Last Supper connection.”¹⁷⁵ In fact, according to Stuhlmacher:

In its present form the ransom saying of Mark 10:45 (Matt 20:28) is not derivable either from early Jewish tradition, which has no knowledge of a suffering Son of Man, or from early church tradition, which rather built its confession in 1 Tim 2:5-6 upon the ransom saying. We are dealing with a “*non-derivable*” or “*dissimilar*” saying in the strict methodological sense of the word and therefore with an *original Jesus saying*.¹⁷⁶

Thus, there is no reason to question the authenticity of this passage because of its supposed “Christian theological meaning.”¹⁷⁷

The historicity of James and John’s question is further established when one considers how well such an episode fits historically within the context of Jesus’ ministry. “That Jesus’ talk of the kingdom,” which is one of the most widely accepted historical details of Jesus’ preaching, “should have given rise to such ambition among his intimates is entirely credible” according to Dunn.¹⁷⁸ Ehrman goes further and states quite bluntly:

Jesus evidently taught his disciples about their roles in the Kingdom (see, e.g., the Q quotation given above [Luke 22.30/Matt. 19.28]) – which may account for another firmly rooted tradition, that the message had gone to some of the disciples’ heads. For they are occasionally depicted as arguing among themselves over which of them would be the greatest when the Kingdom arrived. *Nothing like a vision of glory to raise a lower-class peasant into an egomaniacal, if imaginary, despot.*¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Stuhlmacher, qtd. in *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Stuhlmacher, “Messianic Son of Man,” 340 (emphasis original).

¹⁷⁷ Funk and Hoover, *Words of Jesus*, 95.

¹⁷⁸ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 560.

¹⁷⁹ Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 187 (my emphasis).

Moreover, Jesus' words about the greatest being the least and the least the greatest, i.e., eschatological reversal, is "deeply rooted in the tradition."¹⁸⁰ Jesus' derision of the manner in which the Gentiles rule, and his teaching that there is no place for such a rule and mindset among his movement, is likewise completely credible on the lips of Jesus.¹⁸¹ One may therefore put away any doubts as to the authenticity of this passage and move on to determining what this passage might reveal about the disciples' view of Jesus.

There are two views advanced as to the interpretation of this passage. The first assumes that James and John's request indicates that they had failed to understand Jesus' mission, which included being put to death by his opposition. The second, for which Maurice Casey argues, assumes that James and John did understand that Jesus would be put to death, and that they were ready to share in their leader's suffering and death. Whichever interpretation one finds more credible, both clearly indicate that James and John viewed Jesus as the royal Messiah.

When one reviews the literature, the first interpretation clearly emerges as the more popular one. Taylor writes, "Probably the two disciples were thinking of the Kingdom of which Jesus had spoken....in it they desired places of eminence and authority....they wanted the most important thrones....It follows that they had entirely failed to apprehend the teaching concerning the Messianic suffering; their minds still

¹⁸⁰ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 414, 560.

¹⁸¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 145; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2002), 311.

moved in the circle of contemporary beliefs.”¹⁸² Wright believes that “[the disciples] thought, as one might well imagine, that they were going to Jerusalem to sit on actual physical thrones, and they disputed as to who would get the most important ones....They had a foot in both camps. Loyal to him in principle...they nevertheless still cherished ambitions for the nation of Israel, and for themselves within Israel, which showed that they had not grasped the radical nature of Jesus’ agenda.”¹⁸³ Lane, Mullins, Donahue and Harrington, and Bird all interpret this passage along these same lines.¹⁸⁴ According to this interpretation, the disciples were either seeking to “share the thrones of political power with the newly proclaimed messianic-warrior king [i.e., Jesus],”¹⁸⁵ or they might have been envisioning places of honor at the messianic banquet.¹⁸⁶ Regardless of which of these options the disciples had in mind, it is clear that they viewed Jesus as the one around whom this future messianic activity would be centered, i.e., the Messiah.

Casey has put forth a very different interpretation. He suggests that exegetes have taken Jesus words, Οὐκ οἴδατε τί αἰτεῖσθε (“You do not know what you are asking”), too literally, and that the brothers’ simple affirmative response to Jesus indicate that James and John “must have understood what they were asking for” and “must have understood

¹⁸² Taylor, *Mark*, 440.

¹⁸³ Wright, *Victory*, 462-463. Wright goes on to note, “This theme as a whole, whatever is made of particular sayings, has an excellent claim to be historical, coming as it does in many strands of tradition, and going against the grain of later adulation of early leaders” (463).

¹⁸⁴ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 314; Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Dublin: Blackrock, 2005), 435; Bird, *Are You the One*, 106.

¹⁸⁵ Mullins, *Mark*, 435.

¹⁸⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 378; Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 314-315; Mullins, *Mark*, 435.

the metaphorical references to Jesus' death."¹⁸⁷ He concludes therefore that James and John "understood that to sit on Jesus' right and left in his glory would entail suffering and death for them in the present life."¹⁸⁸ One could argue that Casey is being overconfident in his conclusions. Simply because the disciples answered in the affirmative and apparently believe that they have understood Jesus' statement about sharing his cup and baptism, it does not follow that they understood these as metaphorical references to Jesus' death, or that they were ready to share in Jesus' death. The imagery of the cup can be used with reference to blessings,¹⁸⁹ and the baptism could have been interpreted by James and John along the lines of the coming one's baptism about which the Baptist preached, i.e., future restoration. Thus, despite Casey's arguments, one could still argue that James and John's question was ill-conceived.

Although I would not favor Casey's interpretation, it does not take away from James and John's messianic understanding of Jesus noted in the first interpretation. Casey notes that if James and John did indeed understand, and were ready to share in, Jesus' metaphorical references to his death, they would have understood this death in a manner similar to Maccabean literature.¹⁹⁰ This literature describes the martyrdom of faithful Jews and explains that their death was not meaningless; their death sentences would not only be reversed and their lives given back to them after death, but their deaths would be

¹⁸⁷ Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 205.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Wright, *Victory*, 573.

¹⁹⁰ Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 214-216.

beneficial to the nation as a whole.¹⁹¹ If James and John did interpret Jesus' words in this way, or in some way like this, it is probable that they viewed Jesus' and their possible deaths as something that would occur in the service of God and the kingdom that Jesus emphasized in his ministry; they would possibly suffer and die with their Messiah for the sake of God and Israel, but ultimately they believed that they and Jesus would be vindicated by God. When this happened, Jesus would take his throne in the kingdom, and they would be sitting on his left and right, quite clearly messianic aspirations. This is thoroughly plausible, if Casey is indeed correct in his interpretation. After all, the disciples were approaching Jerusalem near the time of Passover, Jesus' kingdom message would still have been fresh in their minds, they would have been well aware of the oppressive hand of the Romans, and a struggle against the oppressive rule of the Gentiles was the context in which the Maccabees sacrificed their lives. Most importantly, one must note that however one interprets Mk 10:35-45 and parallels, this passage reveals James and John belief that Jesus was the royal Messiah.

VII. After the Crucifixion and Resurrection

The story about the disciples on the road to Emmaus reported in Luke 24.13-35 is one of the most well-known stories in the Gospels. It is generally regarded as inauthentic because the story is built around one of Jesus' resurrection appearances. However, its authenticity does not prevent one from gaining an important historical insight. Regardless of the historicity of the story as a whole, Luke 24.21 in particular indicates that the disciples believed Jesus was the royal Messiah.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.; Wright, *Victory*, 582, 587.

After Jesus' crucifixion, two of his followers were "going to a village called Emmaus."¹⁹² According to Luke, on their way they encounter the risen Jesus, though they are unable to recognize him.¹⁹³ When the strange traveler asks the followers of Jesus about the "things" in Jerusalem that they were discussing, the traveler is told, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. *But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*"¹⁹⁴ This last statement clearly expresses the royal messianic hope that was placed in Jesus. As observed by Theissen and Merz:

When in 24.21 the disciples say, "But we had hoped that he would be the one who would redeem Israel," the fundamental expectation is one of the royal Messiah who will restore the greatness of Israel with military force. It is therefore logical that the risen Christ should make the title Messiah/Christ the object of this interpretation of scripture and show from Moses and the prophets "that the Christ had to suffer this and enter into his glory" (24.26).¹⁹⁵

Thus, though Luke, or Jesus if one accepts the authenticity of this event, clearly reshaped the royal messianic hopes of his followers, the passage itself reveals that Jesus' followers "had in fact been convinced that Jesus was Messiah, son of David, during his mission, but

¹⁹² Luke 24.12.

¹⁹³ Luke 24.15-16.

¹⁹⁴ Luke 24.21 (my emphasis).

¹⁹⁵ Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 609; cf. Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 120: "[Jesus'] followers both hoped for (Lk 24:21) and proclaimed (esp., e.g., the Triumphal Entry) that 'he was the one to redeem Israel,' that is, that he was the messiah as understood by Jews at that time."; David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 243; Ludemann, *Jesus*, 411; Bird, *Are You the One*, 65.

that their conception of his messiahship was radically transformed by the events of Good Friday.”¹⁹⁶

Acts 1.6 provides evidence that this messianic conception was not limited to two, one unnamed, followers of Jesus, but rather was a conception held by Jesus’ closest disciples. In this opening chapter of Acts, one learns that after the resurrection appearances, the disciples gather and ask the risen Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” The hopes they had built up during his earthly ministry had been crushed with Jesus’ crucifixion. Now, after his resurrection, the disciples were reinvigorated and, although apparently grasping the meaning of Jesus’ words and deeds, still looked forward to the final messianic act, the restoration of the kingdom of Israel.

VIII. Conclusion

The traditions examined in this paper have offered valuable historical information regarding the disciples’ view of Jesus.¹⁹⁷ They reveal that a central feature of John the Baptist’s preaching was his proclamation of the imminent arrival of the Davidic Messiah; after learning of, or spending time with, Jesus and coming to the conclusion that he was the Davidic Messiah about whom the Baptist preached, the followers of the Baptist left him and became disciples of Jesus; at some point in Jesus’ ministry Peter, acting as the spokesman for the rest of the disciples and representing their views, explicitly confesses

¹⁹⁶ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 653.

¹⁹⁷ There are other traditions, such as the Triumphal Entry and the Temple Cleansing, that might also reveal the disciples’ belief that Jesus was the Messiah (see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 627-646). However, they would require a detailed analysis of Jesus’ own words and deeds, which I did not want to offer in this paper.

Jesus as the Messiah; at another point in Jesus' ministry, most likely during their approach to Jerusalem, James and John request seats in the messianic kingdom over which Jesus will rule as the Messiah; after Jesus' death, the disciples' hopes that Jesus, the Messiah, would redeem Israel were crushed; however, when they were visited by the resurrected Jesus, their hopes were reignited and they again looked forward to Jesus reestablishing the kingdom of Israel.

IX. Significance and Implications

The above findings are significant for historical Jesus studies and for the messianic question in particular. The most obvious implication of this study is the need to abandon any hypothesis that suggests the disciples only viewed Jesus after and as a result of either his crucifixion or resurrection. The flaw in Wrede's argument, i.e., the lack of any expectation of a dying and rising Messiah, that has been noted above is itself overwhelming, and Wrede and his followers are unable to overcome it. However, those who have pointed out this flaw do so by focusing on the context in which Jesus and his disciples lived, i.e., they point out this flaw with reference to Second Temple Judaism. This paper acknowledges the situation, but at the same time circumvents it by demonstrating the trustworthiness of the Gospel testimony that the disciples believed Jesus to be the Messiah during his earthly ministry.

There is another group of scholars who trace the origin of the title Messiah and its application to Jesus to the crucifixion, more specifically the titulus, which is almost

universally accepted as historical.¹⁹⁸ In light of the evidence presented here, this conclusion cannot be maintained, as the application of the messianic title to Jesus must be taken back even further to the days of Jesus' early ministry. Jesus was viewed as the Messiah early on in his ministry and on at least two occasions prior to his death his disciples explicitly made reference to Jesus as the Messiah: Peter's confession and James and John's request. Moreover, it seems that this claim requires more nuance than it is given. This is because those who trace the origin of the messianic title to the crucifixion also, seemingly contradictorily, agree that Jesus' followers viewed him as the Messiah prior to his crucifixion. For instance, Dinkler and Fitzmyer, as noted above, accept the authenticity of Peter's confession and argue that Jesus rejected the messianic title as satanic. In order for Jesus to have rejected a messianic title confessed by Peter, Peter had to have confessed Jesus as the Messiah prior to the resurrection.

Dahl likewise acknowledges that Jesus would have given rise to messianic hopes among his followers even before his crucifixion,¹⁹⁹ and this is in line with a number of scholars who have reasoned that the disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah prior to his crucifixion.²⁰⁰ Throughout this paper I have presented evidence that this messianic belief existed from early on and throughout Jesus' ministry. Therefore, the disciples' belief that Jesus was the Messiah could not have originated from the titulus.

¹⁹⁸ Dinkler, "Peter's Confession," 194-197; Dahl, "Crucified Messiah," 43-44; Fitzmyer, *One to Come*, 140-141.

¹⁹⁹ N. A. Dahl, "The Crucified Messiah and the Endangered Promises," *Word & World* 3, no. 3 (1983), 258; Dahl, "Crucified Messiah," 42.

²⁰⁰ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 628; Ehrman, *Apocalyptic Prophet*, 217-218; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 495; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 646-647.

A second important implication of this thesis relates to the historical analysis of Jesus' own words and deeds. Quite often scholars conclude that a pericope is inauthentic because it is in some way messianic. Alternatively, scholars will argue for an historical core of a given tradition, but will go on to strip that tradition of any messianic overtones and designate those overtones creations of the Church. However, if the disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, then one must ask why they believed this.²⁰¹ I see no way around this answer: Jesus must have said and done things that were sufficiently messianic to give rise to the consistent messianic hope of his followers described above;²⁰² the disciples' beliefs are quite incomprehensible otherwise.

The third and probably most significant implication of my study is that one must provide an in-depth answer as to why Jesus did and said messianic things. This is often absent in commentaries and lives of Jesus. Obviously those who are skeptical regarding sayings and deeds of Jesus that are messianic do not offer this sort of detailed analysis. However, because of this they also fail to explain why Jesus' closest followers viewed him as the Messiah. It is difficult to see how the Jesus of Ludemann, Crossan, Borg, or the Jesus Seminar would have led Jesus' disciples to place messianic hopes in him prior to his death and resurrection. One might be tempted to claim that Jesus never saw or intended to portray himself as the Messiah even though he did and said messianic things; the disciples simply misunderstood his intentions and therefore wrongly viewed him as the Messiah. However, such an argument would be unnecessarily circular. One would

²⁰¹ Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 56n.80.

²⁰² Space precludes me from providing a detailed analysis of what those sayings and actions might have been. For a brief summary, see "Future Research" below.

have oddly to suppose that (1) the disciples were mistaken, (2) that Jesus either never corrected them or did correct them but they disregarded his correction, (3) Jesus' opponents were mistaken when executing him as a messianic claimant, and (4) all these conclusions would have to be based in large part on sources written by those who believed Jesus was the Messiah. This sort of claim would have to be argued through extremely thoroughly and, because of its complexity, one must explain why such a conclusion is more likely than the conclusion that Jesus did make some sort of messianic claim. In fact, it is removing the messianic teachings, actions, and overtones in Jesus' ministry that allows these scholars to get around this circular reasoning.

A brief survey of some scholars who take the position that Jesus did in fact do and say things that were messianic, but who go on to explain that this does not indicate that Jesus made a messianic claim for himself, demonstrates the difficulty of such a position. Bart Ehrman, for example, argues that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet announcing the arrival of God's physical kingdom on earth. However, in light of the facts that Jesus was executed as king of the Jews, that he preached of a coming kingdom, and that his disciples viewed him as the Messiah who would rule in that earthly kingdom, Ehrman is forced to conclude, "[Jesus], in effect, would be the king of God's coming Kingdom. In *that apocalyptic* sense (and I would say, only in that sense) did Jesus think of himself as the Messiah. He wasn't a cosmic judge, an authoritative priest, or a military leader. He was the one sent from God to proclaim the good news of the coming Kingdom, who would be the ultimate ruler when the end arrived."²⁰³

²⁰³ Ehrman, *Apocalyptic Prophet*, 217-218 (emphasis original). Interestingly, this sounds somewhat like the portrait of Jesus one finds in the Gospels themselves.

E. P. Sanders suggests that it is perfectly understandable that the disciples would view Jesus as the Messiah after his crucifixion and resurrection:

“On the hypothesis proposed here, the disciples already thought of Jesus as ‘king – or, better, viceroy under the true king, God. If Jesus taught his disciples that there would be a kingdom and that *they* would have a role in it, he certainly, at least by implication, gave himself a role also. ‘Messiah’ will do perfectly well for the person who is superior to the judges of Israel, even if he was not a warrior. As long as they expected him to return and establish ‘his’ kingdom (Matt. 20.21), the disciples could think of Jesus as Messiah.”²⁰⁴

Sanders later explains that

There are, it appears, two reasons for hesitating about Jesus’ self-claim. One is that there are only two instances in the Gospels in which Jesus accepts the title “Messiah” (the trial, Mark 14.61f.; Peter’s Confession, Mark 8.29f. and parr.), and both are dubious historically. The other is that the title “Messiah” was used by the early church, and the criterion of dissimilarity therefore excludes it from the ministry of Jesus.²⁰⁵

Sanders therefore suggests that Jesus only thought of himself as God’s “viceroy.”²⁰⁶

Although I do not have space to give a thorough response to Sanders, three flaws may be pointed out in his choice of “viceroy” rather than “Messiah.” Firstly, this paper has demonstrated there is good reason to view Peter’s confession as authentic.²⁰⁷ Secondly, although the criterion of dissimilarity may not be used to substantiate the argument that

²⁰⁴ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 234.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁰⁶ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 242.

²⁰⁷ Oddly, Sanders later uses Peter’s confession to claim that Jesus rejected the worldly messianic title, apparently presupposing its historicity (*Historical Figure*, 242). This would seem to call into question his “hesitation about Jesus’ self-claim.”

Jesus claimed he was the Messiah, it does not count against it either; of course the early Church would call Jesus the Messiah if he had claimed to be. Finally, and most importantly, Sanders makes an unnecessary distinction between “viceroy” and “Messiah” and an unwarranted assumption regarding the disciples’ views of Jesus prior to the crucifixion versus after the crucifixion. Concerning the latter, Sanders differentiates between the disciples’ pre-crucifixion title for Jesus and their post-crucifixion title for him, i.e., pre-crucifixion the disciples viewed him as viceroy or king whereas post-crucifixion they viewed him as Messiah.²⁰⁸ Sanders himself says that because Jesus taught that there would be a coming kingdom and that the disciples would have a role in it, and because the disciples believed Jesus would rule as king in this kingdom, then the title “Messiah” would be an appropriate title after the crucifixion and resurrection. However, given that each of these elements was present during Jesus’ pre-crucifixion ministry, it is completely unnecessary for Sanders to make this differentiation. Regarding Sanders’ distinction between viceroy and Messiah, I again must question why. Sanders views Jesus as an eschatological king or viceroy. Yet, the words and deeds Sanders’ Jesus speaks and performs can easily, if not more appropriately, describe the ministry of the Messiah. Thus, with reference to Sander’s portrait of Jesus Bird comments:

If Jesus saw himself in some sense as the king of God’s kingdom, and if that role was expressed within the matrix of Jewish restoration eschatology, which could often include Messianism, then we must take seriously the claim that sayings and actions of Jesus that point to a royal role for himself are to be understood in a messianic sense. The only way to avoid that conclusion is either to reject Luke 22:29-30/Matt. 19:28; Mark 10:35-45;

²⁰⁸ Sanders, as noted above, does not seem to view this as a sharp distinction. For in *Historical Figure* he appears to state, without any reservations as to its historicity, that Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah and that Jesus silenced or rejected this confession.

and the triumphal entry as inauthentic [which Sanders does not] or else to posit a rigid distinction between the roles of king and Messiah, both of which are needless.²⁰⁹

Dunn and Meier likewise have trouble maintaining a Jesus who is not a messianic claimant. Meier chooses to see Jesus as the Elijah-like eschatological prophet, even though the words and deeds that he claims are representative of the Elijah-like prophet are once more just as easily, if not more appropriately, representative of the Messiah.²¹⁰ In fact, Meier does eventually allow that Jesus made a messianic claim for himself.²¹¹ Dunn answers his own question, “Did [Jesus] claim to be the long-hoped-for David’s royal son?,” with “a qualified No!”²¹² However, Dunn’s qualification is revealing:

The answer is No because Jesus is never once recalled as using the title “Messiah” of himself or as unequivocally welcoming its application to him by others (Mark 14.62 is the sole exception). It is also sufficiently clear from several, though not all, of the episodes reviewed above, that Jesus ignored or refused or rejected the dominant current understanding of the royal Messiah as a royal and military power like Herod the Great....The qualification is necessary, however, because there is a legitimate query as to whether the then current understanding of the royal Messiah’s role was the only one possible from Israel’s prophetic texts. The fact that the first Christians took over the title “Messiah” so speedily and so completely...suggests that there were other strands of Israel’s expectation which had what might be called “messianic potential.”²¹³

²⁰⁹ Bird, *Are You the One*, 106-107.

²¹⁰ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, 1039-1048; vol. 3, 495-496, 498, 622-625.

²¹¹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 3, 634.

²¹² Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 652.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 653.

It appears that the cause of Dunn's hesitation is the common understanding of the Davidic Messiah's role as a "royal Messiah and military power like Herod the Great." In fact, Dunn himself suggests that Jesus might have claimed royal messiahship, but only on the condition that the reference to and understanding of the royal Messiah was "unclear," i.e., not simply that of a royal, military figure.²¹⁴ However, one must ask whether Dunn is not allowing Jesus to be the "creative person" he acknowledges Jesus was in his preaching of the kingdom of God.²¹⁵ If Jesus altered the common perceptions of how the kingdom of God would come and look, would it not also be possible that he challenged and redefined the role of the central figure in that kingdom's coming and manifestation, i.e., the royal Messiah? One must again ask why Jesus did and said things that would cause those around him to regard him as the royal Davidic Messiah, as Dunn acknowledges he did,²¹⁶ if he had no intention to lay some claim to that role.

X. Future Research

My answer as to why Jesus spoke messianic words and performed messianic deeds would require much more space than I am able to devote here. I hope to offer a detailed answer to this question sometime in the near future. To briefly summarize my future research, much of which has been completed, I argue that Jesus did and said things that were messianic because he intended to take up and redefine the role of Messiah, particularly the Davidic Messiah that was prominent within Judaism as a whole and his audience in particular. This is evident to me in Jesus' reaction to his disciples and others

²¹⁴ Ibid., 654.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 387.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 627-648.

when they confronted him with their messianic expectation; Jesus does not reject this expectation outright. Rather, he responds with a redefinition of that role. He does not deny that he is the Baptist's coming one, the Davidic Messiah,²¹⁷ but instead responds by telling the Baptist's disciples about the great success he is having in his ministry, i.e., "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." One must remember that in the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was the Messiah who would do these things.²¹⁸ When Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah, representing the views of the rest of the disciples as well, Jesus does not deny the role, but responds by explaining that he will suffer, die, and be raised;²¹⁹ Jesus rejects Peter's interpretation of Messiah, not the title itself.²²⁰ When the disciples ask him for a place in his coming kingdom, he does not deny that he will have a kingdom, or that he will rule in it, but rather he redefines kingship and rule.²²¹ When he enters Jerusalem on a donkey, he evokes messianic expectations, but it is of a humble Messiah, not the military figure many expected.²²² When asked whether he is the Messiah during his trial, Jesus is at least ambiguous in his response, indicating that he did not reject the title, but perhaps only the common association of a military king with that title. This picture of Jesus is coherent and makes excellent sense of the evidence. It

²¹⁷ As noted above, this figure was at the very least messianic.

²¹⁸ 4Q521.

²¹⁹ Mark 8.27-31.

²²⁰ Mark 8.31-33.

²²¹ Mark 10.45.

²²² Mark 11.1-10.

explains why his disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah; it explains why Jesus engaged in actions and offered teachings that were messianic; it explains why he was executed as a messianic claimant; lastly, it fits within the overall historical picture we have of Jesus, particularly his preaching concerning the kingdom of God. If the kingdom would come, and is manifest, through love, healings, and defeating the satanic powers, rather than military might as was expected, then it makes perfect sense that the Messiah who would reign in that new kingdom would be redefined as well and accordingly. This is what I argue that Jesus did.

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