

**Was Jesus Ever a Disciple of John the Baptist?  
A Historical Study**

**Max Aplin**

Ph.D.

The University of Edinburgh

2011

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I have composed this thesis, the work is my own, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

.....

## Abstract

This study asks if the historical Jesus was ever a disciple of John the Baptist, where by ‘disciple’ is meant someone who would have been in a close personal relationship to John as their leader and teacher, and who would have spent considerable time in his presence. The current majority view of scholars is that Jesus is likely to have been John’s disciple at some time before beginning his own ministry (and in the opinion of some, during the early part of his ministry too). However, this study argues that, although we cannot be sure, he is actually unlikely to have chosen to submit himself to John in this way. Reasons are provided for believing that, even early in his ministry, Jesus had a profound confidence in his (sometimes distinctive) beliefs across a range of religious issues, including those beliefs that had to do with his own extremely important place in God’s plan. It is argued too that if Jesus was ever John’s disciple, he would very probably have to have first become his disciple no more than a matter of months before beginning his own ministry. The shortness of the time in which his confidence in his religious beliefs could have developed means that, during the period in which any potential discipleship would have begun, it is probable that Jesus had at least a fairly deep assurance about what he believed in religious matters, including what he believed concerning his own crucial place in God’s plan. This assurance makes it unlikely that he would have wished to become John’s disciple. Further – related – reasons for thinking that Jesus’ discipleship is historically unlikely are also provided. These are (a) that Jesus may well have had a spiritual experience at the time of his baptism (before any discipleship could have occurred), something that would not have cohered well with a decision then to become John’s disciple; and (b) that Jesus may have spent time alone in the wilderness very soon after his baptism. In addition to presenting these arguments against Jesus’ discipleship, most of the study involves detailed examination of the most cogent arguments that have been used to support the view that Jesus was once John’s disciple. It finds that even the strongest of these are relatively weak.

# Contents

Abbreviations . . . . .	vi
1. Introduction . . . . .	1
1.1 The goal of this study . . . . .	1
1.2 Sources . . . . .	5
1.3 Methodology . . . . .	14
1.4 The conclusion that will be reached . . . . .	19
2. John's Disciples . . . . .	21
2.1 Discipleship in John's day . . . . .	21
2.2 What we mean by John's disciples . . . . .	26
2.3 Did John have disciples? . . . . .	28
2.4 Characteristics of John's disciples . . . . .	30
2.5 Summary . . . . .	37
3. Research So Far and the Contributions of this Study . . . . .	39
3.1 Topics that will not be examined in later chapters . . . . .	43
3.2 Topics that will be examined in later chapters . . . . .	65
4. Jesus' Confidence about Religious Matters . . . . .	69
4.1 Chronological issues . . . . .	69
4.2 Jesus' confidence about religious matters during his ministry . . . . .	83
4.3 Jesus' confidence about religious matters soon before his ministry . . . . .	105
4.4 Jesus' baptism by John . . . . .	107
4.5 Jesus' time in the wilderness . . . . .	115
4.6 Conclusion . . . . .	121
5. The Fourth Gospel . . . . .	123
5.1 Opponents of the Fourth Gospel with an interest in John . . . . .	124
5.2 Jesus' debut appearance in John's vicinity . . . . .	129
5.3 The transfer of disciples from John to Jesus . . . . .	132
5.4 John 3.26b . . . . .	140
5.5 John 3.30 . . . . .	141
5.6 Conclusion . . . . .	143
6. Jesus Baptising . . . . .	144

6.1 Did Jesus baptise? . . . . .	145
6.2 For how long did Jesus baptise? . . . . .	169
6.3 Did Jesus perform John's rite of baptism? . . . . .	172
6.4 Would Jesus' performance of John's baptism suggest discipleship? . .	180
6.5 Conclusion . . . . .	187
7. The One Coming after John . . . . .	188
7.1 Texts and translations . . . . .	189
7.2 Preliminary considerations . . . . .	191
7.3 The sense of the logion in the text of the NT and in Q . . . . .	193
7.4 Is the logion authentic? . . . . .	204
7.5 The original sense of the logion . . . . .	212
7.6 Conclusion . . . . .	219
8. Matthew 11.11 // Luke 7.28 . . . . .	220
8.1 Texts . . . . .	222
8.2 Is the logion authentic? . . . . .	224
8.3 The interpretation of the logion . . . . .	226
8.4 Dibelius' exegesis does not necessarily imply Jesus' discipleship . . . .	238
8.5 Conclusion . . . . .	241
9. Conclusion . . . . .	242
Bibliography . . . . .	248

## Abbreviations

ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABD	D. N. Freedman et al., eds., <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANRW	H. Temporini & W. Haase, eds., <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> (multiple vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972-1997)
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
A.Z.	<i>Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud tractate
BAC	Bible in Ancient Christianity
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BB	Biblische Bücher
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCE	Before the Christian/Common Era
BCR	Biblioteca di cultura religiosa
BDAG	Walter Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> edn. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000 (based on Kurt & Barbara Aland, eds., Walter Bauer's <i>Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des neuen Testament und der frühchristlichen Literatur</i> , 6 <sup>th</sup> edn. [1988])
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs. <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> (based on the lexicon of William Gesenius). Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2001.
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner & Robert W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakhot</i>
BG	Biblische Gestalten
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BibS(N)	Biblische Studien (Neukirchen)
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZWNKAK	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	Christian/Common Era
CEP	Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives

<i>ChrCent</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
COL	Christian Origins Library
<i>ConNT</i>	<i>Coniectanea neotestamentica</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CV	<i>Communio viatorum</i>
DJG	J. B. Green, S. McKnight & I. H. Marshall, eds., <i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992)
ed(s).	editor(s)
edn.	edition
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ET	English translation
<i>ETR</i>	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
ff.	and the following (verses)
FFRS	Foundations and Facets Reference Series
<i>FO</i>	<i>Folia orientalia</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTKNTSup	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament Supplement Series
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	G. A. Buttrick, ed., <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962)
<i>IDBSup</i>	K. Crim et al., eds., <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume</i> . (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976)
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JApplPsychol</i>	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCTCRS	Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSocPsychol</i>	<i>Journal of Social Psychology</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSSR</i>	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEKNT	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
<i>Ket.</i>	<i>Ketubot</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah tractate
MS(S)	manuscript(s)

MT	Masoretic Text
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
Nestle-Aland	Eberhard & Erwin Nestle, Barbara & Kurt Aland et al., eds. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 27 <sup>th</sup> edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown et al., eds., <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , revised edn. (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NT	New Testament
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBS	Oxford Bible Series
ÖBS	Österreichische Biblische Studien
<i> OCD</i>	S. Hornblower & A. J. S. Spawforth, eds., <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999)
OT	Old Testament
par(s).	and parallel(s)
<i>PG</i>	J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae Graecae</i> (multiple vols.; Paris: Garnier, 1857-1891)
<i>PL</i>	J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae Latinae</i> (multiple vols.; Paris: Garnier, 1879-1890)
PTS	Paderborner Theologische Studien
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSPS	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCJ	Studies in Christianity and Judaism
SHJ	Studying the Historical Jesus
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPIB	Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici
StudNeot	Studia Neotestamentica
<i>Taan.</i>	<i>Taanit</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976; ET, with editing, of G. Kittel, ed.,



	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (11 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933-1979)
<i>Th</i>	<i>Theology</i>
THNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>TJT</i>	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
vol(s).	volume(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

# **1. Introduction**

Recent years have seen a proliferation of studies on Jesus as a historical figure, and the interest of scholars shows no signs of waning. Despite the amount of ink spilled, I am not aware of any monograph that has been written – recently or at any time – looking specifically at whether historically Jesus was ever a disciple of John the Baptist (where by ‘disciple’ I mean someone who was in a close personal relationship to John as their leader and teacher and who would have spent considerable time in his presence, as I will explain in the next chapter). This is surprising, since whether or not Jesus was once John’s disciple clearly has potential implications for how we understand him. The present study will attempt in some measure to fill this gap in Jesus research.

Before beginning our analysis of the question at hand there are a number of introductory matters to be dealt with that will occupy the first three chapters. In chapter two attention will be turned to a consideration of what we mean by John’s disciples. This will be followed in chapter three by an overview of scholars’ thoughts to date on whether Jesus was ever John’s disciple. In this first chapter I want to say a little about the goal of this study, the sources and methodology that will be used, and the conclusion I will reach, along with a few other miscellaneous points.

## **1.1 The goal of this study**

The aim of this study is to find out how likely it is that the Jesus who lived on earth was ever John’s disciple in the sense of being in a close personal relationship to him. If using the term ‘the Jesus who lived on earth’ looks a little pedantic, there is actually a good reason why I am so specific. Scholars who study Jesus as a historical figure almost invariably use the term ‘the historical Jesus’ (often also ‘the Jesus of history’) in their work. Everyone agrees that the historical Jesus is different from any portrait of Jesus that is the result of theological reinterpretation and different too

from the exalted, heavenly Jesus. However, the term is used in more than one way. Some apparently use it simply as an equivalent of ‘the Jesus who lived on earth’ – Jesus as he actually was.<sup>1</sup> Others use it in the more subtle sense of the hypothetical construct of Jesus that can be formed using the methods of a modern historian.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, many of those who use ‘the historical Jesus’ in the latter sense do not believe that the conclusions drawn about this historical Jesus necessarily correspond to the reality of the Jesus who lived on earth.<sup>3</sup> Some of these explicitly contrast what they see as ‘the real Jesus’ or ‘the actual Jesus’ – i.e., the Jesus who lived on earth – with the historian’s modern construct that they call ‘the historical Jesus’.<sup>4</sup> Importantly too, scholars who create a construct historical Jesus always, as far as I am aware, have as the final goal of their study to reach conclusions about the construct; they never take the further step of using the construct to reach conclusions about the Jesus who lived on earth.

It is not necessary for me here to go into why some scholars choose to form this latter, construct type of historical Jesus, except to say that I think they realise that religious beliefs affect people’s views, and they have as their paramount concern to find some

---

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the way it is used by N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), esp. 3-124; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), esp. xxvii-xxxiv; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), esp. 27-76; idem, ‘The Historical Study of Jesus and Christian Origins’ (in M. J. Borg, ed., *Jesus at 2000* [Boulder: Westview, 1997], 121-147), passim; Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University, 2005), esp. 28-32; and Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: de Gruyter, 1998; ET of *Jesus von Nazaret* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996]), esp. 3-6 (although some of these authors rarely use the term). In conversation, Helen K. Bond has told me that this is how she will understand this term in her essay, ‘The Quest of the Historical Jesus: An Appraisal’ (in D. Burkett, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 337-354).

<sup>2</sup> So John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001; and New Haven: Yale University, 2009), 1.21-26, 31; 2.4; 3.9; 4.11-12; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 125-126; James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), 26-32, esp. 26, 31; Leander E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 18-35, esp. 35; Gerd Theissen & Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM, 1998; ET of *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996]), 13; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 105-106, 827-828.

<sup>3</sup> This is true of Meier, Dunn, Robinson, Keck (and Theissen & Merz?). See the previous note for references.

<sup>4</sup> So Meier and Dunn.

sort of ‘neutral’ ground in which they think everyone, regardless of beliefs, will be able to share in discussion.

In this study I will not find any need to create constructs of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> I will turn my attention directly to the Jesus who lived on earth around 2000 years ago. In fact, I believe that every study of Jesus as a historical figure ought to have as its goal to provide what insight it can about the Jesus who lived on earth, even if conclusions are often uncertain. This is the Jesus people want to know about, not some sort of hypothetical construct.

Even if scholars insist on creating constructs as part of their methodology, there is no need to let the construct be the final word. For scholars who create a construct and for whom the construct corresponds exactly to what they believe about the Jesus who lived on earth,<sup>6</sup> it should be obvious that they can just ‘map’ their findings about the construct onto the Jesus who lived on earth. For those who create a construct and who think that the picture of Jesus given by the construct is likely to differ only slightly from the reality of the Jesus who lived on earth, they ought easily to be able to use the construct to reach conclusions – albeit with some level of doubt – about the Jesus who lived on earth. If any scholar were to create a construct and yet believe that the Jesus who lived on earth is likely to have been significantly different from that construct, the construct – and his or her entire study – would, sadly, yield no meaningful results. Happily, despite the phraseology used by some,<sup>7</sup> I am not aware of any author who would fall into the last category.

In this study, then, I will be aiming to gain – with as much probability as each instance allows – insights into the Jesus who lived on earth (and above all, to find out whether he was ever John’s disciple). Likewise, when I consider John or anyone else

---

<sup>5</sup> I have spent some time looking at scholarly historical works, including some very modern ones, on three figures from history – Julius Caesar, Francis of Assisi and King Henry VIII – to see what approaches were taken. In none of these works did I see any hint of distinguishing between the ‘real Caesar’ and the ‘historical Caesar’ or between the ‘actual Francis’ and the ‘historical Francis’ or anything of this kind. The scholars I looked at turned their attention directly to the Caesar, Francis and Henry who lived on earth.

<sup>6</sup> This seems to be the position of Brown. See n. 2 for the reference.

<sup>7</sup> See the next note.

I will be thinking of the person who lived on earth. Modern constructs of Jesus or John or anyone or anything have no place in my study. In this study, ‘the historical Jesus’ is simply the Jesus who lived on earth. Similarly, when I use the words ‘history’, ‘historical’ and their cognates, they will always have to do with past reality (history having to do with the past, not the historian’s reconstruction of the past), never with modern constructs.

Although my study focuses on the Jesus who lived on earth and does not use hypothetical constructs, this does not mean that I will be unable to interact with scholars, such as John P. Meier and James D. G. Dunn, who focus on a modern construct of Jesus. The way these scholars phrase things throughout their works strongly suggests that what they believe about their constructs corresponds very closely – at least a vast majority of the time – with what they believe about the Jesus who lived on earth.<sup>8</sup> In the case of other scholars who discuss the historical Jesus but are not clear whether they are thinking of the Jesus who lived on earth or a modern construct, the same applies: even if they are thinking of a construct, I have no reason to think that they would believe something substantially different about the Jesus who lived on earth. In fact, I cannot conceive that any scholar would toil laboriously to reach conclusions about a construct Jesus only to believe that this construct was or may well be very different from how Jesus really was. What would be the point? Therefore, when any scholar makes an assertion about Jesus as a historical figure (including when he or she uses the term ‘the historical Jesus’), even if they are talking about a hypothetical construct or I do not know whether they are talking about a construct, I believe I am justified in assuming that they would make the same

---

<sup>8</sup> In the latest volume of his *Marginal Jew* Meier states: ‘If scholars apply [historical-critical methods] to the appropriate sources with professional expertise, careful logic, and personal integrity, we have good reason to expect that their abstract construct will approach and partially coincide with the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jew called Jesus of Nazareth. . . . the match between 21<sup>st</sup>-century historical construct and 1<sup>st</sup>-century historical reality will never be perfect. At best, it will be a more or less accurate approximation’ (4.12). Dunn, for his part, states: ‘It needs to be said . . . that the ‘historical Jesus’ is properly speaking a nineteenth- and twentieth-century construction using the data provided by the Synoptic tradition, *not* Jesus back then and *not* a figure in history . . .’ (*Jesus Remembered*, 125-126, italics Dunn’s). These two quotes (especially Dunn’s) may suggest more of a difference than I am allowing in the views of these two scholars between the construct and the reality of the Jesus who lived on earth. However, at the risk of seeming to know better than these authors themselves, having read much of their material, I cannot help believing that Meier and Dunn believe that the conclusions they reach about their hypothetical constructs of Jesus correspond very closely to their views of the Jesus who lived on earth.

assertion about the Jesus who lived on earth too. They may believe that there is or might be a slight difference between the two ‘Jesuses’, but I would usually have no way of knowing, and I am convinced that making this (slightly inexact) equation is very unlikely to mean that I ever significantly misrepresent any author’s views.

## 1.2 Sources

No ancient author, Christian or non-Christian, ever asserts that Jesus was or was not John’s disciple. Of course, even if they did, we would need to try to determine how likely it is that their claims were historically accurate. But, as it happens, we have no such claims, so we will have to make do with indirect clues in our attempt to answer the question before us. These clues will be found in a number of sources, some of which are much more important than others.<sup>9</sup>

### (1) The Synoptics

There is a very broad consensus that the Synoptic Gospels are a good place to go looking for information about the historical Jesus (and John the Baptist). Of course, as study of the Synoptics in recent decades has shown all too clearly, these Gospels are far more than plain history. They are in essence works of early Christian theology, and this needs constantly to be kept in mind. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for believing that they have the potential to be very valuable for the historian who is interested in Jesus and John:<sup>10</sup>

(a) The fact that the significance of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection has been presented as Gospels, i.e., in a historical format, and not just in some sort of theological treatise, shows the interest of the early church in Jesus as a historical

---

<sup>9</sup> On the sources available to a Jesus-historian, see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 139-172; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.41-166; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 17-124; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 13-41.

<sup>10</sup> Further reasons for believing that the Synoptics contain much that is historical can be found on pp. 95-97.

figure.<sup>11</sup> It is surely also the case that at least a majority of early Christians would have been very interested in knowing something about Jesus' life. They would have wanted an account of how their movement originated.

(b) Many details in the Synoptics look implausible as traditions that originated in the early church. For example, Jesus can be found receiving baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1.4, 9 pars.), unable to heal (Mark 6.5) and refusing to be called 'good' (Mark 10.18 par.). 'Embarrassing' traditions such as these are best seen as authentic.<sup>12</sup> So are traditions that would have been out of date by the time they were included in the Gospel in which they are found, such as Jesus' saying about swearing by the temple (Matt 23.16-21). Similarly, the Synoptics sometimes distinguish between pre- and post-Easter perspectives. For instance, in Matt 10.5-6, 23, the twelve are clearly instructed to take their message only to Jews, yet the theology of Matthew's Gospel clearly includes Gentiles as disciples (see 28.18-20).<sup>13</sup>

(c) Although some sayings attributed to Jesus in the Synoptics almost certainly originated in the early church as it confronted new situations, we must not overemphasise the importance of this. We know, for example, that circumcision was an issue for early Christians but nowhere do we find any saying of Jesus on the subject. Nor do we find him teaching anything about the structure of church leadership, which would also probably have been a matter of some debate.<sup>14</sup>

(d) The fact that Paul rarely explicitly cites Jesus traditions in his letters does not mean that most Synoptic traditions did not exist in Paul's day. When writing to churches, Paul usually had pressing concerns that forced him to concentrate on

---

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 174-186.

<sup>12</sup> See below, pp. 14-16, on the methodological criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity, which often applies to Synoptic material. In this study, whenever I describe a tradition as authentic or historical, I will always mean that the tradition relates something that actually happened or was actually said. I will never mean simply that the tradition in question existed as a tradition. This will in any case usually be obvious from the context. It is worth noting that when I assert that a tradition or text is likely to be inauthentic, I am not implying in the slightest that it is wrong or substandard. I am simply claiming that in my view it is unlikely to relate what happened, the Gospels and Acts (in which the vast majority of the texts relevant for this study are to be found) being more complex than simple history.

<sup>13</sup> See further, Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 103-104.

<sup>14</sup> More details in Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 104-105.

specific issues, leaving little space for anything else. Besides, although Paul cites Jesus explicitly only three times (1 Cor 7.10-11; 9.14; 11.23-25), he seems to allude to Synoptic traditions much more frequently.<sup>15</sup>

(e) The wide variety of portraits of the historical Jesus that have resulted from recent studies does not mean that the Synoptics cannot be trusted to provide historical information. In some areas there are actually very wide consensuses about what Jesus did or said. Furthermore, not all studies should command the same respect. As Jürgen Becker puts it bluntly: ‘We must weigh rather than count the various interpretations of Jesus. We can dismiss many of them easily as arbitrary and false . . .’.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, if the goal of a study of the historical Jesus is limited in scope, as ours is here as we simply ask a single question about him, the Synoptics are more able to do what is required of them than if one expects to be able to reach a relatively rounded picture of Jesus using mainly Synoptic traditions.

In this study, then, we will make considerable use of the Synoptics. We will, however, use them with caution, constantly on the lookout for literary and theological tendencies, in order to try to uncover historical realities.

For historical purposes, of course, the Synoptics ought not to be regarded as a single ‘mass’ of material. Firstly, there are the relationships between these Gospels to take into account. Along with a large majority of critics, I will assume Marcan priority, i.e., that Matthew and Luke both made use of Mark’s Gospel in their work. It is possible that Matthew and/or Luke may have used something that was either somewhat less or more developed than our Gospel of Mark, but, if so, the difference between their source and canonical Mark is not likely to have been great, so it is a sufficiently accurate assumption that they used our Gospel of Mark.

Secondly, we need to consider the relationships between Matthew and the other source material he used, and between Luke and the other sources he used. Again,

---

<sup>15</sup> See the list in Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 182 n. 47; see too Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 94-96.

<sup>16</sup> Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 6.



along with a fairly large majority of critics, I will assume the two-document hypothesis, i.e., that as well as using Mark, Matthew and Luke both used a written document that has come to be designated ‘Q’, and which comprised at least most of the material common to Matthew and Luke that they did not take from Mark. It is true that a minority of scholars designate Q simply as the sum of all the traditional material Matthew and Luke have in common that they did not derive from Mark (regardless of whether it came from one or many documents, whether written or oral traditions).<sup>17</sup> However, most have in mind a specific written document, and that is how I will understand the term.<sup>18</sup>

It does not necessarily follow that every tradition Matthew and Luke have in common, that they did not take from Mark, has to have come from Q. They could both possibly have had access to one or more other common written sources and, since they must both have been immersed in the Christianity of their day, they may on occasion have used similar oral traditions.<sup>19</sup> However, the fact that a large majority of this material common to Matthew and Luke is sayings material makes it plausible that a single document is probably behind most of it (and conceivably behind all of it). In this study, therefore, when we use a tradition that Matthew and Luke had in common, and which they did not take from Mark, I will assume that it has come from Q unless there are specific reasons for questioning this, in which case I will discuss the matter.

As well as using Mark, Q, and any non-Markan, non-Q traditions that they had in common, Matthew and Luke have each used other traditions, referred to respectively as M and L traditions, that were not used by any other synoptist. In the past, some scholars used the terms M and L to refer to what they believed were two specific written documents that Matthew and Luke used. However, today M and L are generally used simply to refer to all the traditions (whether oral or written) that

---

<sup>17</sup> So, e.g., Maurice Casey, *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> For a ‘mainstream’ discussion of Q, see Harry T. Fleddermann, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), esp. 3-206.

<sup>19</sup> So Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 149, citing B. H. Streeter.

Matthew and Luke respectively used that were not used by any other synoptist.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore not correct to speak of ‘the M *source*’ or ‘the L *source*’. M traditions are bound to have come from a plurality of sources, although it is true on the other hand that some doubtless came from the same source; the same is true of L traditions.<sup>21</sup> This means that two traditions from M (or L) may or may not stem from the same source. Each case would need to be examined on its own merits.

Deciding – as far as is possible – whether a given tradition was present in one or more of the sources listed here is important for determining if there is more than one source that tells us the same or approximately the same thing.<sup>22</sup> Some critics would also see one or more of these sources as tending in general to have rather greater or lesser value than the others as far as historicity is concerned. In my view, it is much more important to take each tradition on its own merits, and I will see the sources listed above as being of equal value in principle.

## (2) Acts

Owing to its subject matter, Acts (the second volume of Luke’s work) is obviously a much less important source for the historical Jesus and John than the Synoptics. Nevertheless, there are a number of texts that are relevant for this study, not least

---

<sup>20</sup> On M, see Paul Foster, ‘The M-Source: Its History and Demise in Biblical Scholarship’ (in P. Foster, A. Gregory, J. Kloppenborg & J. Verheyden, eds., *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem* [Leuven: Peeters, 2010], 595-620). Although scholars sometimes exclude the traditions behind the infancy narratives of Matt 1-2 and Luke 1-2 from their definitions of M and L, I will include these traditions in my definitions of the terms. Occasionally, an M or an L tradition may have been very similar to a tradition that came from Mark or came from a non-Marcian source that Matthew and Luke used in common (whether Q or not). We should note too that because Matthew and Luke are likely to have used parts of Q that the other did not use (as they both used parts of Mark that the other omitted), some M and L traditions probably came from Q. However, it is doubtful whether it is ever possible to conclude that a part of M or L is more likely than not to have come from Q, so the potential Q-origin of M and L traditions is something that we will ignore in this study.

<sup>21</sup> A clear case in point of where some traditions have surely come from the same source can be found in the infancy narratives. Although there are many traditions that underlie Matt 1-2, they are bound to have come from a limited number of sources. The same can be said for Luke 1-2. Even apart from M and L material that underlies the infancy narratives, it is doubtless the case that some M traditions came from the same oral or written source as others and that the same is true of some L traditions.

<sup>22</sup> On the methodological criterion of multiple attestation, see below, pp. 16-17.

some verses that speak of John's ministry. As with the Synoptics, Acts needs to be used with caution as a historical source.<sup>23</sup>

### (3) The Fourth Gospel

The historical value of the Fourth Gospel is much more debated than that of the Synoptics.<sup>24</sup> Scholars can be found at every place on the spectrum from believing that it is extremely historical to believing that its historical value is virtually nil, with most seeing it as a useful source of information, albeit less important on the whole than the Synoptics.<sup>25</sup>

That this Gospel is very different in style from the Synoptics is apparent, even on a cursory reading of the text.<sup>26</sup> The way characters – especially Jesus – speak is usually difficult to envisage historically. The content also differs significantly from what we find in the Synoptics. The Synoptic Jesus speaks frequently of the kingdom of God, often uses parables, and can be found on a number of occasions casting out demons. These are all aspects of the historical Jesus' ministry that are (rightly) viewed as being authentic, but importantly they are all (apart from two references to the kingdom of God in John 3) missing from the Fourth Gospel. In the Fourth Gospel by contrast Jesus speaks a great deal about himself and his purpose in God's plan. These differences constitute a significant piece of evidence pointing against the historicity of the Fourth Gospel.

---

<sup>23</sup> On Acts as a historical source, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 8-12 and references; also C. K. Barrett, 'The Historicity of Acts' (*JTS* 50 [1999], 515-534).

<sup>24</sup> For recent treatments, see Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just & Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History* (vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*; vol. 2: *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007-2009]); Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: Clark, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> At the former end of the spectrum, Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Fourth Gospel: issues and commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and D. A. Carson, 'Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?' (in R. T. France & D. Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* [2 vols.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980-1981], 2.83-145), are confident that this Gospel is thoroughly historical. At the other end, Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996), is highly sceptical.

<sup>26</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 69-70; Marianne M. Thompson, 'The Historical Jesus and the Johannine Christ' (in R. A. Culpepper & C. C. Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 21-42), 22-25.

There is, however, the other side of the coin to consider too. Like the Synoptics, the fact that this Gospel presents Jesus as a historical figure and not simply in a theological treatise needs to be taken seriously,<sup>27</sup> as does its claim to be providing eyewitness testimony.<sup>28</sup> It has also become increasingly common in recent years for scholars to point to elements within the text that are considered to be historically accurate.<sup>29</sup> Details such as the location of Jacob's well (4.12), the Samaritans worshipping on Mount Gerizim (4.20), the description of the pool of Bethesda (5.2), the existence of the pool of Siloam (9.7) and Solomon's Portico being a place to shelter in the cold winter months (10.22-23) are cases in point. Moreover, there are snippets of information that seem to have nothing to do with symbolism or theology.<sup>30</sup> In 2.12, for example, we read: 'After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and there they stayed for a few days'. Again, in 11.54 we are told: 'He went away from there to a town called Ephraim in the land near the desert, and stayed there with his disciples'. Any motive for creating these details, either on the part of the evangelist<sup>31</sup> or people earlier in the

---

<sup>27</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; London: SPCK, 1978), 142, likens the Fourth Gospel to ancient Egyptian impressionistic art, and believes that 'at every point history underlies what John wrote'. Cf. Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 102-104; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963), 4; Anders Ekenberg, 'The Fourth Gospel and the History of Jesus' (CV 44 [2002], 182-191), 185.

<sup>28</sup> See 21.24. Cf. 19.35. Although chapter 21 is almost certainly a later addition to the body of the Gospel, the similarity of subject matter and style between it and the first 20 chapters (see n. 31) makes it highly likely that it was added by someone in the same Christian circle as the other author(s) who contributed to writing this Gospel. Hence the claim in 21.24 must be given due weight. On eyewitness testimony in the Fourth Gospel, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), esp. 358-471.

<sup>29</sup> A brief list of such features can be found in Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. F. J. Moloney; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 91-93.

<sup>30</sup> On the methodological criterion of unimportant data, see below, pp. 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> Because the Fourth Gospel contains what are apparently contradictions (e.g., between 4.1 and 4.2), awkward sequences of material (e.g., between 14.31 and 15.1 ff., and between 20.30-31 and 21.1 ff.) and duplication (e.g., cf. 20.30-31 with 21.24-25), it is highly probable that the text as we have it stems from at least two writers. The relative uniformity of subject matter, vocabulary and style throughout this Gospel suggest that the two or more persons responsible were part of the same early Christian community. For reasons unnecessary to go into here, it seems highly likely that the author who wrote first contributed the majority of the Gospel, the later redactor(s) adding a fairly sizeable minority. Because most of the Gospel was written by the first author, it is appropriate to refer to him as the (fourth) evangelist, as I will do in this study. (There is a broad scholarly consensus – obviously including those scholars who believe that the whole Gospel was written by one author – that at least a majority of the Fourth Gospel stems from the author who wrote first; there is broad agreement too that it is appropriate to refer to this person as the fourth evangelist.) For the sake of simplicity, in the following chapters I will usually simply assume, as I have done in the main text here, that passages in the Fourth Gospel were written by the evangelist rather than a later redactor. On those occasions when the identity of the author of a passage is important I will discuss the matter. For more detail on redaction in this Gospel, see Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 82-85; Rudolf

line of tradition, is certainly not obvious, and these verses are most probably historical facts that have been preserved.

Overall, then, the Fourth Gospel's historicity is not a clear-cut issue. However, it is surely correct to say that the long discourses and dialogues of Jesus are less likely to be historical than parts of the text that comprise mainly narrative: (a) The discourses and dialogues are the parts of this Gospel that are most difficult to envisage historically and which differ so markedly from Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics. (b) The incidental pieces of information and details considered to be historically accurate are usually found in narrative portions of the text. Significantly, the parts of the Fourth Gospel that are most important for considering Jesus' relationship to John the Baptist are ones in which narrative is a major feature, especially portions of chapters one and three. This Gospel will therefore be a major source of information for our examination of whether Jesus was ever John's disciple, although great care will be needed in evaluating the relevant texts.

Finally, there is the issue of how independent the Fourth Gospel is of the Synoptics. The lack of verbal correspondences in the places where the subject matter is the same or similar has led most critics to believe – rightly in my view – that there is not a close relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels (or Q or any other Synoptic source known to us).<sup>32</sup> This means that if the Fourth Gospel asserts something that agrees with what a Synoptic source tells us, this agreement clearly has potential implications for making decisions about historicity.<sup>33</sup>

#### (4) Josephus

Another useful source for answering the question posed in this study is the Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote towards the end of the first century CE. In his

---

Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* (3 vols.; London: Burns & Oates, 1980-1982; ET of *Das Johannesevangelium* [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965-1975]), 1.44-64.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationships between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, see Anderson, *Fourth Gospel*, 101-126. See too D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> On multiple attestation as a methodological criterion, see below, pp. 16-17.

*Antiquities* Josephus mentions both Jesus and John the Baptist.<sup>34</sup> Of these references, his (longer) reference to John will be the more important in the following chapters. Josephus is also a very important source of information for late second temple Judaism in general, and his writings will be used at times in this study to provide background information.

As with the canonical Gospels, what Josephus asserts cannot be taken as plain history. He had biases and agendas that have coloured what he says.<sup>35</sup> When he composed his works he did so in Rome on a Roman salary, so he tends at times to be biased towards Rome. He also had a very dim view of those Jews whom he saw as responsible for the disastrous war against Rome, so he has a tendency to omit things like messianic expectations which he believed were partly responsible for the war. Despite his biases, Josephus ought to be regarded as a reasonably competent historian as far as what happened is concerned. When it comes to the reasons and motivations for what happened, however, his tendentiousness comes more into play.

#### (5) Other Sources

There are a few other sources of minor importance that will be used in the study. Occasionally we will use the OT, other NT books, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the rabbinic literature, the Mandaean literature, the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, and various patristic and secular authors. The historical value of the various texts cited will be noted as and when necessary.

In chapter eight we will also examine a logion from the *Gospel of Thomas*. A fierce debate has raged in NT circles in recent decades over the relevance of *Thomas* for

---

<sup>34</sup> His reference to John in *Ant.* 18.116-119 is almost universally believed to be authentic. His reference to Jesus in *Ant.* 18.63-64 – the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum* – undoubtedly contains some later Christian additions, but there is a wide consensus that its ‘core’ stems from Josephus. For a detailed treatment of the *Testimonium*, see J. Carleton Paget, ‘Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity’ (*JTS* 52 [2001], 539-624), esp. 554-606. A brief but judicious discussion can be found in Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave – A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1.373-376.

<sup>35</sup> On Josephus as a historical source, see Z. Rodgers, ed., *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), esp. 195-346; Paget, ‘Some Observations’, passim; Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992).

historical Jesus research. The key question is whether this gospel is based on the Synoptics or on non-Synoptic (even pre-Synoptic) traditions.<sup>36</sup> For our purposes, however, this is unimportant: (a) Even if *Thomas* is based on non-Synoptic traditions, those traditions been so heavily reworked that determining the original sayings is even more difficult than for the Synoptics. (b) *Thomas* does not mention John the Baptist very often.<sup>37</sup> (c) For the purposes of this study, *Thomas* hardly adds anything to information given by the canonical Gospels. (d) On the one occasion that we do examine a logion in *Thomas*,<sup>38</sup> the logion is manifestly more developed than its Q counterpart. *Thomas* will therefore play just a small part in our analysis.

### 1.3 Methodology

The methodological approach taken in this study will simply be to make use of whatever I have at my disposal at each stage of each argument that might enable me to gain any insight. Most of the reasoning that will be used is difficult to categorise, but we can be specific about some of it. To be noted especially are the following criteria of authenticity that can at times be applied to texts.

#### (1) Dissimilarity to early Christianity

There is the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity. If a Christian source informs us of something about Jesus (or John, etc.) that is at odds with the agenda of the early church, it is unlikely that it was invented by the church,<sup>39</sup> which means it is likely to be authentic.

Of course, someone may want to argue that because our Christian sources were written by members of the early church who were free to include what they wished,

---

<sup>36</sup> Bibliography in Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 161-165.

<sup>37</sup> He appears explicitly only in *Thomas* 46. Cf. 52, 78, 104.

<sup>38</sup> See below, pp. 223-224.

<sup>39</sup> 'Invention by the church' in this context is not a negative concept. It simply refers to any way in which something might have originated – usually with good motives and a clear conscience – in the church.

it makes no sense to say that anything in these sources could have been at odds with the agenda of the church. Despite the apparent logic of this argument, it is nevertheless clear that our sources *do* include material that, broadly speaking, did not cohere with the church's agenda. For example, to find Jesus receiving a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Mark 1.9 fits very awkwardly with early Christians' belief in Jesus' sinlessness.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, Christians would surely have felt much less inhibited from merely *handing down* traditions of this kind – especially if these traditions were closely connected to other traditions that suited the church's agenda – than they would have been from inventing them 'out of thin air'. In the case of Jesus' baptism it is far less awkward to imagine that this tradition was handed down because it is a historical event (especially if it was a tradition that was always connected to the tradition of the vision and voice in Mark 1.10-11 pars.)<sup>41</sup> than that an early Christian took the trouble to invent it. Traditions in Christian sources, then, that are dissimilar to early Christianity are likely to be authentic.<sup>42</sup>

Some of these dissimilar traditions are so at odds with the agenda of the early church that the church would surely have been embarrassed about them.<sup>43</sup> The tradition of Jesus' baptism, just mentioned, is a case in point. Other dissimilar traditions are not, as far as we know, those that would have caused embarrassment, but they are dissimilar nevertheless. An example of a non-embarrassing type of the criterion of

---

<sup>40</sup> See below, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> See below, pp. 111-112.

<sup>42</sup> Instead of the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity, the 'criterion of *double* dissimilarity' – dissimilarity to early Christianity *and* to late second temple Judaism – is often invoked as a criterion of authenticity. However, regardless of whether traditions in Christian sources conformed to Judaism or not, if they did not cohere with the agenda of the early church, they are unlikely to have been invented by early Christians. Hence dissimilarity to early Christianity alone is sufficient as a criterion of authenticity. Furthermore, dissimilarity to Judaism alone – a criterion of authenticity that is sometimes appealed to – is at best very weak. If Jesus agrees with the early church against Judaism about something, that is hardly strong support for authenticity. How do we know that the fact in question was not invented by the church? Although I think that in certain cases it is conceivable that dissimilarity to Judaism might be some small support for authenticity, I am not aware of any instances in this study and this criterion is therefore not one that we will use. On the weaknesses of the criteria of double dissimilarity and of dissimilarity to Judaism, see the well-argued study by Tom Holmén: 'Doubts about Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the main criterion of Jesus-of-history research' (in B. D. Chilton & C. A. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 47-80).

<sup>43</sup> Scholars often appeal to a specific 'criterion of embarrassment'. However, traditions that embarrassed the early church are really just those that were very dissimilar to its agenda, and if we accept that the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity (and not double dissimilarity – see the previous note) is valid, the criterion of embarrassment is not really a separate criterion at all. See Holmén, 'Doubts', 75-76.



dissimilarity to early Christianity in this study is one that concerns the historicity of Jesus' twelve disciples. Because a group of twelve disciples is so rarely referred to in Acts, the letters of Paul, etc., that early Christians invented its presence in the ministry of Jesus should be regarded as implausible, and the historical Jesus is therefore – quite apart from other considerations – all the more likely to have had twelve disciples.<sup>44</sup>

Importantly, if the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity does *not* apply in a given situation (e.g., if an attitude that is attributed to Jesus is the same or very similar to an attitude that we know Paul had), this is not a pointer *against* the authenticity of whatever aspect of Jesus' life is under consideration; it simply means there is no pointer from this criterion one way or the other.<sup>45</sup>

## (2) Multiple attestation

The criterion of multiple attestation is also important. The more sources a given tradition is found in, the more likely it is to be authentic. Somewhat less importantly, the more literary forms or genres (such as parables, sayings, pronouncement stories, etc.) a given tradition is found in, the more likely it is to be authentic. Finally, and least important of all, the more often a given tradition is found overall (regardless of sources or genres), the more probable it is that it is authentic.

This criterion needs to be used with some caution. Just because a tradition appears only once does not mean that there should be a general presumption that it is inauthentic, as some would seem to believe.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, just because something is found in more than one source does not necessarily mean that it is probably authentic, as is also often believed: on occasion something that originated in the early church may have found its way quickly into different bodies of

---

<sup>44</sup> See below, pp. 99-100.

<sup>45</sup> See Holmén, 'Doubts', passim, esp. 49-50. Cf. Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 115-116; I. Howard Marshall, *I believe in the Historical Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 201-203; Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 4, 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Marshall, *Historical Jesus*, 203; Robert H. Stein, 'The "Criteria" for Authenticity' (in R. T. France & D. Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* [2 vols.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980-1981], 1.225-263), 232.

tradition.<sup>47</sup> An example of where multiple attestation is used in this study has to do with the existence of John's disciples. I consider the fact that they are mentioned in Mark, Q, the Fourth Gospel, and probably L, in which they also appear in some rather different literary genres, to be a strong piece of evidence that John did indeed have disciples.<sup>48</sup>

### (3) Coherence

The criterion of coherence can also help determine authenticity. If something is attributed to Jesus (or John, etc.) that fits with what we already know to be true about him, this can *sometimes* be a pointer towards authenticity. We need to be aware that on occasion the early church probably invented things that cohered with what it knew of Jesus,<sup>49</sup> so situations need to be taken on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, there is some value in this criterion. An example of its use in this study is where I see antithetic parallelism – a rhetorical feature widely agreed to have been commonly used by the historical Jesus – in a logion attributed to Jesus to be evidence that the logion is authentic.<sup>50</sup>

### (4) Unimportant data

Lastly, there is the criterion of unimportant data. I noted above, when outlining the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity, that Christian sources sometimes include authentic traditions that would have been at odds with the agenda of the early church. At times, these sources also seem clearly to have included authentic traditions that were *irrelevant* to the early church's agenda. (If early Christians were prepared to hand down traditions that were at odds with their interests, *a fortiori* we would not expect them to have had any difficulty with handing down traditions that were merely irrelevant to those interests.)

---

<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Marshall, *Historical Jesus*, 203.

<sup>48</sup> See below, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> The criterion of coherence is often rated much more highly than it deserves, through a failure to recognise this. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 130-131.

<sup>50</sup> See below, p. 225.

In John 1.39, for example, we are told ‘it was about the tenth hour’ when Andrew and an unnamed disciple of John met Jesus. I will argue in chapter five that this time reference is unlikely to have any significance as far as the theology of the Fourth Gospel is concerned, and also that there is no good reason for thinking that it had any theological importance at some stage prior to the composition of this Gospel. If this is correct, it is surely much more likely that this detail and other irrelevant details like it have been preserved simply because they are historical snippets of information than because Christians took the trouble to invent them *ex nihilo*.<sup>51</sup> This is especially so if such details were embedded in, and therefore part of the traditional ‘scenery’ of, larger traditions that cohered with the church’s interests. The upshot is that a passage in which an irrelevant detail can be found is more likely to be authentically based than if the detail were not present. An example of the use of the criterion of unimportant data in this study is where I regard the phrase in John 1.39, just mentioned, to be support for the historicity of the transfer of disciples from John to Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

Although there is a lot to be said for these criteria, they are only part of the picture.<sup>53</sup> They are not infallible guides by any stretch of the imagination and need to be weighed along with any other cogent arguments.

Finally, as in any study of this kind, there will be a significant amount of subjectivity ‘mixed up’ with the reasoning that is employed. This is true not least when deciding how much weight to give to specific arguments and pieces of evidence. In fact, it would probably be right to see the whole process as more of an art than a science.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, people’s subjective judgements are often very similar, so subjectivity

---

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 201-202.

<sup>52</sup> See below, pp. 136-137.

<sup>53</sup> Stressed by McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 44-45.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.184; McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 45; Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering*, 316-317 n. 13. Borg, 75, describes the process of reconstructing the historical Jesus as a ‘craft’. The degree of subjectivity that is inevitable in forming judgements about the historical Jesus is why I prefer not to describe this study as one that uses the ‘historical-critical method’. As customarily used, this term seems to imply that historical analysis – including Jesus research – can be carried out essentially scientifically and objectively. My experience – and clearly the experience of the authors cited in this note – has led me to believe that this is wishful thinking. For further critique of the historical-critical method, see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 26-29.

does not in any way have to mean arbitrariness or difficulty in persuading someone of a case.

#### **1.4 The conclusion that will be reached**

Many scholars have given their views on whether the historical Jesus<sup>55</sup> was ever John's disciple, but usually with only a cursory examination of the topic, occasionally with something a little more substantial. The positions scholars take will be listed at the beginning of chapter three. About 80% think Jesus was probably once John's disciple, with about 20% taking the opposite view. In chapter three also, the precise arguments that scholars have used for and against Jesus' discipleship, and their relative weight, will be discussed. Most of these arguments will be fairly rapidly rejected as weak, but some will be noted as worthy of detailed treatment in later chapters. A list of the topics that will receive detailed examination can be found at the end of chapter three.

As is usual in investigations of this type in which we have small and fragmentary clues from which to gain inferences, not all the clues point in the same direction. I will therefore be found arguing at times that certain issues support the view that Jesus was once John's disciple, and at times that other issues suggest he was never his disciple. I will also be found using words like 'probably', 'possibly', etc. a great deal. The meagre evidence at our disposal means that rarely is it possible to be confident about conclusions; there is usually at least a degree of doubt. That said, some arguments will be seen to be much more convincing than others, so we will often be able to reach conclusions about things with reasonable conviction.

In a study of this length we do not have space to look at every issue that has a bearing, however slight, on Jesus' potential discipleship. However, all the issues that are in my view of more than minor significance will be covered, and the omission of

---

<sup>55</sup> Either specifically the Jesus who lived on earth or the construct of Jesus that I am sure is seen as approximating to the Jesus who lived on earth; see above, pp. 1-5.

relatively insignificant lines of inquiry will not affect the overall result. In the course of the study, especially in chapter four, I will use some major arguments against Jesus' discipleship that have up until now, as far as I know, never been used. My overall conclusion will be that although the evidence does not allow us to reach anything like certainty, Jesus is unlikely to have been John's disciple. Before beginning to look at the question of Jesus' discipleship, however, in the next chapter we need to say something about John's disciples in general.

## 2. John's Disciples

John the Baptist is referred to in the NT as a διδάσκαλος ('teacher'; Luke 3.12), and as a ῥαββί ('master', 'rabbi'; John 3.26), which the fourth evangelist translates as διδάσκαλος (John 1.38).<sup>1</sup> He is also said in numerous passages to have μαθηταί, which can be translated by 'disciples', as we will see below. In this chapter we will first look briefly at examples of discipleship<sup>2</sup> that existed in John's day in order to understand something of the context in which his disciple-group existed. Second, we will define precisely what we mean by John's disciples for the purposes of this study, i.e., those people who were in a close personal relationship to John as their leader and teacher and who would have spent considerable time in his presence. Third, attention will be turned to uncovering convincing reasons for accepting the historicity of such a group around John, before, finally, looking briefly at some characteristics of this group.

### 2.1 Discipleship in John's day

#### (1) The Greco-Roman world outside Judaism

In the decades around the time of John's ministry<sup>3</sup> there existed a variety of pagan movements involving people who could in some sense be called disciples of leadership figures. These movements usually had significant religious and philosophical elements to them. Interestingly, disciples of this kind tended to be of teachers who had long since died. These teachers had had close followers when they were alive, but by the first century discipleship under them was necessarily of a more

---

<sup>1</sup> The exact sense of ῥαββί (Hebrew and Aramaic: רַבִּי) in John's day is disputed. All that is important here is that in John 3.26 it denotes some sort of teacher.

<sup>2</sup> In connection with followers other than John's, I am taking the English word 'disciple' in a broad sense to designate some sort of follower of a religious and/or philosophical leader. The precise use of the word in connection with John's followers will be outlined in § 2.2.

<sup>3</sup> On the dates of John's ministry, see below, pp. 69-72.

impersonal variety. Prominent examples include the neo-Pythagoreans,<sup>4</sup> Middle Platonists,<sup>5</sup> Epicureans,<sup>6</sup> Stoics<sup>7</sup> and Cynics.<sup>8</sup>

Although the founders of these movements were now dead, it must have been the case that individual groups of this sort had leaders who, while themselves disciples of the master of old, also had ‘sub-disciples’ whom they taught. One probable example is Apollonius of Tyana, a neo-Pythagorean of the first century. We are hindered by the fact that our main source for Apollonius’ life, Philostratus, is notoriously unreliable.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Philostratus asserts on a number of occasions that Apollonius had disciples who travelled with and/or learned from him,<sup>10</sup> and this does seem entirely plausible.

## (2) Judaism of John’s Day

In the canonical Gospels and Acts, μαθητής, the standard term in Hellenistic Greek for a disciple (of whatever kind)<sup>11</sup> is found approximately 261 times. It therefore comes as a surprise to find that this word never occurs in the best attested text of the LXX.<sup>12</sup> In the MT too, words for discipleship are very rare. תלמיד (‘disciple’)

---

<sup>4</sup> The philosopher and arithmetician Pythagoras flourished in the sixth century BCE. Neo-Pythagoreanism, which was a stage of the movement inspired by him, began in the first century BCE.

<sup>5</sup> The Athenian philosopher Plato lived in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Middle Platonism, which was a phase of the movement originating with him, lasted from the first century BCE to the third century CE.

<sup>6</sup> Epicurus was a moral and natural philosopher of the fourth and third centuries BCE. In Acts 17.18 we find Paul conversing with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

<sup>7</sup> Stoicism originated with Zeno of Citium in the fourth century BCE.

<sup>8</sup> Cynicism began with Diogenes in the fourth century BCE. Aristotle is another major figure who was revered in the first century, although at this time his teachings had largely been assimilated by other groups. On all these movements see R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-school Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 39-143. Cf. too Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1981; ET of *Nachfolge und Charisma* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968]), 25-27.

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher P. Jones, *Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, Books I-IV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005), 1-21, esp. 7-13; Antony J. S. Spawforth, ‘Apollonius of Tyana’ (in *OCD*, 128).

<sup>10</sup> *Life of Apollonius* 1.16; 4.20, 37-38; 5.43; 6.12, 15; 7.10, 13-14, 31. Philostratus does not use the common μαθητής for ‘disciple’ but prefers the rare όμιλητής (1.16; 4.37; 5.43) and έταίρος (1.16; 7.10), which could both perhaps be translated most accurately by ‘companion’ rather than ‘disciple’. Regardless of the precise meanings of these words, however, the texts listed clearly present Apollonius with what can be described as disciples.

<sup>11</sup> On the meanings of μαθητής, see below, pp. 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> It is present only in codex Alexandrinus at Jer 13.21; 20.11; 26.9 (46.9 of the MT).

occurs only in 1 Chron 25.8, while **לְמַדְרָא** ('disciple' or 'taught one')<sup>13</sup> is found in Isa 8.16; 50.4 (×2); 54.13.

Although discipleship *terminology* is so lacking in the OT, the *concept* is actually somewhat more frequent.<sup>14</sup> In 1 Sam 19.20-24, for instance, Samuel is explicitly said to be the leader of a group of prophets; in 1 Kings 19.19-21 and 2 Kings 2.1-17, Elisha is portrayed as the disciple of Elijah; in 2 Kings 4.1, 38; 9.1, Elisha himself is found leading some 'sons of the prophets'; and there is the example of Jeremiah and Baruch in Jer 36.32.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, it is a fact that on balance the motif of discipleship in the OT is much rarer than we find in the Gospels and Acts.

Despite the comparative infrequency of this theme in the OT, in Judaism of the decades around when John flourished the phenomenon of a leader with disciples of various kinds was a more common one. Similar to pagan examples, we find disciples of Jewish teachers who were now dead. Although discipleship terminology is absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>16</sup> it would surely be correct to regard the members of the sect at Qumran as in some sense disciples of the Teacher of Righteousness, their founder, who had lived in the second century BCE.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, we should see members of the 'House of Hillel' and the 'House of Shammai' as disciples of the Jewish leaders Hillel and Shammai respectively, who flourished late in the first century BCE. As noted in connection with the pagan examples cited above too, in John's day there must have been leaders at Qumran and of the Hillelites and

---

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Koehler & Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.; 5 vols.; J. J. Stamm et al., eds.; Leiden: Brill, 1967-1995), 2.505, have 'Schüler' (= 'disciple') for **לְמַדְרָא**. BDB, 541, understands **לְמַדְרָא** as an adjective – 'taught', that is used to imply discipleship.

<sup>14</sup> Karl H. Rengstorff has suggested that the reason for the lack of discipleship terminology in the OT is that, because all Israel was chosen by God, discipleship would have been regarded as being to him alone, and that master – disciple relationships would have been regarded as usurping God's prerogative. See Rengstorff, 'μαθητῶν κ.τ.λ.' (in *TDNT*, 4.390-461), 427. However, Rengstorff fails to note the times that the concept is present, even when no terminology is. His view is well criticised by Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 43-91, esp. 43-44.

<sup>15</sup> For these and further examples, see Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 51-91.

<sup>16</sup> They contain no examples of the Hebrew **לְמַדְרָא**, apart of course from translations of Scripture. Nor do they use the Aramaic **לְמַדְרָא** ('disciple') or **לְמַדְרָא** ('servant, apprentice'). Cf. Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 98-99.

<sup>17</sup> On the thesis of a 'school' at Qumran, see Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 145-170.



Shammaites, who passed on their founders' teaching and themselves acted in some sense as the masters of disciples.

Evidence for the existence of Jewish leaders with disciples can also be found in the NT. In Matt 23.1-11, for example, we find Jesus railing against the Pharisees and scribes, who are clearly portrayed abusing the status their teaching role gives them (see especially vv. 3, 7, 8). Whether or not the subject matter here stems from the historical Jesus, there is no reason to doubt that historical situations of first century Palestine are in view.

Similarly, in Luke 5.17 and Acts 5.34 Luke uses the term νομοδιδάσκαλος ('teacher of the law'). It is true that in both these passages he may have introduced the word into his tradition.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that he uses this word at all in connection with the scribes<sup>19</sup> and the Jewish leader Gamaliel reveals that he saw these characters as teachers (who must have had disciples), and there is no reason to believe that he was mistaken.

In fact, in Acts 22.3 Luke mentions Gamaliel again, and this time he has Paul state that he was educated under Gamaliel in Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> We have strong evidence that Gamaliel was a prominent Jewish Pharisee of the period,<sup>21</sup> and, given Paul's Pharisaic roots,<sup>22</sup> an education as a disciple of Gamaliel is entirely plausible. In any case, regardless of whether or not the historical Paul was a disciple of Gamaliel, we have a further insight in this verse into what was doubtless a common feature of

---

<sup>18</sup> In Luke 5.17 he seems to have added the word to his Marcan source. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1981-1985), 1.578.

<sup>19</sup> Comparing Luke 5.17 with 5.21 shows that νομοδιδάσκαλος is used as a close equivalent to γραμματεὺς ('scribe').

<sup>20</sup> This is generally how the verse is interpreted. See, e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), 704-705.

<sup>21</sup> The Gamaliel of Acts is Gamaliel the Elder (as opposed to Gamaliel II, his grandson). In addition to the evidence of Acts 5.34; 22.3, see *m. Sotah* 9.15; *m. Gittin* 4.2; *m. Rosh Hashshanah* 2.5. He is also mentioned frequently in the Babylonian Talmud and probably referred to in *Ant.* 20.213. See too Bruce D. Chilton, 'Gamaliel' (in *ABD*, 2.904-906); Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)* (revised edn.; 2 vols; eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar & M. Black; Edinburgh: Clark, 1979), 2.367-368.

<sup>22</sup> See Phil 3.5; Acts 23.6.

Jewish society, especially in Jerusalem: that of a Jewish teacher of the law who had disciples.

Besides Gamaliel, a few other names of Jewish teachers of the law of the early or mid first century are known to us. These include Hanina ben Dosa and Yohanan ben Zakkai.

As well as more formal types of discipleship in Judaism of this period, we also know of a number of Jewish charismatic leaders who had what could probably in some sense be called disciples. Some of these men led movements that could be described as military. An important example is Judas the Galilean (c. 6-9 CE), who aimed to overthrow Roman rule in Judea.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, we hear of a Theudas (c. 44-46 CE), who seems probably to have attempted to use military means to achieve his ends.<sup>24</sup> We are also told of an unnamed Egyptian – apparently a Jew – who led a revolt when Felix was procurator (c. 52-60 CE).<sup>25</sup> As well as being military figures, all these individuals are clearly portrayed in our sources as having, in part at least, a religious motivation for their actions.

Other charismatic Jewish religious leaders of this time eschewed violence. The most obvious example is Jesus himself, who chronologically was also of course closely contemporary with John.<sup>26</sup> Another example of an apparently non-violent teacher with disciples can be found in Josephus' *Life*, where Josephus (born in 37 CE) mentions spending time as a young man in the wilderness as the disciple of an ascetic named Bannus.<sup>27</sup>

In the decades around the time of John's ministry, then, there were numerous Jewish religious leaders who had a following of disciples. The nature of discipleship varied

---

<sup>23</sup> See Josephus, *War* 2.117-118, 433; 7.253; *Ant.* 18.4-10, 23-25; 20.102; Acts 5.37.

<sup>24</sup> See *Ant.* 20.97-99. Acts 5.36 most likely refers to this person.

<sup>25</sup> See *War* 2.261-263; *Ant.* 20.169-172; Acts 21.38. Other similar figures are mentioned more briefly in *War* 2.258-260 // *Ant.* 20.167-168; *War* 6.285-286, 288. Cf. too the unnamed Samaritan (*Ant.* 18.85-87), who led a revolt in Samaria sometime in Pilate's reign (26-36 CE).

<sup>26</sup> On the relative chronologies of Jesus' and John's movements, see below, pp. 69-75, 78-82. Studies of the historical Jesus, which have argued that he was interested in using violent means to overthrow Roman rule, have not succeeded in persuading many critics.

<sup>27</sup> *Life* 11-12. Josephus uses the word ζηλωτής ('zealous follower').

greatly from case to case. The existence of other leaders with disciples – both Jewish and pagan – may in part have encouraged John to form his own group, but the nature and significance of John’s disciples have to be assessed on their own merits; there is simply too much variety in types of discipleship to reason that since one group had a certain feature, John’s group is likely to have had the same feature too.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 What we mean by John’s disciples

In the NT John is said on a number of occasions to have μαθηταί. References to these are found in Mark 2.18 // Matt 9.14 // Luke 5.33; Matt 11.2-6 // Luke 7.18-22; Mark 6.29 // Matt 14.12; Luke 11.1; John 1.35-42; 3.25-28; 4.1. The word μαθητής, which had been used since classical times, derives from the verb μανθάνω, meaning ‘to learn’. The original sense of μαθητής is therefore a ‘learner’. However, in determining the meaning of μαθητής in the first century we must not stress the significance of this etymological derivation more than is appropriate. Words which have been in existence for hundreds of years often deviate from their original sense or form secondary meanings in which the root meaning has either disappeared or faded into the background.

As it happens, in Greek authors of around this time, μαθητής is used in different ways. Sometimes the word seems to connote only that someone learns or has learned something, or this is at least by far the most important connotation.<sup>29</sup> However, on other occasions, although the sense of learning still seems to be included, there is another prominent idea present that we could call relating as a subordinate. This idea appears to be especially suggested when the name of the character who has the μαθητής/μαθηταί is given.<sup>30</sup> In examples that include a relational element,

---

<sup>28</sup> On the reasons for believing that the historical John had disciples, see below, pp. 28-29.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., in Matt 10.24-25; Luke 6.40; Diodorus of Sicily (mid first century BCE), *Library of History* 23.2.1.13, 26; Dio Chrysostom (c. 40/50-after 110 CE), *On Slavery and Freedom* 65.19.3, 6.

<sup>30</sup> In the NT, every time Jesus’ μαθηταί are mentioned, there seems clearly to be a relational element in addition to the learning element. (BDAG, 609, defines the sense of μαθητής when used of Jesus’ disciples as ‘one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views’.) For other examples of the word being used in this sense, see Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 1.7.7.3; 3.67.2.2; Dio Chrysostom, *A Refusal of the Office of Archon*

translations such as ‘disciple’, ‘follower’, ‘student’ or ‘adherent’ frequently do μαθητής justice.

Every time μαθητής is used in the NT to denote people who are in some way connected to John, there seems clearly to be an element of relating as a subordinate in the use of the word; just as for Jesus’ μαθηταί, it would be unnatural to see the term simply to mean that John’s μαθηταί learned from him. The translation ‘disciple’ is therefore appropriate in each case.<sup>31</sup>

In almost all of these texts it seems clear that by John’s disciples a group of people far smaller than the whole number he baptised is in view. In Luke 11.1, for example, John’s disciples are compared with Jesus’ disciples, who were a much smaller group than everyone who accepted Jesus’ message. Similarly, in Matt 11.2 par. the way John commissions his disciples obviously suggests they have a close personal relationship with him, a relationship that would not have been possible for the large majority of those who were baptised.<sup>32</sup> The only text where a small group is not implied is John 4.1, where μαθητής is uncharacteristically used to denote all who receive John’s baptism.

For the purposes of this study, our focus will not be on this broader group of John’s disciples that constituted everyone he baptised. In this study, we are defining John’s disciples as those people who were in a close personal relationship to John as their

---

*Delivered before the Council* 32.5.7; 32.6.5. On the use of μαθητής in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, see the numerous texts cited by Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 32-42. Wilkins does, however, fail to note that even when the word is used to connote relationship, there seems to be a connotation of learning too. He therefore tends to distinguish too sharply between categories.

<sup>31</sup> BDAG, 609, has the same definition for μαθητής as a description of John’s disciples as it has for Jesus’ – see the quotation in the previous note. In texts where μαθητής is used regarding people connected to John (although they do not mention John 4.1), they translate the word as ‘disciple, adherent’.

<sup>32</sup> Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 102, 106, 209, has argued that because μαθητής means a learner, and everyone who was baptised must have learned from John before they received baptism, in the NT John’s μαθηταί must designate not only everyone baptised but an even larger number that would have included those who had not yet submitted to baptism! However, she is placing far too much emphasis on the etymological derivation of μαθητής. In the NT passages which refer to John’s μαθηταί it is natural to see a relational element in the use of the word. More importantly, on almost every occasion that μαθητής is used in connection with John, it seems obvious that those who are in view are a far smaller number than everyone baptised.

leader and teacher and who would have spent considerable time in his presence.<sup>33</sup> Since John spent much time in the wilderness,<sup>34</sup> where his disciples would not have been able to ‘commute’ from their homes to be near him, most if not all of these disciples would have lived with him for a time.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.3 Did John have disciples?

There are two main reasons for believing that the historical John had disciples:

(1) There is significant attestation to their existence. They are found twice in Mark (2.18; 6.29), once in tradition shared by Matthew and Luke (Matt 11.2-3 // Luke 7.18-20, probably from Q), in chapters 1 and 3 of the Fourth Gospel (1.35-42; 3.25-28), and probably once in L tradition (Luke 11.1).<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> This – or something very close to it – is typically what scholars mean when they refer to John’s disciples. Occasionally (e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.116-117) a distinction is made between the two types of disciples. The enigmatic μαθηταί of Acts 19.1-7 are possibly another type of disciples of John that existed some decades after his death.

<sup>34</sup> That the historical John performed at least much of his ministry in the wilderness at the southern end of the Jordan valley is, as far as I am aware, not disputed.

<sup>35</sup> Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 193, citing the reference to John’s disciples in a Galilean setting in Mark 2.18 and other texts, believes that his disciples did not stay with him while he was ministering in the wilderness. However, this is a very weak argument: (1) In Mark 2.18 John’s disciples are not actually presented as being in Galilee; all that is clear is that they are the subject of a discussion that takes place in Galilee. It is true that in Matthew’s parallel (9.14) they seem to be located in Galilee, but this passage is obviously redactional. (2) Mark 2.18 is portrayed taking place after John’s arrest, so even if this text *does* indicate that his disciples were located in Galilee for a time, it need not imply that they were based there while he was still ministering. (3) The Galilean setting of the conversation in Mark 2.18-20 could easily be redactional, the actual event (if historical) possibly having taken place elsewhere. (4) The fact that John’s disciples are presented reporting goings-on in Galilee to him in Matt 11.2 par. is hardly strong evidence that they were based in Galilee while he was still ministering. (5) Texts such as John 1.35-42; 3.26-28; Matt 11.2-3 par.; Luke 11.1 imply that John’s disciples were often in his presence. There is therefore no good reason to doubt that John’s disciples spent considerable time with him when he was ministering, even if they were not continuously in his location.

<sup>36</sup> Some critics believe that Luke 11.1 in its entirety should be attributed to Luke’s composition. Fleddermann, *Q*, 455, thinks that the presence of Lucan stylistic traits within this verse, such as a noun with τις, ὡς used as a conjunction, and εἶπεν with πρὸς, indicates that Luke created it all. Similarly, Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2.897-898, believes that the initial καὶ ἐγένετο, the reference to Jesus praying and the admonition to pray all support categorising the verse as Lucan composition. However, it is worth noting that none of the stylistic traits or motifs these scholars mention are found in the clause ‘just as John also taught his disciples’. It may well be true that the majority of 11.1 is simply Lucan composition, but even if Luke essentially composed the verse in order to promote prayer among early Christians, he could surely just as easily have done this without any reference to John or his disciples. ‘Lord, teach us to pray’, followed by, ‘And he said to them’, would form a perfectly adequate

(2) There is an apparent lack of tendentiousness in the references to them.<sup>37</sup> It seems very unlikely that the early church would have felt it worthwhile to invent the existence of his disciples in order to create a parallel between Jesus and his forerunner. Early Christians clearly had no problem with John and Jesus being different in some senses. In terms of how ascetic they were, to give just one example, Matthew and Luke were happy to present John as much more ascetic than Jesus.<sup>38</sup> Why would the early church, then, have felt a need to ‘harmonise’ them as far as disciple groups were concerned? Moreover, if there had been some sort of a desire to harmonise in respect of their disciples, we would expect the parallel to have attention drawn to it. The incidental way in which John’s disciples are referred to in the Gospels therefore speaks volumes in favour of their historicity.

In addition to these two points, it is worth noting that for John to have had disciples around him makes perfect sense. Located in the wilderness as he was (for at least much of his ministry), they could have helped him in various ways, such as gathering food, carrying messages, etc. It is also highly plausible that John would have wanted to teach some people in depth in a way that he was usually prevented from doing as people hurried home to their daily lives after receiving baptism.

It should be accepted as beyond reasonable doubt, then, that John had disciples. In fact, many scholars simply assume that he did, apparently seeing no need to defend this view.<sup>39</sup>

---

introduction to the following Lord’s Prayer without any intervening mention of John and his disciples. John Nolland, *Luke* (3 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1989-1993), 2.612, thinks that Luke might have invented the reference to John in the light of parallels between John and Jesus in the infancy narrative and chapter seven. This seems rather contrived. There is really no need for Luke to have brought John in at all here. It is best simply to assume that the reference to John’s disciples in this text uses a tradition, possibly oral, of which Luke knew, that had John teaching a prayer to his disciples.

<sup>37</sup> So Paul W. Hollenbach, ‘The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer’ (in *ANRW*, 2.25.1.196-219 [this vol. 1982]), 203 n. 25.

<sup>38</sup> See Matt 11.16-19 // Luke 7.31-35.

<sup>39</sup> The decision of the *Jesus Seminar* (W. Barnes Tatum, *John the Baptist and Jesus: A report of the Jesus Seminar* [Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994], 137) to award the statement ‘John the Baptist had disciples’ an average score of 0.62 (where 13% of participants believed that it is ‘virtually certain’ John had disciples, 60% had ‘some degree of doubt’ and 27% had ‘a considerable degree of doubt’) is characteristically too sceptical of the historical value of the NT picture, far too sceptical in this instance. It is interesting to note that Tatum gives no reasons why participants in the *Seminar* might

## 2.4 Characteristics of John's disciples

It is beyond the scope of this study to go into any detail on what being a disciple of John involved, but some brief comments are in order.

### (1) Jewish identity

There should be no doubt that John's disciples would all have been Jews. The suggestion has been made that John may have directed some of his ministry towards Samaritans.<sup>40</sup> However, even if he did, it is surely inconceivable that he would have included Samaritans among his close circle of disciples.

### (2) Gender and age

We have no explicit statements regarding the gender of John's disciples. It is conceivable that women were included, but without direct evidence it is surely probable that his disciples were exclusively male. Judaism in John's day was culturally very male-dominated, at times even misogynistic. The sexes were also segregated much more than we are used to in modern Western society. It is true that Jesus seems to have had female followers who travelled with him.<sup>41</sup> However, this does not make it probable that John acted similarly. It is more likely that Jesus, as was his wont, took the initiative in acting in a way that would have had the potential to cause offence.<sup>42</sup>

As far as the age of John's disciples is concerned, it would probably make sense to imagine that most of them were fairly young. It was uncommon for Jews in John's

---

have doubted the existence of John's disciples; the only pieces of evidence he mentions are those in favour of their existence. This perhaps provides some insight into how members of the *Seminar* tend to approach the Gospels; inauthenticity seems to be assumed as a kind of default position. However, for setting out the average views of a group of scholars to be worthwhile, it is essential that the scholars involved represent an average cross-section of scholarly opinion. In the *Jesus Seminar*, however, this is far from being the case; participants tend to be concentrated at the sceptical end of the spectrum. For an insightful critique of the *Jesus Seminar*, see Johnson, *Real Jesus*, 1-27.

<sup>40</sup> This is the thesis of Charles H. H. Scobie; see his *John the Baptist* (London: SCM, 1964), 163-177.

<sup>41</sup> See Mark 15.40-41 pars.; Luke 8.1-3, and Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.73-80.

<sup>42</sup> On Jesus' offensiveness, see below, pp. 184-185.

day not to marry and have children, and it may well have been the case that many of John's disciples were young men who had not yet married.

### (3) Social status

It is doubtless true that the vast majority of people in Palestine of the period could simply not have afforded the financial cost of leaving their usual employment for any length of time. Conceivably, the imminent expectation of the eschaton might have led to a typical disciple of John selling all his possessions in order to support himself financially. However, in the absence of any specific evidence to suggest this, we should probably regard it as unlikely (see also (4) below). Besides, there may even be reason for believing that John's disciples did *not* sell their possessions. As we will see in chapter five, it is likely that Peter and Andrew were both historically disciples of John before becoming Jesus' disciples.<sup>43</sup> It may well be significant that there are texts in the Gospels that portray (with varying levels of explicitness) one or both of these men in possession of a boat after they have begun to follow Jesus.<sup>44</sup> On balance, then, the theory that John's disciples would have sold their possessions seems weak. This means that they probably had among their number at least some who were comparatively very well off. Whether a few wealthy disciples met the financial needs of them all<sup>45</sup> or whether most of his disciples came from wealthy backgrounds remains speculative.

### (4) The structure of his group

There would doubtless have been a scale of structure or formality that existed among religious groups of John's day. At one end of the spectrum a group like the Qumran community, with its many rules and regulations, could be classified as highly structured. Other groups (such as Jesus') will have made less use of set times, prayers, rituals, offices, etc. Some may have gone so far as to avoid these things entirely.

---

<sup>43</sup> See below, pp. 133-137.

<sup>44</sup> See Mark 1.16-18 par.; Luke 5.1-11; John 21.1-11.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John's teaching in Luke 3.11 about sharing possessions.



It has been claimed that for John to have formed a structured group of disciples would be at odds with the imminence of the end he preached. Why would he have bothered with details and regulations, it is argued, when God's final judgement was expected so soon?<sup>46</sup> However, Knut Backhaus may be correct that such a train of thought would not have coincided with the 'logic of ancient religiousness' and that people who believed that the end was imminent would have tended to form strong groups, such beliefs even serving to foster community bonding.<sup>47</sup>

Besides, there is evidence that points to a certain amount of structure in John's group. Firstly, we have the reference to John teaching his disciples to pray in Luke 11.1. In n. 36 I argued that Luke is likely to have taken this information from tradition. It seems reasonable too to think that it is likely to be an authentic tradition; that John would have wished to instruct his disciples in prayer is entirely plausible. The way that Luke goes on to answer the disciple's request in 11.1 by having Jesus in vv. 2-4 give his disciples a specific prayer suggests that at least one specific set prayer of John's (that would in some respects mirror the Lord's Prayer) is in mind in v. 1 and not just the general fact that John taught his disciples how to pray.<sup>48</sup> A set prayer suggests a degree of formality in John's group.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, we have the reference to fasting in Mark 2.18, where the disciples of John and the Pharisees<sup>50</sup> are said to have fasted in contrast to the practice of Jesus' disciples. Again, this is best regarded as an authentic reminiscence: it makes perfect

---

<sup>46</sup> So Josef Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler Johannes' des Täufers?' (in H. Frankemölle & K. Kertelge, eds., *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus. Joachim Gnilka Festschrift* [Freiburg: Herder, 1989], 13-33), 30; idem, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation, Geschichte, Wirkungsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 338. Cf. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Knut Backhaus, *Die "Jüngerkreise" des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991), 319. Cf. John H. Hughes, 'Disciples of John the Baptist: An Examination of the Evidence for Their Existence, and an Estimate of Their Significance for the Study of the Fourth Gospel' (M.A. Thesis; Durham University, 1969), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Similarly Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 35; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 134; Hughes, 'Disciples of John', 8; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Johannes der Täufer* (vol. 1 of *Das Urchristentum*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 114.

<sup>49</sup> So Lohmeyer, *Johannes der Täufer*, 116; Hughes, 'Disciples of John', 8.

<sup>50</sup> V. 18a has 'the Pharisees' and v. 18b has 'the disciples of the Pharisees' in the best attested text.

sense that disciples of the ascetic John (Matt 11.16-19 par.)<sup>51</sup> would have fasted.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Joan Taylor may be correct that the early church would have been unlikely to invent a link between John's disciples and the Pharisees, John being seen as an ally but the Pharisees not.<sup>53</sup> The verse reads most easily if we imagine, not simply that John's disciples were people who individually fasted from time to time, but that they fasted in unison. If this is correct, then this corporate fast, like the prayer of Luke 11.1, points towards a degree of structure and formality in how John's disciples behaved.

Although we have such little evidence from which to draw conclusions, the emphasis in John's message on repentance and moral behaviour<sup>54</sup> – i.e., his heavy stress on the inward person – would seem to make it unlikely that the degree of formality in his group was as extensive as, say, that of the Qumran community. From what snippets of information we have in the NT, we perhaps get the impression of a degree of formality similar to Jesus' group or possibly rather greater.

#### (5) Did they baptise and preach?

It seems obvious that disciples of John would have assisted him in general matters such as the gathering of supplies and running of errands. However, most scholars who express an opinion believe that their assistance would not have extended as far as baptising people.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> On John's asceticism, see below, pp. 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> The fasting here must involve more than the mandatory fast on the Day of Atonement (referred to in Lev 16.29-31; 23.26-32; Num 29.7; cf. Acts 27.9), in which Jesus' disciples would surely have participated.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *Immerser*, 209-210. Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 30, provides no explanation for his view that the portrait of John's disciples fasting in Mark 2.18 'reflects a post-Easter discussion-position', seemingly in a perceived framework of early Christians abstaining from fasting while contemporary followers of John did not. This claim is at best weak. First, post-Easter circumstances often correspond to pre-Easter events, so if followers of John in a post-Easter setting fasted, it does not follow that they necessarily did not fast pre-Easter. Second, the post-Easter portrait of Christianity itself, as seen in the NT, includes fasting (see Acts 13.2-3; 14.23. Matt 6.16; Mark 2.20 pars. may well also indicate fasting in the early church; similarly 2 Cor 6.5; 11.27 may refer to voluntary fasting on the part of Paul), and it is unnecessary to suspect that this portrait is unhistorical.

<sup>54</sup> On these aspects of the historical John's teaching, see below, pp. 173-176.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.192 n. 52; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 141. Ernst ('War Jesus ein Schüler', 31; also 'Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth in historischer Sicht' [NTS 43 (1997), 161-183], 167) thinks that they may have been what he somewhat ambiguously describes as baptising

As we will see in chapter six, there are good reasons for thinking that Jesus probably performed John's baptising rite for a time.<sup>56</sup> Many who take the same view believe that Jesus would have baptised as John's disciple. If this were true, it could perhaps be argued that if *one* of John's disciples baptised, then others may have done likewise. However, in chapter six we will also find strong reasons for believing that Jesus may well have baptised without receiving John's authorisation, and that even if he received his authorisation, it does not have to mean that he was ever his disciple.<sup>57</sup> Finally, even if, improbably, Jesus did perform John's baptism under his authority and as his disciple, he could easily have done so as his right-hand man – i.e., not just as any disciple – and therefore have acted differently from John's other disciples. The issue of Jesus' baptising therefore cannot provide more than very weak evidence for John's disciples having baptised.

In actual fact, the most natural way of understanding references to John's baptising ministry in the Synoptics is as a rite he alone performed. This is especially so in Mark 1.5 par. (ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ: 'they were baptised *by him*') and Mark 1.8 (ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα: '*I baptised*'), and in the Q tradition in Luke 3.16 par. (ἐγὼ βαπτίζω: '*I baptise*').<sup>58</sup> If Jesus did perform John's baptism, this means that these texts are a little misleading, but they would be more misleading if many or all of John's disciples baptised. They therefore suggest that John's disciples are unlikely to have baptised.

The Fourth Gospel points in the same direction. In John 3.22 the statement that Jesus and his disciples came into the territory of Judea is followed by one that he baptised. The implication is clearly that Jesus' disciples did not themselves baptise. In v. 23 John is then introduced baptising in a way that seems in some way to parallel the baptising of Jesus. Because Jesus' disciples have implicitly just been excluded from baptising, it is most natural to exclude John's disciples (who are not in fact

---

assistants ('Taufassistenten'), a word that most naturally suggests that he views them as actually having baptised. Cf. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> See below, pp. 172-180.

<sup>57</sup> See below, pp. 180-187.

<sup>58</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.192 n. 52.

mentioned) also. Jesus and John baptising alone is likewise the most natural understanding of 4.1.<sup>59</sup>

We are best to conclude, then, that John's disciples are unlikely to have performed the rite of baptism. As far as preaching is concerned, again, the way that the focus seems to be on John as the preacher (Mark 1.3, 4, 7 pars.) probably suggests that his disciples did not preach to the crowds. That said, it is perhaps unlikely that John's disciples played no part at all in warning people of the judgement that was understood to be so imminent, even if such warning occurred only in conversations with people who came to John for baptism.

#### (6) Asceticism

In the NT John is pictured as an ascetic. He lives in the wilderness (Mark 1.4 pars.), abstains from alcoholic drink and ordinary food (Matt 11.18 par.; Mark 1.6 par.; Luke 1.15), and wears uncomfortable clothing (Mark 1.6 par.). There is no good reason for believing that historically he did not live an ascetic lifestyle, especially since living in the wilderness would have made a degree of asceticism unavoidable.<sup>60</sup>

His disciples too, by living with John in the wilderness, would have had a certain amount of asceticism forced upon them. Their accommodation is bound to have been rudimentary.<sup>61</sup> They would also necessarily have had few possessions with them and, whether separated for a while from wives or, much more probably, unmarried, would have been celibate while living there. Furthermore, I have already argued that John's disciples would have practised the ascetic discipline of fasting. Given John's diet of 'locusts and wild honey' (Mark 1.6 par.), it is easy to think of them, at least on occasion, eating some of this food too. It is also difficult to imagine them drinking

---

<sup>59</sup> I will argue on pp. 147-149 that the note in 4.2, which asserts that it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptised, is a later, unhistorical addition to the text.

<sup>60</sup> Scholars widely agree that the historical John was an ascetic. See, e.g., Taylor, *Immerser*, 32-34; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 134-140; Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 36; Daniel S. Dapaah, *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth: A Critical Study* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 50-51.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce D. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 47, may be correct to speak of them living in 'natural huts of brush'.

anything alcoholic, at least when living with John. We would surely be correct, then, to regard the lifestyle of John's disciples as ascetic.

However, there is no reason to believe that their asceticism would have gone so far as wearing a camels' hair garment, such as we find attributed to John himself in Mark 1.6 par. Because John's clothing in this text – camels' hair garment and leather belt – so closely matches that of the prophet Elijah in 2 Kings 1.8, and possibly alludes to the prophetic garb described in Zech 13.4, it is possible that these are inauthentic details that have been invented by Mark or someone earlier in his line of tradition to highlight John's connection to Elijah.<sup>62</sup> However, even if the historical John did dress in this way, because there is no suggestion that his disciples were in any way Elijanic or prophetic, it is surely preferable to think that this was one way in which John himself stood out.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, there is no good reason for believing that John or his disciples were Nazirites.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, Nazirites were known for their abstention from alcohol, but John may have done this simply because it was not a naturally occurring foodstuff.<sup>65</sup> Besides, if he had been a Nazirite, we might expect him to have limited his asceticism to the prescriptions in Num 6, which imposes no other restriction on food and drink than abstention from grape products. Most importantly, the peculiarity for which Nazirites are probably best known – not cutting their hair<sup>66</sup> – is nowhere attributed to John. If John was not a Nazirite, there is clearly no reason for believing his disciples would have been either.

## (7) Number

The number of John's disciples is perhaps the most difficult thing to determine about them. It is made even more difficult because their number is bound to have fluctuated as new members joined and as some, for whatever reason, left. I will argue in chapter

---

<sup>62</sup> For John as Elijah, see Mark 9.11-13 par.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Lohmeyer, *Johannes der Täufer*, 115.

<sup>64</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.48-49.

<sup>65</sup> So Taylor, *Immerser*, 34.

<sup>66</sup> Num 6.5, 18.

five that John 1.35-51 has a historical basis and that in this passage reference is probably made to five individual disciples of John (four of them named) who are likely historically to have transferred allegiance from John to Jesus.<sup>67</sup> Yet this does not get us very far. It is easy to imagine John with an average of, say, ten or so disciples at any one time. But it would probably be just as easy to think of him with 20 or even considerably more. Nor does the location in the wilderness necessarily suggest a smaller rather than a larger group, especially if some disciples provided money to support others and if most of the food eaten by the disciples was not the locusts and wild honey eaten by John. We are probably best to concede that we simply do not know how many disciples the historical John had.

## **2.5 Summary**

In the Greco-Roman world of John's day, there existed leaders of pagan religious or philosophical groups who had disciples. In Judaism too this phenomenon was a fairly common feature. There was no set formula and the features of leadership and discipleship varied from case to case.

It is beyond reasonable doubt that John the Baptist was one of these leaders with disciples who were in a close personal relationship to him, who learned from him and looked to him as a leader. The amount of attestation to this in the NT as well as the incidental nature of references speaks volumes for authenticity.

The scarcity of detail in our sources means that we have to be fairly speculative about the characteristics of John's disciples. Nevertheless, we can reach some conclusions with a certain degree of probability. His disciples would all have been Jewish, and it is likely that they were exclusively male and that at least some of them were well-to-do. The group seems to have had a degree of formality, but not to the extent that we find at Qumran. John's disciples are unlikely to have personally baptised or to have preached to crowds, although they would certainly have aided

---

<sup>67</sup> See below, pp. 133-137.

John in more mundane ways. They were ascetic, although the extent of their asceticism remains unclear. As to their number, we are not really in a position to say.

This is the group of disciples, then, in which Jesus was at one time potentially involved. We will now turn our attention to the evidence supporting and opposing the thesis of his discipleship.

### 3. Research So Far and the Contributions of This Study

From the beginning of the twentieth century, whether the historical Jesus might at one time have been a disciple of John the Baptist is an issue that has caught the attention of a large number of scholars.<sup>1</sup> Although some earlier authors had stated their views on the subject, the collective amount of writing on it between 1900 and the present is in my view substantial enough to make that date a suitable one from which to begin to consider scholarly opinions. Besides, a historical survey of who has and has not believed that Jesus was once John's disciple is in itself a huge topic and is therefore beyond the scope of this study.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will therefore consider only those authors who have written since 1900.

Despite the large number of scholars who have touched on the question of Jesus' discipleship, I am not aware of any major study that is devoted specifically to it. In fact, a large majority of those who will be referred to below have spent just a few sentences or paragraphs on the subject. The reasoning used therefore tends often to be rather superficial. To date, the largest amount of material provided by a single author is a section of 90 pages in Knut Backhaus' book on John's disciples, *Die "Jüngerkreise" des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums*, and most of these pages are not in actual fact directly concerned with Jesus' discipleship.<sup>3</sup> Apart from Backhaus, the longest studies are by three authors who each spend about 20 pages tackling the subject: (1) a portion of Maurice Goguel's *Au seuil de l'évangile: Jean-Baptiste*;<sup>4</sup> (2) Josef Ernst's essay,

---

<sup>1</sup> As I explained on pp. 27-28, in this study I am defining John's disciples as those people who were in a close personal relationship to John as their leader and teacher and who would have spent considerable time in his presence.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest writer known to me, who provides evidence that Jesus was believed to be John's disciple, is the eighth to ninth century Christian author Agobard. In his Latin text, referring to the claims of his Jewish opponents, he uses the words: 'Jesum . . . magisterio Baptistae Joannis eruditum', which can be literally translated: 'Jesus, taught by the tutorship of the Baptist John' (cited by Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* [London: SCM, 1960; ET of *Jesus: Gestalt und Geschichte* (Berne: Francke, 1957)], 172 n. 2; for the text, see *PL*, 104.87). In more recent times the nineteenth century Jesus-historian David Friedrich Strauss held this view. See his *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (New York: MacMillan, 1898; ET of *Das Leben Jesu* [4<sup>th</sup> edn.; Tübingen: Osiander, 1840]), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 22-112.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Goguel, *Au seuil de l'évangile: Jean-Baptiste* (Paris: Payot, 1928), 235-257.



‘War Jesus ein Schüler Johannes’ des Täufers?’<sup>5</sup> (3) a section of volume two of John Meier’s *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*.<sup>6</sup>

Of the scholars who have expressed an opinion, roughly speaking, those who think that Jesus was once John’s disciple outnumber those who take the opposite view by around four to one. A glance at the dates of these studies also reveals that in recent decades there has been no noticeable trend either towards greater acceptance or rejection of the thesis of Jesus’ discipleship.

Those who, with varying degrees of certainty, believe that Jesus was at one time John’s disciple include the following: William B. Badke,<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Becker,<sup>8</sup> Craig L. Blomberg,<sup>9</sup> Bruce D. Chilton,<sup>10</sup> Oscar Cullmann,<sup>11</sup> Daniel S. Dapaah,<sup>12</sup> W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison Jr.,<sup>13</sup> Martin Dibelius,<sup>14</sup> William R. Farmer,<sup>15</sup> R. T. France,<sup>16</sup> Maurice Goguel,<sup>17</sup> Kendrick Grobel,<sup>18</sup> Laurent Guyénot,<sup>19</sup> Paul Hoffmann,<sup>20</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach,<sup>21</sup> Craig S. Keener,<sup>22</sup> Eta Linnemann,<sup>23</sup> John P.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ernst, ‘War Jesus ein Schüler’, 13-33. Despite the title of Ernst’s *Johannes der Täufer - der Lehrer Jesu?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), this later book has virtually nothing on Jesus’ discipleship under John and will not therefore be used in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*. 2.116-130, 191-197.

<sup>7</sup> William B. Badke, ‘Was Jesus a Disciple of John?’ *EvQ* 62 (1990), 195-204.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Becker, *Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 12-15, 105; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 80-81.

<sup>10</sup> Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 32-63. Although spending over 30 pages on what he believes was Jesus’ disciple relationship to John, Chilton’s book is more novelistic than academic, and his arguments in favour of discipleship are relatively few. Also *Jesus’ Baptism and Jesus’ Healing: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 38-42.

<sup>11</sup> Oscar Cullmann, ‘The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity’ (*JBL* 74 [1955], 213-226), 218-219; *Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959; ET of *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments* [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1957]), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Dapaah, *Relationship*, 93-96, 133.

<sup>13</sup> W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1988-1997), 1.313.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), 65-66.

<sup>15</sup> William R. Farmer, ‘John the Baptist’ (in *IDB*, 2.955-962), 959.

<sup>16</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 70-71.

<sup>17</sup> See n. 4 and also his *The Life of Jesus* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933; ET of *La Vie de Jésus* [Paris: Payot, 1932]), 264-279.

<sup>18</sup> Kendrick Grobel, ‘“He That Cometh After Me”’ (*JBL* 60 [1941], 397-401), 400-401.

<sup>19</sup> Laurent Guyénot, *Le roi sans prophète: L’enquête historique sur la relation entre Jésus et Jean-Baptiste* (Paris: Pierre d’Angle, 1996), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Hoffmann, *Studien zur Theologie der Logienquelle* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.; Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), 223-224.

<sup>21</sup> Hollenbach, ‘Conversion of Jesus’, 203-207.

<sup>22</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1.578.

Meier,<sup>24</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels,<sup>25</sup> Francis J. Moloney,<sup>26</sup> Ulrich B. Müller,<sup>27</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor,<sup>28</sup> John A. T. Robinson,<sup>29</sup> Clare K. Rothschild,<sup>30</sup> E. P. Sanders,<sup>31</sup> Jacques Schlosser,<sup>32</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,<sup>33</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer,<sup>34</sup> Joan E. Taylor<sup>35</sup> and Robert L. Webb.<sup>36</sup>

This list can be expanded by adding a number of other authors who are not explicit in their view that Jesus was once John's disciple, yet who appear – again with varying degrees of certainty – to suggest as much, if one reads between the lines. These include: Marcus J. Borg,<sup>37</sup> Raymond E. Brown,<sup>38</sup> Rudolf Bultmann,<sup>39</sup> David R. Catchpole,<sup>40</sup> C. H. Dodd,<sup>41</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer,<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Schenk<sup>43</sup> and Walter Wink.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Eta Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer' (in G. Ebeling, E. Jüngel & G. Schunack, eds., *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs* [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1973], 219-236), 227, 229-232, 235-236.

<sup>24</sup> See n. 6.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 19-22.

<sup>26</sup> Francis J. Moloney, 'The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History' (*NTS* 46 [2000], 42-58), 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich B. Müller, *Johannes der Täufer: Jüdischer Prophet und Wegbereiter Jesu* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 56.

<sup>28</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist and Jesus: History and Hypotheses' (*NTS* 36 [1990], 359-374), 362, 365-366, 371.

<sup>29</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (ed. J. F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985), 129-130, 170, 182-186; 'Elijah, John and Jesus: An Essay in Detection' (*NTS* 4 [1958], 263-281), 272.

<sup>30</sup> Clare K. Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions and Q* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 52-56.

<sup>31</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 91-92.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Schlosser, *Le Règne de Dieu dans les Dits de Jésus* (2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1980), 1.166.

<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983), 118.

<sup>34</sup> Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 59-60.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Immerser*, 277-278.

<sup>36</sup> Robert L. Webb, 'John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus' (in B. D. Chilton & C. A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 179-229), 214-223; 'Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications' (*BBR* 10 [2000], 261-309), 301-305, 309 (although see his reservations on 308 about describing Jesus as John's disciple). The latter essay is also available at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/jesus\\_webb.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/jesus_webb.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Marcus J. Borg, in M. J. Borg & N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: 2 Visions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 59.

<sup>38</sup> Raymond E. Brown, 'Jesus and Elisha' (*Perspective* 12 [1971], 85-104), 88.

<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934; ET of *Jesus* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1934]), 24; 'Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums' (*ZNW* 24 [1925], 100-146), 143-144.

<sup>40</sup> David R. Catchpole, 'The Beginning of Q: A Proposal' (*NTS* 38 [1992], 205-221), 209.

<sup>41</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273-275; *The Founder of Christianity* (London: Collins, 1971), 125.

<sup>42</sup> Lohmeyer, *Johannes der Täufer*, 27 n. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Schenk, *Synopse zur Redenquelle der Evangelien* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1981), 43.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968), 38, 55.

The list of scholars who – once again with varying levels of conviction – believe that Jesus was never John’s disciple includes: Knut Backhaus,<sup>45</sup> Günther Bornkamm,<sup>46</sup> Morton S. Enslin,<sup>47</sup> Josef Ernst<sup>48</sup> and Joachim Gnilka.<sup>49</sup> Scholars giving the impression of taking this view include: Ernst Haenchen,<sup>50</sup> Joachim Jeremias,<sup>51</sup> Robert M. Price<sup>52</sup> and Ben Witherington, III.<sup>53</sup>

In this chapter I will list an array of arguments that scholars have used to support or oppose the view that Jesus was once John’s disciple. I am aware that it is customary in reviews of this kind to deal with authors chronologically. However, because so many writers have had something to say on this subject yet none of them goes into much depth, rather than giving an overview of the ideas of a large number of scholars, I will instead proceed thematically, taking in turn topics from which arguments have been adduced.

These topics will be presented in two lists. The first will include the topics that I do not believe are important enough to warrant treatment in a later chapter. As I go through this list, I will set out the arguments that have been used for or against the thesis of Jesus’ discipleship, along with who uses them. I will then provide a (usually quite brief) explanation why I believe the arguments involved are weak and can be discounted. The second list will include those topics that I intend to examine more fully in later chapters. As I go through the second list, I will succinctly outline the

---

<sup>45</sup> See n. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (2<sup>nd</sup> impression; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963; ET based on *Jesus von Nazareth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. [no details given]), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Morton S. Enslin, ‘John and Jesus’ (ZNW 66 [1975], 1-18), 7.

<sup>48</sup> See n. 5 and also his *Johannes der Täufer*, 338-339; ‘Johannes der Täufer’ (1997), 162-167, 172-176.

<sup>49</sup> Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus von Nazaret: Botschaft und Geschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 84-85.

<sup>50</sup> The fact that Haenchen argues that Jesus was not baptised by John, basing his argument in part at least on what he sees as differences between the two (see Ernst Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu: Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen*. [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966], 60-63) means that he would surely also deny Jesus’ discipleship.

<sup>51</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Proclamation of Jesus* (vol. 1 of *New Testament Theology*; London: SCM, 1971; ET of *Neutestamentliche Theologie, I Teil: Die Verkündigung Jesu* [Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971]), 43-49, esp. 47-49.

<sup>52</sup> Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003), 101-130.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 54.

major arguments that scholars have used regarding Jesus' discipleship. However, in order to avoid repetition, I will not provide any detail about these arguments, who uses them, how persuasive they are, etc., leaving all analysis until later. Finally, at the end of the chapter I will outline one major topic that, as far as I am aware, no scholar has discussed before, and which I also intend to examine.

### 3.1 Topics that will not be examined in later chapters

#### (1) Jesus' baptism by John

In view of the difficulty that was caused the early church by having its sinless Lord Jesus<sup>54</sup> submit to a baptism of repentance (Mark 1.4, 9 pars.),<sup>55</sup> the historical Jesus' baptism by John should be accepted – as it is by almost all critics – as one of the most certain events in his life.<sup>56</sup> Some scholars have seen in Jesus' baptism evidence that he was once John's disciple. Robinson thinks that we can infer Jesus' discipleship from his baptism.<sup>57</sup> Webb, in a criticism of Ernst's view that Jesus is unlikely to have been John's disciple, charges him with 'fail[ing] to appreciate the significance of Jesus' baptism by John with respect to the issue'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Becker believes that Jesus' baptism suggests there was a deeper relationship between the two men than that involved in the simple act of baptism itself.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Jesus' sinlessness is unambiguously referred to in 2 Cor 5.21; Heb 4.15; 7.26; 1 Pet 2.22; and frequently by implication elsewhere in the NT.

<sup>55</sup> On the historical John's baptism signifying (in part at least) repentance of sins, see below, pp. 173-176.

<sup>56</sup> For a defence of the historicity of Jesus' baptism, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.100-116, esp. 100-105. On embarrassment as a pointer towards authenticity, see above, p. 15. Even to imagine that the tradition of Jesus' baptism might have been invented in a very early Christian circle that had no knowledge of the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness seems highly implausible: (a) By inventing this tradition, the church would have been specifically highlighting an action of Jesus that would surely most naturally have been construed as drawing attention to his sinfulness. Why would they have done this? (b) It seems very doubtful that the tradition of Jesus' baptism would have 'stuck' unless it was historical.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182.

<sup>58</sup> Webb, 'John the Baptist', 219 n. 143.

<sup>59</sup> Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 12.

Unfortunately, none of these authors explains why Jesus' baptism should be seen as evidence for his discipleship. As we saw in the previous chapter, only a small proportion of those who received John's baptism would have become his disciples.<sup>60</sup> In a large majority of cases, baptism did not lead to discipleship, and Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism does not therefore constitute any tangible evidence that he was ever John's disciple.

(2) Matt 3.13-15

In Matt 3.13-15 Jesus comes to John for baptism, John objects and then relents. Robinson believes that the words 'Do you come to me?' in v. 14 'may reflect a technical phrase for coming to a teacher to be his disciple', and that if they do, they hint at the historical Jesus' discipleship under John.<sup>61</sup>

However, no differently from today, in the first century people were doubtless described as coming to other people – even to religious leaders such as John – very frequently in a variety of contexts and for a great many reasons. Even if it is correct, therefore, that 'coming to' a religious leader was on occasion used as a technical phrase to express an intention to become the leader's disciple, we would expect it to be made clear in the context when such a usage is being employed. Not only is a usage of this kind not made clear in v. 14, but by far the most natural way of reading the verse is simply that Jesus comes to John in order to be baptised. There is therefore no need whatever to see a discipleship motif too.

Badke, who takes this incident as historical, thinks that when John said 'I need to be baptised by you' (v. 14), he is unlikely to have meant this literally, since he would not have considered himself in need of baptism at that time. He believes, however, that if John understood Jesus' request for baptism in fact to be a request to become his disciple, John's 'I need to be baptised by you', understood as a counter-request to become *Jesus'* disciple, makes sense.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> See above, p. 27.

<sup>61</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182.

<sup>62</sup> Badke, 'Was Jesus a Disciple', 200.

Quite apart from the questionable historicity of this passage, there are two significant objections that can be made to Badke's theory. First and more importantly, because only a few of those John baptised ever became his disciples, it is surely eisegetical to see Jesus' request for baptism to be a request to become John's disciple too. Second, John's 'I need to be baptised by you' need not be understood as a sober statement of fact. It can be seen essentially as an emotional outburst that serves to demonstrate Jesus' moral superiority. Reasoning that John might not have considered himself in need of baptism would then be beside the point.

### (3) Jesus' cleansing of the temple

Robinson has seen Jesus' cleansing of the temple as a pointer towards his discipleship.<sup>63</sup> He is sure that the historical cleansing should be dated early in Jesus' ministry as we find in the Fourth Gospel, and, although he is not explicit, seems to think it took place before John's arrest as it does in that Gospel (cf. 2.13-22 with 3.24). Robinson also regards the prophecy of Mal 3.1, which refers to the Lord suddenly coming to his temple, as corresponding to John's agenda, and believes too that the cleansing was a deliberate attempt by Jesus to act out this prophecy. He therefore sees a pointer towards Jesus' discipleship.

Robinson also understands the reply Jesus gives to those who confront him after the cleansing in Mark 11.27-33 pars. as support for his theory. (Although he believes that the synoptists have placed the cleansing chronologically inaccurately, he accepts that historically the confrontation referred to in these verses occurred soon after Jesus had cleansed the temple.) By mentioning John (11.30 pars.), Jesus is alluding, Robinson believes, to the fact that the cleansing has coincided with John's purposes.<sup>64</sup> Stauffer too believes that the cleansing of the temple was accomplished

---

<sup>63</sup> Strictly speaking, Robinson seems already to have decided that Jesus was John's disciple before mentioning the cleansing (see *Priority of John*, 182-186). Yet he does appear to see the cleansing as a pointer of a sort.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 127-131, 185-186; 'Elijah, John and Jesus', 271-272.

by Jesus early in his ministry and under John's authority, although he provides rather less substantiation.<sup>65</sup>

Robinson's argument here is in essence simply one of similarity of outlook and purpose between Jesus and John. I will argue below that even if there was a high degree of similarity between the two (something that is hotly disputed), that would not amount to much evidence for Jesus' discipleship. Furthermore, it is a matter of some debate whether the cleansing did in fact take place early in Jesus' ministry.<sup>66</sup> Most scholars think it actually occurred shortly before his crucifixion. Finally, that the cleansing corresponds to Mal 3.1 is at least highly questionable. It is noteworthy that none of the Gospel accounts of the cleansing cite this text (as Robinson himself concedes).<sup>67</sup> These points combined weaken Robinson's argument considerably, and we will not pursue his line of thought any further.

#### (4) John 3.5

Robinson also sees a pointer towards Jesus' discipleship in his dialogue with Nicodemus, specifically in John 3.5: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is begotten of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'.<sup>68</sup> Pointing to vocabulary such as 'kingdom of God' that is not at home in the Fourth Gospel, he believes that this verse (as well as vv. 3-4) is likely to be based on authentic tradition from a time very early in Jesus' ministry. He believes too that if the words are authentic, by 'water and Spirit' Jesus would have been referring to John's water baptism and prophecy of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1.8 pars.). He therefore sees Jesus in his early ministry as connected with John's programme.<sup>69</sup>

However, firstly, once again this is essentially a matter of similarity between John and Jesus, and, as I will argue below, even a high level of similarity would not amount to significant evidence for Jesus' discipleship. Secondly, even if 'kingdom of

---

<sup>65</sup> Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 61-62.

<sup>66</sup> See below, pp. 74-75.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 185.

<sup>68</sup> Again, Robinson appears to see it as a pointer of a sort; see n. 63.

<sup>69</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 184-185; 'Elijah, John and Jesus', 272-273.

God' is an authentic tradition, this does not mean that the reference to water and Spirit is too. Thirdly, even if this reference is authentic, it is far from certain that it can be traced back to the early part of the historical Jesus' ministry. Again, these points greatly weaken Robinson's argument, and it will not be examined further.

#### (5) The NT portrayal of John's subordination to Jesus

The portrait of John the Baptist in the canonical Gospels and Acts is of someone who is clearly subordinate to Jesus. It is no surprise that many critics have questioned how authentic this picture is. However, Sanders has gone so far as to argue that the effort we can observe in the Gospels and Acts to make John subordinate to Jesus is so great that it suggests the reverse is true and that Jesus was once John's disciple.<sup>70</sup>

Purely for the sake of argument let us assume for a moment that Sanders is correct that the NT authors have taken great pains to reduce the historical John's importance vis-à-vis Jesus and that in reality he was not subordinate to Jesus in any way, or at least not nearly as much as the NT suggests.<sup>71</sup> Even if we do this, however, it would surely be reading too much into our texts to see Jesus' discipleship as the reason for the Christian 'reduction' of John. If the historical John had simply never testified to Jesus or had never seen himself as Jesus' forerunner, we could easily envisage a desire to subordinate John on the part of Christians. Similarly, if John had been the more prominent figure, that may well have provided the necessary motivation. Seeing the subordination of John to Jesus in the NT as evidence for Jesus' discipleship must therefore be regarded as unreasonably specific.

#### (6) The way Jesus speaks about John

Some critics have seen the way Jesus speaks about John in the Gospels as evidence for his discipleship. Hollenbach thinks that Jesus' effort to 'clarify his relation to

---

<sup>70</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> Whether and in what ways the NT authors have altered tradition in their treatment of the relationship between Jesus and John are issues that will crop up frequently throughout this study.



John' shows that 'his former association with John must have been substantial'.<sup>72</sup> Although more cautiously, Meier takes a similar view.<sup>73</sup> In Goguel's opinion, the number of times Jesus speaks about John shows how deeply influenced by him he was, and that influence, he claims, implies prolonged contact between the two.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Martin Dibelius vaguely asserts that Jesus' words – which words exactly are not specified – suggest that he knew John from personal experience.<sup>75</sup>

Somewhat differently, Robinson and Linnemann think that the esteem in which Jesus held John<sup>76</sup> suggests that he was once his disciple.<sup>77</sup> Becker seems to believe something along the same lines.<sup>78</sup>

In my view, these arguments do not provide any real indication that Jesus was ever John's disciple, for the following reasons:

(a) John was clearly a major religious figure in the Judaism of his day, and it makes perfect sense that Jesus would have spoken publicly about him. Moreover, it is certain that many Jews would have wondered whether John and Jesus were in some way connected in God's purposes, and it is likely that Jesus would have addressed their concerns. To posit Jesus' discipleship as the reason that he spoke about John is therefore unwarranted.

(b) Jesus' high view of John hardly means we ought to conclude that he was once his disciple. John was obviously a man who made an impact on the people of his day, as both the NT and Josephus testify. A great many of his compatriots would undoubtedly have regarded him as a man of God and would have spoken highly of him, yet there is no need to suppose that more than a small proportion of these ever

---

<sup>72</sup> Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 205-206.

<sup>73</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.128.

<sup>74</sup> Goguel, *Au seuil*, 240; *The Life of Jesus* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933; ET of *La Vie de Jésus* [Paris: Payot, 1932]), 271.

<sup>75</sup> Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., Matt 11.9, 11 par.

<sup>77</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 229.

<sup>78</sup> Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 12-13.

became his disciples. Similarly, Jesus' high opinion of John in no way implies that he is likely ever to have taken the step of becoming his disciple.<sup>79</sup>

#### (7) Chilton's theory of the young Jesus

Chilton develops an imaginative theory that involves Jesus becoming John's disciple at about 13 or 14 years of age.<sup>80</sup> He accepts as essentially historical Luke's assertion (2.42-43) that the young Jesus visited the temple at Jerusalem and then stayed behind without parental consent, although he believes Jesus was a little older than the twelve years of Luke 2.42 and also that Joseph was already dead. Chilton reasons that because there is no description of Jesus living in Galilee between the visit to Jerusalem and the beginning of his public ministry, it is best inferred that he never returned there after the Jerusalem visit. He also believes – although he provides no reason why – that it is implausible that Jesus would not have come to know John until he was about thirty years old as Luke 3.23 states. He therefore thinks that instead of returning to Nazareth as the Lucan narrative informs us, Jesus most probably made his way to John and became his disciple.<sup>81</sup>

Chilton's thesis is too lacking in substantiating evidence to be taken particularly seriously. The fact that we have no record of Jesus' life in Nazareth between his youth and the beginning of his public ministry does not in any way have to mean that he did not live there during that time. The Gospels are interested primarily in the period of Jesus' public ministry as well as the events surrounding his death and resurrection, and these subjects, along with some information on his birth provided by Matthew and Luke, are what they therefore concentrate on. Furthermore, even if there were some reason to doubt that Jesus was in Nazareth during these years, Chilton does not provide any credible evidence to support the idea that he was *with John* at that time. Moreover, he seems to have disregarded the parts of Luke's account that do not conform to his theory, while firmly holding on to other elements that happen to fit in with his views. Chilton's theory can therefore be discarded.

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 25-27.

<sup>80</sup> Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, xv, 32-63.

<sup>81</sup> Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 32-33.

## (8) The Babylonian Talmud

With almost no explanation, Stauffer claims to have seen allusions to Jesus' discipleship in the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>82</sup> It is true that the uncensored version of *b. Sanh.* 107b mentions Jesus, and it may well be true also that 106a by means of a codeword – Balaam – speaks of him too.<sup>83</sup> However, 107b says nothing of an early or late part of Jesus' life, and the most that can be said of 106a is that if the reference is to Jesus, he was not originally, in the eyes of the author, an evildoer. Most importantly, no mention is made in either of these passages of any character who could be John the Baptist, and Stauffer's argument should therefore be rejected.

## (9) The silence of the NT about Jesus' discipleship

Some scholars believe that the silence of the NT concerning any discipleship of Jesus under John is strong evidence that no relationship of this kind ever existed. Ernst thinks there is a limit to what the evangelists could have excluded from their work and that if Jesus had been John's disciple, we would expect that fact to appear in the NT. Reading between the lines, Ernst's point appears to be this: because opponents of the early church would have known and used the fact that Jesus was John's disciple to their advantage if it was historical, for Christians to have omitted reference to his discipleship in apologetics would have looked like obvious doctoring of tradition, and their apology would have been less likely to be successful as a result; they would have been better to admit that Jesus was once John's disciple and confront this difficulty head on; however, the fact that Jesus is never said to be John's disciple in the NT means that it is unlikely that there was any problematic memory of Jesus' discipleship that needed confronting. Ernst also believes that it is difficult to argue that Jesus' discipleship would have been omitted from the tradition through being embarrassing to the church. He points to other items in the Gospel

---

<sup>82</sup> Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 59, 172 n. 2. He also believes there are allusions in the *Toledoth Yeshu* and in the eighth to ninth century author Agobard (see n. 2); however, the very late date of these texts means that their historical value is extremely low.

<sup>83</sup> Stauffer also cites *b. Sanh.* 90a. However, there does not seem to be any sort of reference to Jesus in this passage.

tradition, such as Jesus' baptism by John and Peter's denial, that have been preserved despite their awkwardness.<sup>84</sup> Backhaus too sets great store by the silence of the NT on a discipleship of Jesus under John, for similar reasons to those provided by Ernst.<sup>85</sup>

To my mind, these arguments are at best weak. If Jesus' discipleship under John were a historical fact, there are various reasons that could easily account for its omission from our sources:

(a) John is so rarely mentioned in the NT outside the canonical Gospels, that it would actually be surprising if there were any mention of Jesus' discipleship other than in the Gospels. Likewise, it would be surprising for Josephus to tell us anything about it: first, it is doubtful that Josephus would have known about a short discipleship of Jesus under John; second, even if he did know of one, given the brevity of his note on Jesus,<sup>86</sup> we would expect him to have omitted this minor detail.

(b) Even in the Gospels, there are only a few passages that mention John, thus cutting down the likelihood of a reference to Jesus' discipleship.

(c) There are further good reasons why we might not expect to find Jesus' discipleship referred to in the Synoptics: (i) The Synoptics have very little interest in the time before John's arrest.<sup>87</sup> (ii) Although all the synoptists are likely to have found Jesus' baptism by John awkward and difficult to defend, they probably felt it was worth mentioning because of the accompanying vision and voice.<sup>88</sup> There is not, as far as we are aware, anything about Jesus' discipleship that would have made any synoptist regard it similarly as something worth mentioning.

(d) There are also further good reasons why a reference to Jesus' discipleship might not appear in the Fourth Gospel: (i) Although the fourth evangelist shows more than

---

<sup>84</sup> Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 33.

<sup>85</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 45-46.

<sup>86</sup> *Ant.* 18.63-64. On the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*, see above, p. 13 n. 34.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 60.

<sup>88</sup> See below, pp. 111-112.

a passing interest in Jesus' activities before John's arrest (which is noted in 3.24 as not yet having taken place), he omits the embarrassing baptism of Jesus by John,<sup>89</sup> so why should he not also omit Jesus' embarrassing discipleship, if he knew of it? (ii) It is true that he mentions John's temporal priority in 1.15, 30 (something that Baptist sectarians seem to have been using in apologetics against early Christianity,<sup>90</sup> as they would undoubtedly have used Jesus' discipleship under John if they knew of it), but he could easily defend against that by citing Jesus' pre-existence, whereas defending against Jesus' discipleship would probably have been much harder.

The upshot of all this is that the silence of the NT about a discipleship of Jesus under John counts for little as evidence that there was no such thing.

#### (10) Similarities and differences between Jesus and John<sup>91</sup>

A number of scholars claim to have observed noticeable similarities in the ministries, messages, or lifestyles of John and Jesus, and see this as support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship. Interestingly, others believe that differences between them suggest that Jesus was never John's disciple.

Firstly, there are those who regard the similarities as important. Becker points to what he sees as a high level of agreement in the two men's preaching of God's wrath, and believes this suggests that Jesus was at one time John's disciple.<sup>92</sup> Taylor, apparently looking to perceived similarities between Jesus and John, thinks it is likely that Jesus appropriated a number of beliefs and practices from John, and that if such appropriation did occur, the inference is that Jesus would have been John's disciple for a time.<sup>93</sup> Murphy-O'Connor believes that John had preached in Galilee and that Jesus 'as John's senior disciple' carried on the work of his former master

---

<sup>89</sup> See below, p. 109 n. 127.

<sup>90</sup> On the Baptist sectarian opponents of the fourth evangelist, see below, pp. 124-129.

<sup>91</sup> I am excluding a consideration of their baptising activities here. The issue of Jesus baptising is not simply one of whether Jesus might have been like John. It has to do in large part with whether Jesus might actually have been directly involved in John's work.

<sup>92</sup> Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 52.

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, *Immerser*, 277-278.

there.<sup>94</sup> Murphy-O'Connor does not, it is true, argue *from* Jesus' preaching in Galilee *to* his having been John's disciple, but he nevertheless seems to regard Jesus' preaching there as support for his view that Jesus was once John's disciple. Finally, Bultmann curiously seems to think that the combination of 'sayings which stress . . . the agreement between Jesus and the Baptist' and 'sayings which stress . . . the superiority of Jesus over John' suggests that Jesus was John's disciple for a time.<sup>95</sup>

Just as some scholars have been quick to recognise similarities between Jesus and John, so others have been equally ready to see dissimilarities. For Jeremias, perceived differences, such as John's asceticism versus Jesus' 'open[ness] to the world' and John's message of judgement versus Jesus' proclamation of the 'kingly reign of God', seem to be the main reason he rejects the thesis of Jesus' discipleship.<sup>96</sup> Gnilka also believes that there were historical differences between the two – e.g., that Jesus preached the kingdom of God and performed miracles, whereas John did neither – and that these differences suggest that Jesus was never John's disciple.<sup>97</sup> Ernst too seems to think that in the absence of clear similarities between Jesus and John it is more appropriate to regard them as dissimilar, and that the dissimilarity points against the thesis of Jesus' discipleship.<sup>98</sup>

Whether and, if so, to what extent Jesus and John were either similar or dissimilar is clearly a significant issue. However, for the attempt to discover whether Jesus was ever John's disciple, it is not a particularly important one, for the following reasons:

(a) It seems likely that there was significant similarity *and* dissimilarity between the historical Jesus and John. As far as similarity is concerned, there is no convincing reason to doubt, for example, that they both believed in and preached God's judgement and the existence of some sort of hell. It is not, to my knowledge,

---

<sup>94</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 369, 371.

<sup>95</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 24.

<sup>96</sup> Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 48-49.

<sup>97</sup> Gnilka, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 84-85.

<sup>98</sup> Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 27-28.

disputed that John's preaching contained these motifs.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, they are found so often in sayings attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic tradition,<sup>100</sup> that the burden of proof rests firmly on anyone who would deny that he too made use of these themes in his preaching.<sup>101</sup> Nor is there a good reason to doubt that both John and Jesus taught that people should repent. Again, I am not aware of any critic who would dispute that this was a part of John's teaching.<sup>102</sup> And, once again too, there is significant attestation suggesting that the need to repent formed part of Jesus' message.<sup>103</sup> In view of the prevalence of the motif of repentance in the OT, it would in any case be *a priori* very unlikely that any Jewish prophet and teacher would have been unconcerned with this issue. Finally, in chapter six we will see that there are good reasons for believing that Jesus is likely to have performed John's rite of baptism for a time.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> On John's preaching of these themes, see Matt 3.7-12 par., and the discussion of this material in Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 261-306; Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997; ET of *Die Gerichtspredigt Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zur eschatologischen Verkündigung Jesu und ihrem frühjüdischen Hintergrund* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1990]), 167-193; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.27-40; and Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 36-44.

<sup>100</sup> See (with more or less explicitness) Mark 6.11 pars.; Mark 8.38 par.; Mark 9.42-48 pars.; Mark 9.49 pars.; Mark 13.35; Matt 5.25-26 par.; Matt 7.1-2 par.; Matt 7.21-23 par.; Matt 7.24-27 par.; Matt 8.11-12 par.; Matt 10.15; Matt 10.32-33 par.; Matt 11.20-24 par.; Matt 12.41-42 par.; Matt 13.30, 41-42, 47-50; Matt 18.23-35; Matt 22.1-14 par.; Matt 23.13-23 par.; Matt 23.34-36 par.; Matt 24.37-42 par.; Matt 24.43-44 par.; Matt 24.45-51 par.; Matt 25.1-13; Matt 25.14-30 par.; Matt 25.31-46; Luke 10.10-11; 13.1-5, 28; 16.1-9; 20.45-47.

<sup>101</sup> On Jesus' preaching of judgement, see Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 197-323; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 182-186, 322-336; Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 49-80; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 265-269; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 420-425.

<sup>102</sup> On the reasons for believing that the historical John's baptism signified, in part at least, an expression of repentance, see below, pp. 173-176.

<sup>103</sup> See (with more or less explicitness) Mark 1.15 par.; 2.1-12 pars.; 6.12; Matt 11.21 par.; 12.41 par.; 12.43-45 par.; 18.12-14 par.; Luke 5.32 (although this is almost certainly redactional); 6.32-34; 13.1-5; 15.8-10, 11-32; 16.30; 17.3-4; 18.9-14; 19.1-10. In addition to these passages, a great many others in which Jesus can be found encouraging good behaviour or warning of judgement (e.g., Mark 4.1-9 pars.; Matt 13.47-50) could be seen as incorporating an implicit summons to repent. On the historical Jesus' preaching of repentance, see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 246-258; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 498-500, 528-532; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 265-266, 268-269. The thesis of Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism*, 106-113, 198-208; *Historical Figure*, 226-237), that Jesus was probably not especially concerned with repentance (either moral or ritual), has not generally met with approval. For criticisms of Sanders' view, see Wright, 246-258; Dunn, 528-532.

<sup>104</sup> See below, pp. 172-180. In Matt 3.7 // Luke 3.7 we find John describing his audience as 'offspring of vipers' (γεννηματα ἑχιδνῶν), while in Matt 12.34; 23.33, Jesus is found using the same term. We may have here another historical similarity between the two. However, it is well established that Matthew had a concern to develop parallels between John and Jesus (see John P. Meier, 'John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel' [*JBL* 99 (1980), 383-405], passim; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.289-290), and it is therefore a significant possibility that 12.34; 23.33 originated with Matthew and that the historical Jesus never used this term. It is especially noteworthy that neither 12.34 or 23.33 has any Synoptic parallel, which serves to reinforce this suggestion (noted by Meier, 389-390). (In fact, it is

As far as dissimilarity is concerned, less evidence is available to us,<sup>105</sup> but there is at least a broad consensus that John was more ascetic than Jesus.<sup>106</sup>

(b) Such similarities between Jesus and John of which we know can be fairly easily explained without recourse to the thesis of Jesus' discipleship. It is true that, because Jesus received baptism from John and also appears to have spoken highly of him,<sup>107</sup> it would surely be correct to see at least some connection between Jesus' and John's ministries in all of the above-mentioned areas of agreement, i.e., in their preaching of judgement and hell, insistence on repentance, and performance of John's rite of baptism. Nevertheless, even though Jesus does seem – at least to some degree – to have consciously aligned his ministry with John's in these areas, there is still no strong reason for believing that his discipleship was the reason for this. Jesus could easily have aligned himself with John simply because he believed that in God's sight John's and his own ministries were linked<sup>108</sup> and that it was his duty to make the alignment. There is, of course, a world of difference between a Jesus who did this and one who sat at John's feet learning and only then coming to an understanding of God's will for own ministry.

(c) Such dissimilarity that is discernible between Jesus and John counts as very little support for the view that Jesus was never John's disciple, since the degree to which Jesus could have come to differ from the teaching and praxis of his former mentor, if John was such, is surely considerable. Nor should we think that it would have taken

---

not certain that the historical John used the term either, although the presence of this tradition in Q and the lack of any particular reason for doubting its historicity speak in favour of authenticity.)

<sup>105</sup> It is frequently asserted that while Jesus preached the kingdom (or reign, etc.) of God, John did not do so. However, on pp. 177-178 I will argue that it is very unclear whether or not this theme formed part of John's message. That Jesus is reported to have performed many miracles, whereas in our sources no miracles are attributed to John (cf. John 10.41), is not sufficiently important as a dissimilarity here: awareness of an ability to perform supernatural acts on the part of Jesus in contrast to John would hardly have to mean that Jesus' religious outlook differed from John's. Nor is it of any great importance that Jesus and John seem to have differed, at least to an extent, in where they performed their ministries.

<sup>106</sup> The parable contrasting Jesus and John in Matt 11.16-19 par. is generally held to be authentic and to reflect authentic differences between the two. See, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.144-154.

<sup>107</sup> Matt 11.7-19 par. is widely believed to contain much that is authentic.

<sup>108</sup> This, of course, is how the NT views the ministries of John and Jesus; see, e.g., Mark 1.2-3, 7-8 pars.; John 1.8, 15; 3.28-30.



time for Jesus to break with some of John's beliefs or practices after ceasing to be his disciple. He could even have begun to take issue with John on certain matters while still a disciple.<sup>109</sup>

In view of the cumulative weight of the above points, exactly how Jesus compares with John is therefore not a topic that will be specifically examined in this study, although it will crop up at times in the following chapters.

#### (11) Nazoraean and Nazarene

Finally, we come to a topic that does not warrant detailed treatment in a later chapter but requires rather more attention than the previous points. In the NT Jesus is called a Ναζωραῖος, 'Nazoraean', (Matt 2.23; 26.71; Luke 18.37; John 18.5, 7; 19.19; Acts 2.22; 3.6; 4.10; 6.14; 22.8; 26.9) and a Ναζαρηνός, 'Nazarene', (Mark 1.24 // Luke 4.34; Mark 10.47 [par. to Luke 18.37]; 14.67; 16.6; Luke 24.19).<sup>110</sup> In Bultmann's view, the fact that Jesus is described as a Ναζωραῖος suggests he was once connected to John's movement. Although he is not explicit, he probably has in mind the sort of relationship between John and Jesus that we are describing as discipleship.<sup>111</sup>

A majority of critics believe that from the time the words were first used Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός (and the Semitic word or words underlying them)

---

<sup>109</sup> Some scholars (e.g., Goguel, *Au seuil*, 235-274, esp. 257-274; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 206-207) believe that Jesus was once John's disciple but a rift later developed between the two. Although – for reasons unnecessary to go into here – I do not believe the arguments used to support the rift theory carry any real weight, I do agree that differences between John and Jesus scarcely have to mean that Jesus was never John's disciple.

<sup>110</sup> These are the preferred readings in Nestle-Aland. In a number of these texts the alternative word appears as a variant reading.

<sup>111</sup> Bultmann, 'Bedeutung', 143-144; idem, *Jesus and the Word*, 24. See above, pp. 27-28, for the definition of discipleship that we are using in this study. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 197-200, thinks that Ναζωραῖος may be evidence for Jesus' discipleship. J. Spencer Kennard Jr., 'Was Capernaum the Home of Jesus?' (*JBL* 65 [1946], 131-141), 131-136; idem, 'Nazorean and Nazareth' (*JBL* 66 [1947], 79-81), passim; and Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998; ET of *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993]), 219; see both Greek words as evidence for Jesus' membership in John's circle, although it is unclear whether they have in mind a close group around John or everyone who was baptised by him. Other (predominantly German) scholars who believe that the use of one or both of these words in connection with Jesus points to some sort of historical link between him and John are noted in Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 36 n. 66.

meant ‘from Nazareth’ or ‘of Nazareth’, a village in lower Galilee. However, we do not have any extant examples of a Greek or Semitic word that indisputably means ‘from Nazareth’ with which to validate this translation. Accordingly, it is argued by some that linguistically Ναζωραῖος (and by a few that Ναζαρηνός too) cannot have been derived from a Semitic word meaning ‘from Nazareth’.

J. Spencer Kennard Jr. thinks that for this sense we would expect Ναζαρεταῖος, Ναζαρετηνός, or something similar.<sup>112</sup> More commonly, it is accepted that Ναζαρηνός always meant ‘from Nazareth’ but denied that Ναζωραῖος originally had this meaning, specifically because the second syllable is an ω and not an α.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, in Acts 24.5 Christians are referred to as Ναζωραῖοι, ‘Nazoraeans’. It is argued that religious movements do not tend to take their names from the place of birth of their founder, especially when the place did not generally receive the founder’s message (cf. Mark 6.1-6 par.; Luke 4.16-30), and that for yet another reason we ought to suspect that Ναζωραῖος did not originally mean ‘from Nazareth’.<sup>114</sup>

Those who reject the view that Ναζωραῖος originally meant ‘from Nazareth’ believe that a Semitic word with the root נצַר, whose fundamental meaning is ‘to observe’, or with the root נָנַר, meaning ‘to consecrate’ or ‘to vow’, underlies this word (occasionally it is held that the word underlies Ναζαρηνός too), and think that Jesus was once connected in one way or another with a Jewish sect that involved specific religious practices. Some of these scholars, referring to the fact that the sect known as the Mandaeans call themselves נַצְרַיִתָא (a word containing the נצַר root) and the fact that this sect sees John the Baptist as a major figure in its history, believe that the sect Jesus was connected to was one led by John.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Kennard, ‘Was Capernaum’, 131; idem, ‘Nazorean’, 79.

<sup>113</sup> So Mark Lidzbarski, ‘Mandäische Liturgien’ (originally 1918/1920; in G. Widengren, ed., *Der Mandäismus* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982], 155-161), 156; Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 197-200, esp. 198. Cf. Bultmann, ‘Bedeutung’, 143-144; idem, *Jesus and the Word*, 24.

<sup>114</sup> So Kennard, ‘Was Capernaum’, 131-132; idem, ‘Nazorean’, 79.

<sup>115</sup> So Bultmann, ‘Bedeutung’, 143-144; idem, *Jesus and the Word*, 24. (Bultmann is very brief but the fact that he cites Lidzbarski [‘Bedeutung’, 143] shows that he is reasoning in this way). Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 197-200, thinks it is possible. Kennard, ‘Was Capernaum’, 133; ‘Nazorean’, 8,

Most scholars, however, are unconvinced, and, in fact, many experts find no difficulty in postulating ‘from Nazareth’ as the original meaning of both Ναζαρηνός and Ναζωραῖος (and of the underlying Semitic words).<sup>116</sup> As we will see, these words do indeed appear originally to have had this sense. Let us examine them in turn, beginning with Ναζαρηνός:

(a) In Mark and Luke, ‘from Nazareth’ seems to be the sense of the word. In Mark’s Gospel this term first appears in 1.24, where no explanation for its meaning is offered. Because Mark has already told us in 1.9 that Jesus came from Nazareth (Ναζαρέτ) to be baptised by John in the Jordan, the reader is apparently supposed to infer the meaning ‘from Nazareth’ for Ναζαρηνός in 1.24 as well as for subsequent appearances of the word. The same logic holds in Luke too. Ναζαρηνός first appears in Luke at 4.34 in the parallel passage to Mark 1.24. Again, there is no explanation of its meaning, and, again, Jesus has previously been connected with Nazareth (1.26; 2.4, 39, 51; 4.16). As in Mark, the reader is apparently expected to understand the meaning ‘from Nazareth’.<sup>117</sup> If ‘from Nazareth’ is the meaning of Ναζαρηνός in the NT, all other things being equal, we would expect it probably always to have had that sense.

(b) In Matt 4.13 and Luke 4.16, as scholars generally agree, the correct spelling of Nazareth is probably Ναζαρά. We know of a town Γαδαρά (Gadara) in the Decapolis, an inhabitant of which is described using the adjective Γαδαρηνός (Matt 8.28). Similarly, we know of the village Μαγδαλά (Magdala) in Galilee, an inhabitant of which is described as Μαγδαληνός (Mark 15.40 par.; 15.47 par.; 16.1;

---

unusually, sees Ναζωραῖος as evidence for Jesus’ connection to a group led by John despite both rejecting the view that this word suggests a connection between the Mandaeans and John and believing that the Semitic word may have contained the 𐤍𐤏 root.

<sup>116</sup> So George F. Moore, ‘Nazarene and Nazareth’ (in F. J. Foakes Jackson & K. Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity* [5 vols.; London: MacMillan, 1920-1933], 1.426-432), 1.426-431; Hans Heinrich Schaefer, ‘Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος’ (in *TDNT*, 4.874-879); W. F. Albright, ‘The Names “Nazareth and “Nazoraean”’ (*JBL* 65 [1946], 397-401); Hans Peter Rüger, ‘NAZAPEΘ / NAZAPA NAZAPHNOC / NAZΩΠΑΙΟC’ (*ZNW* 72 [1981], 257-263); Michael O. Wise, ‘Nazarene’ (in *DJG*, 571-574).

<sup>117</sup> Some of the points listed immediately below also support seeing ‘from Nazareth’ as the sense of Ναζαρηνός on the level of the text of Mark and Luke.

Matt 28.1 par.; Luke 8.2; 24.10; John 19.25; 20.18). Exactly the same pattern would therefore result in an inhabitant of Ναζαρά being described as Ναζαρηνός.<sup>118</sup> This is a strong pointer towards Ναζαρηνός having originated with the meaning ‘from Nazareth’.

(c) Although in Semitic languages Nazareth was almost certainly spelled נַצְרֶת,<sup>119</sup> i.e., with a ז rather than a י, and a ז was usually transliterated into Greek with a σ rather than a ζ, there are numerous extant examples where a ז has been transliterated with a ζ.<sup>120</sup> Besides, the fact that the Greek words for Nazareth – Ναζαρέθ (Matt 21.11; Luke 1.26; 2.4, 39, 51; Acts 10.38), Ναζαρέτ (Mark 1.9; Matt 2.23; John 1.45, 46) and Ναζαρά (Matt 4.13; Luke 4.16) – were spelled with a ζ and not a σ in itself means that we would expect an adjective meaning ‘from Nazareth’ to be spelled with a ζ. The alternative would be to suppose that all these texts involve misspellings and that in Greek the name of the village was in fact spelled with a σ. This seems very improbable. The presence of the ζ, then, should not cause us to suspect that Ναζαρηνός once meant something other than ‘from Nazareth’.

(d) Jesus (Greek: Ἰησοῦς; Semitic: ישו) was such a common name in Judaism, that it would be understandable if Jesus was given an epithet in order to distinguish him from others of the same name. Apart from a patronymic, which Ναζαρηνός is obviously not, the most natural epithet is probably one that referred to his place of origin.<sup>121</sup> All the examples of Ναζαρηνός in the NT are connected with Ἰησοῦς, which would make perfect sense if Ναζαρηνός serves to define Jesus’ geographical origin. If even one of these examples is historically based, it would help suggest that a Semitic word underlying Ναζαρηνός was used to refer to Jesus coming ‘from Nazareth’.

---

<sup>118</sup> Noted by Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 209.

<sup>119</sup> See Stephen Goranson, ‘Nazarenes’ (in *ABD*, 4.1049-1050), 1049.

<sup>120</sup> See Schaefer, ‘Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος’, 879; Rüger, ‘NAZAPEΘ / NAZAPA’, 257.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Backhaus, “Jüngerkreise”, 36.

It is widely agreed that, quite apart from how we interpret Ναζαρηνός or Ναζωραῖος, it is probable that the historical Jesus lived in Nazareth prior to beginning his ministry. In view of this and the points just listed, it seems highly likely that Ναζαρηνός always meant ‘from Nazareth’ or ‘of Nazareth’, and that whenever it or the Semitic word or words underlying it were applied to Jesus this would have been the sense.

Let us turn now to Ναζωραῖος:

(a) Like Ναζαρηνός, on the level of the NT, when applied to Jesus this word seems to mean ‘from Nazareth’. Matthew (2.23) explicitly connects Ναζωραῖος with Nazareth. Although he does not make the precise meaning of the word clear, ‘from Nazareth’ would seem to be the best option.<sup>122</sup> In Luke 18.37 Jesus is described as Ναζωραῖος. Because there is no explanation of the term and in view of the similar Ναζαρηνός meaning ‘from Nazareth’ in this Gospel, it seems highly likely that this is the sense of Ναζωραῖος in Luke and Acts too. In the Fourth Gospel, Ναζωραῖος is first used to describe Jesus in 18.5, where, once again, no explanation for its meaning is provided. Because Jesus has been described as coming from Nazareth in 1.45-46, it makes most sense to imagine that the reader is supposed to understand ‘from Nazareth’ in 18.5. It seems likely, then, that on every occasion Ναζωραῖος is applied to Jesus in the NT it means ‘from Nazareth’.<sup>123</sup> If this is its meaning in the NT, all other things being equal, we would expect it probably originally to have had that sense.

(b) Because Jesus was given the epithet Ναζαρηνός, and it is highly likely that this always meant ‘from Nazareth’, it does not seem probable that the original meaning of the similar epithet Ναζωραῖος was completely different. This is especially so

---

<sup>122</sup> How to explain Matthew’s supposed citation of the OT in this text does not need to concern us here.

<sup>123</sup> Some of the points listed immediately below also support seeing ‘from Nazareth’ as the sense of Ναζωραῖος on the level of the NT text.

when we bear in mind that –ηνός and –αῖος are found as alternative endings of the same word.<sup>124</sup>

(c) For the same reasons as with Ναζαρηνός, the presence of the ζ should not cause us to suspect that Ναζωραῖος once meant something other than ‘from Nazareth’.

(d) As regards the second vowel in Ναζωραῖος being an ω, despite the second vowel in Ναζαρέθ, Ναζαρέτ and Ναζαρά being an α, this is admittedly somewhat unexpected if Ναζωραῖος is an adjective that is cognate with these nouns. Yet a number of experts believe that it is not a great problem. It is pointed out that Semitic gentilic adjectives did not necessarily have the same vowels as the place-names to which they corresponded.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, it is argued that the Semitic word behind Ναζωραῖος would have had a vocal sheva as its second syllable, and examples are provided of a vocal sheva being transliterated with an ω.<sup>126</sup> The presence of the ω, therefore, does not suggest that this word originally meant something other than ‘from Nazareth’.

(e) Apart from Matt 2.23, in every NT text where Ναζωραῖος is used to describe Jesus, Ἰησοῦς is also present (occasionally Χριστός is too). Just as the presence of Ἰησοῦς in connection with Ναζαρηνός helped to suggest that the Semitic word underlying that Greek word was used to refer to Jesus coming ‘from Nazareth’, so the connection of Ἰησοῦς and Ναζωραῖος makes it increasingly likely that the word underlying Ναζωραῖος was used likewise.

It is true that if Ναζωραῖος originally meant ‘from Nazareth’ the designation of early Christians in Acts 24.5 as Ναζωραῖοι is rather surprising. That historically early Christians were indeed called Ναζωραῖοι (and an underlying Semitic term or terms) is made highly plausible, first, by the unexpectedness of this designation in

---

<sup>124</sup> The two Greek words for ‘Essene’ are the similarly formed Ἐσσηνός and Ἐσσηαῖος. Rieger, ‘NAZAPEΘ / NAZAPA’, 260, also provides some examples of this type of alternation in ending from MSS of the LXX.

<sup>125</sup> See Albright, ‘Names’, 398.

<sup>126</sup> See Schaefer, ‘Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος’, 877. Cf. Albright, ‘Names’, 398-401; Rieger, ‘NAZAPEΘ / NAZAPA’, 261-262; Wise, ‘Nazarene’, 573.

the light of the rest of the NT; second, by the fact that in Syriac the word for Christians is *nāsrāyā*;<sup>127</sup> and third, because Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.1.3; 29.6.2, 7) tells us that there was a time when all Christians were called *Ναζωραῖοι*.

There is no reason to believe that the underlying Semitic of *Ναζωραῖοι* as a designation of Christians was different from the Semitic underlying *Ναζωραῖος* as applied to Jesus. This means that if *Ναζωραῖος* and its precursor Semitic meant ‘from Nazareth’, in a pre-Christian context the term *Ναζωραῖοι* and its precursor Semitic would have meant ‘those from Nazareth’. Nevertheless, despite the unexpectedness of a word with this original sense coming to be used to designate Christians, in the light of the above points it seems likely that whenever *Ναζωραῖος* or the Semitic word or words underlying it were applied to the historical Jesus, it would have meant ‘from Nazareth’.<sup>128</sup>

It would be far too much of a coincidence to imagine that *Ναζωραῖος* or *Ναζαρηνός* (and the relevant underlying Semitic words) could have been used to designate a member of a pre-Christian sect to which Jesus belonged as well as meaning ‘from Nazareth’.<sup>129</sup> That these words probably originally meant ‘from Nazareth’ therefore makes it unlikely that they have anything to do with Jesus’ relationship to such a sect.

Furthermore, that *Ναζωραῖοι* (and the underlying Semitic term(s)) was used as a designation of early Christians surely makes it unlikely that the same word would have been used for a pre-Christian sect: firstly, if Jesus had been a *Ναζωραῖος* as a member of a sect of *Ναζωραῖοι*, it seems unlikely that *Ναζωραῖοι* (or an equivalent Semitic word) would have been a designation for Christians that was first

---

<sup>127</sup> See Schaefer, ‘*Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος*’, 874-875.

<sup>128</sup> The fact that Jesus and his disciples are referred to in the Talmud as *נְזִירֵי נָזְרִי* / *נְזִירֵי נָזְרִי* (e.g., in *b. Ber.* 17b [in MS M]; *b. Taan.* 27b; *b. San.* 107b; *b. A.Z.* 17a [in MS M]) helps to demonstrate that a Semitic word underlying *Ναζωραῖος* and/or *Ναζαρηνός* was used for Jesus and his disciples, but does not greatly help us determine its meaning.

<sup>129</sup> That is not to say that there cannot have been any secondary allusions in the word when applied to Jesus. Matthew (2.23) apparently believed that the word connoted more than a link with Nazareth. The most commonly perceived allusions are the rite of the Nazirite and the ‘branch’ (*נְזִירִי*) of Isa 11.1. See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.275-281.

used by non-Christians, because it would surely have caused confusion to give Christians exactly the same name as a pre-Christian sect that existed at or almost at the same time. Secondly, if Jesus had belonged to a sect called the Ναζωραῖοι, even if the church now saw itself as the true continuation of what the Ναζωραῖοι stood for, it still seems unlikely that early Christians would have been the first to call themselves by this name: (i) It is rather improbable that they would have used a name that could have been misunderstood as a designation of another group. (ii) We might expect that they would have wanted to distinguish themselves from a sect that Jesus had merely belonged to without being the leader.

It is very unlikely, then, that Ναζωραῖος (and Ναζαρηνός) indicates that Jesus was a member of a pre-Christian sect or group. Moreover, even if it does indicate this, there would still be only a possibility that this was a group led by John, for the following reasons:

(a) In extant sources the terms Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός (or any similar Semitic word) are never linked with John or his movement.

(b) Although נַצְרַיָא (vocalised something along the lines of nāṣōrāyā)<sup>130</sup> is a term used by the Mandaeans, and they see John as a key figure in their past, we know of no strong reason for believing that they gained this name as the result of a connection with John's group. First, it is at least highly questionable whether there is any historical connection between John and the Mandaeans.<sup>131</sup> Second, John is only one of the prominent characters in Mandaean religion,<sup>132</sup> so even if there was a historical link between John and the Mandaeans, and even if (and it is a big 'if') they derived this name as the result of a perceived connection – whether historical or not –

<sup>130</sup> See Schaefer, 'Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος', 875-878.

<sup>131</sup> Edmondo Lupieri, *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993; ET of *I Mandei. Gli ultimi gnostici* [1993]), 161-165, denies a connection. So do Şinasi Gündüz, *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994), 106-108; and Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970), 53-67. Kurt Rudolph, 'Mandaeism' (in *ABD*, 4.500-502), 501, believes that it is 'unsolved' whether there is a link.

<sup>132</sup> See Lupieri, *Mandaeans*, passim, esp. 3-52, 127-172; Gündüz, *Knowledge of Life*, 55-124, esp. 105; Rudolph, 'Mandaeism', 501;



with a specific person, it could have been the connection with someone other than John that resulted in the name.

(c) The way that Jesus (at least during most of his public career) apparently differed from John (and at times with his disciples too) in some respects, notably in how ascetic he was<sup>133</sup> and in that he seems not to have baptised throughout his ministry,<sup>134</sup> means that for him to have been remembered using a description for a member of John's group is rather implausible.

(d) According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 18)<sup>135</sup> a pre-Christian<sup>136</sup> Jewish sect called the Ναζαράῖοι (sometimes spelled Νασσαράῖοι)<sup>137</sup> existed, which he does not connect with John. If, very improbably, Ναζωραῖος in the NT does indicate that the historical Jesus was a member of a pre-Christian sect, because the variation in the second syllable between an ω and an α is hardly strong evidence that Ναζωραῖος is not closely related to Ναζαράῖοι/Νασσαράῖοι,<sup>138</sup> and because (in contrasting Ναζωραῖος with Νασσαράῖοι), as we have seen, Greek ζ and σ could both be used to transliterate the same Semitic letter (נ), it is conceivable that it was the sect mentioned by Epiphanius rather than a group led by John, to which Jesus was connected.

All things considered, then, the fact that in the NT the words Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός are applied to Jesus does not provide us with any real evidence that he was once John's disciple.

---

<sup>133</sup> See Mark 2.18-20 pars.; Matt 11.16-19 par., texts that are widely held to be historically based. On the asceticism of John and his disciples, see above, pp. 35-36. It is true, as I will note on p. 119, that Jesus may have been somewhat more ascetic than is often believed to be the case, but, nevertheless, there is no good reason to doubt that at least during most of his ministry he was less ascetic than John and his disciples.

<sup>134</sup> See below, pp. 169-172.

<sup>135</sup> There are also other scattered references elsewhere in *Panarion*.

<sup>136</sup> *Panarion* 14.1.1 and 29.6.1 make it clear that Epiphanius regards this sect as pre-Christian.

<sup>137</sup> E.g., in *Panarion* 29.6.1; 30.1.3.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Schaeder, 'Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος', 877; Albright, 'Names', 398-401.

## 3.2 Topics that will be examined in later chapters

As I have already noted, this second list includes those topics from which various scholars have adduced arguments regarding Jesus' discipleship, and which I intend to examine in later chapters. I will leave all details about the arguments, who uses them, and how persuasive they are until later.

### (1) Jesus' initial appearance in John's vicinity in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel

In the narrative of the Fourth Gospel Jesus makes his first appearance in a location where John is present. A few critics have seen this as evidence for the historical Jesus' discipleship. This issue will be discussed in chapter five.<sup>139</sup>

### (2) The transfer of disciples from John to Jesus

In the Fourth Gospel disciples of John are portrayed transferring their allegiance to Jesus. For the transfer to have taken place, it is argued by some, Jesus must have become well known to John's disciples, the reason being that he is likely to have spent time as a disciple of John himself. This topic will also be discussed in chapter five.<sup>140</sup>

### (3) John 3.26b

A few scholars have seen the words of John's disciples in John 3.26b – 'Rabbi, he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan . . .' – as a hint that Jesus stayed with John as his disciple. This is another idea that will be considered in chapter five.<sup>141</sup>

### (4) John 3.30

---

<sup>139</sup> See below, pp. 129-132.

<sup>140</sup> See below, pp. 132-139.

<sup>141</sup> See below, pp. 140-141.

M.-É. Boismard claims that there would have been a play on words in the Aramaic underlying John 3.30 – ‘He must become greater but I must become less’ – that alluded to Jesus’ discipleship. This too will be discussed in chapter five.<sup>142</sup>

#### (5) Jesus baptising

The argument that is most commonly used in support of Jesus’ discipleship is that he baptised (see John 3.22-26; 4.1-2). This important topic will be examined at length in chapter six.

#### (6) Mark 1.14

In Mark 1.14 we are told that after John’s imprisonment Jesus came to Galilee. A few critics have seen in this statement a possible implication that up until John was arrested Jesus had been with him as his disciple.

Because the information in this verse has the potential to tie in chronologically with the baptising activity of Jesus referred to in John 3-4, it makes sense to examine these texts together. Mark 1.14 will therefore be discussed in chapter six in conjunction with Jesus’ baptising ministry.<sup>143</sup>

#### (7) The one coming after John

A number of scholars claim to have seen evidence for Jesus’ discipleship in the logion attributed to John in Mark 1.7 pars., where he speaks of one who comes after (Greek: ὀπίσω) himself, who is in some sense greater than he is. Most exegetes treat this preposition as temporal – after in time – and understand the coming after to be chronological. Others, by contrast, understand coming after in its common Gospel sense of coming after as a disciple. They claim that in the logion John is stating that he has a disciple – Jesus – who is in actual fact greater than he.

---

<sup>142</sup> See below, pp. 141-142.

<sup>143</sup> See below, pp. 149-151, including esp. n. 27.

A few critics, pointing to rabbinic tradition, also claim that the reference in Mark 1.7 pars. to John's unworthiness to untie Jesus' sandals is in itself (i.e., quite apart from its existence as part of the logion as a whole) evidence for Jesus' discipleship. This logion needs thorough examination and will be analysed in chapter seven.<sup>144</sup>

(8) Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28

In Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28 a logion is attributed to Jesus, the second half of which is usually translated 'but the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [John]'. Under this exegesis, the comparative-form adjective μικρότερος is taken as a de facto superlative – 'least'. A few scholars, however, believe that μικρότερος should be taken as a genuine comparative adjective and that we should translate 'but the one who is lesser [than John] is greater than he in the kingdom of God.' Some of those who adopt this latter exegesis have understood the saying to mean that Jesus is the one who is lesser than John and that he is lesser *by virtue of being his disciple*, and have therefore seen this text as evidence for the historical Jesus' discipleship. This is another logion that needs careful examination. It will be the subject of chapter eight.

In addition to examining the topics just mentioned, in chapter four we will look at an issue that has never, to my knowledge, been discussed when considering Jesus' potential discipleship. We will ask whether his deep confidence in his beliefs across a range of religious issues – including those beliefs that had to do with his own extremely important place in God's plan – fits with the idea that he would have chosen to become John's disciple. In chapter four too we will examine three further related topics, to see if they can shed any light on the thesis of Jesus' discipleship. These are: the spiritual experience attributed to him at the time of his baptism; the time spent alone in the wilderness attributed to him soon after his baptism; and whether any of those people known to us, who were most like Jesus, was ever the disciple of a religious leader.

---

<sup>144</sup> The latter point will be discussed on p. 215 n. 84.

The five chapters that follow will vary considerably in length. However, this is only to be expected. In investigations of this sort, where we are dealing with the mismatching fragments of information that are available to us, it would be unrealistic to expect things to be too uniform. Let us turn, then, to a consideration of Jesus' confidence about what he believed.

## **4. Jesus' Confidence about Religious Matters**

Scholars who believe that Jesus was once John's disciple never, as far as I am aware, stop to ask if becoming his disciple seems like something Jesus would have wanted to do, when we bear in mind what we know of him. My main aim in this chapter will be to show that in his public ministry – even early in his ministry – Jesus' profound confidence in his (sometimes distinctive) beliefs across a range of religious issues, including those beliefs that concerned his own crucial place in God's plan, is a fairly strong indication that he is unlikely to have made a decision to become John's disciple a short time before.

We will begin by examining some matters of chronology that will be useful later in the chapter. Attention will then be turned to the main argument concerning Jesus' confidence about religious issues. Finally, we will consider some related points regarding (1) Jesus' baptism by John and (2) Jesus' time in the wilderness.

### **4.1 Chronological issues**

We begin, then, with some issues of chronology. My aim here is (1) to demonstrate that if Jesus was ever John's disciple, he would very probably have to have first become his disciple no more than a matter of months before beginning his own ministry; (2) to briefly look at the length of Jesus' ministry; and (3) to show that John was almost certainly arrested no later than early in Jesus' ministry and that he probably died no later than quite early in Jesus' ministry too.

#### **(1) The timing of any potential discipleship of Jesus under John**

If Jesus was ever John's disciple, the time between first becoming his disciple and beginning his own ministry would very probably have been no longer than a matter

of months. To demonstrate this we need to consider the evidence that the historical Jesus' ministry began months rather than years after John's began:

(a) This is the most natural impression we gain from the Synoptics.<sup>1</sup> It could possibly be the case too that because Luke gives us the date of the beginning of John's ministry (3.1-2) but no date for the start of Jesus' ministry, the reader is supposed to assume that this year is also the year in which Jesus began ministering.<sup>2</sup>

(b) That John's ministry seems to have lasted months rather than years, together with with the high likelihood – which I will demonstrate in chapter six<sup>3</sup> – that there was a chronological overlap in the ministries of John and Jesus, also suggests that Jesus' ministry began months rather than years after John's began.

The impression we gain from the Gospels is that John's ministry did not last for years. In Mark he first appears in 1.4 and has been arrested by 1.14. Matthew and Luke follow Mark's outline closely here. Furthermore, in Luke 3.1-2 we are told that in the fifteenth year of Tiberius 'the word of God came to John . . . in the wilderness'. This may well suggest that it was only in that year that he ministered. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus tells 'the Jews' that they were willing to rejoice in John's light 'for a time' – πρὸς ὥρᾱν (5.35). On every other occasion that this phrase is used in the NT<sup>4</sup> it has to do with a time that is noteworthy for its short duration. This seems to be the most likely connotation in John 5.35 too,<sup>5</sup> and it seems more natural to think of months rather than years. It is conceivable that the shortness of the time of John's light has a theological purpose here in making an implied contrast with Jesus' light that endures.<sup>6</sup> However, there is no mention of Jesus' light in the passage or of anything else that is said to be long-lasting. Besides, even if there is theology in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 37. The Fourth Gospel does not refer to John beginning his ministry (unlike Mark 1.4; Matt 3.1; Luke 3.2), but he is already ministering in 1.19 when the reader first encounters him in the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Josef Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu* (4<sup>th</sup> edn.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1969), 102.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 145-169, esp. 168-169; also 132-137.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor 7.8; Gal 2.5; Philem 15.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 136.

<sup>6</sup> Schnackenburg, *St John*, 2.122, sees a contrast here between the lasting testimony of John (v. 33) and the short duration of his light.

reference to the short duration of John's light, that in no way necessarily means that the evangelist has used something unhistorical to make his point.<sup>7</sup>

All the Gospels, then, give the impression that John's ministry lasted months – albeit possibly many months – rather than years. Even though John is not the Gospels' main focus, this needs to be afforded due weight when attempting to determine the length of the historical John's ministry. (Josephus' note on John in *Ant.* 18.116-119 does not really give any impression of how long he ministered.) If John's ministry lasted months rather than years, and if Jesus' ministry overlapped chronologically with John's, obviously Jesus' ministry would have to have begun months, and not years, after John's began.

(c) A consideration of specific dates also suggests that Jesus' ministry began months rather than years after John's began. In Luke 3.1-2, as I have already noted, we are told that John's ministry began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. It is true that we have examples of what are probably chronological mistakes by Luke. For example, in Luke 2.2 he refers to a census in Judea conducted by Quirinius, the governor of Syria, at a time before Jesus' birth. Jesus is widely believed to have been born before the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE. However, a census by a Quirinius is widely held to have taken place in 6-7 CE, and the easiest solution is simply that Luke has made a mistake.<sup>8</sup> In Acts 5.36 too Luke seems probably to have made an error. In this text he portrays Gamaliel in the 30s CE looking back in time to a rebellion by someone called Theudas. However, Josephus mentions a rebellion by a Theudas in the mid 40s when Fadus was procurator.<sup>9</sup> Again, the most likely solution is that Luke has made a chronological mistake.

However, the fact that Luke has made chronological mistakes in some places – if indeed he has, and there is no reasonable solution that preserves his chronology – does not mean that he is likely to have erred most of the time. Moreover, Luke's

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Marshall, *Historical Jesus*, 188-190.

<sup>8</sup> On this see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 547-557. For attempts to preserve the historicity of the chronology of Luke 2.2, see Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 13-23; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (revised edn.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 302-306.

<sup>9</sup> *Ant.* 20.97-98.



errors (if they are errors) in Luke 2.2 and Acts 5.36 are made ‘in passing’. They do not concern the main point he is making. In Luke 3.1-2, by contrast, his main focus is to locate John’s appearance chronologically vis-à-vis the Roman and Jewish rulers of the time. He is therefore less likely to have made a mistake. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that Luke’s date in Luke 3.1-2 is theologically motivated. He seems to have given us to the best of his ability what he thought was the historical date of the start of John’s ministry.

It seems highly likely, then, that John did in fact begin his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, perhaps allowing for an error of a few months either way. (Josephus’ reference to John includes no time reference more precise than the fact that his ministry took place during the reign of Herod Antipas [4 BCE-39 CE]). Owing to the existence of different calendars in the first century, it is uncertain exactly what is meant by the fifteenth year of Tiberius’ reign in Luke 3.1, but it seems very probably to have fallen sometime within the period August 29th 27 CE and December 31st 29 CE.<sup>10</sup>

Now, Jesus’ ministry is very widely held to have taken place for some of the time within the period between late 27 and early 33 CE (and to have begun at some point between late 27 and late 32). In fact, because most scholars believe that Jesus was crucified in or before the spring of 30,<sup>11</sup> and because it is very rare to hold that his ministry lasted less than a year,<sup>12</sup> it is surely correct to say that the majority view is that his ministry was underway by early 29.<sup>13</sup>

Of interest here is the fact that in Luke 3.23 Luke states that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. If, as is widely believed, Jesus was born at the latest

---

<sup>10</sup> See Finegan, *Handbook*, 329-344; Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 32-36; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.383-386; Blinzler, *Prozess Jesu*, 102. It is very unlikely that the years of Tiberius’ reign should be understood here to include the time of his co-regency with Augustus that lasted for two or three years before Tiberius’ sole reign beginning in 14 CE. See Finegan, 337; Hoehner, 31-32; Meier, 1.384.

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of fairly recent opinions, see Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998; ET of *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus* [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1994]), 52-58.

<sup>12</sup> On the length of Jesus’ ministry, see the next subsection.

<sup>13</sup> The date of Jesus’ crucifixion is an issue that has received far more attention than the date he began ministering.

in early 4 BCE,<sup>14</sup> his thirtieth birthday would have fallen at the latest in early 27 CE. This means that he would have been 30 or over when his ministry began (assuming it began sometime between late 27 and late 32, as is almost certain). Because there is no good reason to believe that Luke is not giving us Jesus' historical age to the best of his ability, and because there is no particular reason to believe that he is greatly mistaken, it is preferable to think that his estimate of Jesus' age is more rather than less accurate. Hence a date for the beginning of Jesus' ministry sooner rather than later within the period late 27 to late 32 is to be preferred.

Of interest too is the chronological note in John 2.20. In this verse 'the Jews' state τεσσεράκοντα καὶ ἕξ ἔτεσιν οἰκοδομήθη ὁ ναὸς οὗτος. The most natural way of translating these words would seem to be: 'It took 46 years to build this sanctuary', with the implication that the sanctuary proper rather than the temple precincts as a whole is in view, and the implication also that the building work ceased sometime in the past.

There are, however, problems with this understanding of the phrase:

(i) Although it is a fact that elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel when the evangelist wishes to refer to the precincts of the temple he always uses ἱερόν and never ναός, because Josephus tells us that Herod the Great's reconstruction of the sanctuary lasted a mere 18 months,<sup>15</sup> the 46 years of construction of the ναός referred to in this verse probably has in mind both the sanctuary and the rest of the temple precincts.<sup>16</sup>

(ii) Josephus informs us that building work on the temple precincts did not actually cease until c. 63 CE,<sup>17</sup> which would mean that the work, which began in Herod's reign, lasted decades in excess of 46 years. Because there is no reason to believe that

---

<sup>14</sup> See Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 11-27, esp. 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ant.* 15.421.

<sup>16</sup> Finegan, *Handbook*, 348-349; and Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 40-43, think that ναός in John 2.20 refers only to the sanctuary and that the words should be translated: 'This sanctuary has stood for 46 years.' However, the Jews' amazement that Jesus could rebuild the ναός in the space of three days surely involves a contrast with 46 years of construction. Their astonishment would not make sense if the ναός has simply stood there for 46 years.

<sup>17</sup> *Ant.* 20.219.

Josephus is mistaken, rather than envisaging the Jews of this verse looking back at a completed building project, it seems better to imagine them speaking these words at a time 46 years after Herod's (as yet unfinished) building programme began. If this is correct, the words could be translated, 'This temple has been under construction for 46 years', although this admittedly would involve an unusual way of taking the aorist οἰκοδομήθη. More likely, the most natural translation can be retained, but without the implication that the temple work has ceased: 'It took 46 years to build this temple [to bring it to the stage of construction it has reached so far, understood].' With either translation Jesus would be presented ministering at a time 46 years after Herod began his temple rebuilding programme.

In the absence of any obvious symbolic meaning of 46, it may well be the case that there is some sort of a historical recollection here and that Jesus' ministry was in progress 46 years, to the nearest year, after Herod began rebuilding the temple. Herod is generally believed to have begun this work in his eighteenth year (20-19 BCE).<sup>18</sup> 46 years after this date would bring us to 27-28 CE.<sup>19</sup> It is possible, then, that John 2.20 preserves a record that the historical Jesus' ministry was underway at this time (late 27 being the earliest possible – see above).

This chronological reconstruction is admittedly not without its difficulties. In the Fourth Gospel the reference to 46 years is presented taking place at the Passover when Jesus cleanses the temple precincts (2.13-22). However, most critics take the view that the historical Jesus is likely to have cleansed the temple on the occasion of the Passover at which he was crucified (as the Synoptics inform us; see Mark 11.15-17 pars.),<sup>20</sup> and the year of his crucifixion is rarely believed to be 28 CE,<sup>21</sup> which it would have to have been under this chronology.

---

<sup>18</sup> So Finegan, *Handbook*, 347-348; Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 39-40; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.380; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Finegan, *Handbook*, 294, 347, believes that the eighteenth year of Herod was between the springs of 20 and 19 BCE. If he is right, 46 years later would be between the springs of 27 and 28 CE.

<sup>20</sup> So, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.892-894; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 636-637 n. 113; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1966-1970), 1.117-118; Barrett, *St John*, 195; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3.135. Taking the opposite view are Robinson, *Priority of John*, 127-131; and Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2.1265

<sup>21</sup> See Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 52.

Nevertheless, this objection to the historical value of the reference to 46 years is not especially strong: (i) Even if, as seems highly likely, there was only one historical cleansing of the temple by Jesus, it is far from certain that it took place at the Passover when he was crucified. The fact that the Synoptics present Jesus travelling to Jerusalem on only one occasion means that they had no option but to place the cleansing just before the time of his death, regardless of when it occurred historically. (ii) Even if the cleansing took place close to when Jesus was crucified, there could still be a historical recollection in John 2.20 that Jesus' ministry was in progress 46 years after Herod began rebuilding the temple, a recollection that has been secondarily linked to the cleansing. All things considered, then, it is still a possibility that John 2.20 preserves a memory that Jesus' ministry was underway at a point sometime in late 27 or 28 CE.<sup>22</sup>

The information about dates that we have, therefore, suggests that Jesus' ministry was in progress months rather than years after John's began.

In view of these three points, even allowing for the uncertainties that exist, it seems highly likely that John's ministry would have been underway for months – even if many months – rather than years before Jesus' ministry began.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the time between Jesus first becoming John's disciple and beginning his own ministry would have to have been even shorter than the period between the beginnings of the two ministries.<sup>24</sup> If Jesus was ever John's disciple, it seems highly probable, then, that he would first have become his disciple no more than a matter of months before beginning his own ministry.

---

<sup>22</sup> Blinzler, *Prozess Jesu*, 103; and Robinson, *Priority of John*, 130-131, 155, believe the Passover of 28 CE is in view in John 2.20. Cf. Brown, *John*, 1.116. Finegan, *Handbook*, 348-349; and Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 42-43, both arrive at 30 CE, but their reasoning is flawed due to their misreading of the Greek – see n. 16. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.380-381, believes that a time anywhere between 28 and 30 CE could be in view, but he fails to narrow this down by rejecting Finegan's translation of the Greek.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> If Jesus was ever John's disciple, he would surely have to have first become his disciple before his own ministry began. To think of Jesus, with his ministry already in progress, asking John if he could come under his supervision seems very implausible. As far as I am aware, all those scholars who believe that Jesus was John's disciple, believe that he would have first become such before beginning his own ministry.

## (2) The length of Jesus' ministry

A little needs to be said about the duration of Jesus' ministry. Because dating Jesus' death, without already having a fairly good idea of how long his ministry lasted, is so difficult,<sup>25</sup> we will not try to determine the length of his ministry by working out the date it began and the date it ended. Instead, we will concentrate on other clues given by the Gospels:

(a) The Fourth Gospel most naturally gives an impression of a ministry that lasted a little over two years. (At the moment we are simply thinking about how the Fourth Gospel presents things, not about historicity.) A Passover festival is mentioned in 2.13 (again in 2.23) after Jesus has been ministering for a few days or weeks. We are told of a second Passover in 6.4 and finally the Passover at which Jesus is crucified (12.1; 13.1; 18.28, 39; 19.14). It is conceivable that the 'feast of the Jews' referred to in 5.1 is meant to be a Passover too, in which case Jesus' ministry would be presented as being a little over three years. However, Passover is just one among several Jewish feasts, so from probability alone it is unlikely that there is an implied reference to the Passover in 5.1. More importantly, everything in chapter 5 is said to take place at the time of the feast of 5.1. But we then find as early as 6.4 that a Passover is near. If chapter 5 takes place at a Passover, where has the intervening year (apart from 6.1-3) gone? We are therefore best to think of a feast other than Passover as the context for chapter 5. This means it is very likely that the Fourth Gospel presents a ministry of Jesus that lasted a little over two years.<sup>26</sup>

(b) Turning to the Synoptics, it is well known that they explicitly tell us of only one occasion on which Jesus travels to Jerusalem. However, even in the Synoptics, Jesus' ministry seems to be presented as something longer than one year.<sup>27</sup> In Mark, the reference to plucking ripe grain in Mark 2.23 (late spring or summer) and to 'green

---

<sup>25</sup> If the Johannine chronology of the date of the crucifixion is accepted (the majority view), 30 or 33 CE fit best with astronomical considerations. See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.401-402. Choosing between these two without having some confidence about how long Jesus' ministry lasted is not possible.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.405-406; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 123-157, esp. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Finegan, *Handbook*, 351.

grass' in 6.39 (spring)<sup>28</sup> and the large amount of travelling between chapters 2 and 6, and 6 and 11, may depict a ministry of two years or longer. In Matthew and Luke Jesus remarks how often he wanted to gather Jerusalem under his wings (Matt 23.37 // Luke 13.34). This sounds as if he has been there many times. In Luke 4.44, according to the text most usually read, Jesus preaches in the synagogues of Judea, and in the trial before Pilate the chief priests accuse Jesus of preaching 'throughout Judea' (23.5).<sup>29</sup> The Synoptics, then, may well be presenting Jesus' ministry in a way that is not too dissimilar from the Fourth Gospel as far as its length is concerned.<sup>30</sup> The reason for this could easily be that the historical Jesus' ministry did in fact last somewhere around two years or perhaps a little longer.

(c) If we consider the historicity of Matt 23.37 // Luke 13.34 (just mentioned) there is no particular reason for believing that this saying of Jesus about how often he wanted to gather Jerusalem under his wings is unhistorical. In fact, the reference in this text to those who were sent to Jerusalem (as Jesus believed he was) being stoned – a fate that Jesus did not experience – is a pointer against creation by the early church.<sup>31</sup> If this saying is authentic, as it probably is, it may suggest that his ministry took him to Jerusalem on a number of occasions, more occasions than could be fitted into a single year.

In view of these considerations, the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' ministry lasting somewhat over two years may well be fairly accurate. It could have been rather longer or shorter than this, but I think it is unlikely to have been considerably longer or shorter. That would seem to be at odds with the Johannine and Synoptic pictures. Interestingly, if Jesus was crucified in 30 CE (the most commonly held date), a ministry of just over two years would fit very well with the observations

---

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the reference to green grass is symbolic and alludes to Psalm 23.2 ('He makes me lie down in green pastures') or to an evocation of the messianic age in this story (cf. Isa 35.1). However, importantly, symbolism and history are by no means necessarily mutually exclusive, and historical green grass could later have been interpreted symbolically. Furthermore, there may in fact be no symbolism in the green grass at all, it being simply a detail resulting from eyewitness memory; similarly, Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 687. On balance we are probably better to take the green grass as a historical reminiscence from the time of the feeding of the 5000.

<sup>29</sup> For more detail on these points see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.403-405. See also Robinson, *Priority of John*, 124-127.

<sup>30</sup> So Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.403-406; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 123-157.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 798.

above about the date of the beginning of his ministry in relation to the beginning of John's. Scholars who have commented on the length of Jesus' ministry by and large reach a conclusion roughly similar to the one I have reached.<sup>32</sup>

### (3) The timing of John's arrest and death in relation to Jesus' ministry

We need to spend some time establishing that John was almost certainly arrested no later than the early part of Jesus' ministry. We also need to establish that he was probably executed no later than fairly early in Jesus' ministry too. I will argue in chapter six that there was very likely a time of overlap in the ministries of John and Jesus.<sup>33</sup> However, that overlap was surely not long, and there is evidence that John's imprisonment was probably not long either:

(a) There are a number of NT texts which suggest that John was arrested early in or even before Jesus' ministry. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus does not begin his public ministry until after John's arrest (Mark 1.14-15 // Matt 4.12-17). It is true that in his Gospel Luke is not clear that John is arrested before Jesus begins ministering.<sup>34</sup> However, he makes his position clear in Acts. In Acts 1.21-22 he refers to the time that John was baptising as the very beginning of the period in which 'the Lord Jesus

---

<sup>32</sup> Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 151-161, esp. 152, think it lasted between a few months and several years; Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 13, believes that it 'apparently . . . lasted only one or possibly two years'; Karl P. Donfried, 'Chronology' (in *ABD*, 1.1011-1022), 1014-1015, has between one and two years; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2.1374-1376, thinks it lasted between 'somewhat less than two years' and 'some 4 years'; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 312, believes it was two or three years; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 123-157 (summary on 157) has just over two years; Meier, *Marginal Jew* 1.403-406, believes it is likely to have been a little over two years; Blinzler, *Prozess Jesu*, 103, has probably two years and a few months; Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 47-48, has a little over two years or a little over three years; Finegan, *Handbook*, 349-353, prefers three years and some months; Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 45-63, esp. 55-63, thinks it was three and a half years. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, passim, esp. xv, seems to have Jesus ministering for somewhere between about eleven and fifteen years, initially under John's authority and for over ten years after his death. However, as I have already mentioned, Chilton's book is remarkable for its unsubstantiated assertions, particularly that Jesus abandoned his family to join John aged about 13 or 14. His dating of John's death to 21 CE is also more than a little eccentric.

<sup>33</sup> See below, pp. 145-169, esp. 168-169; also 132-137.

<sup>34</sup> The reference to John being arrested in 3.19-20 should very probably be seen as a proleptic reference to his arrest, since Luke surely has to expect his readers to believe in the following verses (21-22) that Jesus is baptised by John. Who else, on the level of Luke's Gospel (or any level, for that matter), could possibly have baptised him, especially as it is stated that he is baptised at the time all the other people are baptised (v. 22)? This means that when Jesus begins his ministry in 4.14-15 it is not clear that John has been arrested, although it would not be difficult to think that the events in vv. 19-20 are envisaged taking place shortly after Jesus' baptism.

went in and out among us'; in 10.35 he speaks of Jesus' ministry occurring after John's baptism; in 13.23-25 it is while John is finishing his ministry that he prophesies that Jesus will follow him (in a temporal sense); in 19.4 he reiterates his point in chapter 13. For Luke, then, the latest time that John can be arrested is at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. In the Fourth Gospel, although it is explicitly stated in 3.24 that John has not yet been imprisoned, in the same chapter John states that he has been sent ahead of Jesus (3.28) and in some way wants to give way to Jesus (3.30), and John is in any case no longer ministering by 5.35, which speaks of him in the past tense and thus at least implies that he has been arrested and probably implies that he is dead too.

Further attestation to John's arrest early in Jesus' ministry can be found in (i) the fact that John is presented preparing the way for Jesus in fulfilment of Mal 3.1 (Mark 1.2; Matt 11.10 // Luke 7.27) and Isa 40.3 (Mark 1.3 // Matt 3.3 // Luke 3.4; John 1.23); and (ii) the way that John prophesies in Mark 1.7 pars. that Jesus will succeed him (see also (d) below).<sup>35</sup> If – and it is a big if – the phrase 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ' in Mark 1.1 refers to the work of John in the following verses rather than to the whole of Mark's Gospel,<sup>36</sup> that would also make most sense if John was arrested early in Jesus' ministry.

The NT, then, attests frequently that John's ministry ended at its latest early in Jesus' ministry. (As I noted above, Josephus cannot help us locate John's ministry chronologically with any precision.) Given the amount of attestation, it seems implausible to imagine that all these references stem from the early church in its belief that John was Elijah, who had to come before the Messiah (cf. Mal 3.1; 4.5). It is much more reasonable to think that the historical John did, broadly speaking, minister before Jesus, and that this led, or helped lead, to the identification of John with Elijah.

---

<sup>35</sup> In chapter seven I will argue at length that the logion in Mark 1.7 pars. should be understood to mean that Jesus follows John chronologically rather than as his disciple.

<sup>36</sup> See the discussion in France, *Mark*, 49-53.



(b) All four Gospels present John as dead fairly early in their texts, i.e., early in Jesus' ministry. Mark 6.14 has his death as a past event, although Mark does not specify when in his time-frame he actually died. Matt 14.2, similarly, looks back to John as dead, although Matt 11.2-6 has him still alive in prison. In Luke John is dead by 9.9, although still alive in 7.18-23. As we have already seen, John 5.35 probably portrays John as dead. Each of the four Gospels, then, gives the impression that John died quite early in Jesus' ministry. To be sure, Matthew and Luke may have basically followed Mark's outline in this, but they may have received other traditions that coincided with Mark, so their own testimony counts for something here. We need to bear in mind too that the order of events in the Gospels is likely usually to be a construct of the evangelists. Nevertheless, that all four Gospels agree in placing John's death early in this way is worth noting.

(c) Looking at the Fourth Gospel, one argument that seems clearly to have been levelled against the early church is that John's chronological priority over Jesus implies John's superiority.<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that the fourth evangelist does not attempt to deny that John came first, which he would likely have done if that option were available to him.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that the evangelist believed that John's ministry broadly speaking took place before Jesus' and is therefore a pointer towards an early arrest – and possibly death? – of John.

(d) I will argue later in the present chapter that John's question to Jesus asking if he is the coming one in Matt 11.3 // Luke 7.19 is probably authentic.<sup>39</sup> In chapter seven I will argue also that the logion attributed to John in Mark 1.7 pars., in which he prophesies the coming of one after him (chronologically), very probably stems from the historical John too.<sup>40</sup> In chapter seven we will also see that there are good reasons for believing (i) that in Matthew and Luke John's question almost certainly refers to the same person as the one coming after John of Matt 3.11 // Luke 3.16, and that in Q

---

<sup>37</sup> See above, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> The Fourth Gospel makes less of John as a forerunner than do the other canonical Gospels. For example, it never quotes Mal 3.1, making do with Isa 40.3.

<sup>39</sup> See below, pp. 102-104.

<sup>40</sup> See below, pp. 204-212.

the question probably referred to the coming one as well,<sup>41</sup> and (ii) that if the prophecy of the coming one and the question are both authentic, it seems quite likely that in the perspective of the historical John too they both referred to the same figure, since in the absence of any particular reason to deny what Matthew, Luke and Q portray, we are probably better to accept it.<sup>42</sup> If the historical John did indeed wonder whether Jesus was the one who he had prophesied would come after himself, he could surely only have done so if Jesus' ministry was, broadly speaking, one that came after his own. John's logion about the coming one and question combined therefore support the view that his ministry ended at the very latest early in Jesus' ministry.

(e) In Mark 6.14-16 pars.; 8.28 pars. Herod Antipas and other unnamed Jews express the view that Jesus is John risen from the dead.<sup>43</sup> It cannot easily be argued that the identification in Mark 6.14-16 has been invented simply for dramatic effect in order to emphasise Antipas' fear after beheading John, because the fact that the people themselves are said to believe this too (v. 14b), and the identification of Jesus with Elijah and one of the prophets (v. 15), would be unnecessary to achieve this. John Meier believes that the identification in 6.14-16 and 8.28 forms an *inclusio* around the intervening material, and that the presence of this *inclusio* suggests that the identification is unhistorical.<sup>44</sup> This too is a weak argument. Even if there is an *inclusio* here (something that is very doubtful),<sup>45</sup> why could Mark not have used a historical tradition to form it?

It may be, then, that the identification of Jesus with John by some elements of the population is historical. If it is, that implies that they would not have been aware of

---

<sup>41</sup> See below, pp. 197, 203, 217.

<sup>42</sup> See below, pp. 217-218.

<sup>43</sup> ἔλεγον is to be preferred to ἔλεγε in 6.14, which means that it is the people and not Antipas who make the identification in that verse. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 76.

<sup>44</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.226 n. 241.

<sup>45</sup> Meier believes that the identification of Jesus as John et al. by the people brackets the so-called 'bread-section' of 6.32-8.21. However, first, if it were intended to bracket this section, we would expect the identification more naturally to be mentioned immediately before 6.32 and immediately after 8.21, neither of which is the case. Second, the fact that a number of pericopes in 6.32-8.21 make no mention of bread, and in many of those which do its presence is unimportant, makes it questionable whether there is any specific section here at all.

Jesus while John was still alive, the likely reason being that Jesus' ministry was still in its infancy at the time of John's death. There is therefore a little support here for the view that John died early in Jesus' ministry.<sup>46</sup>

(f) Some small support for John's death having taken place soon after his arrest can also be found in Josephus' *Ant.* 18.118-119. In this passage Antipas decides to execute John before arresting him. Even if Josephus was just guessing at what Antipas' intentions might have been, it could be that a historically speedy execution of John after his arrest helped him make that guess. It is true that Josephus' account is very brief so that not much weight ought to be attached to its value here, but it is worth noting nevertheless.

In the light of all this evidence we can say with a great deal of confidence that John was almost certainly arrested no later than the early part of Jesus' ministry, and that he was probably executed no later than fairly early in Jesus' ministry too.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> This identification by elements of the population is taken as historical by Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 297-298; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 737 n. 135; and Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 372. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.226 n. 241, as I have noted, takes the opposite view.

<sup>47</sup> The vast majority of scholars do not believe that John's arrest took place any later than the early part of Jesus' ministry. Wolfgang Schenk, 'Gefangenschaft und Tod des Täufers: Erwägungen zur Chronologie und ihrer Konsequenzen' (*NTS* 29 [1983], 453-483), *passim*, esp. 459-464, highly unusually, thinks that John actually outlived Jesus by a number of years! He argues that the military defeat of Antipas by the Nabatean ruler Aretas IV (see *Ant.* 18.113-115) – widely believed to have taken place in 36 or 37 CE – occurred very soon after Antipas' execution of John, and that John would have been executed very soon after his arrest. Schenk therefore dates John's arrest to around 35 CE. However, although Josephus states that some Jews believed that Antipas' defeat was God's punishment for his execution of John (*Ant.* 18.116-119), there is no need to conclude from this, as Schenk does, that the execution and the defeat were chronologically closely connected, especially as the events Josephus relates in this part of his *Antiquities* are often not in chronological order. In the light of all the evidence for an arrest of John long before 35 (cf. the arguments given in part (3) with the findings of parts (1) and (2)), Schenk's theory should therefore be rejected.

Although scholars seem by and large not to be explicit, the impression I get is that most would agree too that his death had probably occurred by quite early in Jesus' ministry. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 139-140, 157, believes that John may well have been in prison for many months before his execution, but he fails to note any of the arguments that I have given above for a short imprisonment or early death. He is also mistaken (139) in thinking that John 5.35 could easily suggest that John is imprisoned rather than dead; to speak of John's light being in the past most naturally suggests that there is no longer any hope for his release from prison. In any case, Robinson is too confident that Jesus' words in John 5.33-35 can be placed historically in the setting in which the fourth evangelist presents them. As it happens, even Robinson's best estimate is that John was executed only about nine or ten months into Jesus' ministry.

## 4.2 Jesus' confidence about religious matters during his ministry

We are now ready to begin considering the historical Jesus' confidence in his religious beliefs. We will begin by looking at how confident he was in these beliefs at the time when his ministry was in progress. In section 4.3 we will then move on to think about his confidence in this area at the time shortly before his ministry began.

We start, therefore, with the period when Jesus' ministry was underway. Our analysis here will consist of two parts. First, we will look at the general evidence (including both actions and words attributed to him) that cannot easily be placed at a certain time in Jesus' ministry. Second, attention will be turned to the evidence that has specifically to do with the early part of his ministry. We will find that there are very good reasons for believing that even early in his ministry Jesus had a profound confidence in his beliefs across a range of religious issues, beliefs that were at times distinctive and that in part concerned his own crucial place in God's plan.<sup>48</sup>

(1) General support for the view that in his ministry Jesus was confident about his beliefs on religious issues

---

<sup>48</sup> I have spent some time looking at psychological studies in an attempt to discover whether charismatic leaders tend to be people who, as far as their personalities are concerned, are disinclined from submitting themselves to others. Despite a plethora of studies on charismatic leadership in recent years, I have been unable to find any studies – either of charismatic or other leaders – which deal specifically with this question. Nevertheless, the personality traits of charismatic leaders is a subject that has received considerable attention (see, e.g., Timothy A. Judge, Joyce E. Bono, Remus Ilies & Megan W. Gerhardt, 'Personality and Leadership: A Qualitative and Quantitative Review' [*JApplPsychol* 87 (2002), 765-780]; Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities* [Syracuse, NT: Syracuse University, 1997]; Stuart J. M. Weierter, 'Who Wants to Play "Follow the Leader"? A Theory of Charismatic Relationships Based on Routinized Charisma and Follower Characteristics' [*The Leadership Quarterly* 8 (1997), 171-193]; Robert J. House & Jane M. Howell, 'Personality and Charismatic Leadership' [*The Leadership Quarterly* 3 (1992), 81-108]; Richard A. Hutch, *Religious Leadership: Personality, History and Sacred Authority* [New York; Lang, 1991]; Douglas F. Barnes, 'Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis' [*JSSR* 17 (1978), 1-18]; Irvine Schiffer, *Charisma: a psychoanalytic look at mass society* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973]), and it is clear that such leaders have a wide range of personalities. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that, in the period shortly before undertaking a leadership role themselves, some charismatic leaders would be the sort of people who would have disliked taking the role of a follower, while others would have had far fewer inhibitions, or perhaps no inhibitions at all, about taking this role. Importantly, however, for our purposes Jesus' personality is not the key issue. Regardless of whether or not he was someone who was disinclined, as far as his personality was concerned, from voluntarily becoming someone else's disciple, my argument in what follows is essentially that his profound confidence about what he believed in religious issues in itself makes it unlikely that he would have chosen to submit himself to John's leadership.

Jesus is portrayed having a deep confidence in his religious beliefs very frequently in all strata of the canonical Gospels, i.e., Mark, Q, M, L and the Fourth Gospel. The following is a list that provides examples of this. In this list we will limit ourselves to what we find in the Synoptics. This is not because I believe the Fourth Gospel is worthless as a historical source.<sup>49</sup> It is, however, generally speaking a weaker source of historical information than the Synoptics, and because there is so much attestation within the Synoptics themselves, the Synoptic tradition is more than adequate for me to make my point here. This point is simply that there is vast attestation that during his ministry Jesus had a great assurance about what he believed across a range of religious issues, and that the amount of attestation makes it beyond doubt that at least for most of his ministry the historical Jesus did indeed have a great confidence of this kind. (For the moment I am leaving open the possibility that Jesus was less confident about his beliefs in the early part of his ministry.) Even if a large majority of the list were unhistorical (something that I would vigorously dispute), there would doubtless be enough left over to allow my point to stand.

It is true that it is usually impossible to determine when in the historical Jesus' ministry actions and sayings of his – where they are judged to be historical – actually occurred.<sup>50</sup> However, this will not be a problem here, since I am not concentrating on a certain portion of Jesus' ministry but simply making a general point about his ministry as a whole. As we go through the list, my own comments will not be many; I will basically let the massive multiple attestation speak for itself, although I will add a few remarks of my own, including on occasion to note where scholars generally agree that something is historical. (When we come, below, to look specifically at Jesus' confidence in his religious beliefs in the early part of his ministry, we will by contrast examine the historicity of the examples cited in some detail.) Much in the list is explicitly about Jesus' religious beliefs. Other items are more to do with his authoritative behaviour, but there is always at least an

---

<sup>49</sup> See above, pp. 10-12.

<sup>50</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.408-409; 2.125-126, 237; also Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 765; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 152.

implication that he has a confident belief about the truth of something religious. The list is as follows:

Jesus can be found calling disciples (Mark 1.17 // Matt 4.19; Mark 2.14 // Matt 9.9 // Luke 5.27; Mark 10.21 // Matt 19.21 // Luke 18.22; Matt 8.22 // Luke 9.59) in contrast to the custom of the day, where the would-be disciple approached the teacher and asked to become his follower. This manner of calling by Jesus is widely believed to be authentic.<sup>51</sup> The general impression of authority in the way he relates to his disciples also goes far beyond what was typically current – see below. His choosing of twelve disciples, generally believed to be historical,<sup>52</sup> clearly alludes to the tribes of Israel and may well show an intention to reconstitute the twelve tribes.<sup>53</sup> Jesus can be found calling God ‘Father’ (Mark 14.36 // Matt 26.39 // Luke 22.42; Matt 6.9 // Luke 11.2; Matt 11.25 // Luke 10.21; Matt 26.42; Luke 23.46), a mode of address widely viewed as historical and one that was at least highly unusual, if not unique.<sup>54</sup> His prefacing sayings by ‘amen’ or ‘I say to you’ or a combination of these (frequently attested; see, e.g., Mark 3.28 // Matt 12.31; Mark 9.1 // Matt 16.28 // Luke 9.27; Mark 14.18 // Matt 26.21) is generally held to be authentic; his use of prefatory amen would at least have been very distinctive and may have been unique.<sup>55</sup> Jesus can be found telling someone his sins are forgiven and that he has authority to forgive sins (Mark 2.1-12 // Matt 9.1-8 // Luke 5.17-26), using ‘I have come’ sayings (Mark 2.17 // Matt 9.13 // Luke 5.32; Matt 5.17; 10.34, 35; cf. Mark 10.45 // Matt 20.28; Matt 11.19 // Luke 7.34; Luke 12.49), and reinterpreting parts of the Torah (Mark 7.14-23 // Matt 15.10-20; Matt 5.21-48; 19.7-9 // Luke 6.27-36; 16.18).<sup>56</sup> He frequently speaks in parables or leaves people to work out the meaning of what he is saying (see, e.g., Mark 4.11-12 // Matt 13.11, 13 // Luke 8.10). This has the air of someone who is very sure of what he believes. He also has an ability to silence his opponents (Mark 11.33 // Matt 21.27 // Luke 20.7; Mark 12.24-27 // Matt 22.29-33 // Luke 20.34-40; Matt 22.46). Moreover, there is the general impression of

---

<sup>51</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.50-54.

<sup>52</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.128-147; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 98-106; also pp. 99-100 below.

<sup>53</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.148-154; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 299-300, 431, 532.

<sup>54</sup> See Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 526-527; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 711-718.

<sup>55</sup> See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 700-702; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 523-525.

<sup>56</sup> On Jesus altering the Mosaic law, see Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 94-143.

great authority in much of his teaching. To give three examples among numerous possible ones, Jesus' saying on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3.28-29 // Matt 12.31-32 // Luke 12.10), his telling Peter that what he binds on earth will be bound in heaven (Matt 16.19), and his warning that the way people judge is the way they will be judged (Matt 7.2) have a great sense of confidence about them.

In Mark 1.22 // Luke 4.32 (cf. Matt 7.28-29) we are told that people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he taught them as someone who had authority and not like the scribes. Admittedly, this verse may well stem from Mark or have been invented by someone from whom he took his tradition. However, it is easy to believe that on many occasions people really would have been amazed at Jesus' teaching, both because of its content and his authoritative manner that contrasted with scribal techniques of quoting predecessors, etc. To imagine that this text is exaggerating the response that Jesus was often met with seems unnecessary. People do become amazed by things that are very out of the ordinary. For a Jewish teacher of the first century to appear on the scene speaking profound things in such an authoritative manner would likely have been something that amazed many people of his day.<sup>57</sup>

Jesus' profound confidence in his religious beliefs can also be seen in the way he speaks about himself. (Here the distinctiveness of these beliefs is most apparent.) Again, there is such overwhelming testimony to this in all strata of the Synoptics, that even if a large majority of texts were inauthentic, it is certain that the historical Jesus believed that he had an extremely exalted, unique and crucial place in God's plan. The above list can therefore be continued by citing the Synoptic examples of where Jesus refers directly or indirectly to himself. I have made a cursory attempt to group the following according to theme, although many could go in more than one category and some are difficult to categorise. However, I want to reiterate that my purpose at the present time is simply to show that during at least most of Jesus' ministry he had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs, which were at times

---

<sup>57</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Question of Uniqueness in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: University of London, 1990), 25: 'I think it historically beyond doubt that many people who heard [Jesus] . . . were gripped by his message, his deeds, and his behaviour'. This essay is also available at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/uniqueness\\_sanders.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/uniqueness_sanders.pdf).

distinctive and which included his beliefs about himself. It is therefore the combined weight of the following texts, rather than how they should be categorised, that is important. There are:

(a) Sayings in which Jesus sees a positive response to himself as very important:

‘Everyone who acknowledges me in the presence of people, I will also acknowledge in the presence of my Father in heaven. But whoever rejects me in the presence of people, I will also reject in the presence of my Father in heaven’ (Matt 10.32-33 // Luke 12.8-9; see immediately below for other texts warning against rejection of Jesus);<sup>58</sup> ‘I did not come to call the upright but sinners’ (Mark 2.17 // Matt 9.13 // Luke 5.32); the person who hears Jesus’ words and acts on them is likened to someone who builds a house on rock rather than sand (Matt 7.24-27 // Luke 6.47-49); Jesus speaks about the importance of ‘receiving’ him (Mark 9.37 // Matt 18.5 // Luke 9.48; Matt 10.40 // Luke 10.16 // John 13.20); he speaks of ‘little ones who believe in me’ (Mark 9.42 // Matt 18.6).

(b) Sayings that warn against a negative response to himself:

‘Whoever is ashamed of me and my words . . . , the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels’ (Mark 8.38 // Luke 9.26; for other texts referring to the coming of the Son of Man see below); ‘He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me’ (Matt 10.38 // Luke 14.27); ‘He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters’ (Matt 12.30 // Luke 11.23); ‘Blessed is the person who does not take offence at me’ (Matt 11.6 // Luke 7.23); ‘Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him’ (Matt 12.32 // Luke 12.10). Despite the promise of forgiveness, this nevertheless implies that it is a serious matter to say something against Jesus.

(c) Sayings that speak of things being done for his sake:

---

<sup>58</sup> It is unnecessary to mention variations in the texts of parallel passages or to try to determine which Gospel is more original in such a broad-brush-stroke approach as this.



‘Whoever loses his life for my sake . . .’ (Mark 8.35 // Matt 16.25 // Luke 9.24); Jesus says that everyone who has left what is dear to them for his sake will not miss out on a reward (Mark 10.29-30 // Matt 19.29); ‘The person who has lost his life for my sake will find it’ (Matt 10.39); ‘You will stand before governors and kings for my sake’ (Mark 13.9 // Matt 24.28 // Luke 21.12).

(d) Sayings that speak of things being done in his name:

‘Many will come in my name . . .’ (Mark 13.6 // Matt 24.5 // Luke 21.8); ‘No one will perform a miracle in my name . . .’ (Mark 9.39); ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst’ (Matt 18.20). See also Mark 9.37 // Matt 18.5 // Luke 9.48 already referred to above.

(e) The use of suggestive or explicit titles:

Jesus’ frequent self-designation ‘Son of Man’<sup>59</sup> very probably at least sometimes has something to do with the ‘one like a son of man’ who comes with the clouds of heaven in Dan 7.13.<sup>60</sup> In Mark 9.41 Jesus clearly alludes to himself as the Messiah. He does so too in his reply to the high priest in Mark 14.62, while in the Matthean and Lucan parallels (Matt 26.62; Luke 22.70) he at least does not deny being the Messiah. In the reply to Pilate in Mark 15.2 // Matt 27.11 // Luke 23.3 // John 18.37, again, Jesus at least does not deny that he is the Messiah. Whether the historical Jesus ever explicitly referred to himself as the royal Messiah is disputed, but even if he was never explicit, quite apart from any further considerations, the high likelihood that he was executed as a Messianic pretender<sup>61</sup> in itself makes it probable that he believed he was.

---

<sup>59</sup> The Greek is ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. The underlying Aramaic is generally believed to be one or more of the following: ܒܪ ܢܫܐ; ܒܪ ܢܫܐܢ; ܒܪ ܢܫܐܢܝܘܬܐ.

<sup>60</sup> For a recent and balanced overview of Jesus’ use of this phrase, see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 724-761. See also L. W. Hurtado & P. Owen, eds., ‘Who Is This Son of Man?’: *The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus* (London: Clark, forthcoming 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Scholars do not often dispute that Jesus was crucified as a Messianic claimant.

(f) Sayings that imply extraordinary power:

‘I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy . . .’ (Luke 10.19); ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . .’ (Matt 16.19).

(g) Sayings that speak of an exceptionally close relationship to God:

‘Everything has been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him’ (Matt 11.27 // Luke 10.22); ‘My Father has granted me a kingdom’ (Luke 22.29); in the parable of the vine growers Jesus alludes to himself as God’s Son (Mark 12.1-12 // Matt 21.33-46 // Luke 20.9-19); in the parable of the great feast in Matt 22.1-14 (esp. v. 2) Jesus might be implying that he is God’s Son.

(h) Sayings implying that he has or will have a strong influence:

‘Come to me . . . and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me . . . , and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’ (Matt 11.28-30); ‘The Son of Man came to search out and save what was lost’ (Luke 19.10 // Matt 18.11?); ‘Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation’ (Luke 11.30); ‘I have come to throw fire on the earth . . .’ (Luke 12.49); Jesus also speaks about bringing a sword to the earth and expecting to divide families (Matt 10.34-36 // Luke 12.51-53); ‘Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away’ (Mark 13.31 // Matt 24.35 // Luke 21.33); ‘You will be hated by everyone because of my name’ (Mark 13.13 // Matt 24.9 // Luke 21.17; Matt 10.22); ‘I will give you a mouth and wisdom . . .’ (Luke 21.15); ‘On this rock I will build my church.’ (Matt 16.18); Jesus expects that the anointing given him by the woman in Bethany will be spoken of in the whole world (Mark 14.9 // Matt 26.13).

(i) Sayings that see his suffering and death as highly significant:

Jesus can be found predicting his passion (and in some cases his resurrection) in Mark 8.31-32a // Matt 16.21 // Luke 9.22; Mark 9.31 // Matt 17.22-23 // Luke 9.44; Mark 10.32c-34 // Matt 20.18-19 // Luke 18.31-33; Mark 9.12 // Matt 17.12; Mark 14.8 // Matt 26.12; Matt 26.2; Luke 22.15; Mark 14.21 // Matt 26.24 // Luke 22.22; he is portrayed stating, ‘The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10.45 // Matt 20.28); in his prayer in Gethsemane he sees God’s will in his suffering (Mark 14.36 // Matt 26.39 // Luke 22.42); at the last supper he sees the bread to be his body and the wine to be nothing less than the new covenant that would be established by his blood (Mark 14.22-24 // Matt 26.26-28 // Luke 22.17-20). As massive support for the historicity of these words of institution is 1 Cor 11.23-25, where Paul tells of a tradition he received and handed on. This was certainly written by Paul, and Paul knew Peter and John (Gal 1.18; 2.9-14) and probably others of those who had been there that evening (cf. Acts 15.4, 6).

(j) Sayings that speak of what will happen to him immediately after death or of his resurrection (in addition to those already cited in the previous section):

‘The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ (Matt 12.40); Jesus tells his disciples to keep quiet until the Son of Man has risen from the dead (Mark 9.9 // Matt 17.9); in Luke 16.30-31 Jesus seems to hint at his resurrection.

(k) Sayings in which he finds OT fulfilment in himself:

Jesus refers the prophecy of the bringer of good news in Isa 61.1-2a to himself (Luke 4.18-19); he alludes more widely to the book of Isaiah in his reply to John’s question about his ministry (Matt 11.2-6 // Luke 7.19-22);<sup>62</sup> he refers Psalm 118.22-23 about the stone that was rejected becoming the chief corner stone to himself (Mark 12.10-11 // Matt 21.42 // Luke 20.17); he sees his teaching as fulfilling OT prophecy (Mark

---

<sup>62</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.131-137, esp. 134.

4.12 // Matt 13.13 // Luke 8.10; Matt 13.14-15); he enters Jerusalem in a way that alludes to Zechariah's prophecy in Zech 9.9 (Mark 11.1-10 // Matt 21.9 // Luke 19.28-40); he sees his death as prophesied in the OT (Mark 14.21 // Matt 26.24 // Luke 22.22; Mark 14.49 // Matt 26.56; Matt 26.54), including specifically in Zechariah's prophecy of the striking of the shepherd in Zech 13.7 (Mark 14.27 // Matt 26.31), and the prophecy of the servant who is numbered with transgressors in Isa 53.12 (Luke 22.37).

(l) Sayings or actions that allude more generally to his own importance:

'Blessed are you when people insult you . . . because of me.' (Matt 5.11 // Luke 6.22); using the metaphor of the bridegroom he implies that his presence with his disciples is special for them (Mark 2.19-20 // Matt 9.15 // Luke 5.34-35); 'You always have the poor but not always me' (Mark 14.7 // Matt 26.11 // John 12.8); probably alluding to himself he says 'something greater than the temple is here' (Matt 12.6), 'something greater than Jonah is here' (Matt 12.41 // Luke 11.32), and 'something greater than Solomon is here' (Matt 12.42 // Luke 11.31); also probably alluding to himself he states, 'Many prophets and upright people desired to see what you see . . . and hear what you hear . . . ' (Matt 13.17 // Luke 10.24); 'The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath' (Mark 2.28 // Matt 12.8 // Luke 6.5); Jesus accepts the title 'Son of David' and accepts praise (Matt 21.15-16); 'Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7.21); 'The person who loves father . . . more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son . . . more than me is not worthy of me' (Matt 10.37 // Luke 14.26); 'No one who does not give away all his possessions can be my disciple' (Luke 14.33); Jesus' instruction to his disciples who are sent to get a donkey simply to say 'The Lord needs it' shows an authoritative manner (Mark 11.3 // Matt 21.3 // Luke 19.31); similarly Jesus appears to tell someone that he wants to celebrate Passover in his house and to expect his wish to be granted (Mark 14.12-16 // Matt 26.17-19 // Luke 22.7-13); 'He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man' (Matt 13.37) – even if the interpretation of the parable of the sower is not from the historical Jesus, if the parable itself stems from Jesus, it is not difficult to believe that he saw himself as the sower; 'How often I wanted to gather

your [Jerusalem's] children the way a hen gathers its chicks under its wings' (Matt 23.37 // Luke 13.34); in Matt 25.34-46 Jesus sees himself as blessed when his disciples are blessed by people.

(m) Numerous sayings in which Jesus believes that he will have an eschatological role:

(i) Those that are explicit about his coming again:

'You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes' (Matt 10.23); 'The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and will then repay everyone according to his actions' (Matt 16.27; this is a parallel text to Mark 8.38 and Luke 9.26 already mentioned); 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18.8); 'Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be' (Matt 24.27 // Luke 17.24); 'The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven' (Matt 24.30) 'and then they will see the Son of Man coming with clouds with great power and glory' (Mark 13.26 // Matt 24.30 // Luke 21.27); 'The coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah' (Matt 24.37 // Luke 17.26; also Matt 24.39 // Luke 17.30); 'The Son of Man is coming at a time when you do not think he will' (Matt 24.44 // Luke 12.40); 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels with him . . .' (Matt 25.31); 'You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14.62 // Matt 26.64 // Luke 22.69).

(ii) Others that imply his coming again:

'When you see these things happening, know that he is near . . .' (Mark 13.29 // Matt 24.33; if, as is likely, ἔστιν means 'he is' rather than 'it is'); 'There are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom' (Matt 16.28); 'From now on you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt 23.39 // Luke 13.35); 'You do not

know when the master of the house is coming' (Mark 13.35 // Matt 24.42; this clearly seems to be referring to Jesus); the parable of the virgins in Matt 25.1-13 is about Jesus as the bridegroom who comes; in the parable of the talents in Matt 25.14-30 // Luke 19.11-27 there may be an allusion to the coming of Jesus.

(iii) Those that refer to his sending angels:

'He will send the angels and will gather his elect' (Mark 13.27 // Matt 24.31); 'The Son of Man will send his angels' (Matt 13.41).

(iv) Those that have to do with his judging:

Jesus will sit as king on a throne and judge the world (Matt 25.31-46); he tells his disciples to pray that they will be able to 'stand before the Son of Man' (Luke 21.36); 'Many will say to me on that day . . . and then I will declare to them, ' . . . depart from me . . . '' (Matt 7.22-23).

(v) Those that see him as having a regal role in the future:

'In the renewal, when the Son of Man sits on his throne . . . ' (Matt 19.28); if the historical Jesus told his disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19.28 // Luke 22.29-30), a saying that is quite widely regarded as authentic,<sup>63</sup> how much greater did he conceive of his own future role, and how important too must he have thought his present role must be?

(vi) Other miscellaneous ones:

When James and John ask to sit on Jesus' right and left in his glory, he says, 'To sit on my right or on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared' (Mark 10.40 // Matt 20.23); 'Today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23.43).

---

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.135-139; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 98-106.

I am well aware that the historicity of much of what I have just listed regarding Jesus' beliefs about himself is disputed. For example, many scholars do not accept that Jesus believed he would have a future, eschatological role. Nevertheless, even if we were to exclude from consideration what he believed about his eschatological role, the amount of attestation that Jesus saw his role in an extremely exalted way is overwhelming.

It is no surprise that recent authors, who have examined the historical Jesus' understanding of himself, have concluded that he did indeed see his own role in God's purposes as extremely important. After 150 pages of analysis, James D. G. Dunn concludes that Jesus had a 'conviction of being God's eschatological agent at the climax of God's purposes for Israel', had a 'sense of intimate sonship before God', and probably had 'strong hope for final acknowledgement as the man who was playing the decisive role in bringing the kingdom to fulfilment and consummation'.<sup>64</sup> Ben Witherington's study of Jesus' self-understanding, *The Christology of Jesus*, concludes that Jesus saw himself as someone who was uniquely important in the purposes of God.<sup>65</sup> Ragnar Leivestad's study, *Jesus in His Own Perspective*, concludes that Jesus believed he was the Messiah and very probably saw his role in terms of the suffering servant of Isaiah.<sup>66</sup> In the chapter on Jesus' understanding of himself in his *Jesus God and Man*, Raymond E. Brown asserts that 'an irreducible historical minimum in the Gospel presentation of Jesus is that he claimed to be the unique agent in the process of establishing God's kingship over men' and 'the certainty with which Jesus spoke and acted implies a consciousness of a unique relationship to God'; also 'no prophet broke with the hallowed past in so radical a way and with so much assurance as did Jesus'.<sup>67</sup> In the view of Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, 'there is a consensus that Jesus had a sense of eschatological authority. He saw the dawn of a new world in his actions. Here he goes before the Jewish

---

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 762; see 615-762.

<sup>65</sup> Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 267-277.

<sup>66</sup> Ragnar Leivestad, *Jesus in His Own Perspective: An Examination of His Sayings, Actions, and Eschatological Titles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987; ET of *Hvem ville Jesus være?* [Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1982]), 175-178.

<sup>67</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man* (London: Chapman, 1968), 96-98.

charismatics and prophets known to us before him'; also '[Jesus'] sense of himself can hardly be underestimated.'<sup>68</sup> N. T. Wright asserts that 'Jesus . . . believed himself to be the focal point of the people of YHWH'.<sup>69</sup> And E. P. Sanders claims that Jesus believed that 'through him . . . God was acting directly and immediately, bypassing the agreed, biblically sanctioned ordinances, reaching out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel with no more mediation than the words and deeds of one man – himself'.<sup>70</sup> Some of these authors also speak of Jesus having a consciousness of being divine in some sense, but the quotes I have given are enough support for the point I am making here.

When all the testimony to Jesus' confidence about his religious beliefs – both regarding his view of himself and the items I listed before that – is set out, it is a very impressive sight. I could also have brought the – admittedly weaker – testimony of the Fourth Gospel to bear. But there is really no need. The list is long enough as it stands. It is true that some items in this list will not stem from the historical Jesus, owing to the redaction of the evangelists or earlier tradents. Yet there is so much testimony, that it stretches the imagination to believe that it is all unhistorical or even that a large majority of it is unhistorical.

In his *Jesus Remembered* Dunn argues at length that the Synoptics should be treated as documents which contain a considerable amount of historical information about Jesus.<sup>71</sup> He brings forward a number of cogent arguments to support his case, notably the following:

---

<sup>68</sup> Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 513, 561. The latter quote should clearly read 'overestimated'!

<sup>69</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 538.

<sup>70</sup> Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 236-237. The *Jesus Seminar* (Robert W. Funk & Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [New York: Polebridge, 1993]) concluded that the vast majority of the aforementioned texts (both the eschatological and non-eschatological ones), in which Jesus speaks of himself, are likely to be inauthentic. However, I have already noted that the *Seminar* adopts an extreme position as regards the authenticity of the Gospels and is in no way representative of mainstream scholarship; see p. 29-30 n. 39.

<sup>71</sup> I have already briefly listed some reasons for believing that the Synoptics are useful sources of historical information; see pp. 5-7. The following arguments overlap with and add to those.



(a) It is implausible to imagine that early Christians would not have been interested in how their movement began.<sup>72</sup>

(b) The canonical gospels by their very existence show that the early church was very interested in stories about Jesus' life.<sup>73</sup>

(c) The motif of remembering – whether remembering Jesus or Jesus' teaching or early Christian traditions – can be found on a number of occasions in the NT,<sup>74</sup> something that suggests a keen interest among the early church to recall what Jesus did and said.

(d) The motif of bearing witness – to Jesus or his actions – makes the same suggestion.<sup>75</sup>

(e) There is strong attestation that Jesus was known as a teacher and his followers were known as disciples. We would therefore expect those disciples to have had a strong interest in preserving Jesus' teaching.<sup>76</sup>

(f) There is no reason for thinking that Easter would have been seen as a completely fresh beginning by those who were already disciples of Jesus. As Dunn himself puts it: 'However great the shock of Good Friday and Easter for the first disciples, it would be unjustified to assume that these events marked a discontinuity with their

---

<sup>72</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 175-176.

<sup>73</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 184-186.

<sup>74</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 177-180. See Luke 22.19; 24.6-8; John 2.22; 12.16; 14.26; 15.20; 16.4; Acts 11.16; 20.35; 1 Cor 11.2, 23-25; 2 Tim 2.8; 2 Pet 3.2; Rev 3.3.

<sup>75</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 177-178. See John 15.26-27; 19.35; 21.24; Acts 1.8, 22; 10.37-39; 1 John 1.2; 4.14.

<sup>76</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 177. The word διδάσκαλος ('teacher') is used in connection with Jesus in Mark 4.38; 5.35 par.; 9.17 par.; 9.38; 10.17 pars.; 10.20, 35; 12.14, 19 pars.; 12.32; 13.1; 14.14 pars.; Matt 8.19; 9.11; 10.24-25 par.; 12.38; 17.24; 22.36 par.; 23.8; Luke 7.40; 11.45; 12.13; 19.39; 20.39; 21.7; John 1.38; 3.2; 11.28; 13.13-14; 20.16; ῥαββί, which also denotes some sort of teacher (see p. 21), is found in connection with Jesus in Mark 9.5; 11.21; 14.45 par.; Matt 26.25; John 1.38, 49; 3.2; 4.31; 6.25; 9.2; 11.8; and the similar ῥαββουνί occurs in Mark 10.51; John 20.16. The word μαθητής ('disciple') is used approximately 73 times in Matthew, 46 times in Mark, 37 times in Luke and 78 times in the Fourth Gospel, in each Gospel usually in connection with Jesus' disciples.

initial disciple-response, that they brought about complete disruption of their earlier faith and that the traditioning process began only from that point on'.<sup>77</sup>

(g) That Jesus' closest disciples during his ministry became at least some of the most prominent leaders of the early church also shows continuity with the ministry of Jesus.<sup>78</sup>

(h) The evangelists themselves see continuity between Jesus' ministry and the post-Easter church. Firstly, in Mark 1.1 (cf. Acts 10.37-40) it is Jesus' ministry and not Easter or Pentecost that is said to be the beginning of the gospel.<sup>79</sup> Secondly, in Acts 1.1-2 Luke describes Acts as a continuation of his Gospel, not merely as a separate work.<sup>80</sup> Thirdly, in Acts 1.21-22 Luke informs us of the requirement that Judas' replacement was someone who had been with Jesus since the beginning of his ministry.<sup>81</sup> Fourthly, the pre-Easter response to Jesus is described in terms of faith, i.e., in the same way as the response of the post-Easter church.<sup>82</sup>

(i) Although Paul does not cite Jesus tradition very often, he does so on some occasions,<sup>83</sup> and in addition, his letters contain numerous examples of what are probably allusions to this tradition.<sup>84</sup>

To be sure, Dunn does not attempt to deny that some of the words and deeds attributed to Jesus in the Synoptics are unhistorical. Nevertheless, his overall conclusion is that the Synoptic Gospels tell us much about Jesus that is authentic.<sup>85</sup> In the light of the number and reasonableness of the aforementioned points, this is surely a conclusion that is valid. Furthermore, just because something is unhistorical does not necessarily mean that it misrepresents the historical Jesus. When the early

---

<sup>77</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 133.

<sup>78</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 180-181.

<sup>79</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 132, including n. 115.

<sup>80</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 180.

<sup>82</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 132-133. See Mark 1.15; 2.5 pars.; 4.40 par.; 5.34-36 pars.; 9.23-24; 9.42 par.; 10.52 pars.; 11.22 par.; 11.23-24 par.; 15.32 par.; Matt 8.10 par.; 8.13; 9.28; 15.28; 17.20 par.; 23.23; Luke 7.50; 8.12-13; 17.5, 19; 18.8; 22.32, 67; 24.25.

<sup>83</sup> See 1 Cor 7.10-11; 9.14; 11.23-25.

<sup>84</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 181-184. See the allusions Dunn finds on p. 182 n. 48.

<sup>85</sup> See *Jesus Remembered*, 253-254.

church redacted and invented sayings of Jesus, it is likely often to have been done in a way that fitted with what they knew about him.<sup>86</sup>

For our purposes, bearing in mind the vast Synoptic attestation that during his ministry Jesus had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs, there should be no doubt that the historical Jesus did indeed have a confidence of this kind. My conclusion thus far is therefore that during at least most of Jesus' public ministry (leaving aside the early period for the moment), it is certain that he had a profound confidence that his (sometimes distinctive) religious beliefs across a range of issues – including beliefs that had to do with his own crucial place in God's plan – were correct.

(2) Support for the view that even early in his ministry Jesus was confident about his beliefs on religious issues

Up to this point we have been considering the evidence that Jesus had a deep confidence about what he believed in religious matters that cannot easily be connected with a particular time in his ministry. We need now to consider specifically the early part of his ministry. Although it is usually difficult to locate events in Jesus' ministry chronologically, there is some evidence showing specifically that early in his ministry Jesus had this sort of confidence. Given the short length of his ministry and that during at least most of it he had a confidence of this kind, this actually comes as no surprise. The following issues are pertinent:

(a) Jesus began his unique preaching early in his ministry

As far as I am aware, it is uncontested that, considered as a whole, the historical Jesus' teaching was unique and differed from anything that had gone before.<sup>87</sup> Given

---

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Dale C. Allison Jr., 'Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1-13 and Mark 1:12-13' (in B. D. Chilton & C. A. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 195-213), 207-208, following Nils Dahl.

<sup>87</sup> Sanders, *Question of Uniqueness*, passim, rightly criticises the tendency of many scholars to be over-confident in their claims that individual aspects of Jesus' teaching were unique. He does, however, acknowledge that some elements of his teaching are not attested of anyone else in extant

that his ministry seems to have overlapped chronologically with John's<sup>88</sup> and that he probably performed John's baptism for a short time (as I will argue in chapter six),<sup>89</sup> he might at first simply have preached what John preached. In this case, the impression given by Mark 1.14,<sup>90</sup> that he began preaching his own message immediately after John's arrest, could be historical. Alternatively, Jesus may have begun preaching uniquely as soon as he began ministering. This is probably the impression we gain from John 1.43-4.3.<sup>91</sup> Importantly, whichever of these options is correct, there is no reason at all to believe that Jesus would have begun preaching uniquely any later than shortly after John's arrest. For Jesus to have taught uniquely obviously involves a deep confidence in his religious beliefs. At an early stage of his ministry, then, we see Jesus with great confidence of this kind.

(b) A transfer of disciples probably took place at an early stage

In John 1.35-51 some disciples of John are portrayed transferring their allegiance to Jesus at a time when both John's and Jesus' ministries are in progress. I will argue in the next chapter that there was indeed probably a historical transfer of disciples from John to Jesus of this kind.<sup>92</sup> Whether John himself encouraged such a transfer or his disciples transferred of their own accord, it most naturally suggests that at this early stage of his ministry Jesus was someone who had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs.

(c) Jesus is likely to have chosen twelve disciples early in his ministry

It is also worth noting that Jesus may well have chosen his twelve disciples fairly early in his ministry. That the historical Jesus chose an inner circle of twelve disciples is widely accepted, and rightly so. Firstly, there is a great deal of attestation

---

sources. More importantly, he ends his essay by stating emphatically that when the discrete parts of Jesus' message are added up (whether or not these parts were characteristic of other teachers too), he ought certainly to be regarded as a unique teacher (26).

<sup>88</sup> See below, pp. 145-169, esp. 168-169; also 132-137.

<sup>89</sup> See below, pp. 172-180.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Acts 10.37; 13.24.

<sup>91</sup> For more on when Jesus began preaching uniquely, see below, pp. 176-178.

<sup>92</sup> See below, pp. 134-137.

in the Gospels to their existence in the time of Jesus' ministry.<sup>93</sup> Secondly, as Meier argues cogently, the fact that in Acts, the letters of Paul, etc. the group of twelve is so rarely referred to speaks volumes against the view that they are a post-Easter creation placed back into Jesus' pre-Easter ministry.<sup>94</sup> Thirdly, Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15.5 that Jesus appeared to 'the twelve' soon after his resurrection sounds as if in the immediate post-Easter period the twelve were an already established group. This text is therefore strong evidence for their existence as a group in Jesus' ministry.<sup>95</sup>

As regards when exactly Jesus chose the twelve, we are not on nearly such secure ground. Nevertheless, there are two reasons for thinking that it may well have been early in his ministry. First, the large number of times that the twelve are referred to being present at incidents in the Gospels could indicate that this group was formed near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, although we need to be aware that many references to them could be redactional. Second, there is the fact that in the Gospels the twelve are portrayed being in existence quite early in Jesus' ministry. In Mark, Jesus chooses them in 3.13-19. Luke (6.12-16) seems to follow Mark's chronology here. In Matthew they are first mentioned in 10.1-4 but, importantly, it is assumed that they already exist as a group. Matthew may, in his mind at least, have been following Mark's chronology or he could, to some extent, be seen as an independent witness to placing the choosing of the twelve early. In the Fourth Gospel the twelve are mentioned first in 6.67 but, as in Matthew, it is assumed that they already exist. Once again, we need to bear in mind that the order of events in the Gospels is usually

---

<sup>93</sup> They are specifically mentioned in Mark 3.13-19 pars.; Mark 4.10; Mark 6.7 pars.; Mark 9. 35; Mark 10.32 pars.; Mark 11.11; Mark 14.10 pars.; Mark 14.17 par.; Mark 14.20; Mark 14.43 pars.; Matt 10.5; Matt 11.1; Matt 19.28 par. (here by implication); Luke 8.1; 9.12; John 6.67, 70, 71; 20.24.

<sup>94</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.146-147. Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 509.

<sup>95</sup> Philipp Vielhauer, 'Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu' (in W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Festschrift für Günther Dehn, zum 75. Geburtstag am 18. April 1957* [Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1957], 51-79), 62-64, has seen a contradiction between the statement in 1 Cor 15.5 that a group of twelve experienced a resurrection appearance of Jesus and the tradition found in all four canonical Gospels (Mark 14.43-45 pars.) that Judas Iscariot apostasised from Jesus' group of twelve, in which case there would have been only eleven of this group remaining at the time referred to in 1 Cor 15.5. Vielhauer believes this contradiction can be explained if there never was a group of twelve disciples in the historical Jesus' ministry, and if Paul's reference to the twelve is to a group that came into existence immediately post-Easter. However, as Meier notes, 'the twelve' could easily have been used by Paul as a 'stereotyped formula', even though the number had shrunk to eleven (Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.139-141; cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 98-102; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 216; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 507 n. 88). Even if the tradition of Judas' apostasy from among Jesus' closest disciples is authentic, then, there is no need to see Paul's statement as an obstacle to accepting that the historical Jesus had a specific group of twelve disciples.

a construct of the evangelists. All the same, it is worth noting how early our Gospels present the twelve existing as a group.

On balance, then, it seems more likely than not that the historical Jesus chose an inner circle of twelve disciples fairly early in his ministry. As I have already touched on above, for him to have chosen a group of disciples in this way may mean that he was making some sort of statement of intent. In any case, it would seem to be the action of someone who had a sense of mission and authority, which by implication suggests that he was confident in his religious beliefs.

(d) John's question and Jesus' reply probably took place at an early stage

John's question to Jesus asking if he is the coming one and Jesus' reply in Matt 11.2-6 // Luke 7.18-23 obviously has the potential to provide evidence for Jesus' assurance about his religious beliefs early in his ministry at a time when John was still alive.<sup>96</sup>

The similarities between Matthew and Luke, especially in vv. 3 // 19; 4-6 // 22-23, show that they have used a common source, which I will assume was Q.<sup>97</sup> Although there are differences between Matthew's and Luke's texts, it is the parts in which they agree – parts that they clearly took from their source – that are important for the arguments I want to make here, so there is no need for us to spend time deciding how the entire Q text ran. What is important is that the Q text would have presented John, through his disciples, asking Jesus if he is the coming one and Jesus giving the reply he does: 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: blind receive sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, dead are raised and poor are given good news. And blessed is the person who does not take offence at me.'<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> On John's death probably having occurred early in Jesus' ministry, see above, pp. 78-82.

<sup>97</sup> See above, pp. 7-8. For our purposes here, however, it is simply that Matthew and Luke have used a common source that is important, regardless of whether that source was Q.

<sup>98</sup> I have followed Luke's text for these verses. Matthew's differs very slightly. As I noted above (see pp. 80-81 and the further references there), in Matthew 11.3 // Luke 7.19 the reference to the coming one almost certainly refers back to John's prophecy of one who would come in Matt 3.11 // Luke 3.16; and in Q too, Q 7.19 probably referred back to Q 3.16.

We need first to ask whether the story is essentially historical.<sup>99</sup> Josef Ernst believes that John's question to Jesus is likely to be a Christian creation, with John being presented as a 'spokesman' – 'Wortführer' – of those who are unsure about Jesus. He thinks it may have been designed to attract Baptist disciples who had not made the final step of becoming Christians.<sup>100</sup> Ernst sees awkwardness in the way that Jesus does not directly answer John's question, and therefore finds his reply difficult to envisage as a historical event.<sup>101</sup> He also thinks it is doubtful that while in prison John would have been allowed to communicate with those outside.<sup>102</sup> Lastly, he believes that if John was arrested and executed early, he would not have had time to reflect upon who Jesus was.<sup>103</sup>

However, none of these arguments carries much weight, and there are in fact a number of reasons for believing that this story is likely to be historical:

(i) The indirect reply to John's question fits very well with what we know of the habits of the historical Jesus.<sup>104</sup> It is true that replying obliquely could conceivably have been invented for Jesus in the knowledge that this was how he often spoke. It is true too that the oblique reply ought not to be seen as something that was the preserve of the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, contrary to Ernst's claims, Jesus' reply does not look awkward or difficult to envisage historically. In fact, it fits perfectly with what we know of him.

---

<sup>99</sup> The following believe it is likely to be basically historical: Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.131-137; Taylor, *Immerser*, 288-294; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 447-450; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.244-246; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 205; Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 278-282; and David Flusser, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (with R. Steven Notley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 26-32. John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999 [originally 1987]), 107-108 takes the opposite view. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 315-319, thinks that John's question is unhistorical but is undecided whether the words attributed to Jesus in Matt 11.4-6 par. stem from the historical Jesus or not.

<sup>100</sup> Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 315-319, esp. 317-319. Similar is Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 107-108.

<sup>101</sup> Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 316-318.

<sup>102</sup> Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 318.

<sup>103</sup> Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 319. He does not explain exactly what he means by 'early' ('frühzeitig').

<sup>104</sup> Noted by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.134; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 205.

(ii) Despite my conclusion above that John's imprisonment is not likely to have lasted long, it is not certain that after his arrest he would have been unable to communicate with people outside prison. Paul's example shows that being a prisoner did not always necessarily mean isolation from the outside world.<sup>105</sup> The same is implied by the reference to visitors of prisoners in Matt 25.36, 39, 43. Importantly too, if it is historical, John's inquiry to Jesus may well have taken place *before* his arrest. Luke makes no mention of John being in prison, and it is easy to see how Matthew might have inserted this reference into his Q text in order to explain things for his readers in the light of John's arrest in Matt 4.12.<sup>106</sup>

(iii) I will argue at length in chapter six that John and Jesus spent time ministering synchronously.<sup>107</sup> If this is correct, it would mean that John is very likely indeed to have reflected on who Jesus was.

(iv) Although what Ernst has to say about the pericope being created to attract those (especially Baptist disciples) who were uncertain about Jesus makes a certain amount of sense, it is perhaps unlikely that a Christian invention would have presented John uncertain about Jesus' identity *and* would have given no indication that once he received Jesus' reply his uncertainty disappeared. To have made John uncertain and then becoming sure about Jesus is one thing. To give no clear indication that he ever stopped being uncertain is quite another.<sup>108</sup>

(v) If the story was invented, it is surprising that the references are not more explicitly Christological, both in John's question and in Jesus' reply. For example, John could have been presented asking, 'Are you the Messiah or should we expect

---

<sup>105</sup> See, e.g., Phil 1.7, 13-14, 17; Philem 1, 23.

<sup>106</sup> James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 118-119; and Fleddermann, *Q*, 345-355, have no mention of prison in Q 7.18-19.

<sup>107</sup> See below, pp. 145-169, esp. 168-169; also 132-137.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.133, 135-136; Taylor, *Immerser*, 289; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 205; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 281; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 447.



someone else?’<sup>109</sup> Or Jesus could have replied, ‘I am the Messiah’ or ‘I am the Son of God’.<sup>110</sup>

(vi) The existence of the beatitude in Matt 11.6 // Luke 7.23 – ‘Blessed is the person who does not take offence at me’ – also provides some support for historicity. It is widely agreed that the historical Jesus used the beatitude form. Importantly too, to find John warned in this way, albeit mildly, is very different from what we find elsewhere in the NT. Elsewhere John himself is never at any fault; only those who are in danger of overestimating him are corrected.<sup>111</sup>

In the light of these considerations, we should conclude that this story is probably historical. If it is, then when Jesus gave his reply to John he obviously had a great confidence in his distinctive religious beliefs, including the belief that he had an exalted role in God’s plan. Firstly, as usual, there is no hesitation in what he has to say. Secondly, his reply implies that he is fulfilling OT prophecy in the book of Isaiah. What he says has close similarities to Isa 29.18-19 (which includes a reference to the deaf hearing and the blind seeing); 35.5-6 (including the blind, deaf and lame being healed); and 61.1 (which has good news being preached to the poor/weak/afflicted). That Jesus’ reply is a claim to be fulfilling one or more Isaianic texts is, to my knowledge, not disputed. Thirdly, as I have already mentioned, to answer in an oblique way like this seems to be the action of someone who is very confident of himself. Fourthly, using a beatitude that focuses on people’s attitude to himself gives a similar impression.

As I noted above, this event could have taken place either when John was in prison or before he was arrested. If it happened before John’s arrest, then it suggests that Jesus had a deep assurance of the truth of his religious beliefs, including a belief about his own crucial role in the purposes of God, at a very early point in his ministry. Even if it took place when John was in prison, it is still likely to have been quite early in his ministry.

---

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 281.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.133.

<sup>111</sup> See, e.g., Luke 3.15-17; John 1.20-21.

Together, then, these four issues provide strong support for believing that even early in his ministry Jesus had a profound confidence in the correctness of his religious beliefs, beliefs which were at times distinctive and which in part concerned his own exalted role in God's plan.

### (3) Conclusion

We have seen, then, that for at least most of his ministry there is extremely strong evidence that Jesus had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs. We have seen too that even early in his ministry he seems clearly to have had a great confidence of this kind. If his confidence about his beliefs on religious issues in the early part of his ministry was any less than it was later on, it was surely not much less. Given the short time of his ministry, it would be very surprising if this was not the case anyway, since he would then have had to grow hugely in his confidence in a short space of time.

The conclusion so far is therefore that during his ministry, even early in his ministry, Jesus had a great assurance of the truth of his beliefs across a range of religious issues, beliefs which were at times distinctive and which in part had to do with his own extremely important role in God's purposes.<sup>112</sup> I would be surprised if any scholar doubted this.

## **4.3 Jesus' confidence about religious matters soon before his ministry**

I argued above that if Jesus was ever John's disciple, he would very probably have to have first become his disciple no more than a matter of months before beginning his

---

<sup>112</sup> Brown takes a similar view: 'From the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the end he exhibited unshakable confidence that he could authoritatively interpret the demands that God's kingship puts on men who are subject to it'; 'in considering [the] evidence for Jesus' consciousness of himself, . . . there is no indication in the Gospels of a development of Jesus' basic conviction.' (*Jesus God and Man*, 97-98).

own ministry.<sup>113</sup> We need to ask how likely it is that in these months before his own ministry began Jesus' confidence in his religious beliefs was significantly less than it was once his ministry was underway. A rapid change in his understanding could possibly be explained if he had some profound spiritual experience at his baptism (on which see below), but, importantly, his baptism would have taken place *before* the time when he would first have become John's disciple.<sup>114</sup> It is true that he could have had a deep spiritual experience of this kind at a time after his baptism and after having been/become John's disciple. However, because there is no substantive evidence that he did, we have to conclude that it is unlikely.

To be sure, in the period before beginning his ministry Jesus may have been somewhat less confident in his religious beliefs than he was in the weeks and months after its commencement, and he may not have had the range of understanding that he did once his ministry was underway. Nevertheless, it does not seem probable that some mere months before Jesus' ministry began his outlook on religious matters would have been drastically different from his outlook after it had commenced.<sup>115</sup>

We are better to suppose, then, that in the months before his ministry began, Jesus had at least a fairly deep confidence that his (sometimes distinctive) religious beliefs were correct. If so, would he really have wanted to become someone's disciple? Would it not have seemed like a course of action that could easily lead to friction and disagreement? Even if he believed that it was not time for his public ministry to begin, would he not have felt that becoming someone's disciple was likely to be

---

<sup>113</sup> See above, pp. 69-75.

<sup>114</sup> See below, pp. 107-108.

<sup>115</sup> That Jesus received baptism from John does not in any way have to show that at the time he was baptised his confidence about what he believed was less than it was later. Meier assumes that receiving John's baptism means that Jesus automatically ought to be described as a disciple of his in the broad sense of the term (As I made clear on pp. 27-28, this sense of discipleship under John is not the focus of this study.), where by 'disciple' he seems to imply some sort of looking to John as a leader (*Marginal Jew*, 2.116; similarly Webb, 'John the Baptist', 219; Theissen & Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 208). This is surely not a valid assumption. If Jesus believed that John's baptism was a rite that God had ordained and that he ought to be baptised, then his being baptised by John does not have to show any submission other than submission to God. Certainly, a large majority of those whom John baptised would have looked to him as a leader in some sense, but this does not always have to have been the case. If Jesus believed it was God's will for him to be baptised, he had no choice but to allow John to perform the rite, and to automatically assume that he looked to him as a leader is unwarranted. The type of submission Jesus showed by being baptised can therefore easily coincide with his having had a deep assurance about what he believed across a range of religious issues.

largely a waste of time? It seems reasonable, therefore, to imagine that in the months before beginning his ministry – i.e., the time in which he would have first become John’s disciple, if he was ever such – Jesus is likely to have been disinclined from becoming someone’s disciple if he could avoid it. Moreover, we are not aware of any reason why he would have submitted to John against his own inclinations. There is, for example, no OT prophecy we know of that could have been fulfilled by him doing so.

Finally, it is worth noting that even if we had no evidence for Jesus’ confidence in his religious beliefs specifically from the early part of his ministry, the conclusion at this point would not be essentially different: his ministry as a whole was so short that the time between its beginning and the point at which any early period finished would have to have been short enough for the arguments in the three preceding paragraphs to hold quite well. As I hope I have demonstrated above, however, we do have evidence from his early ministry.

What we can infer about the historical Jesus’ confidence in his religious beliefs would seem to suggest, then, that he is unlikely ever to have chosen to become John’s disciple. However, there is more that needs to be said.

#### **4.4 Jesus’ baptism by John**

There is Jesus’ experience at his baptism to consider.<sup>116</sup> The Synoptics report that when he was baptised Jesus had a vision of the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove and that he heard a voice from heaven telling him that he was God’s beloved Son and that God was pleased with him (Mark 1.9-11 // Matt 3.13, 16-17 // Luke 3.21-22).<sup>117</sup> Now, it seems highly improbable that anyone would have come to know

---

<sup>116</sup> On the historicity of Jesus’ baptism, see above, pp. 15, 43.

<sup>117</sup> Although Matthew has ‘This is my beloved Son’ in place of Mark’s and Luke’s ‘You are my beloved Son’, obviously in Matthew Jesus is envisaged hearing the voice like anyone else. Luke is not explicit that Jesus sees the Holy Spirit descend on him, but it is clearly implied. The Fourth Gospel has the Spirit descending on Jesus in 1.32-33 (like a dove in 1.32), but does not mention Jesus’ baptism; see n. 127. Some scholars call the Synoptic vision and voice a ‘theophany’ but that is not

John closely and only later have submitted to his baptism: John would doubtless have wanted those needing to repent<sup>118</sup> to do so immediately, and because his baptism signified – in part at least – an expression of repentance,<sup>119</sup> it is implausible to imagine that he would have been in favour of any delay between the repentance and the baptism.<sup>120</sup> This means that if Jesus was ever John's disciple, it would very probably only have been after he was baptised.<sup>121</sup> If at his baptism he experienced this vision and voice or some kind of equivalent inner experience, this clearly at least has the potential to have affected any later decision to become John's disciple or not.

Some scholars believe that at his baptism the historical Jesus experienced no vision or voice or anything that they might represent.<sup>122</sup> Others, however, think that the vision and voice mentioned in Mark are precisely what Jesus experienced at that time.<sup>123</sup> Yet others believe that at his baptism he experienced something profound, something effectively symbolised by the vision and voice, although not the literal vision and voice.<sup>124</sup> Some scholars in the second and third groups think that Jesus would have experienced a 'call' to his ministry at his baptism.<sup>125</sup>

For our purposes, whether at his baptism the historical Jesus experienced the literal vision and voice or something inside himself that the vision and voice represent is not the key issue. Neither is whether he experienced a call to his ministry on that occasion or not. What is key here is whether at his baptism he experienced in some

---

quite right here. A theophany has to do with self-disclosure by God, but here Jesus sees a vision of the Spirit like a dove and there is a disclosure of *Jesus*' identity rather than God's. In what follows I will therefore stick to speaking about the vision and voice.

<sup>118</sup> It is not necessary to examine here whether or not John believed that every Jew ought to repent and receive his baptism.

<sup>119</sup> On the historical John's baptism being an expression of repentance, see below, pp. 173-176.

<sup>120</sup> Similarly, in Acts, on every occasion we find people receiving Christian baptism, the most natural way of reading the text is that the baptism occurs on the day they first accept the Christian message; see 2.38-41; 8.12-13, 36-38; 9.18; 10.47-48; 16.14-15, 33; 18.8; 19.5; 22.16.

<sup>121</sup> I am not assuming that Jesus had committed personal sins for which he needed to repent. However, notwithstanding Matt 3.14-15 and John 1.29, 36, the historical John may have thought he had, and, if so, would surely have wished Jesus to be baptised speedily. Even if John had a sense that Jesus' baptism was not for sins personally committed, it seems very unlikely that he would have 'gone against the grain' of his ministry by baptising Jesus only after coming to know him well.

<sup>122</sup> For representatives of this position, see n. 126.

<sup>123</sup> E.g., Laurent Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste: Enquête historique sur une rencontre légendaire* (Chambéry: Éditions Exergue, 1999), 164-166; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 146.

<sup>124</sup> E.g., Leivestad, *Jesus*, 39.

<sup>125</sup> E.g., Leivestad, *Jesus*, 39, 176; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 55-56; Flusser, *Sage from Galilee*, 21-22.

powerful way the awareness that he had been singled out by God for exceptionally close relationship with him and that he was gifted by God for a very special task that he would fulfil in the future, or at least something very similar to this. (Note that this is essentially a matter of how confident Jesus was in his religious beliefs, although, unlike the examples dealt with in section 4.2, this example has to do with a time before his ministry began.) For want of a better term, I will refer to this as Jesus' 'baptismal experience', although in using this phrase I stress that I mean what I have just described; I do not mean the sort of religious experience that many others who were baptised by John would surely have experienced at their baptism.

In what follows we will look at the case that can be made for and against the historicity of Jesus' baptismal experience. Some arguments will have specifically to do with the literal vision and voice, others will be more general. However, clearly, the more or less likely it is that the literal vision and voice are historical, the more or less likely it is also that Jesus had a baptismal experience. Therefore arguments specifically to do with the literal vision and voice are relevant. Unless otherwise stated, we will be thinking about the Marcan account of the vision and voice. I will argue that the historical Jesus may well have had a baptismal experience,<sup>126</sup> and that this makes it even less likely that he was ever John's disciple.

#### (1) Pointers in favour of the authenticity of Jesus' baptismal experience

(a) We have likely multiple attestation in known sources. As well as being in Mark, it is probable that an account of Jesus' baptism has been used to create John 1.32-34 and that his baptismal experience is alluded to in these verses.<sup>127</sup> In a context that

---

<sup>126</sup> Scholars in favour of a historical baptismal experience include Taylor, *Immerser*, 264-277; Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 164-166; idem, *Roi sans Prophète*, 105-106; Leivestad, *Jesus*, 39, 176; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 49, 55-56; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 146; and Flusser, *Sage from Galilee*, 21-22. Those against include Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.106-109; and apparently Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 232-234, and Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> There seems to be little dispute that John 1.32-34 is based on a tradition of Jesus' baptism. In fact, many scholars (e.g., Wink, *John the Baptist*, 90-91; 104; Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 204; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 144) even believe that the reader is supposed to infer from the Fourth Gospel's text that Jesus received John's baptism. This, however, is surely unwarranted. It is true that the reference to 'the Spirit descending like a dove', means that those who knew of a Synoptic-style tradition of Jesus' baptism would surely have thought of Jesus being baptised. Nevertheless, this Gospel does not actually state or even properly imply that Jesus was baptised.

mentions John's baptising in water, there is a reference to the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove on Jesus (v. 32 and similarly in v. 33), the same image that we find in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism.<sup>128</sup>

It is also true that Q may have included an account of Jesus' baptism and baptismal experience. Some scholars suggest that in Matthew and Luke the devil's use of the words, 'the Son of God' (Matt 4.3, 6 // Luke 4.3, 9), seems to look back to the declaration of Jesus' sonship at his baptism, and believe that unless Q also had this declaration, the devil's 'If you are the Son of God' in Q 4.3, 9 would be unprepared for.<sup>129</sup> The existence of some agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark, such as the heavens being opened (Matthew and Luke use the verb ἀνοίγω) rather than split (Mark uses σχίζω) or a participle (Matthew: βαπτισθείς; Luke: βαπτισθέντος) in place of Mark's finite verb (ἐβαπτίσθη), have also been noted.<sup>130</sup>

In reply to the first of these points John S. Kloppenborg Verbin makes the cogent point that none of the Gospels has a narrative in which the titles Son of Man, Messiah or Son are accounted for, so Q could likewise easily simply have introduced 'Son of God' without explanation.<sup>131</sup> There is also the fact that it is not certain that the temptation narrative was ever part of the Q document.<sup>132</sup> In reply to the second point, all of the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark can quite

---

<sup>128</sup> If ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ('the Son of God') rather than ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ('the chosen one of God') were to be preferred in v. 34, there would be another likely reason for believing that this passage has used a tradition of Jesus' baptism, since all three Synoptic accounts have a declaration of Jesus' sonship at his baptism (Mark 1.11 pars.). However, with Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.185-186 n.13; Brown, *John*, 1.57; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), 152; et al., I prefer to read the relatively poorly attested ἐκλεκτός ('chosen?'; in P<sup>5vid</sup> ⚭\* b e ff<sup>2\*</sup> sy<sup>s,c</sup>) in place of the better attested υἱός ('Son'). It is easy to see why a scribe would have made the change from ἐκλεκτός to υἱός. First, when scribes saw the references to the descent of the Spirit in vv. 32, 33, they would surely have been reminded of the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism. When they then saw 'the chosen one of God' in v. 34, many would surely also have been reminded of the similar 'the Son of God' in the Synoptic accounts of the baptism, and would have wanted to assimilate accordingly. Second, υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ is a common phrase in the Fourth Gospel, whereas ἐκλεκτός is not found elsewhere. That scribes would consciously have altered υἱός to ἐκλεκτός seems very unlikely. An accidental change also seems very implausible.

<sup>129</sup> So, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.103; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 373 n. 165.

<sup>130</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.103.

<sup>131</sup> John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 93; also Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 85.

<sup>132</sup> See below, pp. 115-116.

easily be explained as redactional.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, these counter-arguments do not prove that there was no account of Jesus' baptism and baptismal experience in Q, and we therefore have *possible* attestation for Jesus' baptismal experience from a third source.<sup>134</sup>

(b) The baptism of Jesus by John was clearly a difficulty for the early church.<sup>135</sup> To deal with this difficulty, in at least most contexts in which members of the church found themselves, it would surely have been easier and more effective for them as they handed down tradition simply not to mention the baptism at all than to 'sanctify' it by adding the story of the vision and voice. The way that Matthew apparently felt it necessary to change Mark's account (by adding 3.14-15) is an example of how Mark's 'sanctified' account did not succeed in getting rid of the difficulty of Jesus receiving a baptism of repentance.

If someone were to argue that opponents of the early church, especially Baptist sectarians, would not have allowed Christians to forget that John baptised Jesus, and therefore that Jesus' baptism would have to have remained prominent in the Christian tradition, it is interesting to note that the Gospel that is most likely to be in polemic with Baptist sectarians (the Fourth Gospel)<sup>136</sup> is the only canonical Gospel that does *not* mention it.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, if someone were to object that the early church would not have been able to omit Jesus' baptism from its traditions because it was such a crucial event in his career,<sup>138</sup> I would answer, firstly, that the Fourth Gospel has omitted it, so the fourth evangelist, for one, hardly saw it as crucial; and, secondly, that in the Synoptics it is surely not Jesus' baptism that was important for

---

<sup>133</sup> So Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 85 n. 157; Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 93, including n. 75.

<sup>134</sup> Critics who think that Q probably contained an account of Jesus' baptism and baptismal experience include Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.103; Taylor, *Immerser*, 266 n. 12; and Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 263-265. Those who think it did not include Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 93 [also Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 84-85]; Fleddermann, *Q*, 233-235; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 233; and Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 146.

<sup>135</sup> See above, pp. 15, 43.

<sup>136</sup> See below, pp. 124-129.

<sup>137</sup> See n. 127.

<sup>138</sup> The view of Taylor, *Immerser*, 268.



early Christians but the vision and voice at the baptism,<sup>139</sup> and that the baptism is simply the context in which the vision and voice occur.

It is often said that in the Synoptics Jesus' baptism is the point at which his ministry begins.<sup>140</sup> In actual fact, in Mark (1.14) and Matthew (4.12-17) it is John's imprisonment that is more appropriate as the point at which it begins, and in Luke it is neither John's imprisonment nor Jesus' baptism. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that if the tradition of Jesus' baptism once existed without the vision and voice, it could have become a marginal tradition that would not have found its way into the Synoptics. The reason Jesus' baptism *is* found in the Synoptics may well be that the vision and voice was always a part of the same tradition, the reason for this being that it is a historical event that Jesus related to his disciples.

(c) That the 'dove' is somewhat unexpected as a symbol and its meaning is not readily comprehensible might point against invention.<sup>141</sup> It is true that an inventor, instead of simply saying 'The Holy Spirit descended on him', might have wanted Jesus to see something concrete and therefore have invented the dove, but even so, the choice of a dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit is perhaps not as expected as, say, fire. There seems to be a little support here for historicity.

(d) There is possibly something in the Marcan presentation of the vision and voice as personal to Jesus. It is Jesus alone who sees the Spirit descend on him like a dove, and (probably) he alone hears the voice. It could be argued that a created story is more likely to have had the vision and voice perceived by everyone (as Matthew has done with the voice).<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Similar is Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 373. Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 46-47.

<sup>140</sup> E.g., by Taylor, *Immerser*, 268.

<sup>141</sup> So Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 276-277; Laurent Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste: Enquête historique sur une rencontre légendaire* (Chambéry: Éditions Exergue, 1999), 164-165; idem, *Roi sans Prophète*, 106. For a list of ways in which the dove has been interpreted, see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.331-334.

<sup>142</sup> Similarly Taylor, *Immerser*, 265; Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 165.

(e) Some in the early church might have been perturbed by the idea of Jesus not already being in possession of the Holy Spirit when he was baptised. The impression in Mark 1.10 is that Jesus is receiving the Spirit for the first time. However, other early Christians may well not have been troubled at all by this, so it is admittedly not more than a weak pointer against invention.<sup>143</sup>

## (2) Pointers against the authenticity of Jesus' baptismal experience

(a) We are able to see how the tradition about Jesus' baptism has developed over time. Matthew and Luke have more developed forms than Mark, and further development can be seen in the later *Gospel of the Ebionites* and in Justin Martyr.<sup>144</sup> It is therefore not difficult to think that the Marcan form itself could be a development from an earlier simpler tradition.<sup>145</sup>

(b) In light of the importance of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' divine sonship, both in the historical Jesus' ministry and in the theology of the early church, it is very easy to see how the church might have invented for his baptism an endowment with the Spirit and a declaration of his sonship.<sup>146</sup> While admitting this, Robert Webb also mentions the counter-argument that if Jesus did experience the Holy Spirit and an affirmation of his divine sonship at his baptism, this would cohere well with how his ministry developed.<sup>147</sup> Although Webb has a valid point, on balance I would still see the argument against historicity here to be the stronger.

(c) It is easy to see midrashic style in the account of Jesus' baptismal experience. The account could be a midrash of texts such as Psalm 2.7, which refers to the royal Messiah as God's Son, and Isa 42.1, which refers to the Spirit-endowed Servant of YHWH. This could point to creation by the early church.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 151-152.

<sup>144</sup> See Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.13.7-8; Justin, *Dialogue*, 88.3.8. Both texts are in Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (13<sup>th</sup> edn.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 27.

<sup>145</sup> So Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 375-376.

<sup>146</sup> Similarly, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.106-108; Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 274; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 375-376.

<sup>147</sup> Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 275, including n. 36.

<sup>148</sup> So Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.106-108; Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 275.

(d) In view of the difficulty of Jesus' baptism for the early church, a motive for altering the tradition of his baptism in an attempt to alleviate the difficulty is not hard to find.<sup>149</sup> Having him receive the Spirit and affirmed as God's Son does alleviate the difficulty to an extent.

(e) Webb believes that Jesus could have had the experience at a time after his baptism and that later the two traditions could have been combined.<sup>150</sup> He thinks that the Fourth Gospel suggests that at an early stage Jesus 'engage[d] in a baptizing ministry in association with John and his ministry'. He believes that this might show that Jesus had his experience, which he describes as a 'prophetic call-vision', after this period of association.

However, as I will argue in detail in chapter six, although Jesus is likely to have performed John's rite of baptism for a time, his baptising activity may well have been performed without John's authorisation.<sup>151</sup> Besides, if Jesus began his unique preaching before John's arrest, as he may have done,<sup>152</sup> it would make sense for him already to have received any call to his ministry that he did receive. All the same, it is possible that Jesus' 'baptismal experience' could in fact have taken place at a time shortly after his baptism and after any period in which potentially he would have been John's disciple.

Evaluating the above points is not straightforward. There are clearly good arguments that can be made to support either position, and a cautious conclusion would be to say simply that the historical Jesus may well have had a baptismal experience. If he did, this would probably suggest that he never became John's disciple. It seems rather implausible to imagine that he would have experienced a powerful awareness that he had been singled out by God for exceptionally close relationship with him

---

<sup>149</sup> So Webb, 'Jesus Baptism', 274-275. Similar is Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 232.

<sup>150</sup> Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 277.

<sup>151</sup> See below, pp. 172-180, 181-186.

<sup>152</sup> See above, pp. 98-99, and below, pp. 177-178.

and that he was gifted for a very special future ministry, or something very similar to this, and would then have gone on to submit himself as a disciple to someone else.<sup>153</sup>

#### **4.5 Jesus' time in the wilderness**

There is also Jesus' time in the wilderness to consider. In Mark 1.12-13, immediately after his baptism Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. Matthew 4.1-11 and Luke 4.1-13 do not have the same immediacy but similarly present Jesus going into the wilderness for 40 days soon after his baptism, where he is tempted by Satan. If the historical Jesus did indeed spend some weeks alone in the wilderness very soon after his baptism, this might at least have a potential bearing on whether he was John's disciple in the period closely following his baptism or at a later time.

We therefore need to ask how likely it is that this time in the wilderness is historical. Specifically, the question here is whether very soon after his baptism the historical Jesus spent some weeks alone in the wilderness. Whether it was for precisely 40 days is not key for our purposes here, nor is whether Jesus experienced temptation, although these factors will come into the discussion below. I will argue that Jesus may indeed have spent some weeks alone in the wilderness very soon after his baptism and that this makes it even less likely that he was ever John's disciple. (As will become plain at the end of this section, this issue is another that has in part to do with Jesus' confidence in religious matters.)

To begin with, it is worthwhile trying to establish what sources that we know of are relevant and exactly what they said. I have already mentioned Mark 1.12-13. In addition to this, the similarities between Matt 4.1-11 and Luke 4.1-13 show clearly that they have used a common source to form their pericopes. A large majority of scholars believe that this source was Q. Occasionally it is claimed that Matthew and Luke both used a source that was not Q.

---

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism', 308.

Dieter Lührmann, for example, argues that the temptation accounts in Matthew and Luke are so unlike the rest of the Q material that it is improbable they received this story from Q.<sup>154</sup> Lührmann would seem to have in mind such things as the paucity of scriptural quotations and narrative in Q.

We need to ask, however, whether the temptation accounts really are so different from the the rest of Q. Matt 11.10 // Luke 7.27 and Matt 23.39 // Luke 13.35, both widely believed to come from Q, quote scripture. And the narrative material in Matt 3.7 // Luke 3.7; Matt 8.5-13 // Luke 7.1-10; and Matt 12.22-30 // Luke 11.14-23 is also generally held to have come from Q. Furthermore, Jesus can be found fighting Satan and speaking of demons in Matt 12.22-30 // Luke 11.14-23 and Matt 12.43-45 // Luke 24-26, passages that are, again, usually believed to have been derived from Q.<sup>155</sup> In the light of these points, I prefer to believe that it is more probable than not that the account used by Matthew and Luke was in Q, although the degree of doubt remains considerable. It could possibly have been a separate written source to which both Matthew and Luke had access. For the sake of simplicity in what follows I will speak of a 'Q account' of Jesus' temptation, although I want to stress that I am not certain it was in Q.

We need to try to draw some conclusions about the Q account to see if it corroborates Mark in any way that is important for our purposes. The relevant questions are:

(a) Did the Q account mention 40 days?

Matthew (4.2) and Luke (4.2) mention 40 days, but did they simply take this from Mark, or was the 40 days in the Q account too? On the one hand, if Q had no reference to 40 days, by simple probability, all other things being equal, it is more

---

<sup>154</sup> Dieter Lührmann, *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 56. See also A. W. Argyle, 'The Accounts of the Temptations of Jesus in Relation to the Q Hypothesis', *ExpTim* 64 (1952-1953), 382.

<sup>155</sup> Noted by Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.351.

likely than not that at least one of Matthew and Luke would have followed Q and therefore have chosen not to incorporate a reference to 40 days in their Gospels; that they both do incorporate this reference therefore helps support the view that 40 days was in Q. On the other hand, however, all other things may well not be equal: it is easy to imagine that both Matthew and Luke would have been happy – even eager – to take this detail from Mark, even if it was not in Q, in order to emphasise how long Jesus fasted. On balance, it seems slightly more probable than not that Q contained a reference to the 40 days, although it remains very uncertain.<sup>156</sup>

(b) Did the Q account mention the wilderness?

Matthew (4.1) and Luke (4.1) locate the temptation in the wilderness but, again, we need to ask if they simply took this from Mark, or if the wilderness was referred to as the place of temptation in the Q account too. First, if the Q account mentioned a period of time for which Jesus fasted, the wilderness is at least as suitable a place as any for a prolonged period of fasting to have taken place. Therefore, it may well for this reason have mentioned the wilderness. Second and more importantly, it is widely agreed that the temptation accounts in Matthew and Luke (and in Q) contain as a prominent motif the testing of Israel in the wilderness, specifically in connection with Deut 6, 8.<sup>157</sup> It would therefore be very apt if Jesus' antitypical temptations took place in the wilderness and this was made explicit. On balance, therefore, it seems highly likely that the Q account mentioned the wilderness.<sup>158</sup>

(c) Did the Q account place Jesus' temptation very soon after his baptism?

Unlike with (a) and (b), the answer to this question depends on whether what I have called the Q account really was in Q. If it was not, we would be on far too shaky ground if we were to try to draw any conclusion by imagining that the source Matthew and Luke used might also have had an account of Jesus' baptism by John. If

---

<sup>156</sup> A large majority of scholars believe that Q mentioned 40 days. Fleddermann, *Q*, 235-241, 252, esp. 240-241, however, omits it and any other time reference.

<sup>157</sup> See Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son (Matt 4:1-11 & Par.): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966); Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.351-374.

<sup>158</sup> Again, a large majority of scholars accept this.

it was in Q, then it depends, firstly, on whether Q contained the story of Jesus' baptism. We touched on this question above and found the answer to be very uncertain. Secondly, even if Jesus' baptism and temptation were both in Q, it is not certain that they would have been juxtaposed. Finally, even if they were juxtaposed, we cannot know what sort of wording would have linked them. Would there have been an implication of the temptation closely following the baptism or not? In the light of all these uncertainties, the best we can say is that we have no more than weak evidence that what I have called the Q account placed Jesus' temptation very soon after his baptism.

As I outlined above, the question we are asking in this section is whether very soon after his baptism the historical Jesus spent some weeks alone in the wilderness. Mark affirms all of this. Our conclusion here is therefore that the Q account does corroborate the Marcan picture, but only patchily, and weakly regarding the 40 days and the close temporal proximity of the baptism and the time in the wilderness. It would therefore be correct to say that we have weak and partial multiple attestation for a positive answer to the question we are asking.<sup>159</sup>

Let us move on, then, to examine the case that can be made for and against historicity.

#### (1) Pointers in favour of historicity

(a) To begin with, partial multiple attestation does provide some support, albeit not strong support, for the view that very soon after his baptism Jesus spent some weeks alone in the wilderness. That there seem to have been differences between the Marcan and Q accounts – notably the likely fasting in Q against the likely absence of fasting in Mark – suggests also that these two accounts are not closely dependent,

---

<sup>159</sup> Heb 2.18, which speaks of Jesus being tempted, may derive from a tradition similar to the Marcan and Q traditions, but is too brief to be relevant here.

one on the other.<sup>160</sup> This gives a little more weight to the significance of the multiple attestation.

(b) The fact that Jesus in his ministry can at times be found avoiding ascetic practices<sup>161</sup> does not in any way mean that he would necessarily have eschewed taking time out to pray (even fast and pray) in the wilderness for a prolonged period near the beginning of his ministry. Besides, as Allison points out, there are elements of Jesus' life during his ministry that involved 'rigorous self-denial'. For example, he and his disciples left their families behind and went without home comforts, and some of them, including Jesus, were celibate.<sup>162</sup> Spending time alone in the wilderness would also fit well with Jesus' later liking for withdrawing to isolated places, often for the specific purpose of prayer.<sup>163</sup>

(c) Combating evil powers is something that fits with what we know of the historical Jesus. That part of his ministry involved acting as an exorcist is not often disputed. Furthermore, Mark 3.27, in which Jesus speaks of tying up 'the strong man' (apparently a reference to some kind of supernatural evil power) and plundering his property, and Luke 10.18, where he refers to watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven, are also both widely held to stem from the historical Jesus. Because the accounts of his time in the wilderness that we possess (Mark) or can deduce (Q) involve conflict with evil powers, we have a further reason why a time alone in the wilderness very soon after his baptism should be regarded as entirely plausible.

(d) It is generally agreed that the Marcan and Q accounts of the temptation contain much theology. Midrash and various typologies are often perceived.<sup>164</sup> However, it is quite possible that a historical event – i.e., a time spent alone by Jesus in the wilderness shortly after his baptism – could have been used as a basis for later

---

<sup>160</sup> Allison, 'Behind the Temptations', 195-201, believes that the Q version did not use the Marcan version and vice versa.

<sup>161</sup> See Mark 2.18-20 pars.; Matt 11.16-19 par.

<sup>162</sup> For these and further examples of voluntary hardships in Jesus' life, see Allison, 'Behind the Temptations', 211-213.

<sup>163</sup> See Mark 1.35 par.; Mark 1.45 par.; Mark 6.32 par.; Luke 6.12; John 6.15; 11.54. Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 379.

<sup>164</sup> See, e.g., Gerhardsson, *Testing of God's Son*; passim; Jan Willem van Henten, 'The First Testing of Jesus: A Rereading of Mark 1.12-13', *NTS* 45 (1999), 349-366.



embellishment.<sup>165</sup> Besides, typology does not necessarily imply the absence of historicity.<sup>166</sup> For example, why could the historical Jesus not have spent 40 days in the wilderness *and* have fulfilled a role that was the antitype of the wandering of ancient Israel in the wilderness for 40 years?<sup>167</sup> Jesus did, after all, almost certainly choose twelve disciples, very probably alluding in some way to Israel's twelve tribes.<sup>168</sup> Why could he not have done something similar at an earlier stage in his life?

(e) Finally, it is interesting to note that in the Marcan account there is no indication that Jesus was victorious over Satan. This could possibly be a pointer against creation by the early church.

## (2) Pointers against historicity

(a) Fictitious narratives in the ancient world often mention a trial that a great figure faces early in his career.<sup>169</sup> It is conceivable that the early church invented something similar – complete with wilderness setting – for Jesus in order to symbolise the defeat over Satan and evil powers that was characteristic of his ministry.

(b) Even if Jesus did spend some weeks alone in the wilderness, the chronological placement of this so soon after his baptism by John might be unhistorical. Jesus could have spent time in the wilderness later, after the period in which any potential discipleship under John would have occurred.<sup>170</sup> We have already noted the high degree of doubt over whether Q (or the source Matthew and Luke used, if it was not Q) would have closely linked chronologically the stories of Jesus' baptism and temptation.<sup>171</sup> Importantly too, Mark's ἐὺθύς ('immediately'), which connects the temptation story so closely to Jesus' baptism in his Gospel, is a great favourite of

---

<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.357; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 71. See also Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.271-272 n. 1.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 167-168; idem, *Historical Jesus*, 188-190; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 71.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 379.

<sup>168</sup> See above, pp. 99-100.

<sup>169</sup> See Allison, 'Behind the Temptations', 204-205.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 380.

<sup>171</sup> See above, pp. 117-118.

his,<sup>172</sup> and it seems highly likely that he has added it to his tradition. He may even be responsible for juxtaposing the baptism and temptation stories.<sup>173</sup> That is not to say that it is impossible for Mark's redaction accurately to reflect history in his chronological arrangement, but his liking for εὐθύς has to be seen to hinder the case for historically placing the baptism and time in the wilderness temporally very close to each other.

As with Jesus' baptismal experience, reaching a conclusion as to historicity is not easy. Taking all the above points into consideration, it would probably be wise to say that Jesus may have spent some weeks alone in the wilderness shortly after his baptism.<sup>174</sup> If he did, this could well be a pointer against his ever having been John's disciple.<sup>175</sup> First, for him to have spent a lengthy period in the wilderness at this time might suggest that he did not become John's disciple immediately or very soon after he was baptised, since going alone into the wilderness for weeks means that he would have been unable to relate to John as a disciple for a surprisingly long period of time. Second, it is also questionable whether Jesus became John's disciple weeks or months after being baptised, because spending weeks alone in the wilderness seems to show an unusual degree of confidence for someone who will later go on to become another person's disciple.

## 4.6 Conclusion

When all the issues discussed in this chapter are brought together, we have indications of fairly strong value opposing the theory that Jesus was ever John's disciple. Importantly, even without the less substantial indications from the points I

---

<sup>172</sup> This word appears approximately 46 times in Mark, five times in Matthew, twice in Luke-Acts and three times in the rest of the NT.

<sup>173</sup> For scholars who think Mark combined the two traditions, and others who think the combination was pre-Markan, see van Henten, 'First Testing', 350 n. 6. See also Jacques Dupont, *Les Tentations de Jésus au Désert* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968), 94-95.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 379-380; Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 117; Marshall, *Luke*, 168.

<sup>175</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.271-272 n. 1, thinks it is possible that Jesus' time in the wilderness immediately after his baptism is historical and that he would have been undergoing 'an inner spiritual struggle in preparation for his public ministry'. He has apparently failed to realise that this fits very awkwardly with him later going on to become John's disciple.

have made near the end of the chapter regarding Jesus' baptism by John and his time in the wilderness, the overall case against his discipleship would be almost as strong. Jesus' profound confidence, even early in his ministry, in what he believed across a range of religious issues (issues that went far beyond what was taught in mainstream Judaism and included an extremely exalted place for himself in God's purposes), together with the point that if he was ever John's disciple he would very probably have to have first become such no more than a matter of months before beginning his ministry, suggest quite strongly that he never became John's disciple.

I find it more than a little surprising that most scholars accept Jesus' discipleship under John, yet none of these, as far as I know, asks whether becoming John's disciple is something that Jesus is likely to have wanted to do. Many seem not to have taken seriously enough how Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels time and time again with a profound confidence about where he stood on religious issues, issues including his own role in God's plan. Perhaps an awareness that the early church had a tendency to redact its traditions has caused some, when faced with a Jesus of this kind in the Gospels, to compensate by drastically reducing his confidence when forming a picture of the historical Jesus. If so, the degree of compensation would seem to have been far too great. Other scholars – those who are well aware that during his ministry the historical Jesus had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs – seem either to have been too hasty simply to assume that shortly before his ministry began this confidence would have been much reduced, or not to have noticed that a decision of his to become John's disciple is apparently so at odds with his confidence.

From what we have seen so far, then, it seems unlikely that the historical Jesus was ever John's disciple. However, there is much that still needs to be discussed. Many critics claim to have seen evidence of Jesus' discipleship in a number of texts in the NT. These texts need to be examined properly, and others that arguably point against Jesus' discipleship also need to be considered. We will therefore continue by looking at what indications for and against Jesus' discipleship can be gained from the Fourth Gospel.

## 5. The Fourth Gospel

Scholars who claim to have seen evidence for Jesus' discipleship under John the Baptist refer to the Fourth Gospel more than any other text. Jesus' baptising ministry, mentioned exclusively in the Fourth Gospel, and the logion attributed to John concerning the one coming after him, found in various forms three times in this Gospel (as well as on several occasions in the Synoptics and Acts), are commonly cited. These topics will be discussed in chapters six and seven. The present chapter will deal with the remaining issues to do with Jesus' potential discipleship that are the preserve of the Fourth Gospel.

We will begin this chapter with an examination of some of the opponents of the community that penned this Gospel. Attention will then be turned to look at the specific topics from which scholars have seen support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship:

(1) We will begin by considering the fact that in the Fourth Gospel's narrative Jesus makes his initial appearance in John's vicinity. I will argue that this is no more than weak evidence for his discipleship.

(2) We will consider the transfer of disciples from John to Jesus portrayed in John 1.35-51. I will argue that support for Jesus' discipleship from this issue is fairly minor.

(3) We will examine the words of John's disciples in John 3.26b – 'he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan'. We will find good reasons for believing that there is no real evidence here for Jesus' discipleship.

(4) Finally, we will consider the theory of M.-É. Boismard that the Aramaic underlying the words attributed to John in John 3.30 – 'He must become greater but I must become less' – contained an allusion to Jesus' discipleship. I will argue that there is no more than weak evidence for Jesus' discipleship in this text.

## 5.1 Opponents of the Fourth Gospel with an interest in John

There is a very broad scholarly consensus that the Fourth Gospel contains polemic against those who were believed to be viewing (or in danger of viewing) John the Baptist as more important than he really was, and that it demonstrates a conscious effort to highlight Jesus' superiority.<sup>1</sup> This is an important issue, because if the consensus is correct – which it undoubtedly is, as we will see immediately below – there are obvious potential ramifications for how historical the Fourth Gospel's picture of John is.

There are a number of texts in which the evangelist's concern<sup>2</sup> can be observed. One of the most clear-cut of these is 1.8, where we are told unexpectedly about John: 'He was not the light'. Because there is no reason to think that from a simple reading of the Fourth Gospel's prologue a reader might suspect John of being the light (since Jesus is unambiguously presented as the light in 1.4, 5, 7, 8, 9), it seems clear that the evangelist is specifically tackling an issue known to him. Almost as certainly polemical is the statement about John in 1.20: 'He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah''. It is very difficult to imagine the evangelist twice saying that John 'confessed' (Greek: ὡμολόγησεν)<sup>3</sup> unless he were trying to stress the point, and there seems no reason for him to stress it unless he were attempting to deal with an already-existing issue. As it happens, this point is stressed yet again, in 3.28, where John reminds his disciples that he denied being the Messiah. Other texts that seem to serve a similar purpose are John's statement in 3.30: 'He must become greater but I must become less'; the reference to Jesus making more disciples than John in 4.1; and the way we are told in 10.41 that John did not perform miracles. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Whether the Fourth Gospel was intended for Christians or non-Christians does not need to be considered here.

<sup>2</sup> Or the concern of a later redactor, who was part of the same community as the evangelist; see above, pp. 11-12 n. 31.

<sup>3</sup> The second ὡμολόγησεν is omitted by  $\aleph$  e 1 sa. However, this amounts to no more than fairly weak attestation for its omission. More importantly, it is easy to see why a scribe would want to omit what he may have seen as a superfluous second ὡμολόγησεν, but it is much more unlikely that a second ὡμολόγησεν would have been added to an already coherent sentence.

the logion of the coming one too (1.15, 27, 30),<sup>4</sup> John goes out of his way to declare Jesus' superiority.

There are very good reasons, then, for believing that the evangelist had a polemical concern to prevent people viewing John as too important vis-à-vis Jesus. As long ago as the end of the nineteenth century, W. Baldensperger suggested that the intended target of this polemic was the claims of sectarians of John the Baptist concerning their leader.<sup>5</sup> Since then, many scholars have come to believe that at the end of the first century there was a sect of followers of John in existence, who not only exalted him over Jesus but also claimed he was the Messiah, and that the fourth evangelist was in polemic with this sect.<sup>6</sup>

Other critics have failed to accept this theory, however.<sup>7</sup> Some think there is no need to posit the existence of a sect of followers of John, believing it is more probable that mainstream Jews at the end of the first century had simply appropriated John as an ally and were attempting to use him to bolster their own position; both the Johannine community and the Jewish mainstream were therefore laying claim to his authority.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Robert Kysar wonders whether the community responsible for the Fourth Gospel had Jewish adversaries (who he thinks may have belonged to his 'local

---

<sup>4</sup> On this logion, see chapter seven.

<sup>5</sup> W. Baldensperger, *Der Prolog des vierten Evangelium: Sein polemisch-apologetischer Zweck* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1898), passim. According to Wink, *John the Baptist*, 98, this idea actually originated with J. D. Michaelis in 1788.

<sup>6</sup> So, e.g., Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 153-157; Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 244, 345-366; Cullmann, 'Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος' (*ConNT* 11 [1947], 26-32), passim (this essay is in French; it is also in German in *Vorträge und Aufsätze 1925-1962* [Zurich: Zwingli, 1966], 169-175; and in ET in *The Early Church* [London: SCM, 1956], 177-182); idem, 'Significance', 218; Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 202-205; idem, *Roi sans Prophète*, 291-296; Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1.389-391; Hermann Lichtenberger, 'Täufergemeinden und frühchristliche Täuferpolemik im letzten Drittel des 1. Jahrhunderts' (*ZTK* 84 [1987], 36-57), 51-53; idem, 'Reflections on the History of John the Baptist's Communities' (*FO* 25 [1988], 45-49), 48; Edmondo Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista fra Storia e Leggenda* (Brescia: Paideia, 1988), 153, 155; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.119, 170; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 104; Ben Witherington, III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1995), 63. The thesis that the fourth evangelist himself was a former Baptist sectarian does not need to be considered here.

<sup>7</sup> The following do not see polemic against Baptist sectarians in the Fourth Gospel: Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 298; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [originally 1972]), 59-61; Stephen S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 125-128; Taylor, *Immerser*, 197-198; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> So Taylor, *Immerser*, 197-198; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 76-77.

synagogue’) who believed that ‘Jesus was the equal of John the Baptist but no more’.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these opinions, on balance I tentatively think it is more likely that at the end of the first century a distinct sect of followers of John did indeed exist, and that this sect was the object of some of the Fourth Gospel’s polemic. The reasons for this are as follows:

(1) Most significantly, the way the evangelist stresses that John disavowed being the Messiah – ‘He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’’ (1.20); ‘You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah’ . . .’ (3.28) – most naturally seems to suggest that there existed those who believed he should be identified with that figure. Because the Jewish mainstream would not have accepted that John was the Messiah, if these verses have in view those who did believe that he fulfilled that role, they would therefore have to have belonged to a specific Baptist sect.

(2) Apart from the disputed testimony of the Fourth Gospel, there is no specific evidence that the Jewish mainstream at the end of the first century used John as a support for its cause. It is true that Josephus, writing at this time, speaks of him as a ‘good man’ (ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ),<sup>10</sup> and that this impression was therefore probably a common one in Judaism of the time, but holding John in high regard and using him in polemic are two quite different things.

(3) Even if mainstream Jews at the end of the first century *did* use John on occasion to support their own position, that is scarcely a reason to reject the existence of a Baptist sect which could have revered him even more profoundly.

(4) In Acts 19.1-7 we are told of the existence of a group of men in Ephesus in the middle of the first century who had received John’s baptism. Because Ephesus is the

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kysar, ‘Christology and Controversy: The Contributions of the Prologue of the Gospel of John to New Testament Christology and their Historical Setting’ (*CurTM* 5 [1978], 348-364), 358-359.

<sup>10</sup> *Ant.* 18.117.

traditional location for the origin of the Fourth Gospel, a location for which a reasonable case can be made, it is possible that this passage lends support to seeing Baptist sectarians as opponents of the Fourth Gospel. However, even if we assume that Luke has reported an essentially historical incident in these verses, it must be conceded that any support is minor. First, it is far from clear that these men had any connection with John more significant than simply having received his baptism. Second, there is a time span of several decades between the events of Acts 19 and the writing of the Fourth Gospel. Third, it is not certain that the Fourth Gospel was written at Ephesus. Nevertheless, there may be a little support here for believing that the fourth evangelist was combating a Baptist sect.<sup>11</sup>

(5) There are passages in the Pseudo-Clementine literature that may allude to the existence of Baptist sectarians. In *Recognitions* 1.53 in a dialogue between ‘Clement’ and ‘Peter’ ostensibly shortly after Jesus’ death, the latter refers to the Jews being divided into ‘many parties, beginning from the time of John the Baptist’.<sup>12</sup> In the Latin version of 1.54 ‘Peter’ goes on to say of some of the ‘faction’<sup>13</sup> of John’s disciples:

‘But also some of the disciples of John, who were thought to be great, separated themselves from the people and proclaimed their own master as the Messiah.’<sup>14</sup>

A little later at 1.60, ‘Peter’ states:

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 205; idem, *Roi sans Prophète*, 294; Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 63. Any support for believing this that can be gained from the data about Apollos in Acts 18.24-28 (even assuming that these verses are essentially historical) is probably too insignificant: (1) It is even less clear than in the case of the men of Acts 19 that Apollos had any special connection with John; (2) Vv. 24-25 probably suggest that he had no significant connection to Ephesus and that he is likely to have gained his knowledge about John’s baptism elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> This and the following quotations are my own translation of the Latin version. A Syriac version is also extant. In the following notes I will mention any differences between the Latin and Syriac versions that are relevant for our purposes here. The Greek original is not extant for any of the passages I will cite.

<sup>13</sup> In 1.53 the word used is *pars* – ‘party’. In 1.54 it is *schisma*, which is perhaps best translated as ‘faction’.

<sup>14</sup> The Syriac version of 1.54 does not mention John’s disciples acclaiming him as the Messiah.



‘And behold, one of the disciples of John affirmed that John was the Messiah, and not Jesus. ‘This is so much the case’, he said, ‘that even Jesus himself proclaimed that John was greater than all people and prophets. If, then’, he said, ‘he is greater than all, he must undoubtedly be held to be greater than Moses and Jesus himself. Therefore, if he is greater than all, he is the Messiah.’’<sup>15</sup>

The *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*, both generally considered to have been written in the fourth century, are believed to have had a common ancestor that was compiled most probably in the early or middle part of the third century.<sup>16</sup> This ancestor was itself based on earlier sources, which we can surmise are most likely to be either second or early third century. The references in the *Recognitions* to disciples of John who believed he was the Messiah could, then, have originated in the context of second or early third century claims of Baptist sectarians. If there were such sectarians at this time, their existence at the end of the first century becomes considerably more likely. The upshot is that the Pseudo-Clementine literature makes it a little more probable that the fourth evangelist had the claims of a specific Baptist sect in view.<sup>17</sup>

These factors, especially (1), would seem to make it rather more likely than not that a part of the Fourth Gospel’s polemic is aimed at a distinct group of Baptist sectarians. If this is correct, we must nevertheless admit that their exact nature remains highly conjectural.<sup>18</sup> However, for our purposes in this study the precise characteristics of

---

<sup>15</sup> In 1.60 the Syriac version does not differ significantly from the Latin. *Recognitions* 1.63; 2.8 and *Homilies* 2.23-24 also refer to disciples of John but do not add any significant information.

<sup>16</sup> See F. Stanley Jones, ‘Clementines, Pseudo-’ (in *ABD*, 1.1061-1062), passim; Johannes Irmscher & Georg Strecker, ‘The Pseudo-Clementines’ (in R. McL. Wilson, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* [2 vols.; Cambridge: Clarke, 1991-1992; ET with revisions of part of W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1989-1990), 2.483-541]), 492-493.

<sup>17</sup> So Wink, *John the Baptist*, 100-102. Cf. Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 154; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 190-195.

<sup>18</sup> Wink is correct that ‘it is methodologically illegitimate . . . to reconstruct [their] views by reversing every denial and restriction placed on John in the Fourth Gospel’ (*John the Baptist*, 102; also Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 76; Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 155-156; cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.193-194 n. 65; Moloney, ‘Fourth Gospel’, 49). For example, it does not follow that because 1.8 states that John was not ‘the light’, we ought therefore to imagine that the sectarians were accustomed to referring to him as such.

this group are unimportant. In fact, on most of the occasions that we will examine the evangelist's references to John, it is not even particularly important whether a Baptist sectarian group – as opposed to mainstream Jews appropriating John for its own ends – even existed. What is usually of greatest importance is simply that the evangelist has clearly felt it necessary to prevent his audience viewing John too highly vis-à-vis Jesus or as someone who was independent of Jesus.

As we deal with passages from the Fourth Gospel in this study, then, we must constantly ask whether what the evangelist has to say about John has been affected by this concern and might therefore be unhistorical. Furthermore, we must bear in mind too that there may have been other factors in play when the evangelist wrote about John, which could have led to him deviating from history. His high Christology, for example, quite apart from any polemic aimed at those with an overly exalted view of John, at least has the potential to have shaped what he wrote.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, we must also remember that unaltered historical events may often have suited the evangelist's theology. When all these points are taken on board, it is clear that great caution will be needed in examining what the Fourth Gospel has to say about John and his relationship to Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

## **5.2 Jesus' debut appearance in John's vicinity**

We are now ready to begin looking directly at the evidence for and against Jesus' discipleship that can be gained from the Fourth Gospel. We start with the fact that in the narrative of this Gospel Jesus makes his first appearance in John's vicinity. A few scholars have seen this as evidence that the historical Jesus was once John's disciple.

For John Meier, the fact that Jesus first appears in the Fourth Gospel's narrative (at 1.29) neither in Bethlehem, Nazareth, nor Jerusalem, but in an obscure place –

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 156; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> On using the Fourth Gospel as a historical source generally, see above, pp. 10-12.

Bethany on the other side of the Jordan (v. 28)<sup>21</sup> – where John is baptising, suggests that behind John 1.29-45 there exists a historical reminiscence of Jesus being where John was located,<sup>22</sup> and that this time spent in the same location is a pointer towards Jesus' discipleship.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, it does seem probable that John 1.19-51 is based to some extent on a historical recollection of Jesus and John being in the same place at the same time. To begin with, this part of the Fourth Gospel is one that consists mainly of narrative, and we have already noted that such portions of this Gospel are more likely to be historically based than those that comprise Jesus' long discourses and dialogues.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, as I will argue below, the incidental nature of the time reference in John 1.39 – 'it was about the tenth hour' – suggests that a historical reminiscence is likely to be behind vv. 35-39.<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, support for historicity can also be found in John 10.40-42, where we are told that Jesus 'went away again to the other side of the Jordan to the place where John was first baptising', which on the level of the Fourth Gospel's text, at least, is the location of 1.19-51.<sup>26</sup> It may well be that a snippet of

---

<sup>21</sup> On the level of the Fourth Gospel's text, vv. 19-51 all take place at Βηθανία ('Bethany'). Some textual witnesses – C<sup>2</sup> Ψ<sup>c</sup> 083 f<sup>1,13</sup> 33 pm sy<sup>s,c</sup> sa; Or<sup>mss</sup> – read Βηθαβαρα ('Bethabara'), but Βηθανία is more likely the original. Not only does it have the strong support of P<sup>66</sup> P<sup>75</sup> Ⓝ B C, but it is easy to understand why scribes who knew of the Bethany near Jerusalem but no other would have been puzzled by the description 'on the other side of the Jordan' and would therefore have made an alteration. Furthermore, Origen (*Commentary on John* 6.40) states that nearly all the manuscripts known to him had Βηθανία. The precise location of Bethany (see n. 30) is not important for Meier's argument. Nor is whether in the course of handing down the tradition all the pericopes in vv. 19-51 were always connected with Bethany or not. What is key for Meier's argument is simply that Jesus first appears in the Fourth Gospel's narrative in a place other than Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem, and that it is a place where John is located.

<sup>22</sup> Why Meier chooses vv. 29-45 precisely is not clear. The following discussion will consider vv. 19-51 as a more suitable block of material. Meier is not actually explicit that Jesus' debut in John's location in the text suggests that historically he was where John was when he was, but, reading between the lines, this has to be his line of argument.

<sup>23</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.119-120. Similar is Dapaah, *Relationship*, 94. Cf. Goguel, *Au seuil*, 246. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 245, sees evidence in John 1.29, 33, 36 for historical contact between Jesus and John, but not for Jesus' discipleship. Meier actually states that 'the natural thrust of the narrative [in 1.29-45] suggests that [Jesus] is among the Baptist's disciples', but judging by what else he says on these pages (and on other pages too), he cannot mean that he believes Jesus is being presented as a disciple of John in the Fourth Gospel's text.

<sup>24</sup> See above, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> See below, pp. 136-137.

<sup>26</sup> Reference is also made in 3.26 to Jesus and John being together in chapter 1, but as we will see on p. 140, these words are likely to be the evangelist's composition.

the historical Jesus' movements has been preserved in 10.40-42,<sup>27</sup> and that, as they suggest, Jesus had been where John was (on the east side of the Jordan) earlier too. When all these points are taken into account, then, it is probably the case that behind at least some of vv. 19-51 we have a recollection of the historical Jesus and John being in the same location at the same time.

However, importantly, even if these verses do preserve a memory of this kind, there are reasons other than Jesus' discipleship that could easily account for this. Perhaps Jesus was in John's vicinity simply because this was the occasion on which he was baptised. We have already seen that John 1.32-34 seems to be based on a tradition of Jesus' baptism by John.<sup>28</sup> This may be no coincidence.

It is true that in vv. 32-34 John is presented looking back in time to the descent of the Spirit, which might suggest that the traditions in vv. 19-51 have to do with a time after the historical Jesus' baptism. It must be conceded too that the synoptists (Mark 1.9 // Matt 3.13; Luke 3.21-22; 4.1) inform us that Jesus was baptised in the Jordan,<sup>29</sup> whereas the events of John 1.19-51 are presented taking place in Bethany *on the other side of* (πέρρον) the Jordan, and this is unlikely to mean on the east bank of the Jordan.<sup>30</sup> However, even if the synoptists relate history as far as the location of Jesus' baptism is concerned, it is quite possible that in John 1 there is a historical recollection of that baptism, despite the fact that the arrangement of the pericopes in 1.19-51 now locates events east of the Jordan. All things considered, then, it has to be regarded as a possibility that behind the narrative of John 1.19-51 – or at least behind some of it – stands the historical baptism of Jesus by John, and that Jesus was

---

<sup>27</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 241-242, 277-278, thinks that in these verses the evangelist has probably used a tradition of Jesus ministering east of the Jordan.

<sup>28</sup> See above, pp. 109-110.

<sup>29</sup> A comparison of Luke 3.21, 22 with 4.1 (cf. 3.3) shows that Luke clearly implies that Jesus was baptised in the Jordan.

<sup>30</sup> This Bethany is to be distinguished from the village a few miles to the east of Jerusalem. For details on a location at the southern end of the Jordan valley that is believed by some to be the historical Bethany, see Rami Khouri, 'Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan' (*BAR* 31 [2005], 34-43). For an argument supporting its location much further north, to the east of the Sea of Galilee, see Rainer Riesner, 'Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) – Topography, Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel' (*TynB* 38 [1987] 29-63).

in John's location not because he was his disciple but simply to benefit from his baptising ministry.

Another possibility is that Jesus was actually conducting his ministry in the place where John was also ministering. I will argue in the next chapter that Jesus very probably performed a baptising ministry (that presumably included some preaching) before John was arrested.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps for some reason Jesus decided to minister for a time where John was located. There may also be other, obscure reasons why Jesus could have been in John's location other than resorting to the conclusion that it would have been because he was his disciple.

In view of all these possibilities, then, it seems unreasonable to regard the way that Jesus makes his initial appearance in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel in John's location as anything more than weak evidence to support the view that he was ever John's disciple.

### **5.3 The transfer of disciples from John to Jesus**

One topic that has received some attention from those who believe that Jesus was once John's disciple is the transfer of disciples from John to Jesus, portrayed in John 1.35-51 taking place at a time when John is still ministering. If disciples transferred their loyalty, that suggests, it is claimed, that Jesus had become well known to those disciples who transferred, the reason being that he himself had previously been John's disciple.<sup>32</sup>

We will begin this section by looking at what this passage has to say about a transfer of disciples. Attention will then be turned to a consideration of how likely it is that a historical transfer took place. I will argue that some disciples of John probably did

---

<sup>31</sup> See below, pp. 145-169, esp. 168-169.

<sup>32</sup> Those who argue in this way or similarly include Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 80-81; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 94-95; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 362. Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 92.

transfer allegiance to Jesus. Finally, we will look at how this affects the thesis of Jesus' discipleship. My conclusion will be that the transfer provides a little support, but no more, for the view that Jesus was once John's disciple.

#### (1) Transfer of disciples in the text

In John 1.35-51 Andrew, an unnamed individual,<sup>33</sup> Peter, Philip and Nathanael all become disciples of Jesus. Not only is this fairly clear in the passage itself, but the fact that Andrew (6.8; 12.22), Peter (6.68; 13.6, 8, etc.), Philip (6.5, 7; 12.21-22; 14.8-9) and Nathanael (21.2)<sup>34</sup> are all found later in the Fourth Gospel as Jesus' disciples proves beyond doubt that these four at least are presented becoming his disciples in chapter 1. As for the unnamed one, because he is paired with Andrew in vv. 35-40, and because he is surely included in the 'we' of 'we have found the Messiah' in v. 41, it is certain too that he is presented in this passage becoming Jesus' disciple.

The only two of these individuals who are certainly presented as John's disciples are Andrew (vv. 35-42) and the unnamed one (vv. 35-40). However, the fact that Peter is Andrew's brother (v. 41), and the brothers are far from their home in Bethsaida (v. 44),<sup>35</sup> makes it plausible that their reason for being away from home is likely to be the same one, i.e., that they are both John's disciples. Because we are told that Philip is also from Bethsaida, and it is noted specifically too that this was the town of Andrew and Peter (v. 44), it seems reasonable to imagine that he also is probably in the vicinity because he is John's disciple. Finally, that Nathanael knows Philip makes

---

<sup>33</sup> The identity of the unnamed disciple of John in v. 35 has been the subject of much speculation. Brown, *John*, 1.73, thinks he ought perhaps to be identified with the Beloved Disciple. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.194 n. 68, argues on the basis of a perceived parallel between vv. 40-41 and 44-45 that he should be identified with Philip. If v. 35 is historical, it is possible, depending on the historicity of various other matters, that *historically* Philip was the unnamed disciple. However, in the text as it stands Philip should not be identified with him, since Jesus' 'Follow me' in v. 43 looks very strange directed at someone who has already followed him previously (vv. 37-38, 40). For this reason Brown, *John*, 1.74, 81-82, rejects an identification with Philip. A majority of scholars also deny that Philip is the unnamed disciple. So, e.g., Moloney, 'Fourth Gospel', 51; Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> That chapter 21 is almost certainly an appendix to the Gospel is not relevant here, since the canonical text comprises 21 chapters, and chapter 1 needs to be understood in the light of all the other chapters.

<sup>35</sup> Regardless of Bethany's location, it is surely some distance from Bethsaida, a village close to the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

it more likely than not that he is being presented as a disciple of John too. The Fourth Gospel, then, clearly portrays the transfer of at least two disciples from John to Jesus, and probably as many as five.

(2) Is the transfer historical?

There is a fairly broad consensus among scholars that a historical transfer of disciples from John to Jesus is likely to have taken place.<sup>36</sup> However, occasionally critics disagree.

Josef Ernst argues that the evangelist's purpose in this passage is to portray John testifying to Jesus and for Jesus to be confessed as Messiah, and that this theology suggests that the entire passage is unhistorical. He also sees the fact that the Fourth Gospel's account of how Jesus gained his first disciples differs from the Synoptic account as a pointer against the historicity of the transfer.<sup>37</sup>

However, in reply to his first point: (i) There is no need to assume that on every occasion we find theology in the Fourth Gospel no historical tradition has been used as its basis. (ii) There is certainly no reason to believe that the presence of some theology in John 1.35-51 suggests that the *entire* passage originated with the evangelist, as he seems to think we must.

Ernst's second argument too is very weak. It is true that the Fourth Gospel's and the Synoptic accounts of how Jesus gained his first disciples are very dissimilar. In the Synoptics (Mark 1.16-20 pars.) Jesus' first disciples are fishermen at the Sea of Galilee, who live in Capernaum and have to break with their families and work, whereas in the Fourth Gospel they are John's disciples at Bethany, who move from one leader to another.

---

<sup>36</sup> So, e.g., Backhaus, "*Jüngerkreise*", 244; Brown, *John*, 1.77-78; Cullmann, 'Significance', 218; Gnllka, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 84; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 206; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 47-48; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.119-120; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 362; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 146, 187; Thompson, 'Historical Jesus', 28; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 91; Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 29.

However, there are two problems with his argument: (i) He seems simply to assume that the Synoptic account is historical. But the way that in Mark's narrative Peter, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee apparently meet Jesus for the first time and follow him instantly with scarcely a word being said looks historically questionable.<sup>38</sup> This may suggest that there are other elements within this account that could be unhistorical too. Importantly for our purposes here, it would be easy to understand if Mark or an earlier tradent, knowing that these men had worked as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, and knowing that much of Jesus' ministry had taken place in Galilee, had invented the 'when' and the 'where' of how they first became Jesus' disciples. (ii) Even if the 'when' and 'where' of how these men became Jesus' disciples in the Synoptic account *is* historical, it is not impossible that the Fourth Gospel's account could be essentially historical too. This would be the case if we were to imagine that the Synoptic call of the disciples refers to a later time than the Fourth Gospel's transfer, and that some of Jesus' disciples, after previously being such for a time, had gone back to their everyday lives. These difficulties mean that the Synoptic account cannot easily be used, therefore, to object to the historicity of the transfer.

It is true that the transfer seems to fit well with the evangelist's theology. First, one of his concerns is to present John as a witness to Jesus (see 1.7-8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3.26; 5.33, 36). Although it is not specifically said to be testimony, John's declaration in 1.36 (also in 1.29), 'Behold, the lamb of God!', is also best regarded as such. The evangelist presents this testimony procuring concrete results: Jesus gains new disciples. Second, another of his interests (discussed above) is to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus to John. Again, the transfer allows him to do this in concrete terms: disciples of John transfer their allegiance to Jesus (with John's encouragement), i.e., doubtless from an inferior to a superior leader.<sup>39</sup> However,

---

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.393-395; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 509 n. 96; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.194 n. 121; Moloney, 'Fourth Gospel', 49-50.

<sup>39</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120, believes that the evangelist would have been embarrassed that some of Jesus' first disciples were previously disciples of John, and that he would have included this in his Gospel reluctantly (similarly, Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions*, 54-55). But it surely suits his theology well. As soon as Jesus appears, disciples leave John (with his blessing) and move over to Jesus. The reader is certainly supposed to believe that the disciples have moved to someone superior. Besides, if



although we might imagine that these concerns of the evangelist have led to the creation of the transfer motif, there are in fact reasons for believing that a historical transfer of disciples from John to Jesus probably did take place:

(a) It is perhaps unlikely that the fourth evangelist, or an earlier tradent, would have invented the idea that some of Jesus' key disciples transferred their allegiance from John, since there may well have been Baptist sectarians – or others – who would have been able to refute this.<sup>40</sup>

(b) Even if the evangelist had no qualms about inventing names for the passage, we might expect him to have made Peter and Andrew, or Peter and the Beloved Disciple, the two disciples of v. 35. Having one who is never named in subsequent verses looks awkward and suggests the use of tradition. It is likewise difficult to envisage someone earlier in the line of tradition inventing a scenario in which one of the characters is a man who would become one of Jesus' circle of twelve, while the other remains unnamed. Lastly, the way Andrew is mentioned first, yet Peter is the most prominent figure among the disciples in the Fourth Gospel as a whole (as he is in the Synoptics),<sup>41</sup> also seems to count against invention.

(c) There is a striking example of what looks like an incidental time reference in this passage which may suggest that a historical event is being described.<sup>42</sup> In v. 39 we are told that Andrew and the unnamed disciple came and saw where Jesus was staying and that they stayed with him that day. The verse then concludes with the words: 'it was about the tenth hour'. Not only is a time reference unnecessary to make the theological points about discipleship that seem to be latent in the words of the dialogue in vv. 38-39, but if a symbolic sense were intended,<sup>43</sup> it is surprising to find it stated that this encounter took place at *about* (ὥς) the tenth hour.<sup>44</sup> It seems

---

he had been embarrassed about the transfer, we would expect him to have avoided any reference to it, just as he did with Jesus' baptism by John.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "*Jüngerreise*", 244, including n. 767.

<sup>41</sup> See Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 308-309.

<sup>42</sup> On unimportant data as a criterion of authenticity, see above, pp. 17-18.

<sup>43</sup> Backhaus, "*Jüngerreise*", 237, thinks that the number ten may be used here to refer to fulfilment.

<sup>44</sup> It cannot be argued that the fourth evangelist always precedes references to the hour of the day with ὥς, because although he does so in 1.39; 4.6 and 19.14, this is not the case in 4.52.

improbable, then, that this time reference has any symbolic significance as far as the theology of the Fourth Gospel is concerned. Because there is no good reason, either, for thinking that it is likely to have had a symbolic meaning at some stage prior to the composition of the Fourth Gospel, it makes sense to regard it as a probable historical reminiscence.<sup>45</sup>

Since the episode of vv. 35-39 is said to have taken place at this time, we must therefore take all the more seriously the possibility that this encounter did take place as described, or at least that the ‘bones’ of it did. Even if the exact words of the dialogue between Jesus and the two disciples in vv. 38-39 are unhistorical, it does not strain the imagination to suppose that the event which has been recalled in these verses is the occasion on which Andrew and another unnamed disciple of John became disciples of Jesus.

When all these points are taken into account, it seems likely historically that at a time when John’s ministry was still in progress there was a transfer of some of John’s disciples to Jesus, although more than a little uncertainty remains. If a transfer did take place, we are probably best to imagine that the men specifically mentioned in this passage – i.e., Andrew, the unnamed one, Peter, Philip<sup>46</sup> and Nathanael – all transferred, although it is possible that only some of them did so. On the other hand, it is quite plausible that other disciples of John transferred to Jesus too. Perhaps even some of Jesus’ disciples whose names are preserved for us in the NT – possibly even others who would become part of Jesus’ inner circle of twelve – were once in John’s circle.

### (3) Ramifications for the thesis of Jesus’ discipleship

A number of those scholars who accept a historical transfer of disciples from John to Jesus see it as a pointer towards Jesus’ discipleship. Some of these believe that Jesus would have to have spent time in the presence of the disciples who would transfer, in

---

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 81; Ekenberg, ‘Fourth Gospel’, 184; Brown, *John*, 1.75.

<sup>46</sup> Assuming that historically Philip should not be identified with the unnamed disciple; see n. 33.

order for them to have become acquainted with and impressed by him.<sup>47</sup> Others, although not so certain that time spent by Jesus with his future disciples would have been essential for the transfer to have taken place, nevertheless think that a stay of some length would have been beneficial for it.<sup>48</sup> All these scholars believe that if John's disciples had come to know Jesus, it would have been because he too was once a disciple of John. The transfer, it is argued, therefore supports the thesis of Jesus' discipleship.<sup>49</sup>

Again, we need to ask if this logic really holds. If disciples of John transferred allegiance to Jesus, does it really suggest that Jesus was once John's disciple? It would certainly be one explanation, but I think there are others too.

We noted in section 5.2 that one reason Jesus and John could have been in the same location at the same time is that Jesus may have been ministering where John was located. The same is true in connection with the transfer. Possibly the disciples who transferred had indeed got to know Jesus well, simply because he had been ministering a minute or two's walk from where John was based and they had heard him preach on a number of occasions. Or, perhaps they had had opportunity to listen to him preach when they were running errands for John.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of when and where they had heard him, they could have become impressed by him, more impressed than they were by John, and therefore have decided to transfer their allegiance. Alternatively, if Jesus limited himself to John's message (and baptism) at this time before John's arrest,<sup>51</sup> perhaps it was not a matter of being more impressed by Jesus but simply that they thought he could use some assistance, seeing that John had many helpers but he did not.

---

<sup>47</sup> So Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 362.

<sup>48</sup> Although they are very concise, this seems to be the position of Dapaah, *Relationship*, 94-95; and Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 80-81.

<sup>49</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 92, also believes that the transfer provides support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship, although he provides no rationale. Cf. Goguel, *Au seuil*, 249; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 350-351.

<sup>50</sup> See Matt 11.2 par.

<sup>51</sup> See above, pp. 98-99, and below, pp. 176-178.

Furthermore, if John saw Jesus as essentially performing John's own ministry and was in favour of what he was doing, he could surely have encouraged the transfer himself. Even if Jesus' ministry at this early stage went beyond John's, John may have believed that God was behind Jesus' work, perhaps even that Jesus was the coming one he had foretold. He may therefore have wanted to aid him by 'giving' him some of his disciples.

One other point to note is that John 1.35-51 clearly portrays Jesus meeting for the first time the disciples who would transfer. We ought not to rule out the possibility that a historical memory has been preserved here and that some or all of the disciples who transferred were indeed meeting Jesus for the first time when they did so. This is especially the case for Andrew and the unnamed disciple, since, as we saw above, the time reference in v. 39 is reason for believing especially that some of what is presented in vv. 35-39 may well be historical.

If a transfer did occur on the occasion that would-be disciples first met Jesus, it is unlikely that the disciples who transferred knew nothing of Jesus at the time. They may have heard him preach and decided to approach him to become his disciples. If John was in favour of the transfer and his disciples trusted his judgement, that too could have encouraged them to take this step. Importantly, if some of John's disciples transferred their allegiance to Jesus at the time they first met him, it becomes less likely that Jesus was ever a disciple of John himself.

The above discussion has shown that there are clearly a variety of possible scenarios that could account for a transfer of disciples from John to Jesus. It is certainly not necessary to resort to a theory of Jesus' discipleship in order to provide a reason for it. That said, if Jesus was John's disciple, this would be one way that the transfer could be satisfactorily explained. On balance, we should probably see the transfer as some support, albeit fairly minor, for the view that Jesus was once John's disciple.

## 5.4 John 3.26b

In John 3.26 some of John's disciples<sup>52</sup> come to him to inform him that Jesus is baptising. They refer to Jesus in v. 26b as 'he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan'. A few scholars believe that these words provide evidence for Jesus' discipleship.<sup>53</sup> However, those who do seem simply to assume, first, that the words of this clause are historical, and, second, that if Jesus spent time with John on the other side of the Jordan, it would have been for some time and it would have to have been as his disciple. In fact, this argument is full of flaws:

(a) It seems improbable that the evangelist used a tradition in composing v. 26b. It is true that the gist of verse 26, i.e., John's disciples telling him that Jesus is baptising, may well be historical, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.<sup>54</sup> However, it appears most natural to suppose that the clause in v. 26b originated with the evangelist,<sup>55</sup> and that in it he is helping his readers to get their bearings by tying in what is happening here in John 3 with what has already taken place in chapter 1.<sup>56</sup>

(b) Even if the evangelist did use some tradition when he composed this clause, it is highly unlikely that we can take the exact words as historical.

(c) If we *were* to take the exact words 'he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan' as historical, they would actually surely be a pointer *against* Jesus' discipleship: John's disciples do not say 'he who was with *us*' but 'he who was with

---

<sup>52</sup> With most exegetes, I find it more natural to take John's disciples – referred to explicitly in v. 25 – as the subject of ἦλθον ('they came') and εἶπεν ('they said') in v. 26a, than to suppose that these verbs are being used impersonally.

<sup>53</sup> So Badke, 'Was Jesus a Disciple?', 202; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 227; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 361-362. Murphy-O'Connor is not actually explicit that he specifically sees this clause as evidence for Jesus' discipleship, but the fact that he uses the term 'assistant' to refer to Jesus in his relationship to John on p. 362, and the term 'senior disciple' on p. 371, suggests that he does. Michel Cambe, 'Jésus Baptise et Cesse de Baptiser en Judée: Jean 3/22 - 4/3' (*ETR* 53 [1978], 98-102), 99, also seems to see a connotation of Jesus' discipleship in John 3.26b, although his concern is with the Fourth Gospel's text rather than history.

<sup>54</sup> See below, pp. 161-167.

<sup>55</sup> So Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 283-284.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 259.

*you*', which is much more easily understood to imply that Jesus had not been John's disciple.

(d) It would be unwarranted to assume from the 'with you' that the time of contact implied would have been substantial.<sup>57</sup>

(e) There is also a groundless assumption that any time spent in the same location would have to have been because Jesus was John's disciple.

When all these problems are added up, it becomes clear that John 3.26b has no real bearing on whether or not Jesus was ever John's disciple.

## 5.5 John 3.30

Finally, M.-É. Boismard believes that there would have been a play on words in the Aramaic underlying John 3.30 that alluded to Jesus' discipleship.<sup>58</sup> The Greek of this text runs as follows: ἐκεῖνον δεῖ αὐξάνειν, ἐμὲ δὲ ἐλαττοῦσθαι, and is translated 'He must become greater but I must become less'. Boismard believes that the Aramaic would have contained the word ܒܪܐ, <sup>59</sup> which meant both 'great' and 'master', so that in Aramaic when John says 'He must become greater (using a construction that included ܒܪܐ ) but I must become less', it is implied too that Jesus must now swap places with John and become his master.<sup>60</sup> Although Boismard is correct that ܒܪܐ could mean 'great' and 'master', when the weaknesses with his theory are added up it becomes very shaky:

---

<sup>57</sup> So Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 259. Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 227, believes we can deduce from 3.23-27 (she must primarily have 3.26b in mind) that Jesus would have spent a fairly long period of time ('längere Zeit') with John. (Cf. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 151.) There is no justification for this view.

<sup>58</sup> M.-É. Boismard, 'Les Traditions Johanniques concernant le Baptiste' (*RB* 70 [1963], 5-42), 29.

<sup>59</sup> He actually cites the determined-state form ܒܪܐܐ

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Lohmeyer, *Johannes der Täufer*, 27 n. 2.

(a) Although the vocabulary and style of John 3.30 suggest it is more likely to be traditional than a composition of the evangelist,<sup>61</sup> it is not certain that this saying ever had an Aramaic basis (whether as a saying of the historical John or not).<sup>62</sup>

(b) Even if the saying had an Aramaic basis, it is possible that instead of כָּךְ a verb could have been used. The fact that we find the Greek ἀΰξάνειν rather than μείζων γίνεσθαι (i.e., the Greek infinitive is based on a verb rather than on an adjectival construct) could possibly be some support for this. If an Aramaic verb was used, it may well not have had the capacity for producing a play on words. The common verb ܟܕܟܕܟܐ, meaning ‘become great’ or ‘grow’,<sup>63</sup> is the most likely candidate, but it is improbable that this could ever have meant ‘become a master’.

(c) Even if כָּךְ was used, Boismard is wrong to claim that there must have been a play on words. Simply to say ‘He must become greater but I must become less’ makes perfect sense on its own, and any potential that this sentence had to contain a play on words could easily be coincidental.

(d) Even if כָּךְ was used and it contained a play on words, and the saying implied that in addition to becoming greater than John Jesus needed to become his master as well, it does not necessarily follow that Jesus had previously been John’s disciple. This is true even despite the fact that the second half of the saying speaks of John now becoming less in contrast to Jesus’ becoming greater.

When all these obstacles are taken into account, we should see no more than weak evidence for Jesus’ discipleship in this text.

---

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 283.

<sup>62</sup> Boismard himself does not actually state whether he believes that the saying stems from the historical John, but he gives the impression that he thinks this is probable.

<sup>63</sup> See Dan 4.8(11), 17(20), 19(22). See too Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 173.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Examination of the above issues has shown that none of them provides any strong reason for believing that Jesus was ever John's disciple. The fact that in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel Jesus makes his debut appearance in John's vicinity is at best weak evidence for his discipleship. That some of John's disciples probably transferred their allegiance to Jesus is rather more important. Certainly, if Jesus was once John's disciple, the transfer would make sense. However, it can also quite easily be explained without resorting to a theory of Jesus' discipleship, and we should see no more than fairly minor support for his discipleship in this issue. The perceived evidence in John 3.26b – 'he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan' – is virtually non-existent. Finally, the supposed play on words in 'He must become greater but I must become less' is no more than weak evidence for Jesus' discipleship.

So far, then, we have not found any significant evidence that Jesus was ever John's disciple. Let us now move on to look at the important topic of Jesus baptising to see what inferences we can draw from it.



## 6. Jesus Baptising

The most common argument used by those who accept the thesis that Jesus was once John's disciple is that he performed a baptising ministry. In fact, a majority of scholars believe that Jesus baptised, and most of these see his baptising as support for his discipleship.<sup>1</sup>

Whether Jesus baptised is certainly an issue that has potential to shed light on the question of his discipleship, and we will therefore examine it relatively fully. Because those who accept that Jesus performed a baptising ministry have generally been too hasty to conclude that his baptising automatically implies that he was once John's disciple, the analysis in this chapter will proceed in four stages:

(1) We will ask simply if Jesus baptised. I will argue that it is highly likely that he did.

(2) We will ask whether he performed a baptism that held the same significance as the baptism John administered, or one that meant something different. I will argue that he probably performed John's rite of baptism.

(3) We will ask, if Jesus performed John's baptism, how strongly this would support the view that he was once John's disciple. I will argue that it would be much less support than scholars generally recognise.

(4) We will take into account the degree of doubt over whether Jesus did in fact perform John's rite of baptism, in order to draw an overall conclusion. This will be that a consideration of Jesus' baptising ministry provides real but fairly weak support for the view that he was once John's disciple.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a list of scholars who see Jesus' baptising ministry as support for his discipleship, see n. 125.

Of the five sections that follow, the second has to do with whether Jesus would have ceased baptising early in his public ministry or continued until close to the time of his death. Although this section does not form part of the logical progression of the chapter, it has a bearing on whether or not Jesus performed a baptism of the same significance as John's, so it will precede discussion of that.

## 6.1 Did Jesus baptise?

There are a number of arguments that have been used to support or contradict the view that the historical Jesus performed a baptising ministry.<sup>2</sup> However, the key arguments concern the passages John 3.22-26 and 4.1-3, and we will therefore concentrate our attention on these, since other considerations are insignificant in comparison.<sup>3</sup> It is worth setting out the texts, which are as follows:<sup>4</sup>

3.22 Μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν καὶ ἐκεῖ διέτριβεν μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐβάπτισεν.

---

<sup>2</sup> With varying degrees of certainty, the following critics believe that Jesus baptised: Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 13-15; Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 110; idem, 'Jesus and Elisha', 88; Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism*, 36-40; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 96-101; Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 286, 292-293, 301; idem, *Founder of Christianity*, 124-125; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 351, 606; R. T. France, 'Jesus the Baptist?' (in J. B. Green & M. Turner, eds., *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 94-111), passim; Gnlika, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 84-85; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 250-251; idem, *Life of Jesus*, 271-275; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 204-207; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45-46; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', passim; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120-127, 166-167; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 363, 365-372; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 183-184; idem, 'Elijah, John and Jesus', 271-272; Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.411; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153-154; Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 59-60; Taylor, *Immerser*, 294-299; Thompson, 'Historical Jesus'; Webb, 'John the Baptist', 219-223; idem, 'Jesus' Baptism', 302-305; and Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 53-55. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1962), 67-72, accepts that Jesus authorised a baptising ministry, although he thinks it may have been carried out by his disciples alone, as John 4.2 states. Those who think that Jesus never baptised include Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 263-265, 333; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 449, 453 (for an explanation of what he means on these pages, see xxxi); Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 111-113; Enslin, 'John and Jesus', 8; Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 17-18; and apparently Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 157 n. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Every scholar, of whom I know, who believes that Jesus baptised, does so mainly on the basis of these passages.

<sup>4</sup> I have followed the text of Nestle-Aland. We will not consider any variant readings at this stage.

**23** Ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλείμ, ὅτι ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ, καὶ παρεγίνοντο καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο· **24** οὐπω γὰρ ἦν βεβλημένος εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν ὁ Ἰωάννης.

**25** Ἐγένετο οὖν ζήτησις ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν Ἰωάννου μετὰ Ἰουδαίου περὶ καθαρισμοῦ. **26** καὶ ἦλθον πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας, ἴδε οὗτος βαπτίζει καὶ πάντες ἔρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

**4.1** Ὡς οὖν ἔγνω ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἤκουσαν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι ὅτι Ἰησοῦς πλείονας μαθητὰς ποιεῖ καὶ βαπτίζει ἢ Ἰωάννης **2** – καίτοιγε Ἰησοῦς αὐτὸς οὐκ ἐβάπτισεν ἄλλ’ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ – **3** ἀφῆκεν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πάλιν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν.

These passages can be translated:<sup>5</sup>

**3.22** After these things Jesus and his disciples came into the territory of Judea and there he spent time with them and baptised.

**23** Now John was also baptising in Aenon near Salim, because there was a lot of water there, and they came and were baptised. **24** For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

**25** Then a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about purification. **26** And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he is baptising and everyone is coming to him.’

**4.1** So when Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John **2** – although Jesus himself did not baptise, but his disciples – **3** he left Judea and went back again to Galilee.

There is a very broad consensus that these texts contain traditional material which the evangelist received.<sup>6</sup> A large majority of scholars, too, believe that the tradition he

---

<sup>5</sup> In some places the translation given depends on matters to be discussed later in the chapter.

received here included tradition of Jesus baptising, and most of these, as I have mentioned, think that this is an authentic tradition. In what follows, I will argue that behind these passages there is indeed a tradition of Jesus baptising that the evangelist received, and also that the tradition is very probably authentic.

The first point to note about these verses is that 3.22 and 26 unambiguously present Jesus himself baptising.<sup>7</sup> He alone is the subject of the verb βαπτίζω in each of these verses, and even to suppose that his disciples might have joined him in his baptising work would be to go beyond what the text has to say.<sup>8</sup> Given the clear and unqualified nature of this presentation, before proceeding further, we need to know what to make of the abrupt claim in 4.2 (as it qualifies 4.1) that it was not actually Jesus who baptised but his disciples who did so. It is no surprise to find many scholars arguing that 4.2 did not originate with the evangelist but rather with someone who disliked the idea of Jesus baptising and decided to alter the text that he received.<sup>9</sup> This appears to be the best solution, for the following reasons:

(a) Most importantly, 4.2 seems patently to contradict 3.22 and 26, just mentioned, as well as the adjacent 4.1. Commenting specifically on the relationship of 4.2 to 4.1, C. H. Dodd cogently remarks, ‘it is difficult to believe that any writer would have made a statement and contradicted it in the same breath, to the hopeless ruin of his sentence’.<sup>10</sup> Nor can it be argued that the evangelist is employing some form of double meaning here. As John Meier notes, ‘This flat contradiction is not on the

---

<sup>6</sup> Most critics also believe that some of the material in these verses originated with the evangelist.

<sup>7</sup> The use of the iterative imperfect ἐβαπτίζεν (‘baptised’) in 3.22, which is coordinate with the verb διέτριβεν (‘spent time’), itself a (descriptive) imperfect, portrays him baptising over a period of time. Cf. Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 253.

<sup>8</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120-121.

<sup>9</sup> Critics who think that 4.2 was not written by the evangelist include Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.121-122; Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 261-262; Taylor, *Immerser*, 193 n. 99, 295-296; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153; Linnemann, ‘Jesus und der Täufer’, 226; Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 285; Gnilka, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 84-85; Hollenbach, ‘Conversion of Jesus’, 205 n. 27; Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.422; and Brown, *John*, 1.164. Those who believe it originated with the evangelist include Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 351; Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 157 n. 54; idem, *Giovanni e Gesù: storia di un antagonismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), 57-58; Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 111-112; Enslin, ‘John and Jesus’, 8; Carson, *John*, 215; Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 98; and, seemingly, Chilton, *Jesus’ Baptism*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 285. Cf. Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 262; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.121-122.

same level as the various ambiguous and ironic statements of the Fourth Gospel that play with double meaning'.<sup>11</sup>

D. A. Carson sees 4.2 as a parenthesis such as the evangelist is in the habit of inserting.<sup>12</sup> He cites 3.24; 4.8 and 4.9b as examples. However, there is a great difference between 4.2 and these texts, in that none of these others contradicts another part of the Gospel. 4.2 is indeed parenthetical, but not in nearly the same way. Craig Blomberg believes that 4.2 is similar to 1 Cor 1.16, where Paul corrects his previous statement that at Corinth he baptised only Crispus and Gaius (v. 14) by stating that he baptised Stephanas' household too.<sup>13</sup> But again there is a significant difference between the two examples. In 1 Cor Paul is just adding a name to a list; in 4.2 what is stated is much more noticeably different from what has gone before.

(b) The vocabulary of this verse also lends support to the view that it did not originate with the evangelist. The word *καίτοιγε* ('although') is found nowhere else in the Fourth Gospel, the letters of John or – if it should be viewed as part of the same, 'Johannine' stream of early Christianity – in Revelation.<sup>14</sup>

It therefore seems highly probable that 4.2 stems from someone who was unhappy at the thought of Jesus baptising and decided to alter the text he received.<sup>15</sup> Because *καίτοιγε* is not found elsewhere in the Johannine writings, yet the redactor(s) of the Gospel (who belonged to the same community as the evangelist) tended to use vocabulary that coincided with that of the evangelist,<sup>16</sup> it might be thought that 4.2 was added by a later copyist. However, there are no textual variant readings of any importance in this verse,<sup>17</sup> and on balance this makes it more likely that the redactor

---

<sup>11</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.195 n. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Carson, *John*, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerreise", 261-262; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.121-122, 195 n. 73.

<sup>15</sup> The exact reason for his unhappiness is not important here.

<sup>16</sup> See above, pp. 11-12 n. 31.

<sup>17</sup> No variants are cited in Nestle-Aland or in *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*.

who composed it was indeed a member of the community that penned the Fourth Gospel.<sup>18</sup>

For a verse to be a later addition does not necessarily mean that it is unhistorical. Sometimes the motive for adding to a text might be knowledge that the text is historically inaccurate. However, it seems rather implausible to imagine Jesus, the authoritative leader of a group,<sup>19</sup> sitting back and having his disciples do all the baptising. The crude manner in which 4.2 follows what has gone before also gives the impression of a rather hastily thought out improvisation. It seems very unlikely, then, that Jesus' disciples alone performed a baptism that he authorised, and from this point on we will discount 4.2 as a relevant historical source.<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting, however, that even if we were to imagine that Jesus' disciples alone baptised under his supervision, the arguments and conclusions in the rest of this chapter would remain essentially unchanged.

Let us move on, then, to examine the evidence for the historicity of Jesus baptising in these passages. The first three points below have to do with perceived objections to historicity. As we will see, none of these carries much weight. Points (4)-(8) will then set out the much stronger case that can be made to support the essential historicity of Jesus' baptising ministry as it is found in these verses.

#### (1) Comparison with Mark 1.14

In Mark 1.14 (// Matt 4.12, 17) we are told that after John had been imprisoned, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the good news of God.<sup>21</sup> Occasionally scholars claim that

---

<sup>18</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.121-122; Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 285; and Brown, *John*, 1.164, all believe that the redactor was a member of this community. (None of the other authors mentioned in n. 9, who believe that 4.2 did not originate with the evangelist, is clear that he or she believes that the redactor was not a member of this community.)

<sup>19</sup> On Jesus' authoritativeness, see below, pp. 183-184.

<sup>20</sup> In line with his overall thesis, Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 96-99, believes that Jesus' disciples alone baptised. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 67-72; and Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 226, 231, consider it a possibility.

<sup>21</sup> Because Matthew appears to have used Mark here (so, e.g., Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.375, 386; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 59, 61; and a large majority of scholars), my observations will be limited to the Marcan text. In Luke 3.20 too John's imprisonment is mentioned before Jesus'

this text should lead us to question the historicity of Jesus' baptising ministry:<sup>22</sup> we know from Mark, so the argument goes, that Jesus began ministering after John's arrest, but in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' baptising ministry takes place before John has been arrested; hence the historical Jesus never baptised. In reality, however, Mark 1.14 causes very little trouble for the thesis that Jesus baptised, for two reasons:

(a) It is far from certain that what Mark tells us in 1.14 is historically accurate: (i) There is considerable doubt about whether he used a tradition to form this verse. If Mark believed that at least a large majority of Jesus' ministry took place after John's arrest and that Jesus ministered mainly in Galilee, it is not difficult to imagine that he has composed 1.14 in the light of 1.2-3, 7-8, which refer to John's chronological priority.<sup>23</sup> (ii) Even if Mark used a tradition in 1.14, it could have been one that had already been invented for similar reasons. (iii) Mark 1.14 sits uncomfortably with John 1.43-2.12, which presents Jesus ministering (in some sense) in Galilee prior to John's arrest, and with 4.1, 3, which has him travelling to Galilee at a time when his ministry is already underway, and, again, before John has been arrested. These geographical notes in the Fourth Gospel ought to be taken seriously as traditions which may be historically based. If they are essentially authentic, they would therefore cause some difficulty for accepting the historical accuracy of Mark 1.14.

(b) Even if what Mark tells us is historically accurate, there is still no great need to see this text as an obstacle to accepting the essential historicity of the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus' baptising ministry. To be sure, 1.14 most naturally implies that Jesus never ministered before John's arrest. However, Mark is very brief here, and all he really tells us is that in Galilee Jesus did not preach the good news of God (and kingdom of God – v. 15) until after John was arrested.<sup>24</sup> He is not explicit

---

ministry commences, but, as I have already observed (p. 78 n. 34), it is doubtful that Luke is telling us when the imprisonment took place. In any case, Luke seems just to have used Mark as his source; see, e.g., Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.476.

<sup>22</sup> Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 17-18, seems to think it should.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Flusser, *Sage from Galilee*, 23-25; Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969; ET of *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959]), 38-44.

<sup>24</sup> Strictly speaking, he does not even tell us that Jesus had not proclaimed the good news of God in Galilee at an earlier time, although this is very strongly implied.

that prior to John's arrest Jesus never ministered in a way that did not involve the good news of God/kingdom of God. (Admittedly, this is of limited relevance for our purposes here, since it is very unclear whether or not Jesus would have combined his baptising ministry with proclamation of the good news/kingdom.)<sup>25</sup> More importantly, he is not explicit that Jesus did not minister outside Galilee before John was arrested, and the Fourth Gospel, of course, locates Jesus' baptising ministry in Judea, not Galilee. The upshot is that even if Mark 1.14 is historically accurate, there is no strong reason for seeing it as an obstacle to accepting the basic historicity of Jesus' baptising ministry as it is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

For two reasons, then, Mark 1.14 is not a text that should cause us to believe that the presentation of Jesus baptising in the Fourth Gospel is inauthentic.<sup>27</sup>

## (2) Perceived reasons for the invention of Jesus baptising

Some critics have argued that the evangelist has created the references to Jesus baptising in these passages for theological purposes:

(a) There are those who claim that these references are likely to have been invented in order to portray Jesus baptising more effectively than John (see 3.26; 4.1), and thus as superior.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> See below, pp. 176-177; also above, pp. 98-99.

<sup>26</sup> Most scholars recognise this. So, e.g., Goguel, *Au seuil*, 241-242; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 96, 98; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 221; Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 80; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 69. Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 17; Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 149; and apparently Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.117-118, however, think that Mark 1.14 cannot be reconciled with the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>27</sup> Some critics think that Mark 1.14 par. itself provides evidence for Jesus' discipleship. Goguel, *Au seuil*, 241-242 (cf. *Life of Jesus*, 271), believes that to form 1.14 Mark probably used a tradition which supposed that Jesus stayed near John to listen to his preaching. (Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 65-66, takes a similar position. Cf. Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 14-15.) However, even if the chronology in Mark 1.14 is historically accurate, there is no need to infer from this that before John's arrest Jesus would have been with him, especially since, when the reader last heard of Jesus (v. 13), he was in the wilderness and not with John. If Mark 1.14 is historically accurate, the most we can say about this verse is that it does not cause any real problem for believing that the presentation of Jesus baptising in John 3-4 is based on authentic tradition.

<sup>28</sup> So Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 263; Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 18 (cf. 'Johannes der Täufer' [1997], 172-175, esp. 175); Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 111.



It is true that the evangelist seems consciously to have used Jesus' baptising ministry to demonstrate his superiority to John:<sup>29</sup> in 4.1 (cf. 3.26) he is said to be baptising with greater success than John. However, first, prior to this point in the Gospel Jesus' superiority to John has already been demonstrated in two ways: in 1.15, 30 (cf. 8.58) we are told of his pre-existence, and in 1.33 stands the contrast between John's baptism in water and Jesus' superior baptism in the Holy Spirit. It seems unlikely that the evangelist would have felt it necessary to invent a major feature of Jesus' life in order to demonstrate something he has already demonstrated perfectly adequately. Even if he knew of no other tradition that he could use, and was determined to refer to Jesus' superiority to John again, could he not simply have referred once more to the pre-existence motif or the contrast in baptisms?

Second, even if the evangelist was set on inventing something that demonstrated Jesus' superiority, it is very implausible that he would have invented Jesus performing a water baptism. In 1.33, as we have just noted, the relatively lowly baptism of John in water has been contrasted with Jesus' superior baptism in the Holy Spirit. In this text Jesus' superiority consists precisely in the fact that he baptises in something *other than and superior to* water. There is no question that, in the light of this, to find Jesus now performing a water baptism is strange and unexpected. If the evangelist wanted to create a scenario in which Jesus appeared superior to John, there must have been numerous other more 'natural' ways of accomplishing this. The evangelist may have invented Jesus' baptising *success* vis-à-vis John, since receiving a tradition of Jesus baptising would have given him an opportunity to do so, but it is highly unlikely that he would have felt any need to invent Jesus' baptising ministry itself. Instead of imagining that Jesus' baptising ministry was invented to demonstrate his superiority, then, a much easier solution is simply that the evangelist found Jesus baptising in his tradition.

(b) Knut Backhaus thinks that another reason for inventing Jesus' baptising ministry could have been to allow John to testify to him, as he does in 3.27-30.<sup>30</sup> However, in

---

<sup>29</sup> Contra Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 222-226.

<sup>30</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 263. Most scholars believe that vv. 31-36 are supposed to be understood as a comment of the evangelist.

this Gospel John has already managed to testify to Jesus perfectly well a number of times (1.15, 26-27, 29-34, 36), and, again, crucially, if the evangelist really felt it was necessary to invent a further testimony, there are surely many ways of doing this that he would have found preferable to an invention of Jesus baptising.<sup>31</sup> Once more, it is much easier to suppose that he has simply made use of a tradition.

(c) Josef Ernst believes that the evangelist uses Jesus' baptising partly as a symbolic anticipation ('symbolische Vorwegnahme') of Christian baptism, and that this is a further reason for seeing it as a creation.<sup>32</sup>

It is true that in the nearby 3.5 there exists a reference to being begotten (or possibly born) of water. However, it is not certain that the phrase 'of water' (ἐξ ὕδατος) originated with the evangelist rather than a later redactor.<sup>33</sup> More importantly, even if ἐξ ὕδατος originated with the evangelist and the verse alludes, as does seem highly probable, to Christian baptism, it is unlikely that anticipating Christian baptism was an interest of his in 3.22-4.3. Firstly, the way that Jesus' and John's baptisms are juxtaposed in 3.22-23 and 4.1 most naturally suggests that the reader is expected to see Jesus' baptising ministry as having the same significance as John's. Secondly, that John's disciples are aggrieved or puzzled by Jesus baptising,<sup>34</sup> and that John defends Jesus' action (3.26-30), makes Jesus' baptism look more like John's rite than a different one. Although the fact that Jesus and John are not portrayed acting in common might seem to point in the opposite direction,<sup>35</sup> on balance the easiest way to understand the presentation of Jesus baptising in the text of John 3-4 is therefore as a performance of the baptism of John. This makes an anticipation of Christian

---

<sup>31</sup> So Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 18. Lupieri, *Giovanni e Gesù*, 57, believes that the Fourth Gospel actually presents Christian baptism being instituted ('istituito') by Jesus here, although he does not use this to argue that the historical Jesus did not baptise. Cf. Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Again, I have in mind a redactor who was a member of the community that penned the Fourth Gospel, although whether he was or not is unimportant here; the relevant question for our purposes is simply whether this phrase might be an addition to an earlier text. Brown, *John*, 1.141-144, is undecided whether the phrase stems from a redactor (who was a member the community behind the Fourth Gospel) or not. Both Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.369; and Barrett, *St John*, 208, both hold that it originated with the evangelist, however.

<sup>34</sup> As I have already noted, with most critics, I find it more natural to take John's disciples – referred to explicitly in v. 25 – as the subject of ἦλθον ('they came') and εἶπεν ('they said') in v. 26a, than to suppose that these verbs are being used impersonally.

<sup>35</sup> See also below, pp. 178-179.

baptism unlikely. Furthermore, even if the evangelist did, improbably, have an interest in anticipating Christian baptism at this point in his Gospel, as we will see in (4)-(8) below, the specifics of the relevant verses lead us strongly to believe that he would have used traditional material of Jesus baptising to do so.

(d) Finally, Backhaus has seen what he believes is another reason for thinking that the evangelist invented a baptising ministry for Jesus, in a theory developed by Michel Cambe.<sup>36</sup> Cambe's idea is essentially that (i) in 1.33 baptism in water and in the Holy Spirit are in opposition; (ii) in 3.5 in a reference to Christian baptism, water and the Holy Spirit go together; and (iii) in 3.22-4.3 having Jesus, who is from above, perform baptism in water is a kind of intermediate stage between (i) and (ii). Although Cambe himself does not use his schema to argue that the historical Jesus did not baptise, and simply refers to what he sees in the Fourth Gospel's text, Backhaus does take the extra step.

This all seems very unconvincing. Quite apart from the point mentioned above that ἐξ ὕδατος in 3.5 could have originated with a later redactor, the whole theory seems more than a little obscure. In any case, once again, even if such an idea *was* in the evangelist's mind, he appears to have used a tradition of Jesus baptising to make his point.

There is no good reason, then, for believing that the fourth evangelist invented a baptising ministry by Jesus. The simpler solution is always that he found Jesus baptising in his tradition.

(3) The silence elsewhere about a baptising ministry by Jesus

Backhaus claims that if the historical Jesus baptised, we would expect the early church to have made use of that fact aetiologically to explain its own baptism, but there is no evidence that it ever did so.<sup>37</sup> However, if Jesus baptised for only a short

---

<sup>36</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 264-265. See Cambe, 'Jésus Baptise', 100-102.

<sup>37</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 263.

period at the beginning of his public ministry as I will argue is likely in the next section, we would probably not expect this to have been used to provide a rationale for Christian baptism, for several reasons:

(a) It is not impossible that some early Christian writers (including one or more of the synoptists) might have been unaware of a short baptising ministry by Jesus.<sup>38</sup> We ought not simply to assume that early Christian authors would have been well informed about all areas of the historical Jesus' life.

(b) We might imagine that many early Christians who knew that Jesus baptised would have been embarrassed about the idea, and would have omitted any reference to this if they were able to.<sup>39</sup> Embarrassment is likely to have arisen for several reasons: (i) It might have seemed as if Jesus was meekly following John's lead (this would be especially so if Jesus' baptising held the same significance as John's). (ii) There could have been a concern that Jesus would appear to have been in competition with John.<sup>40</sup> (iii) Jesus' role might seem to have become confused with that of his forerunner. (iv) That Jesus, the baptiser in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1.8 pars.), had baptised in water might also have seemed to lessen his importance.

(c) Early Christians may have been embarrassed about using aetiologically something that Jesus had made a conscious decision to stop doing. Would they have wanted to use Jesus' baptising practice as an example, when he had given this up so early in his mission?

---

<sup>38</sup> So Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 221.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.122; Taylor, *Immerser*, 297; Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 13. Although many early Christians are likely to have been embarrassed by the idea of Jesus performing a water baptism, the fourth evangelist, for one, appears not to have been. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120-123, believes that the evangelist would have found this tradition embarrassing, yet included it in his Gospel because it was so deeply rooted in the traditions he received. However, the evangelist could surely easily have omitted any reference to Jesus baptising if he had been troubled about it, without weakening any of his arguments. Besides, he seems to have received a tradition of Jesus' baptism by John and to have omitted that (see above, pp. 109-110, including n. 127), so why not omit anything else that he found embarrassing too? As we will see below, it is not that the tradition of Jesus baptising is embarrassing that points most strongly to its authenticity, but simply its strangeness.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.122.

(d) Even if Jesus' baptising ministry caused no embarrassment, a short baptising ministry by Jesus may have seemed too odd or too long before Easter/Pentecost.

(e) For most early Christians, providing an aetiology for Christian baptism was probably not something they had any interest in anyway, since in the early church, as far as we are aware, there seems to have been a consensus that Christians should be baptised.

Backhaus' argument therefore does not amount to much.

In fact, quite apart from the issue of providing a rationale for Christian baptism, if Jesus baptised for just a short time, the absence of a record of his baptising ministry anywhere else in any context should not cause any surprise. Firstly, as I have just mentioned in connection with Backhaus' aetiology argument, early Christians might not have known about a short baptising ministry, and, even if they did know, it may have been something that embarrassed them and that they therefore would not have wished to include in their texts. Secondly, quite apart from potential embarrassment, the agenda of early Christian writers in itself makes it understandable that any brief period of baptising activity by Jesus would have been passed over. The Synoptics, for example, clearly have very little interest in the time before John's arrest, when a short baptising ministry would (at least mostly) have taken place.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the authors of the remaining NT books by and large had pressing concerns which would probably have made an obscure baptising ministry by Jesus seem unimportant. Thirdly, regarding Josephus' note on Jesus in *Ant.* 18.63-64,<sup>42</sup> not only is it unlikely that Josephus would have known about a short baptising ministry, if there was one, but even if he did know, given the few words that he expends on Jesus, we would not expect him to mention such a marginal part of Jesus' public work.

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 60; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 221; Dibelius, *Urchristliche Überlieferung*, 111; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971; ET of *Das Evangelium des Johannes* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964, 1966]), 168.

<sup>42</sup> On the *Testimonium Flavianum*, see above, p. 13 n. 34.

For several reasons, then, the fact that sources other than the Fourth Gospel are silent about a baptising ministry by Jesus should not cause us to suspect that the historical Jesus never baptised.

#### (4) The strangeness of Jesus baptising

I argued above that the reasons given for believing that the fourth evangelist invented Jesus' baptising ministry are unconvincing. I also argued that the contrast between John's baptism in water and Jesus' baptism in the Holy Spirit in John 1.33 is strong evidence that the evangelist found Jesus performing a water baptism in his tradition: the way that in this text Jesus' greatness consists precisely in his baptising in something other than and superior to water makes it very unlikely that the evangelist would have created the motif of Jesus baptising.

In fact, the oddity of Jesus performing a water baptism not only strongly suggests that the evangelist used a tradition, but also that this tradition is authentic. It is difficult to conceive of any point that an earlier Christian – from whom however directly or indirectly the evangelist received traditional material – wanted to make that would have led to the invention of this idea.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the logion contrasting John's baptism in water and Jesus' baptism in the Holy Spirit that seems such an obstacle for the invention of a baptising ministry by Jesus is in fact found in all four canonical Gospels (Mark 1.8 // Matt 3.11 // Luke 3.16 // John 1.33), making it likely that this tradition circulated widely in the early church. We have noted too that a baptismal ministry by Jesus may have caused his role to be confused with that of his forerunner, John. Importantly, John as the forerunner of Jesus is another motif that seems to have been widespread in the early church (Mark 1.2-3 // Matt 11.10; 3.3 // Luke 7.27; 3.4-6 // John 1.23). Finally, we have seen that Jesus baptising had the danger of making it appear as if he subserviently followed John's lead, or as if he was in competition with John.

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120-123; Taylor, *Immerser*, 296; Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 13; idem, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 52.

The way that the tradition of Jesus baptising conflicts so noticeably with other well-established early Christian traditions, then, and that some other way of engaging in theology or apologetics was surely always readily available, must be seen as strong pointers towards the authenticity of this tradition.<sup>44</sup>

(5) 3.22

The strangeness of Jesus baptising is certainly the most important reason for believing that he performed a baptising ministry, but there are other factors that support this too. For a start, the vocabulary of v. 22 – a verse which tells us that Jesus baptised – includes a number of words that are unusual when compared to the rest of the Fourth Gospel, something which may suggest the use of traditional material. This Gospel has the word Ἰουδαία seven times, but elsewhere it is always a noun (‘Judea’).<sup>45</sup> Here, however, it is used as an adjective which modifies γῆ. Similarly, γῆ itself is found eleven times,<sup>46</sup> but never with the sense ‘territory’, as in 3.22.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the verb διατρίβω (‘to spend time’) is found in the Fourth Gospel only here and possibly in 11.54, although μένω may be the correct reading in that verse. Furthermore, the only words in the verse that are characteristic of this Gospel, and are therefore those that we can pinpoint as likely to have originated with the evangelist, are μετὰ ταῦτα (‘after these things’) and ἐκεῖ (‘there’).<sup>48</sup>

In its vocabulary, then, v. 22 shows no real signs of being a creation of the evangelist, and may even contain some indications that it is traditional.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, the more

---

<sup>44</sup> The following scholars (either explicitly or, reading between the lines, implicitly) see the strangeness of Jesus’ baptising to be support for its historicity: Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.119, 122-123; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 250; Taylor, *Immerser*, 295-296; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153; Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 13; Murphy-O’Connor, ‘John the Baptist’, 363; and Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> See 4.3, 47, 54; 7.1, 3; 11.7.

<sup>46</sup> See 3.31 (×3); 6.21; 12.24, 32; 17.4; 21.8, 9, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Some scholars (e.g., Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 70 n. 3; Carson, *John*, 209) translate γῆ as ‘countryside’ in 3.22. This is less likely, but even if it is correct, it would be a unique sense of the word in the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>48</sup> μετὰ ταῦτα is found in the Fourth Gospel eight times; ἐκεῖ occurs 22 times.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. John W. Pryor, ‘John the Baptist and Jesus: Tradition and Text in John 3.25’ (*JSNT* 66 [1997], 15-26), 20-21; Brown, *John*, 1.151. Cf. too Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 236, 279, although he goes too far in claiming that ‘there is no peculiarly Johannine phraseology’ (236) in this verse.

likely it is that this (or any) verse is traditional, the more likely it is that it contains history.

(6) 3.23

The connective particle δέ (translated ‘now’ or ‘and’) and the conjunction καί (‘also’) near the beginning of v. 23 show that this verse is linked closely in the text to v. 22. V. 23 is also linked quite closely with v. 26, since in the context John seems still to be at Aenon near Salim (the location of v. 23) when his disciples come to him in v. 26. Although v. 23 does not itself state that Jesus baptised, the connection between this verse and vv. 22 and 26 – verses which do refer to Jesus baptising – is important for two reasons: (a) If v. 23 is essentially traditional, it becomes somewhat more likely that vv. 22 and 26 are too. (b) More importantly, there is a specific reason, as we will see, for believing that the tradition in v. 23 is likely to be authentic. Because it at least has to be a serious possibility that the traditions (such as they existed) behind v. 23 were *always* connected to those behind v. 22 and/or v. 26, this supports seeing Jesus’ baptising in vv. 22 and 26 as authentic. Let us take each of these points in turn:

(a) It should be accepted that there are features in v. 23 that are characteristic of the Fourth Gospel’s phraseology. The periphrastic form of the imperfect ἦν . . . βαπτίζων (‘he was baptising’) is found in connection with John’s ministry in 1.28 and 10.40 as it is here, and the presence of these words in v. 23 therefore probably suggests at least some redactional activity on the part of the evangelist.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the word ἐγγύς (‘near’) is a favourite of his, and he uses it on four other occasions as a preposition with the genitive, as here.<sup>51</sup> The common ἐκεῖ is also found in this verse, as it is in v. 22.

On the other hand, the verb παραγίνομαι (‘to come’) occurs only here in the Fourth Gospel, and, although ‘water’ is mentioned 21 times in this Gospel, on every other

---

<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Pryor, ‘John the Baptist’, 21.

<sup>51</sup> ἐγγύς occurs elsewhere in 2.13; 6.4, 19, 23; 7.2; 11.18, 54, 55; 19.20, 42. In 6.19, 23; 11.18, 54 it is a preposition with the genitive.



occasion, the singular ὕδωρ is used, whereas here we find the plural ὕδατα. Importantly too, the obscurity of the place name Aenon near Salim strongly suggests the use of a tradition.<sup>52</sup> Finally, given the evangelist's theological interests, in which John is presented chiefly as a witness to Jesus and subordinate to him, it is surprising to find John working to some extent independently of Jesus;<sup>53</sup> even though Jesus will be seen to baptise more successfully than John (4.1; cf. 3.26), it is still difficult to imagine the evangelist inventing this. On balance, then, although the evangelist seems to have shaped his material, we are definitely best to understand v. 23 essentially as a tradition he received,<sup>54</sup> thus supporting to a degree the traditional nature of vv. 22 and 26. Again, the more likely a text is to be traditional, the more likely it is to contain history.

(b) The obscurity of Aenon near Salim is best seen not just as an indication that the evangelist used a tradition for v. 23, but also that this tradition is authentic. It seems more natural to assume that a tradition of the historical John baptising at Aenon has been retained rather than that for some opaque reason this idea originated in the early church.<sup>55</sup> If v. 23 is authentic tradition, the references to Jesus baptising in vv. 22 and 26 are therefore more likely to be authentic also, as I explained above.

---

<sup>52</sup> See also n. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.413.

<sup>54</sup> So Pryor, 'John the Baptist', 21. Cf. too Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 236, 279, although once again he goes too far in claiming that there are no features characteristic of the Fourth Gospel in this verse.

<sup>55</sup> It is widely believed that the note in v. 23, stating that John baptised at Aenon, is historical. However, Norbert Krieger ('Fiktive Orte der Johannes-Taufe' [*ZNW* 45 (1954), 121-123], 122-123) believes that there is a symbolic fiction here in which John baptises at Aenon (meaning 'springs') near Salim (meaning 'full salvation' - 'vollkommene Heil'). (Krieger does not say whether he believes the symbolism originated with the evangelist or at an earlier time.) He seems to view Jesus' baptising ministry in v. 22 as a conferral of Christian baptism, and also sees Salim as symbolising 'the full salvation of Christian baptism'. It is true that Aenon (deriving from the word אֵנוֹן) means springs, and that Salim (deriving from the Semitic root שָׁלַם) means something along the lines of 'salvation' or 'wholeness'. However, Krieger appears to have made a glaring error. For his theory to hold, Jesus would surely have to baptise at Salim, yet in the text he is not connected with that place at all. Krieger's symbolic reconstruction must therefore be rejected. (For different reasons, Backhaus, "*Jüngerkreise*", 254-255, also rejects Krieger's view.) Nor is there any other apparent reason for seeing the place name as a symbolic fiction: (1) The fact that place names hold potentially religious meanings does not in any way necessarily mean that they are fictitious. (Backhaus, "*Jüngerkreise*", 254, cites Bethlehem ['House of Bread'] as an example.) (2) If the evangelist had invented the name for symbolic purposes (or simply to give some geographical colouring to John's work), we would expect him to have done the same with Jesus in v. 22. (Cf. Backhaus, "*Jüngerkreise*", 254-255; Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 170 n. 9.) (3) In any case, it is almost inconceivable that the evangelist has invented a symbolic meaning here, because he would surely have explained it for his readers by providing a Greek translation, as he does for Semitic names at numerous places in his Gospel: 1.38,

For two reasons, then, v. 23 supports the historicity of Jesus baptising.<sup>56</sup>

(7) 3.25-26

Despite the support for the historicity of Jesus baptising in v. 26 that can be gained from v. 23, the evangelist clearly uses v. 26 to introduce John's highly theological words in vv. 27 ff., so we might wonder whether in fact v. 26 is entirely unhistorical. Suspicions are raised even further when we take into account that there are specific reasons for thinking that much in this verse has originated with the evangelist. We have already noted that the clause ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου ('he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan') is likely to have been composed by him.<sup>57</sup> In view of the prevalence of the motif of testifying in this Gospel, the clause ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας ('to whom you have testified') also probably originated with the evangelist.<sup>58</sup> In fact, unlike vv. 22 and 23, there is no vocabulary in v. 26 that strikes the observer as particularly traditional.

Yet these points do not necessarily mean that there is no tradition behind this verse. Much of the vocabulary consists of very common words and phrases, such as ἔρχομαι πρὸς ('to come to'), that could easily either have originated with the evangelist or represent a tradition he received. Discovering how traditional this verse is by looking at vocabulary, then, looks destined to fail.<sup>59</sup> However, in the text v. 26 is very closely connected with v. 25, and v. 25 contains some striking features that

---

41, 42; 4.25; 9.7; 20.16; and probably 11.16; 20.24; 21.2. Even if he had taken it from tradition, believing it to be a symbolic fiction, we would expect him to have provided a translation. The fact that he has not provided one means that he probably believed that the historical John had baptised at Aenon. That the name was originally a symbolic fiction and the evangelist failed to recognise that fact seems unlikely. We should therefore accept that Aenon near Salim is most probably a name recorded simply because John actually baptised there. Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 254-255; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 154. Some critics (e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.45, 52) simply assume that the note on John baptising at Aenon is historical, apparently believing that this needs no justification. On the location of Aenon, see Brown, *John*, 1.151; Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.412-413; M.-É. Boismard, 'Aenon, près de Salem (*Jean*, III, 23)' (*RB* 80 [1973], 218-229).

<sup>56</sup> The reference to John baptising at Aenon is regarded as evidence for the authenticity of the historical Jesus' baptising activity by Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153-154; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45; and, reading between the lines, Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 222-226.

<sup>57</sup> See above, p. 140.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 293.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Pryor, 'John the Baptist', 22-23.

look traditional. In what follows, I will attempt to show that v. 25 provides evidence that the ‘core’ of v. 26 is authentic, that core including John’s disciples telling him that Jesus was baptising. I have just done something similar with v. 23, although the connection in the text between v. 25 and v. 26 is closer than between v. 23 and v. 26, so carries greater weight. We will spend some time on this issue because the conclusions will be useful later in the chapter too.

The first problem we encounter in v. 25 is that there is uncertainty over the original text. Ἰουδαίου (‘a Jew’) and Ἰουδαίων (‘Jews’) are both well attested in the textual tradition.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, because the Jew, if Ἰουδαίου is read, never reappears in the following passage, and there are also various difficulties involved if Ἰουδαίων is read (see below), some scholars think that the original text read Ἰησοῦ (‘Jesus’) or even τῶν Ἰησοῦ (‘the [disciples] of Jesus’) and that it was changed by scribes who were uneasy at the idea of Jesus being involved in a dispute with John’s disciples.<sup>61</sup>

If one or the other of these conjectures is adopted, the passage does make a lot more sense. However, there are good reasons for rejecting them as unlikely:

(a) There are a number of other places in the Gospel where the evangelist has left his readers in the dark. In 1.35-51 one of John’s disciples remains unnamed, it is not explained who Philip and Nathanael are or why they are there, and the use of the article with the fig tree in 1.48 would make sense if the reader has previously heard of a fig tree, yet none has been mentioned. In 3.25 καθαρισμός is unexplained (see below). In 4.1 and 3 the significance of the Pharisees hearing is not made clear. Finally, the interactions between the Greeks, Philip, Andrew and Jesus in 12.20-23 is not properly explained. All this shows that the evangelist was content sometimes not

---

<sup>60</sup> Ἰουδαίου is read by P<sup>75</sup> **Σ**<sup>c</sup> A B L W; Ἰουδαίων by P<sup>66</sup> **Σ**<sup>\*</sup> G Θ f<sup>1</sup>, 13 205 565 1342 *al.* latt sy<sup>c</sup> sa<sup>mss</sup> bo; Or. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 175, describes this support as ‘rather evenly divided’.

<sup>61</sup> The conjecture Ἰησοῦ appears to have originated with Richard Bentley in the eighteenth century; see comments on the uncertainty of this in Pryor, ‘John the Baptist’, 18. τῶν Ἰησοῦ seems probably to have been first conjectured by O. Holtzmann at the end of the nineteenth century. See Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 257. Nestle-Aland, 254, however, mentions J. Markland as the originator. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 154, believes that one or other of these conjectures is quite possibly the original reading (although cf. his comment on 95).

to give his readers anything like the full picture of what is going on. He could therefore easily have done the same in 3.25.

(b) It is far from certain that later scribes would have been so embarrassed about the idea of Jesus disputing<sup>62</sup> with John's disciples that they would have resolved to change the text, especially as the following verses include a correction of the disciples' misconception. Besides, someone arguing that embarrassment might have caused Ἰησοῦ or τῶν Ἰησοῦ to be altered needs to bear in mind that the same embarrassment might have prevented the evangelist writing these words in the first place.

(c) There is no textual evidence whatsoever for either of these conjectures.<sup>63</sup>

Although it is a possibility that one of these conjectures represents the original text, we are therefore better to stick with Ἰουδαίου or Ἰουδαίων. But which?

It is true that outside this verse the singular occurs only twice in the Fourth Gospel (4.9b; 18.35). Nevertheless, Ἰουδαίου should be preferred to Ἰουδαίων, for the following reasons. Firstly, elsewhere the plural Ἰουδαῖοι (in whatever case) occurs with the article in this Gospel about 66 times, but without it only in 4.9c. Significantly, the lack of an article in 4.9c can be explained by the fact that this clause is a parenthetical statement in which the Jews in question are not participants in the story. The Jews in 3.25 (if Ἰουδαίων is read) by contrast *are* participants in the story, and the lack of an article here would be strikingly at odds with the rest of the Fourth Gospel. Secondly, the text of 3.25 looks rather less perplexing in context if the plural is read, so for this reason too a change from Ἰουδαίου to Ἰουδαίων is

---

<sup>62</sup> With a large majority of critics, I take ζήτησις to mean 'dispute' here, rather than 'discussion' or even 'inquiry'.

<sup>63</sup> This especially is what seems to convince Backhaus, "*Jüngerkreise*", 257; and Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.195 n. 72.

more easily explained.<sup>64</sup> It therefore makes most sense to side with the majority of critics who prefer to read Ἰουδαίου.<sup>65</sup>

Turning to the content of the verse, the first question that needs to be addressed is what exactly the καθαρισμός ('purification'), about which the dispute takes place, signifies in the text. In view of the connection between v. 25 and the statement of John's disciples in v. 26, this word must surely at least include a reference to Jesus' baptising ministry. The wider context, in which John's baptism is mentioned (v. 23), and the fact that his disciples are involved in the dispute, make it highly probable too that καθαρισμός includes a reference to John's baptising ministry.

A number of critics think that the baptising ministries of Jesus and John are all that this word is referring to.<sup>66</sup> However, we need to ask if it also refers more widely to Jewish purifications in general. This seems to be the more probable solution for the following reasons:

(a) If only Jesus' and John's baptising ministries were meant, it is perhaps more likely that the word βάπτισμα or βαπτισμός would have been used, or even some sort of phrase such as 'John's and Jesus' activities'. (b) The only other reference to καθαρισμός in the Fourth Gospel (at 2.6) has to do with Jewish purification rites in general. Admittedly, the word there is qualified by τῶν Ἰουδαίων, but even so, the fact that it has this sense provides some support for seeing the same sense in 3.25 too. (c) In three out of five other NT uses of καθαρισμός the reference is to Jewish purifications (Mark 1.44 // Luke 5.14; Luke 2.22).<sup>67</sup> (d) The fact that the person who disputes with John's disciples is described as a Jew leads easily to thinking of Jewish purification rites.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Pryor, 'John the Baptist', 15.

<sup>65</sup> So, e.g., Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 257; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.195 n. 72; Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.414 n. 11; Brown, *John*, 1.152; Barrett, *St John*, 221.

<sup>66</sup> So (in some cases reading between the lines) Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.121; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 251; Taylor, *Immerser*, 196; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 225. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 258-259, cautiously takes this view.

<sup>67</sup> The remaining references are in Heb 1.3 and 2 Pet 1.9.

<sup>68</sup> So Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 258, although it does not prevent him thinking that only the baptising ministries of Jesus and John are in view.

The best solution is therefore that both the baptising activities of Jesus and John *and* Jewish ritual purifications are in view in the use of the word.<sup>69</sup>

Having decided upon the most likely text of 3.25 and the most probable meaning of καθαρισμός, let us now move on to ask if the evangelist used traditional material to create this verse. He surely did, for the following reasons:

(a) The anonymous Jew plays no part in what follows and is therefore a particularly strange feature of the text. If Ἰουδαίου is the correct reading, as it probably is, it is virtually inconceivable that this word stems from the evangelist.<sup>70</sup> (b) καθαρισμός is not characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, being found elsewhere only at 2.6. All other things being equal, then, we might suspect that this word is based on a tradition. (c) In context, καθαρισμός looks odd and unexplained. Furthermore, there seems to be no theological reason for mentioning Jewish purification in general at this point in the Gospel.<sup>71</sup> Again, it seems almost certain that behind this word stands a tradition the evangelist received. (d) V. 25 as a whole appears to hold no theological purpose and seems to exist in the text only as an introduction to v. 26.<sup>72</sup> If the evangelist had decided to create an introduction to v. 26, he would surely have come up with something far simpler.

---

<sup>69</sup> This seems to be the position of Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 165. Similar are Webb, 'John the Baptist', 222; idem, 'Jesus' Baptism', 304-305; and Carson, *John*, 210. Barrett, *St John*, 221, surprisingly believes that the word denotes *only* Jewish purifications in general, and not the baptisms of Jesus or John. Brown, *John*, 1.151-152, is undecided, as is Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997; ET of *Het Evangelie naar Johannes. Proeve van een theologische Exegese* [2 vols.; Kampen: Kok, 1987-1992]), 146.

<sup>70</sup> Of those scholars who accept the reading Ἰουδαίου, all who comment unsurprisingly see the word as evidence that the evangelist used tradition. Even Ἰουδαίων, were it to be read in place of Ἰουδαίου, would look fairly odd in context and therefore support the use of tradition. Pryor, 'John the Baptist', *passim*, believes that the tradition the evangelist received read Ἰησοῦ or possibly τῶν Ἰησοῦ in place of Ἰουδαίου, and that he changed it to Ἰουδαίου because he did not want to present Jesus in dispute with John's disciples. This is possible, but it would have been much easier for him simply to have omitted the tradition behind v. 25, if it contained a reference to Jesus, and to have used slightly different words for the beginning of v. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Barrett, *St John*, 221, thinks that in v. 25 the evangelist's 'intention . . . is to show that John the Baptist . . . belongs within the world of Judaism'. However, this seems to be an eisegetical reading of the text, especially as it is John's disciples without any special blessing from him who do the disputing. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 259, also rejects Barrett's view, calling it an over-interpretation.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 259.

Even taking into account the lack of certainty over the text or the meaning of καθαρισμός, it is virtually impossible, then, that v. 25 was freely composed by the evangelist. He used traditional material.

Although it is possible that, for reasons unknown to us, the tradition the evangelist drew upon to form v. 25 was invented at an earlier time by the primitive Christian community, we certainly have no particular reason for believing that it is inauthentic. In fact, the features of the verse that have been discussed (especially the obscurities) should be seen as significant support for the view that historical tradition has been used.<sup>73</sup> At the very least, we can say that it may well be the case that v. 25 is historically based.<sup>74</sup>

It is inconceivable that an isolated tradition approximating the length and content of our v. 25 would ever have been handed down in Christian circles (or in any circle, for that matter). It would simply have had no point on its own. What is more, the introductory nature of the verse means that it makes no sense either to hold that it represents the sole remaining part of a longer tradition. Because v. 25 seems to have no purpose other than to introduce v. 26, and because, with minimal alteration of the wording of v. 26, that verse would need no introduction anyway, it is very unlikely too that the evangelist has transposed the tradition behind v. 25 from elsewhere in the traditions he received. When he received the tradition that he used to form v. 25, that tradition – regardless of whether he has abbreviated it or not<sup>75</sup> – was therefore probably already ‘in situ’, i.e., connected to a tradition behind what he has written in v. 26.

---

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 280-281; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45-46.

<sup>74</sup> Most scholars think that v. 25 is based on an authentic tradition. Many, like Meier and Linnemann, whom we might have expected to comment specifically on the historicity of v. 25, do not actually do so, but their comments on neighbouring verses strongly suggest that they regard the verse as essentially historical. Of those who make their position clear, Goguel, *Au seuil*, 250-251; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 95, 154-155; Webb, ‘John the Baptist’, 222-223; idem, ‘Jesus’ Baptism’, 304-305; and Chilton, *Jesus’ Baptism*, 38, believe it is historically based. Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45-46, favours this view; Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 280-281, seems to also. Reading between the lines, Taylor, *Immerser*, 196-197, apparently thinks that this verse is not based on history, but she fails even to mention its obscurities.

<sup>75</sup> If the verse as we have it is an abbreviation of an earlier tradition, that would help to explain its obscurity.

Now, although it is possible that at an earlier time the traditions behind vv. 25 and 26 were unconnected, there is surely a significant likelihood that these traditions were in fact *always* connected. If they were always connected and one tradition is authentic the other tradition would obviously have to be too. Since the tradition behind v. 25 may well be historical (demonstrated above), there is therefore a significant possibility that the tradition behind v. 26 is also. As I have already noted, there is much in v. 26 that seems to be the evangelist's composition. However, if we strip away everything inessential<sup>76</sup> to reach the 'core' of the verse, we find that that core consists of John's disciples going to him to tell him that Jesus is baptising.<sup>77</sup> Indirectly, therefore, v. 25 suggests that Jesus baptised.

There are admittedly uncertainties here, firstly, over whether v. 25 is historically based, and, secondly, over whether the tradition behind v. 25 and that behind v. 26, with its report to John about Jesus baptising, were always connected. Of course, even if vv. 25 and 26 were not connected originally, it is still a real possibility that the report of John's disciples about Jesus' baptising ministry in v. 26 is historical. All things considered, then, there does seem to be some tangible evidence in these verses that the historical Jesus baptised.<sup>78</sup> This issue will be picked up below.<sup>79</sup>

(8) 4.1, 3

In John 4.1, 3<sup>80</sup> we are told that when Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that he was making and baptising more disciples than John, he left Judea and went back to Galilee. It is virtually inconceivable that the evangelist has freely composed everything in these verses.<sup>81</sup> This complex sequence of events must at least have included some tradition he received. Not only are the Pharisees so unexpected and

---

<sup>76</sup> Whether some of these inessential details in v. 26 might be historical is not our concern here.

<sup>77</sup> Strictly speaking, the most fundamental statement in the verse is simply that John's disciples go to him, but that is too meaningless to be handed down as a tradition, and it seems unlikely that everything other than that would have been completely altered in the course of the tradition's history.

<sup>78</sup> Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 45-46, believes that John 3.25 provides evidence for Jesus' baptising ministry, although he does not argue specifically from v. 25 to v. 26 as I have done.

<sup>79</sup> See below, pp. 182-183.

<sup>80</sup> On 4.2, see above, pp. 147-149.

<sup>81</sup> So Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 224. Cf. Pryor, 'John the Baptist', 23 n. 32; Brown, *John*, 1.164-165. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 236-238, believes that the evangelist has probably used a tradition in 4.1, 3. Here, as often, Dodd is too cautious.



obscure in the context, but why the news Jesus receives causes him to return to Galilee is left completely unexplained.

It is possible that the reference in 4.1 to Jesus baptising was added by the evangelist<sup>82</sup> to a tradition that simply spoke of Jesus making disciples, but it is probably more natural to suppose that it was included in what he received. Even if Jesus baptising was in the evangelist's tradition, it is of course a possibility that it was invented at an earlier stage for reasons unknown to us.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, there has to be a real possibility that these verses – including the reference to Jesus baptising – contain authentic tradition.<sup>84</sup>

## (9) Conclusion

The evidence provided by John 3.22-26 and 4.1-3, then, makes it highly likely that the historical Jesus baptised. None of the arguments that have been levelled against the essential historicity of Jesus baptising in these passages carries much weight. Much more importantly, the way that Jesus baptising seems to conflict with other early Christian traditions suggests it is not an invention of the early church. Finally, there are clear signs in some of the key verses here that tradition has been used; at times there are specific reasons for believing that this tradition may well be authentic.

There are other arguments from considerations that do not involve John 3.22-26 and 4.1-3, which could also be used to support the historicity of Jesus' baptising ministry. These, however, are much weaker than those given above, so since they would not substantially add to what we already have, they will be passed over.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> If so, it would have been to fit in with 3.22 and 3.26.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, *Immerfer*, 196-197, thinks that 'in view of the overall character of the Fourth Gospel', 4.1, 3 probably 'derive from issues faced by the Johannine community' and 'reflect continuing debate with the Jewish community'. (She does not say whether she believes these verses originated with the evangelist or at an earlier time.) However, she provides no real reason for this view and fails even to mention the obscurity of the text.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 224, 226.

<sup>85</sup> I have in mind Jesus' preaching of repentance, the way he is identified as John risen from the dead (Mark 6.14-16 pars.; 8.28 pars.), and the baptising practice of the early church. Whether these issues provide any support for the historical Jesus baptising in some cases depends on whether or not his baptising would have held the same significance as John's baptism, and on whether or not he baptised throughout his ministry or only early on. In any case, for each of these issues, even under the scenario

Although we are not certain that Jesus baptised, the degree of doubt is small enough not to have any ramifications for analysis later in the chapter, and from now on we will therefore simply assume that he baptised. It is highly probable that at least part of Jesus' baptising ministry took place before John's arrest.<sup>86</sup> This is the chronology presented by the Fourth Gospel, and we have seen in the analysis above that some of the evidence for the use of tradition and for historicity specifically concerns John's actions at the time Jesus was baptising. However, some scholars have argued that Jesus continued baptising until close to the time of his crucifixion. Whether this is correct is what we need to try to determine next.

## 6.2 For how long did Jesus baptise?

As I have already mentioned, how long Jesus' baptising ministry lasted is not an issue that forms part of the logical progression of this chapter. However, reaching a conclusion about this will help us in the next section to determine whether his baptism held the same significance as John's or meant something different. Hence the need to deal with it here. The question is whether Jesus ceased baptising early in his ministry (i.e., before or around the time that John ceased baptising) or continued administering baptism until close to the time of his crucifixion.<sup>87</sup> As we will see, the former option is the more likely.

Most scholars who accept that Jesus baptised believe that he did not baptise for the duration of his ministry. However, not everyone is convinced.<sup>88</sup> Some think the

---

that maximises the amount of support for the existence of Jesus' baptising ministry, the support gained is minor when compared to what we already have from John 3.22-26 and 4.1-3.

<sup>86</sup> Those scholars who believe that Jesus baptised seem to be unanimous in believing that at least part of his baptising ministry occurred before John was arrested.

<sup>87</sup> It is of course possible that he ceased baptising considerably after John's arrest, yet long before his public ministry came to a close. However, simplifying matters into these two possibilities will not affect the results of the following discussion.

<sup>88</sup> The following believe that Jesus ceased baptising early in his ministry: Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 227, 231, including n. 27; Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism*, 40-41; Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 53-54; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 46; and Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 60. Those who think he baptised throughout his ministry include France, 'Jesus the

baptising practice of the early church suggests that Jesus never gave up baptising. If Jesus did not baptise for the duration of his ministry, it is argued, how can we explain the fact that from the beginning of Acts baptism is assumed to be the proper mode of Christian initiation?<sup>89</sup> This argument certainly ought to be afforded a degree of weight. Nevertheless, we should note that voluntary fasting is something that may have been practised by John but eschewed by Jesus (Mark 2.18-20 pars.),<sup>90</sup> and then practised again in the early church (Acts 13.2-3; 14.23; *Didache* 8.1).<sup>91</sup> It is therefore possible that baptising could have followed a similar pattern.<sup>92</sup>

R. T. France thinks that Jesus' use of the baptism metaphor in Mark 10.38-39 par. (where he speaks of James and John being baptised with the baptism with which he will be baptised) and Luke 12.49-50 (where he says that he has a baptism to undergo) supports a continuing baptising ministry.<sup>93</sup> It should be accepted that the striking and rather unexpected uses of the metaphor in these texts may well stem from the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, these verses are surely not more than weak evidence that Jesus baptised throughout his public ministry.

There are, to my knowledge, no further arguments of any cogency that can be used to support the view that Jesus continued baptising for the duration of his ministry. On the other hand, there are a number of reasons for believing that he ceased baptising early in his public ministry. The following points are significant:

---

Baptist?' 105-107; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.126-129, 166-167; and Taylor, *Immerser*, 294-299. Dale C. Allison Jr., 'The Continuity between John and Jesus' (*JSHJ* 1 [2003], 6-27), 13-14, is undecided. Because I will not examine whether or not Jesus performed a baptism of the same significance as John's until the next section, it would make matters too complicated in the present section to use any arguments that depend on the answer to that question. This reduces the number of arguments that I can refer to, but will not affect the conclusion that will be reached.

<sup>89</sup> So France, 'Jesus the Baptist?' 105-107, esp. 106; similarly Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.129.

<sup>90</sup> We need to be careful, however, not to make more of this text than we should. The historical Jesus may actually have fasted voluntarily more often than we are aware. Cf. Matt 4.1-11 par., and see above, p. 119.

<sup>91</sup> Matt 6.16; Mark 2.20 pars. may also be evidence for fasting in the early church; similarly 2 Cor 6.5; 11.27 may refer to voluntary fasting by Paul.

<sup>92</sup> Noted by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.129, although he still prefers the view that Jesus baptised throughout his ministry.

<sup>93</sup> France, 'Jesus the Baptist?' 107.

(a) The fact that the Synoptics never refer to a baptising ministry by Jesus is surely significant. If Jesus baptised throughout his ministry, it is almost inconceivable that any of the synoptists would not have known about it. It also seems very unlikely that they would all have been so embarrassed about it that, even if they knew he was performing a baptism of the same significance as John's, they would have felt it important enough to avoid all trace of what would have been such a major part of Jesus' public work. This is especially so because if Jesus baptised long after John's arrest, his baptising ministry would have been in less danger of looking like subordination to John than if he baptised only when John was still alive. The Synoptic silence is therefore a significant piece of evidence supporting the view that Jesus ceased baptising early in his public career.<sup>94</sup>

(b) The silence of the Fourth Gospel after 4.3 is also worth noting. Meier claims that the absence of a reference to Jesus baptising after this point in this Gospel's text does not amount to much. He points out that there are no healings after 9.1 and that Jesus is never depicted in Galilee after 7.9, but that we ought not to understand that in the evangelist's mind Jesus never healed or ministered in Galilee after these respective times in his ministry.<sup>95</sup>

Meier is right to infer this attitude of the evangelist. However, first, there is a greater 'distance' between 4.3 and the end of the Gospel than in the cases he mentions. Second and more importantly, that the Fourth Gospel gives what could be described as a misleading impression in regard to Jesus' healings and presence in Galilee does not mean, all other things being equal, that we would expect it to give a misleading impression in other matters also. Because the evangelist was apparently not embarrassed by the idea of Jesus baptising,<sup>96</sup> the fact that Jesus does not appear doing so after 4.3 is surely on balance more likely to be due to the rarity of this motif

---

<sup>94</sup> So, e.g., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 46; Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism*, 41. Chilton, 40-41, also sees relevance in the silence of Josephus, but Josephus' note on Jesus is so brief that it counts for little here.

<sup>95</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.126.

<sup>96</sup> See above, p. 155 n. 39.

in the source material he had to work with. The silence of the Fourth Gospel after 4.3 therefore supports the view that Jesus ceased baptising early in his public ministry.<sup>97</sup>

(c) In Mark 1.8 // Matt 3.11 // Luke 3.16 // John 1.33, as we have already noted, there is a logion attributed to John in which his water baptism is contrasted with the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Matthew and Luke have ‘Holy Spirit and fire’) of an expected figure, understood in the Gospels to be Jesus. In Acts 1.5 and 11.16 we also find words attributed to Jesus (and Peter in 11.16) which closely resemble this logion. If Jesus had baptised in water throughout his ministry, this would mean that, despite his prolific baptising activity, a logion contrasting his ministry with a ministry of water baptism would have come to circulate widely in the early church. This seems rather improbable.

(d) It is perhaps unlikely that the redactor who composed 4.2 – assuming he was a member of the same early Christian community as the evangelist<sup>98</sup> – would have been able to switch the baptising from Jesus to his disciples if baptising was a well-known part of his work, as it surely would have been if he baptised throughout his public ministry.

(e) John 4.1, 3 probably portrays Jesus ceasing his baptising work at a time before John’s arrest.<sup>99</sup> As we have seen, these verses may well contain authentic tradition. Of course, even if the historical Jesus ceased baptising at the time referred to here, it is not impossible that he could have recommenced at a later date. Nevertheless, these texts make it that little bit more likely that Jesus did not baptise for the duration of his public ministry.

It seems likely, then, that the historical Jesus did not baptise for long. Whether he ceased baptising before John’s arrest as 4.1, 3 may imply, upon learning of his arrest, or even a little later<sup>100</sup> is not our concern. What is important for our purposes is

---

<sup>97</sup> So Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 46.

<sup>98</sup> See above, pp. 148-149.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Linnemann, ‘Jesus und der Täufer’, 227, 231, including n. 27; Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 53-54.

<sup>100</sup> He may have wished to continue until there was no longer any hope for John’s release from prison.

simply that he probably made a conscious decision to stop baptising at an early point in his public ministry. We will make use of this conclusion in the next section.

### 6.3 Did Jesus perform John's rite of baptism?

The second stage of the discussion in this chapter concerns the significance of Jesus' baptising ministry. The question here is whether his baptism signified what John's baptism signified or whether it meant something different.<sup>101</sup> This is potentially important, because if he performed John's rite of baptism, all other things being equal, there is clearly a greater likelihood that he was his disciple. Of those scholars who believe that Jesus baptised, most think he administered John's baptism.<sup>102</sup> I will argue in what follows that, although there is some degree of doubt, it is more probable that his baptism did indeed have the same significance as John's.

Before moving on to look at the evidence, it is worth saying a little about the significance of the historical John's baptism. According to Mark 1.4 // Luke 3.3,

---

<sup>101</sup> By 'different significance' I do not mean that if Jesus' and John's baptisms were not identical, they could have had no common features. For example, it is plausible to imagine that they could both have connoted an expression of repentance, but that they differed in other ways. However, it seems unlikely that Jesus' baptism would have almost completely overlapped in significance with John's, without being an exact replica. There would probably have seemed little point in making just a slight change. If Jesus' baptism differed in significance from John's, then, there would probably have been a considerable difference between the two.

<sup>102</sup> With varying levels of certainty, the following critics take this view: Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism*, 36-40; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 98-101; Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 292-293, 301; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 250-251; idem, *Life of Jesus*, 275; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 204-207; Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 229-230; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.166-167 (although on 127 he seems to believe that Jesus' baptism had unique features); Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 363, 365-372; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 183-184; idem, 'Elijah, John and Jesus', 271-272; Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 60; Taylor, *Immerser*, 294-299, esp. 299; Webb, 'John the Baptist', 219-223; and idem, 'Jesus' Baptism', 302-305. Other scholars who are not explicit, but who, reading between the lines, also seem to take this view include Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 14-15; Brown, 'Jesus and Elisha', 88; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 351; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 153-154; and Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 54. Those who think Jesus' baptism held a different significance from John's include Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 71-72 (although, as I observed in n. 2, he thinks the baptising might have been performed by Jesus' disciples alone); France, 'Jesus the Baptist?' 105-111 (although he believes that Jesus' baptism would have been very close in meaning to John's); Gnilk, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 85; and Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.411.

John preached ‘a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’.<sup>103</sup> Matthew 3.11, somewhat differently, has John stating ‘I baptise you with water for repentance’, without any reference to the forgiveness of sins.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, in Acts 13.24 Luke describes John’s baptism simply as ‘a baptism of repentance’. Mark 1.5 // Matt 3.6 also tells us that those who were baptised did so confessing their sins. In the Fourth Gospel, there is no mention of repentance or forgiveness in connection with John’s baptism. Instead we find John declaring in 1.31 that he came baptising in water, so that Jesus might be made manifest to Israel. In 3.25-26 it is apparently implied too that John’s baptism was a ritual purification.<sup>105</sup>

In *Ant.* 18.117, Josephus has this description of John and his baptising ministry:

κτείνει γὰρ δὴ τοῦτον Ἡρώδης ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις κελεύοντα ἀρετὴν ἐπασκοῦσιν καὶ τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους δικαιοσύνη καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εὐσεβεία χρωμένοις βαπτισμῶ συνιέναι· οὕτω γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὴν βάπτισιν ἀποδεκτὴν αὐτῶ φανεῖσθαι μὴ ἐπὶ τινῶν ἁμαρτάδων παραιτήσῃ χρωμένων, ἀλλ’ ἐφ’ ἀγνεία τοῦ σώματος, ἅτε δὴ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιοσύνη προεκεκαθαρμένης.

Anticipating the discussion immediately below, this complex sequence of clauses can be translated:

‘For Herod killed him, although he was a good man and exhorted the Jews to cultivate virtue, to practise right conduct towards each other and piety towards God, and [thereafter] to join in baptism. For [in John’s view] baptism would appear acceptable to him [God] only if it was used not to obtain pardon for certain sins but rather for purification of the body, inasmuch as the soul had already been cleansed by right conduct.’

<sup>103</sup> The repentance here is clearly human repentance and not ‘God . . . repent[ing] with regard to his decision to punish the people’ as Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 140-141, believes is possible in Mark 1.4.

<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew has ‘for the forgiveness of sins’ included in Jesus’ words of institution at the last supper (26.28).

<sup>105</sup> See above, pp. 163-164.

There is, to my knowledge, a consensus, firstly, that in this passage Josephus denies that John's baptism could be used to obtain forgiveness of sins, and, secondly, that he affirms that it served as a ritual purification. He also seems to connect it with repentance.

To be sure, not every exegete sees a connection between John's baptism and repentance in this passage. Meier, for example, treats the participles ἐπασκοῦσιν (literally 'cultivating') and χρωμένοις (literally 'practising') as conditional circumstantial and understands Josephus' meaning to be that John exhorted those Jews who were *already* – i.e., quite apart from his exhortations – cultivating virtue, and practising right conduct towards each other and piety towards God, to join in baptism.<sup>106</sup> These participles are certainly best translated circumstantially,<sup>107</sup> yet it is very unlikely that Josephus simply has in view those who are already acting uprightly. The reference at the end of § 117 to the souls of those baptised having previously been *cleansed* by right conduct (δικαιοσύνη) seems to demonstrate that the virtues John exhorted his audience to practise (ἀρετή, εὐσεβεία, and, notably, δικαιοσύνη) should be viewed in a context of repentance. Circumstantial participles that precede an infinitive (here συνιέναι) can in effect hold the same syntactical sense as that infinitive (in this case an indirect command dependent on κελεύοντα), and such appears to be the case in this passage.

Josephus, therefore, apparently portrays John exhorting his audience to adopt the virtues mentioned, and immediately afterwards to be baptised.<sup>108</sup> The exhortation to adopt these virtues, along with the reference to having been cleansed by right conduct, is well defined as repentance. We are best, then, to see a connection between John's baptism and repentance in this passage.

---

<sup>106</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.57-59. Similar are Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 17; and Farmer, 'John the Baptist', 2.959.

<sup>107</sup> For the participles to be interpreted attributively, the passage, unless Josephus is expressing himself poorly, would have to read τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις . . . τοῖς ἀρετὴν ἐπασκοῦσιν καὶ τοῖς τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους . . . χρωμένοις κ.τ.λ.

<sup>108</sup> This is how Louis H. Feldman understands the passage; see *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, Books XVIII-XIX* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1965), 81-82. So too Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 253 n. 1; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 363; and cautiously Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 187-189.



Our sources, therefore, give us some various and at times contradictory information regarding the significance of John's baptism. It is unnecessary here to go into all that his baptism might have signified.<sup>109</sup> However, for what follows later in the chapter, it is worthwhile establishing that, whatever else it might have signified, the historical John's baptism also almost certainly involved some sort of expression of repentance. There are several reasons for taking this view:

(a) As we have seen, Mark and probably Josephus connect his baptism with repentance. It is also possible that in Acts 13.24 Luke has not simply relied on his memory of what he wrote in Luke 3.3 or of the source he used at that time, but that he has used a separate source. It counts for something too that Matthew and Luke chose to follow Mark in connecting John's baptism with repentance when they wrote their Gospels.

(b) It is very widely agreed that repentance was a fundamental part of the historical John's message. Matt 3.7-10 par., with its references to fleeing from God's anger, the axe lying at the root of the trees, etc., is generally believed to be authentic. In Luke 3.10-14, moral exhortations are attributed to John which look entirely plausible historically. The reference to John reprimanding Antipas over an adulterous relationship (Mark 6.18 pars.) also looks completely believable, especially in the light of Josephus' indication of Antipas' uneasiness about John (*Ant.* 18.116-119).

(c) In Matt 21.31c-32 we are told of tax collectors and prostitutes – i.e., notorious sinners – believing John and thus being enabled to enter the kingdom of God.

In the light of these points, we should accept, therefore, that, whatever else it might have signified, the historical John's baptism was an expression of repentance for the person being baptised.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> On this, see the discussion in Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 183-205; and the briefer treatment in Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 355-362.

<sup>110</sup> This is the broad scholarly consensus. See, e.g., Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 184-189; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 357-361; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 75-77.

Let us turn, then, to the significance of Jesus' baptising ministry, beginning with arguments that have been used to support a different significance of John's and Jesus' baptisms.

Rudolf Schnackenburg believes that Jesus' message went beyond John's, and that this suggests their baptisms did not have the same significance.<sup>111</sup> There are, however, some weaknesses with this argument:

(a) Although it is widely agreed that the historical Jesus' message went beyond what John preached, it is very uncertain whether this was the case before John was arrested. The Synoptics, of course, tell us nothing of any ministry by Jesus before John's arrest, and any inferences that can be gained from the Fourth Gospel are very tenuous. We do find Jesus using the phrase 'the kingdom of God' in John 3.3, 5, before John has been imprisoned, and it is true that because this phrase appears only here in this Gospel, it is likely that traditional material has been used. Even so, there is significant doubt about whether the historical Jesus used this phrase in a conversation with Nicodemus, and even if he did, the chronological placement of the conversation is historically very unclear. We are on quite shaky ground, then, if we use these verses to argue that the historical Jesus preached the kingdom of God before John was imprisoned.

What is more, it is quite possible that John himself preached the kingdom of God, in which case, even if the historical Jesus used this phrase at the time indicated, it might not have distinguished him from John. It is true that the Matthean redactional equivalent 'kingdom of heaven', found in Matt 3.2 as a proclamation of John, is very probably Matthew's composition.<sup>112</sup> It is true too that Jesus' saying, 'The least in the kingdom of God is greater than [John]', a saying that I will argue in chapter eight is probably authentic,<sup>113</sup> would sit very uncomfortably with John having preached the kingdom, if – and it is a big if – it should be interpreted in such a way that John is

---

<sup>111</sup> Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.411.

<sup>112</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.207 n. 128; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1.292.

<sup>113</sup> See below, pp. 224-226.

understood as excluded from the kingdom.<sup>114</sup> However, there is the other side of the coin to consider too: (i) The enigmatic logion preserved in Matt 11.12-13 // Luke 16.16, and which includes a reference to the kingdom of God being operative ‘from the days of John the Baptist’ (Matthew) or ‘from then [= from the time of John]’ (Luke), could be seen as evidence that this theme had formed part of his message. (ii) The logion of Jesus in Matt 21.31c-32, where he links the present (or future?) entrance of tax collectors and prostitutes into the kingdom of God with John’s ministry in the past, might possibly suggest that the historical John preached the kingdom. (iii) Finally, the extreme lack of extant material attributed to John means that an argument from silence is by no means fail-safe.<sup>115</sup> When all these points are taken into account, we should probably conclude that we simply do not know if John preached the kingdom of God or not.<sup>116</sup>

All things considered, then, it is very unclear if Jesus’ message would have differed from John’s at the time before John was imprisoned.<sup>117</sup>

(b) Even if in the period before John was arrested Jesus’ message went beyond John’s, it does not follow that Jesus could not have performed John’s baptism at the time. Jesus’ message included a call to repent,<sup>118</sup> and it seems quite possible that he could have preached his own message (which overlapped with John’s) and have appended John’s (repentance) baptism on to it for a while.

---

<sup>114</sup> See below, pp. 228-231.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Allison, ‘Continuity’, 7-15.

<sup>116</sup> This is the conclusion of Allison, ‘Continuity’, 9-10. Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.166; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.143; Gnilka, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 84; Murphy-O’Connor, ‘John the Baptist’, 372; and Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 49, think it was not part of his message. Taylor, *Immerse*, 135-138; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 62; and Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions*, 203-230, take the opposite view.

<sup>117</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.127, sides with Schnackenburg in believing that Jesus’ message would not simply have mirrored John’s before the latter’s arrest. Linnemann, ‘Jesus und der Täufer’, 229, believes it would have. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 380; and Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 228, seem to take this view too.

<sup>118</sup> See above, p. 54.

(c) If Jesus' message did not go beyond John's until after John's arrest, as may have been the case, Jesus could scarcely have performed anything other than John's baptism before his arrest.<sup>119</sup>

When all these weaknesses with Schnackenburg's argument are taken into account, it loses all its force.

Schnackenburg also points out that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus and John are not portrayed acting 'in common' when baptising, and believes that this also suggests that the historical Jesus' baptism held a different significance from John's.<sup>120</sup> However, there are some (rather less serious) weaknesses with this argument too: (a) Given the choice, the evangelist is unlikely to have wanted to present Jesus working too noticeably on the same level as John, his mere witness. (b) As we will see below, the historical Jesus was someone who often behaved with very great authority. It would therefore be no surprise if he performed John's baptism 'off his own bat'.<sup>121</sup> (c) We will also see below that Jesus was a person who did not shrink from causing people offence. This makes it unlikely that he would have been perturbed about the possibility of offending John by administering his baptism without his permission.<sup>122</sup> Schnackenburg's argument, although valid, is therefore not strong.

There are no convincing reasons, then, for believing that Jesus' baptism meant something different from John's. There is, however, a stronger case that can be made for the opposite position. We saw in the previous section that Jesus probably ceased baptising early in his public ministry. In chapter four we saw too that even early in his ministry Jesus was someone who had a deep confidence about what he believed in religious matters.<sup>123</sup> It is difficult to imagine this Jesus beginning to perform a water baptism that was connected in some way with his unique ministry and then later deciding that maybe performing this baptism might not be the right thing to do

---

<sup>119</sup> Linnemann, 'Jesus und der Täufer', 229, actually argues that Jesus *would have to have* performed John's baptism, because at this time his message did *not* go beyond John's.

<sup>120</sup> Schnackenburg, *St John*, 1.411.

<sup>121</sup> See below, pp. 181-186, esp. 183-184.

<sup>122</sup> See below, pp. 184-185.

<sup>123</sup> See above, pp. 98-105.

after all. It seems easier to believe that he would have ceased baptising simply because he had been performing John's baptism and felt that the time for the performance of that rite in the will of God was now over, John having been arrested. Or, even if John's arrest had not yet taken place, he may have found it problematic to continue performing John's baptism (as John 4.1, 3 seems to suggest), and therefore ceased, because water baptism was not, and never had been, a crucial part of his work anyway.

I admit that this argument is not watertight. There could conceivably have been circumstances of which we are unaware that may have caused Jesus to cease performing his own type of baptism. It is also true that for him to have performed John's baptism is not, all other things being equal, what we would have expected. Nevertheless, for Jesus to have ceased baptising surely makes more sense if it was John's baptism that he performed.

In conclusion, therefore, the arguments that have been made to support the view that Jesus performed a baptism of a different significance from John's do not amount to much, whereas the likelihood that he ceased baptising suggests that he probably performed John's baptism. Summing up our investigation at this point in the chapter, then, even after taking into account the degree of uncertainty over whether Jesus would have performed John's baptism rather than a different one, we can say that it is probable (but far from certain) that the historical Jesus performed John's baptism for a time. In reaching this conclusion, I side with a majority of critics, as I did in the first two sections of this chapter. From now on, however, I will depart from the majority view.

#### **6.4 Would Jesus' performance of John's baptism suggest discipleship?**

The third stage of the discussion in this chapter has to do with deciding how much support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship there would be if he performed John's

baptism. (Lack of certainty over whether he did in fact administer John's baptism will be factored into the final conclusion.)

Nearly all critics who accept that Jesus administered John's baptism seem to believe it suggests that he was once John's disciple.<sup>124</sup> They believe that when Jesus baptised he would have done so in some sense under John's authority, whether or not he should be described as his disciple at the time he was baptising. These scholars are either explicit or seem to imply that Jesus would have been John's disciple before he began baptising.<sup>125</sup>

It is, of course, easy to understand why scholars so readily take this position. However, there are two unwarranted assumptions here. First, we should not simply assume that Jesus would have to have received John's authorisation for him to have performed his rite of baptism. Second, it should not be assumed that John could only have given Jesus his authorisation to baptise if Jesus was or had been his disciple. In fact, when account is taken of both these points, the amount of support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship if he performed John's baptism is seen to be significantly less than these scholars believe. Let us deal with each assumption in turn.

(1) If Jesus performed John's baptism, would it have been with his authorisation?

First impressions might indeed be that if Jesus administered John's rite of baptism, it would have been with his authorisation. All other things being equal, we might expect a man A, intending to perform a rite that originated with a man B, to whom A feels no animosity, more likely than not to get B's authorisation before performing that rite himself.

---

<sup>124</sup> Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 53-55, exceptionally, is explicit that Jesus' performance of baptism (which he appears to believe was John's rite of baptism) does not suggest that he was ever John's disciple.

<sup>125</sup> So, e.g., Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 14-15; Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism*, 36-40; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 250-251; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 204-207; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.120-127, 129, 166-167; Murphy-O'Connor, 'John the Baptist', 365-366, 371-372; Robinson, *Priority of John*, 183-184; idem, 'Elijah, John and Jesus', 271-272; Webb, 'John the Baptist', 219-223; idem, 'Jesus' Baptism', 301-305. Reading between the lines, this also seems to be the view of Brown, 'Jesus and Elisha', 88; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 98-101; and Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, 60.

That Jesus did in fact feel no hostility to John at this time is highly probable. Firstly, at a time prior to Jesus' baptising ministry he had received John's baptism from him (Mark 1.9 pars.). This at least makes it very likely that he had a high opinion of John at that time. Secondly, there is evidence that subsequent to the time Jesus began his baptising ministry he also held John in high esteem. Matt 11.7-19 par. presents Jesus speaking very highly of John in several different logia, and there is widespread agreement that there is much in this passage that is essentially historical. Jesus' statement that of those born of women no one is greater than John (in Matt 11.11 par.), especially, is very unlikely to have arisen in the early church.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, Jesus' reply in Mark 11.29-30 to those who ask him to say by what authority he is acting is also widely believed to be essentially authentic, and these words once again show Jesus with a high opinion of John. Although it is unclear exactly when in his ministry Jesus would have spoken the words behind Matt 11.7-19 par. (where they are historical) and Mark 11.29-30 pars., it seems very unlikely that they would all have come from a time before Jesus began baptising. Jesus, then, seems to have had a high opinion of John both before and after beginning his baptising ministry. There is therefore every reason to believe that at the time he baptised he was favourably disposed towards John too.<sup>127</sup>

At first sight, then, one might expect Jesus not to have performed John's baptism without receiving his authorisation to do so. Furthermore, it could be objected that people would have been unlikely to accept John's baptism from Jesus unless John had authorised his baptising ministry.

However, there are good reasons for thinking that if Jesus performed John's baptism, he may well have done so without his authorisation. The following are arguments that demonstrate this. It is true that points (b), (c), (d) and (e) do not directly support the view that Jesus baptised without John's authorisation; they merely show that Jesus could easily have baptised without his authorisation. Nevertheless, these arguments serve to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the argument that a performance

---

<sup>126</sup> On Matt 11.11 par. see chapter eight.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Webb, 'John the Baptist', 221; idem, 'Jesus' Baptism', 303. There is no reason to believe that he ever became ill-disposed.

of John's baptism by Jesus would necessarily have arisen from Jesus' discipleship. Hence my purpose in what follows is primarily to demonstrate the weakness of this argument (although (a) directly concerns Jesus baptising without John's authorisation). Importantly, the weaker this argument is, by probability, the less likely it is that Jesus would have baptised with John's authorisation.

(a) To begin with, as we have seen, there are good reasons for believing that the core of John 3.26, i.e., John's disciples informing him that Jesus was baptising, may well be historical.<sup>128</sup> Because it is most natural to suppose that they would have told him something he did not previously know, and, if he did not know, Jesus could not have begun baptising with his authorisation, this verse provides some support for an independent baptising ministry by Jesus. I readily admit that there are uncertainties here. In addition to the uncertainty over the historicity of John's disciples telling him that Jesus was baptising, there is also the somewhat less substantial uncertainty over whether John's disciples might in fact have informed him of something he already knew. Nevertheless, this text is well worth noting.

(b) Jesus will doubtless have joined some form of preaching to his baptising, and it is easy to think that people could have become impressed by him enough to trust him to baptise them, even if they knew that he was performing a rite that originated with John without his authorisation. It is also possible that many might not have known that Jesus had not received John's authorisation to baptise.

(c) In Jesus' opinion, John's rite of baptism was surely not something that belonged to John, but rather a rite that belonged to God and of which John had been made a mere steward. There is therefore less reason to think that he would have felt a need to ask John's permission before performing it himself.

(d) The historical Jesus was undoubtedly someone who often acted and spoke with very great authority. In chapter four I provided a long list of texts which, together, provide overwhelming evidence for believing that during at least most of his ministry

---

<sup>128</sup> See above, pp. 161-167.



he was someone who had a deep confidence in his religious beliefs, many of which specifically concerned his own role in God's plan.<sup>129</sup> These same texts also make it clear that for at least most of his ministry he was a person who acted and spoke very authoritatively. We saw in chapter four too that there is strong evidence that even at an early stage of his ministry Jesus had a deep assurance about his religious beliefs.<sup>130</sup> The issues discussed in that context – his unique preaching, the transfer of disciples from John to himself, his choice of twelve disciples and his reply to John's question – also suggest very strongly that he behaved and spoke with great authority at an early period (the time in his ministry when he baptised, or at least began baptising) too. In fact, given what we know of Jesus, the thought of him performing John's baptism without asking John's permission should cause no eyebrows to be raised. We might actually think it would be untypical of Jesus if he had taken the trouble to gain authorisation from John.

(e) As well as Jesus' propensity for acting with authority, there is a further overlapping characteristic of his that is important here, and that is his willingness to offend.<sup>131</sup> For Jesus to have performed John's baptism without his consent, and to have (potentially) offended him in the process, would fit perfectly with what we know of him from elsewhere. Here is a list of ways in which the Gospels present Jesus (obviously or more subtly) offending people. As in section 4.2, when we were listing ways in which Jesus is attested with confidence in his beliefs, we will limit our observations to the Synoptics. Again, this is not because the Fourth Gospel is worthless as a historical source, but because its historical value is generally speaking less than that of the Synoptics and there is in any case so much attestation in the Synoptics that the Fourth Gospel's services are not required. As in the first part of section 4.2, also, we will not spend time examining the historicity of any of these incidents because there is no need. Jesus causes offence so often that even if only some of the list is historical, it is beyond reasonable doubt that he was someone who

---

<sup>129</sup> See above, pp. 85-93.

<sup>130</sup> See above, pp. 98-105.

<sup>131</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.177: 'The historical Jesus did threaten, disturb, and infuriate people . . .'; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 615: 'There is an undeniably controversial, even outrageous element in much of Jesus' mission, both his teaching and his conduct'; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 149: '[Jesus] caused regular offence to some of the pious, . . .'; Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 237: '[Jesus]' view of himself and of the vital importance of his mission was offensive . . .'

would not have shied away from offending people if he believed it was the will of God to do so. The list is as follows:

Jesus can be found causing his parents grief by remaining in Jerusalem without permission (Luke 2.41-50); telling people their sins are forgiven (Mark 2.1-12 // Matt 9.1-8 // Luke 5.17-26; Luke 7.48); consorting with notorious sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2.15-17 // Matt 9.10-13 // Luke 5.29-32; Matt 11.19 // Luke 7.34, 36-39; Luke 15.1-2); acting on the Sabbath in ways that cause his opponents great annoyance (e.g., Mark 2.23-28 // Matt 12.1-8 // Luke 6.1-5; Mark 3.1-6 // Matt 12.9-14 // Luke 6.6-11; Luke 13.10-17; 14.1-6); saying of his family, ‘Who are my mother and brothers?’ (Mark 3.31-35 // Matt 12.46-50); telling the synagogue at Nazareth that an Isaianic prophecy has been fulfilled through himself, and reminding them that Elijah and Elisha were once sent not to Jews but to Gentiles (Luke 4.16-27); making a huge number of exalted claims about himself (see pp. 86-95); telling a Gentile that Gentiles are dogs (Mark 7.24-30 // Matt 15.21-28); telling a bereaved man to ‘let the dead bury their own dead’ (Matt 8.21-22 // Luke 9.59-60); having women disciples (Mark 15.40-41 // Matt 27.55-56 // Luke 23.49; Luke 8.1-3); reinterpreting parts of the Torah (Mark 7.14-23 // Matt 15.10-20; Matt 5.21-48; 19.7-9 // Luke 6.27-36; 16.18); addressing Peter as ‘Satan’ (Mark 8.33 // Matt 16.23); calling Herod Antipas a ‘fox’ (Luke 13.32); referring to the Pharisees and scribes in all sorts of pejorative ways (Mark 8.15 // Matt 16.6 // Luke 12.1; Mark 12.37-40 // Luke 20.45-57; Matt 23.1-36 // Luke 11.37-52); telling the Sadducees that they do not understand the scriptures or the power of God (Mark 12.24 // Matt 22.29); using a parable that likens his audience to murderers (Mark 12.1-12 // Matt 21.33-46 // Luke 20.9-19); violently cleansing the temple (Mark 11.15-17 // Matt 21.12-13 // Luke 19.45-46); and refusing to give straight answers to the Sanhedrin or Pilate (Mark 14.60-62 // Matt 26.62-64 // Luke 22.67-70; Mark 15.2-5 // Matt 27.11-14 // Luke 23.3).

It is true that some of this list may well not be historical. Nevertheless, there is enough attestation to enable us to conclude confidently that the historical Jesus was, at least during the bulk of his ministry, someone who was willing to cause offence when he felt it necessary. It is true too that most of these incidents – where they are

historical – probably relate to a time after John’s arrest. However, once again, as with Jesus’ assurance about his beliefs (examined in chapter four) and his authoritative behaviour and words (noted above), there is no good reason for believing that in the early part of his ministry Jesus would have chosen to act significantly differently from the way he acted later on. For another reason, then, it would be no surprise if Jesus had performed John’s baptism without his blessing.

In the light of all these points, we should conclude that if Jesus performed John’s baptism, he may well have done so without any authorisation from John.

(2) Would John’s authorisation to baptise imply Jesus’ discipleship?

The second unwarranted assumption is that if John gave Jesus authorisation to baptise, it means that at some point Jesus would have to have been John’s disciple. However, it is quite possible that Jesus could have begun preaching – whether a message identical to John’s or a message that differed somewhat from his – and that John had heard Jesus preach or had heard through others of his preaching, and had become impressed by him. Thereupon, either John or Jesus could have approached the other to suggest that Jesus add his efforts to John’s baptising work. It is quite possible, therefore, that John authorised Jesus’ baptising ministry without Jesus ever having been his disciple.

For these two reasons, then, if Jesus performed John’s baptism, there is no need to see this as strong support for the view that he was once his disciple. In chapter four I asserted that scholars of all types seem not to have taken into account Jesus’ confidence in his religious beliefs when deciding whether he would have chosen to become John’s disciple. Something similar appears to be true in connection with his performance of John’s baptism: the authoritativeness Jesus was in the habit of demonstrating and his willingness to offend seem by and large to have been overlooked. An overly sceptical view of the historical worth of the (mainly) narrative portions of the Fourth Gospel has probably also been a contributory factor, since those who believe that Jesus received John’s authorisation to baptise never seem to

find it necessary to argue against the essential historicity of John 3.26. Once a scholar has determined that Jesus is likely to have performed John's baptism, it is all too often simply assumed that he would have received his authorisation before commencing. Nor does it ever seem to be considered that Jesus might have received authorisation without ever having been John's disciple. Jesus' discipleship, to be sure, is certainly one way that his performance of John's baptism could be explained. Nevertheless, on balance, the burden of proof seems to be on those who argue from the baptism to the discipleship. If Jesus administered John's baptism, then, we should see in this no more than a weak or moderate amount of support for his discipleship.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Earlier, we reached the conclusion that Jesus probably (but far from certainly) administered John's baptism for a time. The lack of certainty there should be factored in to the conclusion we have just reached, because, if Jesus did in fact administer a baptism of a different significance from John's, that would clearly not support the thesis that he was once his disciple. Since, then, Jesus' performance of John's baptism would be no more than a weak or moderate amount of support for his discipleship, given that we are far from certain that he ever administered John's baptism in the first place, the overall support for his discipleship resulting from a consideration of his baptising ministry is even less impressive. Our final conclusion is therefore that an examination of Jesus' performance of baptism provides real but fairly weak support for the view that he was once John's disciple.

At this stage, most of our analysis has been completed. However, there are two logia, in which some scholars have claimed to find evidence that Jesus was once John's disciple, that still require examination. We will now turn to the first of these, a logion attributed to John concerning one who would come after himself.

## 7. The One Coming after John

The logion attributed to John the Baptist, found in Mark 1.7; Matt 3.11; John 1.15, 27, 30, in which he speaks of a character who is ‘coming after’ him (using some form of the verb ἔρχομαι, ‘to come’, with the preposition ὀπίσω) has traditionally been understood as the prophecy of the coming of a future figure.<sup>1</sup> In this case ὀπίσω would mean ‘after’ chronologically. However, since the 1930s a number of scholars have argued that some or all of these verses ought to be interpreted not with a temporal reference, but in the same way as those NT texts, such as Luke 9.23; 14.27 (which also use ἔρχομαι and ὀπίσω), that speak of coming after *as a disciple*. In this case ὀπίσω would mean ‘after’ as in walking or following after, used metaphorically. John is in fact, these scholars claim, not speaking of the future but simply saying that he has a disciple who is greater than he is. Because in all these texts the NT clearly applies John’s words to Jesus, it is no surprise that some of the scholars who adopt this exegesis see in the logion evidence that the historical Jesus was once John’s disciple.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I will refer to all these texts, as well as the similar Luke 3.16 and Acts 13.25, and the brief recapitulation in Acts 19.4, as varieties of a single logion, although I am aware that it has a wide range of forms, and that John 1.15, 30 in particular differ considerably from the others. In some of the instances of this saying in the NT a contrast between the baptisms of John and the person referred to is included. However, that part of the saying is not my primary concern in this chapter (although it will crop up on a few occasions), and in what follows, when I speak of ‘the logion’, I will not be including the contrast in baptisms.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer in 1932 (‘Zur Evangelischen Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer’ [*JBL* 51 (1932), 300-319], 311-316) was, to my knowledge, the first to see in the logion (in this essay only in Matt 3.11; John 1.15, 27 – see n. 10 on his later view) a reference to Jesus’ discipleship. Lohmeyer is not explicit, but he apparently sees the logion in these three texts as evidence for the historical Jesus’ discipleship. The next scholar to see a reference to discipleship in the logion (apparently independently of Lohmeyer) was Kendrick Grobel (‘“He That Cometh”’, *passim*) in 1941. Grobel is unclear whether he believes the logion connotes discipleship on the level of the text of the NT (see n. 10), although he does believe that the historical John’s use of it supports the historical Jesus’ discipleship; see esp. 400-401. Other scholars who are explicit that they see the logion as evidence for the historical Jesus’ discipleship are Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182-183; Badke, ‘Was Jesus a Disciple’, 199; and Moloney, ‘Fourth Gospel’, 48-50. Those who seem to imply as much include Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273-275; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 38; Michaels, *Servant and Son*, 19; and France, *Mark*, 70-71. Although they do not actually say so, those other critics, whose concern is not with historicity but simply with one or more texts of the logion in the NT (see n. 10 for references) and who believe that those texts speak of Jesus’ discipleship, would also surely believe that the text(s) in question are evidence for the historical Jesus’ discipleship, because it is not plausible that any scholar would hold that the early church invented the idea that Jesus was once John’s disciple.

A sizeable majority of scholars on the other hand do not believe that the logion provides evidence for Jesus’ discipleship. So, e.g., Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 38-41; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369-

In this chapter, we will examine this discipleship interpretation first on the level of the NT text and Q, and then on the level of what the historical John actually said. I will begin by arguing that the traditional exegesis of the logion as it stands in the text of the NT – that it is a prophecy of the coming of a future figure rather than anything to do with discipleship – is the correct one. I will then provide reasons for believing that on the historical level too the logion – which, as we will see, is very probably authentic – is extremely unlikely to have spoken of Jesus’ discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

## 7.1 Texts and translations

The relevant texts and translations, including those examples of the logion that do not include ὀπίσω, are as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Mark 1.7: ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω μου, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς κύψας  
 λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ.

‘There is coming after me one who is stronger than I, the tie of whose sandals  
 I am not worthy to bend down and undo.’

---

371; Ernst, ‘War Jesus ein Schüler’, 19-21; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.118-119; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 63-64; Taylor, *Immerser*, 133, 142-147; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 283. Dunn and Taylor do not even mention the discipleship interpretation. Oscar Cullmann is sometimes cited as someone who either believes the logion is support for the discipleship of the historical Jesus or who sees it as a reference to discipleship on the level of the NT text. In actual fact Cullmann consistently treats the logion as a future prophecy. See his ‘Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος’ (in *ConNT* 11, 26-32; *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 169-175; *Early Church*, 177-182).

<sup>3</sup> In what follows, the much discussed identity of the coming one (assuming he is a future figure) is not my concern and will not therefore be examined (although on pp. 80-81 I did provide reasons for believing that the coming one should not simply be identified with God himself). The main suggestions (apart from simply God himself) are the royal Messiah, the priestly Messiah, Michael/Melchizedek, the Son of Man and Elijah-*redivivus*, or some combination of these (or a combination of one or more of these *and* God himself). See the lengthy discussion in Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 219-306; see also Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 369-371; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.33-35; Taylor, *Immerser*, 143-146; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 72-74.

<sup>4</sup> I have followed the text of Nestle-Aland, seeing no reason to depart from it. In places the translations given here reflect conclusions that will be reached later in the chapter.

Matt 3.11: ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν, οὐδὲ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι.

‘The one coming after me is stronger than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to remove.’

Luke 3.16: ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου, οὐδὲ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς λύσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ.

‘There is coming one who is stronger than I, the tie of whose sandals I am not worthy to undo.’

John 1.27: ‘. . . , ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, οὐδὲ οὐκ εἰμὶ [ἐγὼ] ἄξιος ἵνα λύσω αὐτοῦ τὸν ἱμάντα τοῦ ὑποδήματος.

‘. . . , the one coming after me, the tie of whose sandal I am not worthy to undo.’

Acts 13.25: ἔρχεται μετ’ ἐμὲ οὐδὲ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἄξιος τὸ ὑπόδημα τῶν ποδῶν λύσαι.

‘There is coming after me one, of whom I am not worthy to undo the sandal of his feet.’

Acts 19.4: . . . τὸν ἐρχόμενον μετ’ αὐτὸν [Ἰωάννην], . . .

‘. . . the one coming after him [John], . . .’

John 1.15: ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

‘The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’

John 1.30: ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεται ἀνὴρ ὃς ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

‘After me is coming a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’

## 7.2 Preliminary considerations

Before moving on to look at these texts, there are two preliminary matters that need to be considered.

### (1) Double meanings

A few scholars think that the logion as it is found in one or more NT texts may simultaneously contain two meanings, i.e., that it could be both a future prophecy *and* portray Jesus’ discipleship.<sup>5</sup> However, to imagine that any NT instance of the logion connotes both these radically different senses seems unnecessarily subtle and rather contrived. The same applies to the logion considered historically; although the underlying Aramaic, like the Greek, apparently had the capacity to form a double meaning,<sup>6</sup> it is difficult to imagine the historical John’s words comprising both these senses at once. As it happens, most of the arguments in this chapter will have to do with ruling out the possibility of a discipleship interpretation of the logion rather than supporting the view that it should be seen as a future prophecy. It is therefore unnecessary to consider potential double meanings.

R. T. France thinks that the logion as it stands in Mark 1.7 is a future prophecy, and that there is no double meaning in the text as such. However, he also believes that ὀπίσω μου would serve to hint at the historical Jesus’ discipleship for those who

---

<sup>5</sup> This seems to be the position of Lohmeyer, in his *Markusevangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), 18, commenting on Mark 1.7; in his ‘Evangelischen Überlieferung’ he does not see a double meaning in any example of the logion. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182-183, commenting on John 1.15, 30, appears to believe it is a possibility.

<sup>6</sup> On the Aramaic of the logion, see n. 86.



knew he was once John's disciple.<sup>7</sup> This really boils down to the fact that France sees the logion in the text as a future prophecy but believes that for the historical John it would have had to do with Jesus' discipleship. There is therefore no need for us to complicate things by thinking on such a subtle level as he does, since we will be looking carefully in due course at both the sense in the texts and the historical sense.

In the rest of the chapter, then, potential double meanings in the logion will not be mentioned or considered, as they would not substantially affect the strength of the arguments used or the conclusion that will be reached.

## (2) Participial and finite-verb forms

A word needs to be said at this stage also about how those examples of the logion that use the participle ἐρχόμενος and those that use the finite verb ἔρχεται compare with each other. The view of Ernst Lohmeyer in his 1932 essay – a view that had probably changed by the time he wrote his commentary on Mark of 1953<sup>8</sup> – that the participial form of the logion has to do with discipleship but the finite-verb form does not is entirely groundless, and is not, as far as I am aware, shared by any other critic. A comparison of John 1.15 (with the participle ἐρχόμενος) and 1.30 (with the finite verb ἔρχεται), which should undoubtedly be interpreted in the same way, helps show this. For the underlying Aramaic too, whether the verb behind ἔρχομαι is in participial or finite-verb form does not affect the meaning. For our purposes, what is key is the presence of the verb ἔρχομαι in combination with ὀπίσω μου, and specifically the meaning of ὀπίσω, as well as the presence and meaning of the Aramaic equivalents of these words. Whether participles or finite verbs are used will not affect any results.

---

<sup>7</sup> France, *Mark*, 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> See nn. 2, 5, 10.

### 7.3 The sense of the logion in the text of the NT and in Q

A fairly large majority of historical Jesus scholars see the logion as it stands in all the above texts as a prophecy of the future rather than to do with discipleship.<sup>9</sup> Most writers of commentaries on the Gospels take the same view. There are, however, some critics who see a discipleship interpretation in one or more of the five texts that use the preposition ὀπίσω (Mark 1.7; Matt 3.11; John 1.15, 27, 30).<sup>10</sup> Most of these provide very little reasoning for their view, apparently believing that the verb ἔρχομαι followed immediately by ὀπίσω must have to do with discipleship, or at least that it most naturally does so.

Before examining the texts themselves, it is necessary to consider the meaning of the word ὀπίσω in Koine Greek of the late second temple period. In pre-classical and classical Greek, this word was used only as an adverb, but by NT times it was used both adverbially and as a preposition. The prepositional use, as found in the logion, is what is most important for our purposes.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> These include those mentioned in n. 2, who believe that the logion provides no evidence for the historical Jesus' discipleship. See the references there. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.118-119, shows some caution in rejecting a discipleship interpretation on the level of the NT text.

<sup>10</sup> In his 'Evangelischen Überlieferung', 311-316, esp. 314, Lohmeyer asserts that on the level of the NT text the participial form in Matt 3.11; John 1.15, 27 connotes discipleship, but the finite-verb form in Mark 1.7 and John 1.30 does not. In his *Markusevangelium*, 18, however, he sees discipleship in Mark 1.7 too. Grobel's position is very unclear. Although much of his essay seems to suggest that he views the logion (including in the Fourth Gospel – see '“He That Cometh”', 401) as having to do with Jesus' discipleship on the level of the NT text, he also appears to say that it is 'apparent' that it is a prophecy of the coming of a future figure 'in the anti-Baptist polemic which all the gospels betray' (399). France, *Mark*, 70-71; Badke, 'Was Jesus a Disciple', 199; Moloney, 'Fourth Gospel', 48-50; and Boismard, 'Traditions Johanniques,' 28-29, are all either explicit or imply that all five citations connote discipleship. Michaels, *Servant and Son*, 19, believes John 1.15, 30 might have to do with discipleship, and implies this for the other three. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273-275, sees discipleship in John 1.15, 27, 30, but not in Mark 1.7 or Matt 3.11. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182-183, sees it in John 1.15, 30, but not in 1.27. Barrett, *St John*, 168; and Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1.456-457, believe the logion might connote discipleship in the Fourth Gospel. Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 51-52, claims that discipleship may be in view in Mark 1.7. Wink, *John the Baptist*, 38, sees it in Matt 3.11, but not elsewhere, it seems. Ulrich Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte: Form- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 103 n. 3, believes that the logion probably connotes discipleship in Mark 1.7.

<sup>11</sup> An examination of the sense of the adverb and any implications it might have for the sense of the preposition would not affect the following results.

Because we are asking whether in the logion ὀπίσω is temporal (with the meaning ‘after’) or by means of a spatial metaphor connotes discipleship (with the meaning ‘after’ in the sense of walking/following after),<sup>12</sup> it is very important to determine what this preposition means elsewhere. Outside the logion, prepositional ὀπίσω is found in the NT about 22 times, none of which is temporal, each being in some sense spatial, although many of these are in parallel texts. In secular writings, extant examples of prepositional ὀπίσω are extremely rare and are apparently spatial on every occasion they do occur.<sup>13</sup> However, ὀπίσω as a preposition is very frequent in the LXX. I have counted 318 examples in the most probable text.

Lohmeyer believes that prepositional ὀπίσω is not used in a temporal sense in the LXX at all.<sup>14</sup> Kendrick Grobel asserts that it was ‘practically unparalleled’ in a temporal sense and that he has found only two examples in the LXX that are certainly temporal.<sup>15</sup> These claims are very misleading. To my knowledge there are twelve instances of prepositional ὀπίσω in the LXX that are certainly temporal: 1 Kdms 24.22; 3 Kdms 1.6, 24; 2 Esdras 23.19; Job 37.4; Eccl 6.12; 7.14; 9.3; 10.14; 12.2; Dan 8.22, 1 Macc 1.9; two more that are probable: 1 Kdms 14.13; Eccl 2.12; and five more that may be temporal: Gen 8.8; 41.19, 27; Joel 2.14; Sir 33.16. This means that approximately 5% of the uses of prepositional ὀπίσω in the LXX are temporal (the remaining 95% being spatial in some sense, whether literally or metaphorically). The temporal sense is therefore certainly a relatively uncommon one, but hardly practically unparalleled. Furthermore, in the text of Daniel that is attributed to Theodotion, which was probably written around the first century BCE, there are a further four temporal uses of prepositional ὀπίσω: Dan 2.39; 7.6, 7, 24.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the idea of one person walking after another has a temporal element to it, but it is predominantly a spatial concept, and I will categorise it as spatial.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG, 716, gives five examples, all spatial. BDF, § 215(1), has three examples, at least two spatial; they are unclear whether they see the third as temporal. However, the text in question – ταύτης δὲ ὀπίσω (in W. Dittenberger, ed., *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum* [2 vols.; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903-1905], 1.56.62) – has to do with the positions of parts of a statue in relation to each other, and should be translated ‘and behind this’. BDAG, which cites the same text, translates ὀπίσω as ‘behind’.

<sup>14</sup> Lohmeyer, ‘Evangelischen Überlieferung’, 313.

<sup>15</sup> Grobel, ‘“He That Cometh”’, 398. Cf. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273; Badke, ‘Was Jesus a Disciple’, 199.

<sup>16</sup> The proportions of temporal to spatial prepositional ὀπίσω in the Greek OT texts attributed to Aquila, Symmachus and (for the most part) Theodotion do not differ significantly from what we find

For the moment, then, we may say with confidence that the temporal sense of ὀπίσω is a potentially viable one as far as the logion in the NT is concerned. So too of course is the sense of a spatial metaphor connoting discipleship. One need look no further than Mark 1.17 or Luke 9.23 to find it attested with this meaning.

#### (1) The logion in Luke-Acts

In Luke 3.16 the absence of any preposition means that the logion cannot be understood in the discipleship sense and must be a prophecy of the coming of a future figure. In Acts 13.25; 19.4 the unambiguously temporal μετά again rules out any connotation of discipleship.

#### (2) The logion in Mark

There is no doubt that in Mark 1.7 too the logion has nothing to do with discipleship. In 1.4-8 everything related about John is presented as something that was characteristic of what he did or said. This includes his use of the logion, as is shown especially by the iterative imperfect ἐκήρυσσεν ('he proclaimed [repeatedly]') that introduces v. 7. Crucially, John is portrayed doing and saying these things before Jesus is ever in his vicinity. Only after John's deeds and words have been described are we told that Jesus travelled to where he was located. Note how καὶ ἐγένετο (literally 'and it happened') in v. 9 introduces a new element – that of the arrival of Jesus – in the narrative. Furthermore, by saying that 'in those days' (ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις) Jesus came to John from Galilee, the certain implication is that he came sometime *during* the period that John did and said the things in vv. 4-8, and that John had begun before Jesus arrived. There cannot therefore be a reference to Jesus' discipleship, because Jesus is nowhere to be seen when John begins speaking the logion.

---

in the LXX. Josephus never uses prepositional ὀπίσω. Philo does so four times (*On the Migration of Abraham* 131; *On Flight and Finding* 165; *On the Change of Names* 9; *On Dreams II* 216), never in a temporal sense, and always either quoting or closely alluding to the Greek OT. The 'Apostolic Fathers' have prepositional ὀπίσω twice (*Hermas Vis.* 3.7.3; *Hermas Sim.* 9.2.7); neither is temporal.

The fact that the verb ἔρχεται is present in form rather than future is no problem for understanding it in a future sense. ἔρχεται is found as a futuristic present in Matt 17.11. More to the point, it is found with a future sense in the logion itself in Luke 3.16 and Acts 13.25.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, we are told that the person to whom the logion refers *will* baptise (βαπτίσει, v. 8) in the Holy Spirit, which fits very well with seeing the logion as a prophecy of the coming of a future figure. Similarly, the chronologically earlier nature of John as portrayed in the quotations from Mal 3.1 (1.2) and Isa 40.3 (1.3), and in the placing of the beginning of Jesus' ministry after John's has ceased (1.14; cf. 6.14; 8.28) cohere well with seeing the logion as a prophecy of the future.

It is simply out of the question, then, that in Mark's text the logion has anything to do with Jesus' (or anyone else's, for that matter) discipleship. As in Luke-Acts, we have here the prophecy of the coming of a future figure.

### (3) The logion in Matthew

For similar reasons, it is just as certain that in Matt 3.11 the logion has nothing to do with Jesus' discipleship. Although the habitual nature of John's use of the logion is not as pronounced as it is in Mark, Jesus is nevertheless clearly not present when he speaks it in 3.11. In 3.13, after hearing about the words and deeds of John, we are told, 'Then (τότε) Jesus arrived from Galilee . . .'. The unambiguous implication is that Jesus' arrival in John's vicinity takes place after John has at least begun speaking the logion. This is true whether τότε here means 'then, thereupon',<sup>18</sup> or, less probably, 'at that time'.

In Matt 3.11, instead of Mark's ἔρχεται we find the participial ἐρχόμενος. Once again, this present can easily hold a future sense.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the future participle is rare

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 38-40; Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 20 n. 24.

<sup>18</sup> So BDAG, s.v. τότε; BDF, § 459(2). On Matthew's use of τότε, see A. H. McNeile, 'τότε in St Matthew' (*JTS* 12 [1911], 127-128).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 38-40; Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 20 n. 24.

in NT Greek.<sup>20</sup> Most importantly, in the brief reference to the logion in Acts 19.4 there is no doubt that ἐρχόμενος has a future meaning. Once again too, the use of βαπτίσει ('he will baptise') in v. 11d coheres well with the logion as a future prophecy, as do the future tenses διακαθαριεῖ ('he will clean out'), συνάξει ('he will gather') and κατακάψει ('he will burn up') in v. 12. Likewise, John's chronological priority over Jesus in the Gospel as a whole fits well with seeing the logion in this way (see 3.3; 4.12; 11.10; cf. 14.2; 16.14).

In Matthew there is a further pointer towards the logion of 3.11 being a prophecy of the future: ὁ ἐρχόμενος ('the coming one') in 11.3 is almost certainly a reference back to ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος in 3.11. Grobel believes that in 11.3 ὁ ἐρχόμενος is the (messianic) title of an expected figure – 'The Coming One' (Heb: מָשִׁיחַ)<sup>21</sup> – and has nothing to do with 3.11.<sup>22</sup> However, it is very hard to believe that such similar terms as ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος and ὁ ἐρχόμενος do not refer to the same person, especially as both are found spoken by John.<sup>23</sup> In any case, 'The Coming One' is not known as the title of an expected figure in late second temple Judaism.<sup>24</sup> Donald A. Hagner sees evidence for titular ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Dan 7.13; 9.25-27; Mal 3.1; Matt 21.9/Matt 23.39/Ps 118.26; Acts 19.4; Heb 10.37; Rev 1.4, 8, all of which use a verb meaning 'to come' that is sometimes qualified in some way and whose subject is an eschatological figure or God himself.<sup>25</sup> But these texts do not make it probable that 'The Coming One' existed as a title. All they show is that the verb 'to come' (Hebrew מָשַׁח; Aramaic מָשַׁח; Greek ἔρχομαι) was able to 'take on a solemn eschatological resonance in a given eschatological context'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See BDF, § 351.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Psalm 118.26; Isa 59.20; Mal 3.1.

<sup>22</sup> Grobel, '“He That Cometh”', 399-400.

<sup>23</sup> A large majority of scholars see in 11.3 a reference back to 3.11. So, e.g., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 363, 371; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.132; Taylor, *Immerser*, 143-144; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.241; Gundry, *Matthew*, 205; Casey, *Q*, 108; Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 32. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1993-1995), 1.51, 300, thinks it is probable. Badke, 'Was Jesus a Disciple', 199, sides with Grobel in rejecting the connection.

<sup>24</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.132, 199 n. 90; Casey, *Q*, 108, 110. Cf. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 316; Gundry, *Matthew*, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.51, 300 (cf. Brown, *John*, 1.44, 64; Flusser, *Sage from Galilee*, 26). Hagner appears to believe that this title was one in late second temple Judaism generally rather than a Christian invention. It is worth noting that even he thinks that 11.3 refers back to 3.11.

<sup>26</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.199 n. 90.

ὁ ἐρχόμενος in 11.3 is therefore almost certainly the same person as ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος in 3.11. If this is correct, ἐρχόμενος must have in view the same sort of coming in each of these verses. Because in 11.3 the word has to do with the coming of an expected figure, and nothing to do with discipleship, the same must be true in 3.11 too. For yet another reason, then, the logion in Matthew should be seen as a future prophecy.

When all the above points are considered, in Matthew, as in Mark and Luke-Acts, the logion undoubtedly has nothing to do with Jesus' discipleship.

#### (4) The logion in the Fourth Gospel

In the Fourth Gospel matters are not quite as straightforward as in the Synoptics, but it is nevertheless virtually certain that the logion is not about Jesus' discipleship. In this Gospel, the logion is found three times and in two very different forms – one similar to Matthew, Mark and Luke-Acts in 1.27, and one unique to the Fourth Gospel in 1.15 and 1.30. Despite the differences, the view of John A. T. Robinson, that John 1.15, 30 has to do with discipleship but 1.27 does not,<sup>27</sup> ought to be swiftly rejected.<sup>28</sup> The fact that both the form in 1.15, 30 and that in 1.27 contain ἔρχομαι + ὀπίσω, that they are in such close proximity to each other, and that Jesus is envisaged as the subject of the verb ἔρχομαι in each of these verses makes it virtually certain that ὀπίσω has the same sense in all three texts.

Before turning to the meaning of ὀπίσω, we must determine the sense of the part of the logion in 1.15, 30 that is unique to the Fourth Gospel. Specifically, we need to ask what ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν means.

Beginning with ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, it is clear that ἔμπροσθεν (literally 'before') refers to a priority over John that Jesus has. Among other things, this word

---

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182-183.

<sup>28</sup> I have already rejected Lohmeyer's view that only John 1.15, 27 have to do with discipleship; see above, p. 192.

can denote priority in time or rank,<sup>29</sup> and in this context cannot conceivably have anything other than one of these two meanings. There are strong reasons for believing that it refers here to Jesus' priority in rank. Firstly, in the logion of 1.15, 30, the main point that John and the evangelist are making about Jesus is that he is ἔμπροσθεν John (the ὅτι clause that follows being used to demonstrate this). Surely the fundamental point that the evangelist wants to make is that Jesus is superior to John, i.e., has priority in rank, rather than that he existed before him. Secondly, γέγονεν, the perfect tense of the verb γίνομαι, seems to denote (in part at least) that Jesus' being ἔμπροσθεν is a state in the present, since if a reference to the past alone were intended (in which case γέγονεν would be an aoristic perfect), there is no apparent reason why the extremely common aorist ἐγένετο would not be used. Because it does not make sense for John to say that Jesus is, rather than was, prior to him in time, but by contrast saying that he is prior to him in rank makes perfect sense, ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν is best seen as a reference to Jesus' priority in rank. We may conclude, then, that ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν means something along the lines of 'ranks ahead of me'.<sup>30</sup>

Turning to πρῶτός μου ἦν, it is clear that, like ἔμπροσθεν, πρῶτος (also literally 'before') refers to a priority over John that Jesus has, and, once again, in the context the only possible types of priority are those of time or rank. Because ἔμπροσθεν has to do with rank, for πρῶτος to do so too would seem to involve a very awkward looking tautology. Moreover, the past tense ἦν makes perfect sense as a reference to Jesus' pre-existence. Finally, πρῶτος + a genitive of comparison (such as we find here in πρῶτός μου) is attested with the sense before in time,<sup>31</sup> but I am not aware

---

<sup>29</sup> ἔμπροσθεν connotes priority in time in 3 Kdms 3.12; 16.25, 33; 4 Kdms 18.5; Eccl 1.16; 2.7, 9; and in rank in Gen 48.20.

<sup>30</sup> Cullmann's view that both ἔμπροσθεν and πρῶτος have to do with Jesus' temporal priority is wholly unwarranted. See *ConNT* 11, 30-31; *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 173-174. The ET of this passage in *Early Church*, 180-181, is problematic. Cullmann's French – 'Celui qui vient après moi a été avant moi puisqu'il est antérieur à moi' – has been translated: 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me'. However, his whole point in this part of his essay is that ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν (= 'a été avant moi' [= German: 'ist vor mir gewesen']) has to do with Jesus' chronological priority, not his ranking before John.

<sup>31</sup> See BDAG, s.v. πρῶτος, 1α.



of any examples of it meaning before in rank.<sup>32</sup> πρῶτός μου ἦν should therefore be translated ‘he existed before me’.

In conclusion, then, we may confidently translate these clauses ‘ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me’, which is in fact the exegesis of the vast majority of commentators, even if they do not always use exactly these words.

Having determined the sense of the remainder of the logion in John 1.15, 30, we now turn to the meaning of the ὀπίσω clause. C. H. Dodd has argued that in verses 15 and 30 this clause probably connotes discipleship, because if it is read in this way, there is a close antithesis between it and the following ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν – ‘He who is my follower in actual fact ranks ahead of me . . .’<sup>33</sup> He points out that this antithesis is lost if the ὀπίσω clause is taken as temporal.

Dodd is correct that with his translation there is a close antithesis that reads very well. However, if the ὀπίσω clause is taken as temporal, the logion still reads fairly well. There could (i), as Dodd himself concedes, be a play on words between following in time (ὀπίσω) and coming before in rank (ἔμπροσθεν).<sup>34</sup> Alternatively (ii), there may be an intentional antithesis between the following in time of the ὀπίσω clause and the precedence in time of the ὅτι clause. In this case, the antithesis is admittedly between the first and third clauses rather than the first and second as in Dodd’s translation, and admittedly between a noun (v. 15) or main (v. 30) clause and a ὅτι clause, but the logion reads well nevertheless: ‘*He who comes after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.*’ Most probably (iii) both these features are intended. In any case, regardless of which of these three options is preferred, having ὀπίσω as temporal does not make the logion look awkward.

As it happens, there are further reasons – some of them compelling – for believing that ὀπίσω in the logion of the Fourth Gospel is temporal: (i) The way that Jesus is

---

<sup>32</sup> Admittedly this is by no means proof that such a sense was impossible.

<sup>33</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273-275. Dodd does not use these actual words, but this is his idea. Cf. Grobel, ‘“He That Cometh”’, 401; Boismard, ‘Traditions Johanniques’, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 273.

portrayed meeting John's disciples in 1.35-51 strongly suggests that he is meeting them for the first time. How then can he be portrayed on the day before as a disciple himself (see vv. 30, 35)? (ii) Similarly, the first two mentioned disciples do not know where Jesus is staying (vv. 38-39), which makes no sense if Jesus was John's disciple on the previous day. (iii) Importantly too, the fact that John's disciples refer to Jesus as 'Rabbi' (v. 38) looks very difficult if Jesus is himself being portrayed – at least on the day before – as a disciple of John. (iv) In 1.35-36, Jesus seems to be distinguished from John's disciples. (v) In 1.29 it is easiest to imagine that Jesus is being presented appearing in John's vicinity for the first time, notably on the day *after* John has used the logion of 1.27. It is true that in v. 26 John tells those who have been sent from the Pharisees that Jesus 'stands among' them. But note how he does not say 'among us' but 'among you'. This is probably a reference simply to Jesus' existence within the Jewish population at large, rather than his presence in John's vicinity. (vi) It is even more probable that when John sees Jesus in 1.29 and declares, 'Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' he is being presented clapping eyes on him for the first time. Importantly again, this comes after his use of the logion in 1.27. (vii) The quotation of Isa 40.3 in 1.23 coheres well with John as the forerunner of Jesus. So does John's statement in 3.28 that he has been sent ahead of Jesus.

It is virtually certain, then, that the logion in the Fourth Gospel has nothing to do with Jesus' discipleship. As in the Synoptics, it refers to the coming of a future figure.

#### (5) The logion in Q

Matthew's and Luke's agreement in structure against Mark – mentioning John's baptism in water, then the logion, then the other figure's baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire (fire not in Mark) – shows that they have not simply used Mark here, but have used another common source, which I will assume was Q.<sup>35</sup> In determining the Q text, there are five questions (some more important than others) that need to be answered:

---

<sup>35</sup> See above, pp. 7-8.

(a) Did Matthew and Luke use different versions of Q for the logion? This is unlikely because, although there are differences in how they have worded the logion, their text is very similar in Matt 3.7-10, 12 // Luke 3.7-9, 17, which were surely in the same part of Q as that in which the logion was contained.

(b) Did Q have ἰσχυρότερός μου? Although this phrase is in Mark, the fact that it is in Matthew and Luke makes it probable that it was in Q also.

(c) Did Q have ὀπίσω μου (present in Matt 3.11 but absent in Luke 3.16)? Most scholars think that it did.<sup>36</sup> I agree for two reasons: (i) Nowhere other than Luke 3.16 is the logion found without a preposition. (ii) Accounting for Luke's omission of ὀπίσω μου is very easy. It is entirely plausible to imagine that Luke believed that the John of his Marcan and Q sources was prophesying the coming of a future figure, saw that ὀπίσω μου (which was present in both) had the danger of being misunderstood to connote Jesus' discipleship rather than the future, so omitted it in Luke 3.16 (and made sure he used the clearly temporal μετά in Acts 13.25; 19.4).<sup>37</sup>

(d) Did Q have τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι or λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ?<sup>38</sup> The latter option is preferable. First, because the latter phrase or one very close to it is found in Mark, the Fourth Gospel, Luke and Acts, whereas the form with βαστάσαι is found only in Matthew, we would expect the Q form more probably to coincide with the one that we think circulated more widely. Second, tidying up that phrase into τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι would be typical of Matthew's style.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> So Robinson et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 14-15; Fleddermann, *Q*, 217-221; Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 40-41; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 265-266. Taylor, *Immerser*, 143, takes the opposite view.

<sup>37</sup> Similarly Fleddermann, *Q*, 19; Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 25; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 265 (cf. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 55-56). Grobel, "He That Cometh", 400; Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 40; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.472-473; Marshall, *Luke*, 146; and Wilckens, *Missionsreden*, 103, hold that Luke omitted ὀπίσω μου which he received in his tradition, but are not clear that they believe it was in Q.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Immerser*, 143; and Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 265 n. 8, 266, opt for the former; Fleddermann, *Q*, 217-221, for the latter.

<sup>39</sup> The verb βαστάζω probably means 'remove' rather than 'carry' in Matt 3.11. Although it is usually translated 'carry' in this verse, it is attested with the meaning 'remove' (see BDAG, s.v.).

(e) Did Q have ἔρχεται or ἐρχόμενος?<sup>40</sup> Matthew has not followed Mark's ἔρχεται here but has ἐρχόμενος instead (Luke has ἔρχεται). The question arises whether he found ἐρχόμενος in Q or if Q, like Mark, had ἔρχεται. It could be argued that ἔρχεται was in Q and that Matthew altered this word that he found in Mark and Q for stylistic reasons. On balance, though, since any stylistic improvement is not great, it is probably better to think that ἐρχόμενος was in Q, although this is a very tentative conclusion.

Thus very cautiously the text of Q 3.16 for which the strongest claim can be made runs: ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ.<sup>41</sup>

Having determined the most plausible text, we now need to ask if ὀπίσω (assuming it existed) was temporal in Q or whether it had to do with Jesus' discipleship:

(a) Importantly, that Matthew (3.11) and Luke (3.16; Acts 13.25; 19.4) have the logion as a prophecy of the future would fit well with seeing it in the same way in Q 3.16 too.

(b) I have already provided good reasons for believing that ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Matt 11.3 refers back to Matt 3.11 and that this supports seeing ὀπίσω in Matt 3.11 as temporal. Because both Matthew (11.3) and Luke (7.19) have ὁ ἐρχόμενος in the same context in their Gospels,<sup>42</sup> we should accept that they both took these words from a common source that was not Mark, which, again, I will assume was Q.<sup>43</sup> For

---

βασιτάζω) and this seems to be its sense here too. When Mark speaks of undoing the sandal tie it is clearly with a view to removing the sandal from the foot. Matthew apparently realised this and typically chose to abbreviate his Marcan source.

<sup>40</sup> ἐρχόμενος is preferred by Robinson et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 14-15; Fleddermann, *Q*, 217-221; Taylor, *Immerser*, 143-145; and Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 266. I am not aware of any critic who prefers ἔρχεται.

<sup>41</sup> Fleddermann, *Q*, 217-221, has precisely this.

<sup>42</sup> It is also in Luke 7.20, but this probably originated with Luke.

<sup>43</sup> See above, pp. 7-8.

the same reasons as in Matthew,<sup>44</sup> in Q too it seems best to understand ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Q 7.19 as a reference back to Q 3.16, which also probably had ἐρχόμενος.<sup>45</sup> Even if, improbably, ἔρχεται was the reading in Q 3.16, it would still be best to see ὁ ἐρχόμενος as a reference back to it. Again, for the same reasons as in Matthew,<sup>46</sup> that ὁ ἐρχόμενος seems to look back to the logion is support for the view that ὀπίσω (if it existed) in the Q version of the logion was temporal.

(c) Finally, the fact that Matthew (11.10) and Luke (7.27) both quote Mal 3.1 at the same place in their texts shows once again that they have used a tradition from Q. In Matthew and Luke this quotation is interpreted as a reference to John as the precursor of Jesus, and it would doubtless have had this meaning in Q too. Having John as Jesus' precursor coheres well with seeing the logion as a prophecy of the coming of a future figure.<sup>47</sup>

In view of these points, we can say with a fairly high degree of confidence that if, as is probable, ὀπίσω μου was included within the logion of Q 3.16, ὀπίσω served as a temporal preposition and had nothing to do with Jesus' discipleship. If, improbably, ὀπίσω μου was not part of the logion in Q 3.16, then any reference to Jesus' discipleship would of course be impossible.

In the logion as it appears in the NT and most probably as it existed in Q, then, ὀπίσω is temporal, and the saying has nothing to do with Jesus being John's disciple. I will argue below that its original meaning likewise almost certainly held no connotation of Jesus' discipleship. Before examining the reasons for this, however, we need to demonstrate that the logion very probably stems from the historical John.

## 7.4 Is the logion authentic?

---

<sup>44</sup> See above, p. 197.

<sup>45</sup> Fleddermann, *Q*, 218; and Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 104, see a connection between Q 7.19 and Q 3.16.

<sup>46</sup> See above, pp. 197-198.

<sup>47</sup> It is possible that Q (3.4) also contained a reference to John as the voice crying in the wilderness (based on Isa 40.3), although most scholars doubt this.

The following discussion of historicity will be limited to an examination of the better attested form of the logion, that found in Mark 1.7; Matt 3.11; Luke 3.16; John 1.27; and Acts 13.25, which I will call the sandal-form. We need to ask first if the lowest common denominator of the sandal-form of the logion was spoken (in Aramaic)<sup>48</sup> by the historical John. As we will see, there are good reasons for believing that it very probably was. We then need to ask if he included a prepositional phrase – some sort of equivalent of the ὀπίσω μου or μετ’ ἐμέ that we find in the Greek forms in the NT. I will argue that he is likely also to have used a prepositional phrase.

The lowest common denominator of the sandal-form of the logion specifically involves John using some form of a verb meaning ‘to come’, and stating that the subject of that verb is someone whose sandal(s) he is unworthy to undo/remove.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> I will assume, with the majority of critics, that John preached mainly in Aramaic. (For the languages spoken in Palestine in his day, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.255-268; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean* [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979], 29-56; Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998], 57-68.) Although I think it is possible that he may sometimes have used Greek, he surely used Aramaic more frequently. As it happens, if we were to assume that the logion originated in Greek, the arguments that follow (where relevant) would lead to the same basic conclusion regarding its historicity and original meaning as they do if we postulate an Aramaic origin. Although I accept that Hebrew – possibly in more than one dialect – was spoken in Palestine in John’s time, its use would surely have been uncommon enough to make a Hebrew origin of the logion highly implausible.

<sup>49</sup> Paul G. Bretscher, ‘“Whose Sandals?” (Matt 3 11)’ (*JBL* 86 [1967], 81-87), develops the thesis that in Matt 3.11 and Acts 13.25 the sandals referred to are not Jesus’ but John’s. He translates Matt 3.11: ‘He who is coming after me is mightier than I, of whom I am not worthy to wear sandals’; and Acts 13.25: ‘There is someone coming after me, of whom I am not worthy to remove the sandals of my feet’. He also believes that the logion is authentic, and that when he spoke it, as in these translations, the historical John would have referred to his own sandal(s). Bretscher’s theory, however, has some huge problems and should be rejected. (1) It is very dubious that his interpretation will stand up grammatically. In English as in Koine Greek we can say that a person is not worthy of someone (using a genitive) or that a person is not worthy to do something (using an infinitive). But in English to say, as Bretscher does in his translations of these texts, that a person is not worthy of someone to do something looks very odd, and we must suspect that it did in Greek too. It is perhaps telling that apart from his perceived use of this construction in these two passages Bretscher provides no examples of where this syntax – or anything similar – is found. (2) If his theory were correct, it would mean that the sense in Matthew would differ from the clear sense of the logion in Mark, and that the meaning in Acts would be different from that in Luke, despite the fact that the logion in Mark and Luke clearly demonstrates Jesus’ superiority vis-à-vis John. (3) Bretscher believes that in the logion of Acts 13.25 – which he thinks may be the most original extant form – John’s point is that even if he were to remove his sandals, he would not be worthy of Jesus (85). This interpretation is a necessary part of his theory, which all revolves around unworthiness to have on footwear in the presence of the divine. However, if we were to accept a reference to John’s own sandals in Acts 13.25, the most natural exegesis would surely be that they should remain firmly on his feet! (4) The fact that Bretscher’s translation of Matt 3.11 has John claiming that he is not worthy to wear his sandals, but his translation

Although we have not yet determined the original sense of the logion, that is not in fact a great hindrance towards analysing the historicity of its lowest common denominator at this stage, since we are limited to two options,<sup>50</sup> each of which can be examined separately, and each of which will be seen to result in similar conclusions. (In the following paragraphs, when I refer to the logion, I will be thinking of the lowest common denominator of the sandal-form.)

Firstly, if the logion originally had to do with Jesus' discipleship, it stretches the imagination to believe that the early church would have invented this. Therefore, it ought to be seen as an authentic saying of John.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, if the logion was originally a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, we are in a very different situation that requires some real analysis, since it needs to be asked whether such a prophecy was invented by the church to provide validation of Jesus by John.<sup>52</sup> Close inspection reveals, however, that there are a number of strong reasons for believing that if the logion was originally a future prophecy, it would have originated with John:

(a) It is not a saying that contains any specifically Christian features.<sup>53</sup> There is, for example, no reference to the Messiah. Moreover, it cannot easily be argued that the logion was invented to have Jesus as 'The Coming One' (ὁ ἐρχόμενος), i.e., as a specific figure expected in late second temple Judaism. First, as I mentioned above, in John's day 'The Coming One' does not seem to have been the title of an expected

---

of Acts 13.25 has him claiming that he is not worthy to take his sandals off, hardly inspires confidence that behind these texts he has uncovered a primitive form of the tradition.

<sup>50</sup> That the logion originally had to do with the discipleship of someone other than Jesus is such a remote possibility that it does not warrant consideration.

<sup>51</sup> Some of the arguments that will be used below to support the historicity of the logion if it is seen as a future prophecy would also support its historicity if it connoted discipleship, but they are not needed. The implausibility of inventing Jesus' discipleship is support enough.

<sup>52</sup> Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 104-105, believes that the logion (which he takes as a future prophecy) originated in the post-Easter period and was caused by rivalry between John's disciples and the Christian church. Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (revised edn.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1972; ET of *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931]), 246-247, thinks this probably explains the logion's origin.

<sup>53</sup> Critics are frequently impressed by this; e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.33, 35; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 268-269; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 42; Guyenot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 125; Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 45.

figure.<sup>54</sup> Second, even if such a title existed, because the participle is needed to denote the title, the alternation between the finite-verb and participial forms of the logion points against the logion having anything to do with this figure.<sup>55</sup> Third and similarly, if ὁ ἐρχόμενος was the title of an expected figure, the fact that ὀπίσω μου is inserted between ὁ and ἐρχόμενος makes it unlikely that this person is in view, since the title would then be at best obscured, at worst ruined, by the insertion.

(b) In Q – as in Matthew (3.11-12) and Luke (3.16-17) – the logion was linked closely with John’s preaching of judgement by fire (Q 3.16d-17), widely believed to be characteristic of the historical John.<sup>56</sup>

(c) There is multiple attestation. The sandal-form of the logion is found in at least three known sources, i.e., Mark, Q and the Fourth Gospel. In addition to these, Acts 13.25 may be based on a special tradition that Luke used for Acts (the alternative being that it is based on Luke’s memory of what he wrote in Luke 3.16 or what he remembered of his sources for Luke 3.16): whereas Luke, Mark and Q have ἱκανός for ‘worthy’, Acts has ἄξιος; they have the plural ὑποδήματα (‘sandals’), while Acts has the singular ὑπόδημα; finally, they have ἰσχυρότερός μου, whereas Acts omits this. These differences may well point to the existence of a separate source (either oral or written).<sup>57</sup>

(d) The impression given by some passages in the NT is that the sandal-form of the logion was a habitual saying of John. See especially Mark 1.4-8.<sup>58</sup> This is more likely for a saying that is authentic.

(e) In the relative clause of the logion in Mark, John 1.27, and probably Q, we find a superfluous pronoun αὐτοῦ. While in Greek this pronoun is superfluous, its equivalent (usually as a suffix to a noun) is necessary in Aramaic (and Hebrew). In Aramaic if we were to say ‘whose sandal tie I am not worthy to undo’, it would be

---

<sup>54</sup> See above, p. 197.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 91 n. 91.

<sup>56</sup> Noted by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.33. Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 363.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.33.

<sup>58</sup> See my comments on these verses on p. 195 above.



expressed literally ‘who I am not worthy to undo his sandal tie’ where the ‘who’ would be represented by the indeclinable ךְ or ךֿ. Since these words are indeclinable, further (pronominal) information is needed to make the sense clear, and this information becomes a superfluous pronoun in a close Greek translation.

Because this superfluous pronoun is common in the LXX (under the influence of the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic),<sup>59</sup> it is possible that its presence in the logion is a Septuagintism, i.e., a composition, consciously or unconsciously, in the style of the LXX.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, this feature may well suggest that the logion is based on an Aramaic precursor.<sup>61</sup> Of course, even with the logion showing signs of an Aramaic precursor, it does not necessarily follow that it originated with the historical John. Many early Christians did, after all, speak Aramaic, and some sayings attributed to Jesus, John, etc., that were originally Aramaic, could potentially have originated in the early church.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, evidence for Aramaic is still evidence for an early form of the logion and by that token is some support for regarding it as authentic.

(f) The fact that Josephus says nothing about John prophesying the coming of a future figure should not be seen as evidence that he did not do so. Given Josephus’ disdain for messianism, owing to the detrimental role he believed it played in the Jews’ relations with the Romans, we would not expect him to attribute such a belief, or any form of eschatological expectation, to John, whom he saw as a ‘good man’ (ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ – *Ant.* 18.117), even if he knew that he had held a belief of this kind.<sup>63</sup>

We may conclude, then, that if the sandal-form of the logion was originally a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, it is highly likely that it was spoken by John. Bearing in mind our conclusion above that if this form of the logion originally had to do with Jesus’ discipleship it should be regarded as authentic, this means that,

---

<sup>59</sup> See Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 100; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.123.

<sup>60</sup> The superfluous pronoun occurs in non-Semitic Koine Greek, but only rarely. See BDF, § 297.

<sup>61</sup> It is seen as evidence for underlying Aramaic by Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 100-101; and C. F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 84-85 (with reference to John 1.27).

<sup>62</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.178.

<sup>63</sup> Noted by Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 269.

regardless of its original sense, the lowest common denominator of the sandal-form of the logion – i.e., that John used a verb meaning ‘to come’, and the subject of that verb was a person whose sandal(s) he claimed to be unworthy to undo/remove – very probably stems from him.<sup>64</sup>

Having determined this, the next step – still thinking about the sandal-form of the logion – is to ask whether the historical John included a prepositional phrase that was some sort of equivalent of the ὀπίσω μου or μετ’ ἐμέ of the logion as it is found in the NT. If he spoke the logion as a reference to Jesus’ discipleship, this prepositional phrase would obviously be essential to the meaning and must therefore have been used. Under the future prophecy interpretation, however, matters are once again more complex. Even without the prepositional phrase, which would mean ‘after me’ (chronologically), by referring simply to one who is coming, the logion (in Aramaic as in Greek and English) would still clearly be a reference to the coming of a figure chronologically after John.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, if the logion was a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, it needs to be asked whether John’s original Aramaic might not have included any prepositional phrase at all.

Eduardo Arens, pointing to the absence of a prepositional phrase in Luke 3.16, thinks that it is secondary.<sup>66</sup> However, we have already seen that there are good reasons for believing that Luke himself omitted ὀπίσω μου, which he found in both Mark and Q.<sup>67</sup> Knut Backhaus thinks that ὀπίσω μου was an addition first made in Q, but he does not provide any real reason for taking this view.<sup>68</sup> On balance, even if the logion was a future prophecy, it seems probable that the historical John (at least on

---

<sup>64</sup> Most scholars believe the sandal-form of the logion is essentially authentic. So, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.32-33; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 362-364, 369-371; Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 305-308; Goguel, *Au seuil*, 42; Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste*, 125; Taylor, *Immerser* 133; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 266-269; and apparently Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 62-73. Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 45, is undecided.

<sup>65</sup> In all three languages, this would be true whether a participle or finite verb is used. As we have seen, a Greek example of the logion without a prepositional phrase can be found in Luke 3.16.

<sup>66</sup> Eduardo Arens, *The HΛΘON-Sayings in the Synoptic Tradition: A Historico-critical Investigation* (Fribourg [Switzerland]: Biblical Institute of the University of Fribourg, 1976), 289.

<sup>67</sup> See above, p. 202.

<sup>68</sup> Backhaus, “*Jüngerkreise*”, 40-41.

one occasion) used a prepositional phrase when he spoke the sandal-form, for the following reasons:

(a) We have strong attestation. A prepositional phrase is found in Mark, (probably) Q, John 1.27, and Acts 13.25, as well as in the brief reference to the logion in Acts 19.4 and the closely related non-sandal-form in John 1.15, 30.

(b) If it is understood as a future prophecy, there is a specific reason from the sense of the logion that supports the idea that John used a prepositional phrase. To begin with, we should observe that there are potentially two different ways in which the logion can be interpreted as a future prophecy. It could either simply be a prophecy that someone whose sandals John was unworthy to undo would appear on the scene at a time after himself. Or it could be that someone whose sandals John was unworthy to undo would appear on the scene at a time after himself *and specifically following on from himself*.<sup>69</sup>

If the latter interpretation were the correct one historically, it would clearly be appropriate for John to have used a prepositional phrase – ‘after me’ (chronologically) – to help emphasise the continuity. As it happens, there are good reasons for thinking that the latter interpretation may well be the preferred one. The evidence for this is found in the logion in Mark 1.8 pars., where John says that he baptised (or baptises) in water but someone else will baptise in the Holy Spirit (or Holy Spirit and fire).

The first point to note about this logion concerning the contrast in baptisms is that it is probably an authentic saying of John:<sup>70</sup> (i) It is well attested, being attributed to John in Mark 1.8; Matt 3.11; Luke 3.16 and John 1.33;<sup>71</sup> in terms of known sources it is found in Mark, Q and the Fourth Gospel. (ii) In Mark it is closely connected with

---

<sup>69</sup> This of course is how the NT understands John. See Mark 1.2-3 pars.

<sup>70</sup> This is fairly widely agreed. In fact, this logion on the contrast in baptisms is almost always treated together with the logion on the coming one as part of one overall saying; critics therefore usually take a view about the authenticity of the combined saying. (All those mentioned in n. 64 take the same view on the authenticity of Mark 1.8 pars. as they do on 1.7 pars.) It is, however, better methodologically to allow the possibility that these two logia might not always have been combined.

<sup>71</sup> It is also attributed to the risen Jesus in Acts 1.5, and to Jesus and Peter in Acts 11.16, but these texts are not important here.

the logion about the one coming after John of Mark 1.7; in Matthew and Luke the connection is even closer – it is actually intertwined with the logion on the coming one, strongly suggesting that it was intertwined in Q too. Because we have already determined that at least the lowest common denominator of the logion on the coming one is very probably authentic, this close connection suggests that the logion of Mark 1.8 pars. is likely to be essentially authentic too.

The second point to note is the fact that in Mark, the Fourth Gospel, and Matthew and Luke (= in Q) the person who will baptise in the Holy Spirit is the same person as the one coming after John. Given the likely authenticity of both logia, this suggests that the historical John was probably referring to the same person in each, i.e., for John, the one coming after him is likely to have been identical with the one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit (or Holy Spirit and fire, or fire alone).<sup>72</sup> If this is correct, the way that John used the same verb – baptise – in connection both with himself and the one coming after himself suggests that if the logion on the coming one was a future prophecy, he may well have understood this person as someone who would specifically follow on from himself and his own work. If he did, as I have noted, using a prepositional phrase would help make this sense clear.

It seems likely, therefore, that even if the logion was originally a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, John would at least on occasion have used a prepositional phrase when speaking it.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, then, we can say that it is highly likely that the historical John spoke a logion that used a verb meaning ‘to come’, and that the subject of that verb was a figure whose sandal(s) he said he was unworthy to undo/remove. If this logion had to do with Jesus’ discipleship, John would certainly have used a prepositional phrase. If

---

<sup>72</sup> Whether the historical John claimed that the person would baptise in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit and fire, or only fire is not important here; what is important is simply that the person would baptise in some sense.

<sup>73</sup> Most scholars who accept the essential authenticity of the sandal-form of the logion do not comment specifically on the authenticity of the prepositional phrase, but generally seem to give the impression that they believe it is historical. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.33, 79 n. 76, who does comment, is undecided.

the logion was a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, he would probably have done so.

The form of the saying in John 1.15, 30, where John uses a verb that means ‘to come’, rates the subject of that verb above himself, and speaks of his pre-existence, could easily be regarded as a development of the sandal-form of the saying. Alternatively, it could easily be based on a similar form of the logion that John spoke, which had no reference to sandals. It is not necessary to examine the historicity of this form of the logion here, since regardless of whether any aspects of it that differ from the sandal-form were spoken by the historical John or not, the arguments that follow would not be affected.

As we have already noted, Mark clearly implies that the logion is something that John spoke repeatedly.<sup>74</sup> Although Matthew and Luke are unclear about any habitual usage, in the Fourth Gospel John is presented speaking some form of the logion on two consecutive days (1.27, 30). In view also of the widespread attestation of the logion, in sandal- and non-sandal-forms, on balance it seems preferable to think that the historical John did indeed use the logion in one form or another on a number of occasions.

## **7.5 The original sense of the logion**

We saw above that, on every occasion it appears in the NT, the logion concerning the one coming after John is a prophecy of the coming of a future figure. We also saw that it is likely to have had this sense in Q too. But might it originally have meant something different? As spoken by the historical John, could it in fact have had to do with Jesus’ discipleship? Before turning to the case that can be made for each side of the argument, there is an initial point that needs to be made. This is that it is unlikely that the logion was *deliberately* altered from being a saying about Jesus’ discipleship

---

<sup>74</sup> See above, p. 195.

to a future prophecy. Any change in meaning would probably have to have been accidental, for two reasons:

(a) We might imagine that generally speaking the consciences of early Christians would have prevented them from so radically changing the logion's meaning that the original sense was completely obscured. Let us be clear that we would not be talking here about the invention of a saying. Nor would we be talking about adding to or subtracting from an existing tradition, or about changing its context or emphasis. We would be talking about altering an existing saying to the extent that its original core meaning was entirely replaced. I, for one, do not know of any other example of where this has happened.

(b) If a deliberate change was made, it is hardly likely that the word ὀπίσω, which had such great potential to be misunderstood as a reference to discipleship, would have been retained. The unambiguously temporal μετά would be expected instead. This goes for whether the change was made after the logion was already in Greek or at the time it was translated from Aramaic into Greek. Even in the case of a deliberate change of meaning from a discipleship-logion to a future prophecy when the saying was still in Aramaic, we would not expect the later form of Aramaic to be one that had the capability of being translated using ἔρχομαι + ὀπίσω, since the Aramaic equivalent of these words – most naturally ܘܢܝܢܐ + either ܒܦܢܝܢ or ܘܢܝܢܐ – can itself be used to refer to discipleship.<sup>75</sup>

If the logion originally had to do with Jesus' discipleship, then, its meaning would probably have changed accidentally. But did an accident of this kind take place? Let us turn to the case that can be made for and against the view that the logion as used by the historical John was not a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, but had to do with Jesus' discipleship under him. We will begin with arguments that have been used to support this view and then move on to the far superior arguments against it. In all of what follows, except where stated, we will be considering the sandal-form of the logion.

---

<sup>75</sup> On the Aramaic of the logion, see n. 86.

(1) Arguments that have been used to support the view that the logion originally connoted Jesus' discipleship<sup>76</sup>

(a) Grobel asserts that the historical John's<sup>77</sup> 'crackling' threat of imminent judgement in his use of words such as 'offspring of vipers' (Matt 3.7 par.), 'already the axe lies at the root of the trees' (Matt 3.10 par.) and 'unquenchable fire' (Matt 3.12 par.), concerned the judgement that John believed would be performed by the Messiah. He asserts too that John could not also have said about that same 'awful Messiah' the comparatively 'pale and lame' words, 'There is coming after me [chronologically] one who is stronger than I'. Therefore, when John spoke the logion, Grobel believes, he must have had Jesus' discipleship in view.<sup>78</sup>

Grobel is very probably correct to attribute such threatening words of judgement to the historical John.<sup>79</sup> However, regardless of who, in John's view, would perform the judgement that he prophesied, and regardless of what he believed about the character referred to in the logion, his prophecies could surely easily have varied greatly in terms of how vivid they were. Besides, the clause, 'There is coming after me [chronologically] one who is stronger than I', is in any case only the first part of a sentence in which the majesty of the stronger one is immediately underlined by means of John's assertion that he is unworthy to undo that character's sandals. To see a contradiction between John's lurid preaching of judgement and the logion understood as a future prophecy is therefore entirely unwarranted.

(b) Grobel also contends that if the logion as spoken by John was a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, his question to Jesus in Matt 11.3 par. – 'Are you the coming one?' (Greek: οὐ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος;) – reveals a 'retrogression' in his view of

---

<sup>76</sup> The two arguments that follow are those of Kendrick Grobel. I mentioned in n. 10 that it is very unclear whether Grobel believes the discipleship interpretation exists on the level of the NT text. As regards what the historical John said, Grobel's view is a little less obscure, but still quite difficult to decipher. He makes no mention of Aramaic or of any view that John taught in Greek, yet his essay seems to read as if he sees in the NT texts of the logion – or at least in the Synoptic examples of it – the words of the historical John. This is how I will understand what he has to say.

<sup>77</sup> He apparently attributes these words to the historical John; see the previous note.

<sup>78</sup> Grobel, ' "He That Cometh" ', 399.

<sup>79</sup> There is a broad scholarly consensus that John's preaching did include vivid threats of judgement.

Jesus (or a retrogression attributed to him, if the question is unhistorical) that would not have been the case if the logion had had to do with Jesus' discipleship.<sup>80</sup>

As we saw in chapter four, John's question is likely to be authentic.<sup>81</sup> However, Grobel assumes that for John to have spoken the logion as a future prophecy, he would have to have known that it referred to Jesus. Many scholars would beg to differ, believing that John may have spoken the logion as a prophecy of the coming of a future figure, though at the time having no expectation that Jesus was the person who would fulfil it.<sup>82</sup> Or, even if John *had* previously connected the (future-prophetic) logion with Jesus, he could easily later have experienced some doubts. In either case, the logion as a future prophecy and John's later question fit comfortably together.

Grobel believes too that if the logion was a future prophecy, οὐ εἶ ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος; , which adheres closely to the wording of the logion, would be more expected in John's question than οὐ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος;. But, firstly, it is highly questionable whether in οὐ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος; we have John's *ipsissima verba* (or rather, the close Greek equivalent of his *ipsissima verba*), with which we can draw any conclusions. Secondly, even if we do have his *ipsissima verba*, it would make perfect sense for John, if he had previously spoken of 'the one coming after me'/'he who comes after me', later to have abbreviated this as 'the coming one'. If John's question is unhistorical, the early church, in place of John, could just as easily have made this abbreviation.

Again, then, Grobel's arguments are very weak.<sup>83</sup> In fact, as we will see, John's question is actually evidence *for* the logion originally having been a future prophecy.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Grobel, ' "He That Cometh" ', 399-400.

<sup>81</sup> See above, pp. 102-104.

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.34-35, 133; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 371.

<sup>83</sup> Grobel, ' "He That Cometh" ', 398-399, also seems to see the present tense ἔρχεται in Mark 1.7, and the presence of ὀπίσω in those texts that include this word in the logion, as support for a discipleship interpretation of the logion as spoken by the historical John. I have already answered both of these points; see above, pp. 195-196, 193-195.



(2) Arguments supporting the view that the logion was originally a prophecy of the coming of a future figure

(a) If John's saying originally had to do with Jesus' discipleship, it would mean that Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts and the Fourth Gospel have all seriously misrepresented his words. In terms of known sources, it would mean that Mark, the Fourth Gospel, Q (it seems), and possibly a further source for Acts have misrepresented what he said. That all these texts and sources have misrepresented what John said seems very improbable. The degree of improbability is increased when we bear in mind that any change in meaning of the logion from a discipleship saying to a future prophecy is likely to have been accidental.<sup>85</sup> It is true that in Aramaic as in Greek the wording of the most probable text of the logion if it was a reference to discipleship would apparently have been identical to its wording if it was a future prophecy, so a confusion in meaning in either language is hypothetically possible.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, in

---

<sup>84</sup> See below, pp. 217-218. Badke, 'Was Jesus a Disciple', 199, believes that the reference in Mark 1.7 to John's unworthiness to undo Jesus' sandals is itself (i.e., quite apart from its existence as part of the logion as a whole) evidence for the historical Jesus' discipleship. He cites *b. Ket.* 96a, which states that a disciple is required to do for his teacher every task that a slave performs for his master except undo his footwear, and sees an allusion to this custom in Mark 1.7. (Cf. Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 32-33.) However, because the rabbinic text states that undoing sandals was something that disciples did *not* have to do, even if the text refers to a custom that existed in John's day (itself highly questionable) and even if there is an allusion to the custom in Mark 1.7 (also highly questionable), any allusion to discipleship would therefore be far too obscure. John would simply be saying that he was unworthy to perform even the role of a slave. Cf. Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 41; Ernst, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 20-21.

<sup>85</sup> See above, pp. 212-213.

<sup>86</sup> In considering the Aramaic form of the logion, before looking at the options, we need to note that Aramaic (like Hebrew) did not have a common word meaning 'follow' in any sense of the English word, but used the periphrasis 'come after' or 'go after' in various senses. Turning first of all to the logion as a future prophecy, then, this means it is likely to have used a verb meaning 'to come' (this would almost certainly have been ܐܘܨܝܢܐ, since it is so common, and, in fact, it is doubtful that there was any alternative), followed immediately by one of the two prepositions ܒܥܝܢܐ and ܕܥܝܢܐ, both of which could mean 'after' (chronologically). (ܒܥܝܢܐ has this sense in, e.g., Dan 2.39; 7.6-7; 1QapGen 12.10; 21.5; 22.27; ܕܥܝܢܐ has this meaning in Dan 2.29, 45; 7.24; 1QapGen 21.14). In order to have the meaning 'after me' the preposition would need a first person singular pronominal suffix, making the forms ܒܥܝܢܐܝܐ or ܕܥܝܢܐܝܐ. We would therefore expect ܐܘܨܝܢܐ (in either finite-verb or participial form) + either ܒܥܝܢܐܝܐ or ܕܥܝܢܐܝܐ. Most scholars who retro-translate the logion understood as a future prophecy use ܐܘܨܝܢܐ + ܒܥܝܢܐ. See Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 144; Casey, *Q*, 108-109; Burney, *Aramaic Origin*, 103-104 (who is retro-translating the non-sandal-form of the logion). In conversation, the Aramaic scholar Timothy Lim has told me that he would use ܐܘܨܝܢܐ + either ܒܥܝܢܐܝܐ or ܕܥܝܢܐܝܐ.

Turning to the logion as a saying about discipleship, I am not aware of any extant examples in which an Aramaic verb meaning to come (again, the best option is ܐܘܨܝܢܐ) + either ܒܥܝܢܐ or ܕܥܝܢܐ is

the absence of evidence to the contrary, we ought to assume that the unanimous witness of the above texts is not misleading.

(b) That John is presented speaking the logion before Jesus is ever in his vicinity in Matthew and Mark, and probably in Luke and the Fourth Gospel too,<sup>87</sup> also counts against the view that the logion of the historical John had to do with Jesus' discipleship. In terms of known sources, definitely Mark, probably the Fourth Gospel, and probably Q<sup>88</sup> present John speaking the logion before Jesus is in his location. Of course, the setting of a saying is less likely to have been preserved in the handing down of tradition than the saying itself, but, even so, the fact that the logion is presented in this way ought not to be ignored.

(c) In chapter four we found that there are good reasons for believing that John's question to Jesus in Matt 11.3 // Luke 7.19 is likely to be authentic.<sup>89</sup> We also saw earlier in the present chapter that in Matthew the logion and the question almost certainly refer to the same figure (as they apparently do in Luke too), and that in Q this was probably the case as well.<sup>90</sup> If the logion and the question are both authentic,

---

used to connote discipleship. However, firstly,  $\text{בְּתֵר}$  could mean 'after' in the sense of literally following after, pursuing after, etc. (e.g., in 1QapGen 22.7; 11QtgJob 32.7); secondly, although I am unaware of any examples, it seems likely that  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  could mean this too, especially as it could be used to mean 'behind' (e.g., in 1Q20 2.2), and in the closely related Hebrew language the identically spelled word could mean 'after' in the sense of following after, either literally or metaphorically (e.g., in Deut 4.3; 1 Kings 19.20; Ezek 20.16; CD 4.19; 19.32). It is therefore no surprise that all scholars of whom I know, who provide what they believe is the Aramaic lying behind  $\epsilon\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota \omicron\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\omega \mu\omicron\upsilon$ , when this Greek clause is used of discipleship in such texts as Luke 9.23; 14.27, have  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  + either  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  or  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  (i.e.,  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  or  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  with the first person singular pronominal suffix: 'after me').  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  is used by Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 195 (who, because he is speaking generally, has  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  instead of  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$ ); Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 23; and Gustaf Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (London: MacMillan, 1929; ET of *Jesus-Jeschua: Die Drei Sprachen Jesu* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922]), 191. In his retro-translation of the non-sandal-form of the logion as a discipleship saying, Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 146, also uses  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  +  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$ . Timothy Lim has told me that he would use  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  + either  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  or  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$ .

Although there is a little more uncertainty concerning the possibility of  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  being used to connote discipleship than there is with  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$ , as far as we can tell, it is  $\text{בְּתֵרִי}$  that would have been the more common word for all the above senses, so on balance it is the more likely word to have been used in the logion as a future prophecy or as a discipleship saying. In all probability, then, the Aramaic for the logion as a future prophecy or as a saying about Jesus' discipleship would have been identical.

<sup>87</sup> See above, pp. 195, 196, 201.

<sup>88</sup> See Robinson et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 1-19; Fleddermann, *Q*, 209-233.

<sup>89</sup> See above, pp. 102-104.

<sup>90</sup> See above, pp. 197, 203.

it seems quite likely that in the perspective of the historical John too they both referred to the same figure, since in the absence of any particular reason to deny what Matthew, Luke and Q portray, we are probably better to accept it. If the historical John referred to the same figure in each, and if in each he referred to the figure 'coming', the same sort of coming would surely have been in view in both cases. Because in his question the coming would have to have been that of an expected figure, and nothing to do with discipleship, the same must have been true in the logion too. Admittedly, there are some big 'ifs' here, but even so, we should probably see some support for seeing the historical logion as a future prophecy.

(d) If the sandal-form of the logion had to do with Jesus' discipleship, John would have made a very strange statement, the strangeness of which seems to have been overlooked by scholars who adopt a discipleship interpretation. Let us be clear that he would not simply have said that he had a disciple who had greater potential than himself, even far greater potential. What he would have said is that then and there he had a disciple whose sandals he was unworthy to undo or remove! It is very difficult to envisage him knowingly accepting as a disciple someone he held in such high esteem. We would probably have to assume that Jesus had insisted on being John's disciple, but of course we have no evidence for that at all. It is almost as difficult to imagine John, believing that among his disciples this person existed incognito, reporting that he had a disciple he regarded so highly.

(e) It is possible that Luke's certainly temporal  $\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$  in his wording of the logion in Acts 13.25; 19.4 may be based on a source that had the logion without  $\acute{\omicron}\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\omega$ , and by that token could have had nothing to do with discipleship. Admittedly, however, this is not a key argument, since Luke may have altered an  $\acute{\omicron}\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\omega$  in a source he used for Acts (as he had previously deleted the  $\acute{\omicron}\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\omega$  in Mark and [probably] Q when he wrote his Gospel), or he may have had no special source at all, and simply relied on his memory of what he had written in Luke 3.16 or what he remembered of the meaning of the sources he used at that time.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, then, we can say confidently that there is not a single argument of any substance to support the view that originally the logion had to do with Jesus' discipleship. On the other hand, there are some strong reasons – particularly the sense of the logion in the Gospels and Q, and the strangeness of John having a disciple that he would have held in such high esteem (points (a) and (d) above) – for thinking that from the time it was first spoken, this logion always had to do with the coming of a future figure. In our quest to discover whether the historical Jesus was ever John's disciple, this logion therefore provides no meaningful evidence one way or the other and can be discounted.

Our examination is now almost complete. It remains for us to examine one final logion, this time a saying attributed to Jesus, which some have claimed suggests that he was once John's disciple.

## 8. Matthew 11.11 // Luke 7.28

Some scholars have seen a reference to Jesus' discipleship in Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28. These texts contain a logion attributed to Jesus, which begins by stating the supremacy of John and then qualifies his greatness in some way. This qualification – in Greek: ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ [τῶν οὐρανῶν] μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν – is usually translated 'but the one who is least in the kingdom of God [heaven]<sup>1</sup> is greater than he', or words to that effect. In this translation the word μικρότερος, in form a comparative adjective, is a de facto superlative (a well-attested use of the comparative form) – 'least' – and 'in the kingdom of God [heaven]' closely modifies it. I will refer to this interpretation as 'the usual interpretation' or 'the usual exegesis'.

In 1910 Franz Dibelius claimed that this translation is a misinterpretation of the clause.<sup>2</sup> He suggested that an exegesis which was common in patristic times is in fact the correct one: μικρότερος is a genuine comparative adjective, 'in the kingdom of God [heaven]' is in fact part of the predicate of the clause, and we should interpret: 'the one who is μικρότερος [than John] is greater than he in the kingdom of God [heaven]', where the one who is μικρότερος is Jesus himself. I will refer to this interpretation – with any meaning of μικρότερος – as 'Dibelius' interpretation' or 'Dibelius' exegesis'.

Throughout the century since Dibelius wrote, a sizeable minority of scholars have followed his interpretation of the logion, albeit with different views of the sense of

---

<sup>1</sup> In what follows I will consistently use the terms 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven', even when referring to authors who prefer the translation 'rule of God [heaven]' or 'reign of God [heaven]', or their foreign language equivalents. The reason for this is, firstly, that if we are to have a single word that translates the βασιλεία (or the underlying Aramaic כְּוַמְלָכָא) of the logion, I think 'kingdom' is marginally the best choice, and, secondly, for our purposes the exact sense of this word is unimportant, and it would complicate things unnecessarily to keep being precise about the sense individual scholars see in the term.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Dibelius, 'Zwei Worte Jesu' (ZNW 11 [1910], 188-192), 190-192. Dibelius actually comments only on Matt 11.11, but he would surely see the same exegesis in Luke 7.28 too.

μικρότερος. Dibelius himself took μικρότερος simply to mean ‘lesser’<sup>3</sup> (i.e., without any connotation of being lesser in a special sense), while some patristic authors took it as lesser in the sense of being less esteemed in public opinion or lesser in age, i.e., younger.<sup>4</sup> Importantly for our purposes, some scholars have seen in μικρότερος a reference to Jesus being lesser than John *by virtue of being his disciple*.<sup>5</sup> Although the number of scholars who have seen Jesus’ discipleship in the logion is relatively few, it is worthwhile examining properly whether this idea stands up under close scrutiny, since it is not immediately obvious that it is wrong.

In what follows, after briefly considering the texts of the logion in Matt 11.11 and Luke 7.28 (and the equivalent in *Thomas* 46), we will first consider the historicity of the logion. I will argue that it is likely to be an authentic saying of Jesus. Attention will then be turned directly to examining the logion’s original sense. As we will see, there are good reasons for believing that the usual interpretation is very probably the correct one. Finally, I will argue that even if Dibelius’ interpretation were the right

---

<sup>3</sup> English speaking scholars vary as to whether they use ‘lesser’ or ‘less’ to translate this and similar interpretations of the logion. I will consistently use the term ‘lesser’ despite the fact that some of the authors I refer to actually use the word ‘less’. There is no need to split hairs here.

<sup>4</sup> For more on these and similar interpretations of μικρότερος under Dibelius’ exegesis, see below, pp. 239-240.

<sup>5</sup> The first to see this possible sense of the logion seems to have been Otto Michel in 1937-1938. See his ‘“Diese Kleinen” – eine Jüngerbezeichnung Jesu’ (*TSK* 108 [1937-1938], 401-415), 413-414. Michel is not absolutely clear about the possibility of the discipleship sense, but because (i) he thinks Dibelius’ interpretation may be correct; (ii) he thinks Jesus may once have been John’s disciple; and (iii) his essay is primarily about the Greek word μικρός being a designation for a disciple, it seems a valid way of interpreting what he says. The first scholar clearly to interpret the logion as a reference to Jesus’ discipleship was, as far as I am aware, Oscar Cullmann in 1955. See his ‘Significance’, 219; also his *Christology* (the German original was written in 1957), 32, which does, however, wrongly translate ‘kleiner’ as ‘least’. In his essay ‘Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος’ of 1947 (ET: 180), Cullmann, although accepting Dibelius’ exegesis, had interpreted μικρότερος as lesser in age, i.e., younger. Other scholars who have seen Jesus’ discipleship in the logion include M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew’s Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970), 46-47; Wolfgang Schenk, *Synopse*, 43; and Paul Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 223. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182, thinks there may be an allusion to Jesus’ discipleship, either if Dibelius’ exegesis is the correct one, or if we should translate ‘he who is least is greater than John in the kingdom of heaven’ (interpretation (3) below). Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.164-166, is undecided between Dibelius’ exegesis and interpretation (3) (although strictly speaking he deviates from both of these slightly by translating ἐν in the logion as ‘because of’ [see n. 32]), and thinks that if Dibelius’ exegesis is the correct one, there could be an allusion to Jesus’ discipleship. Although Suggs, Robinson and Schlosser are the only ones of these scholars who are clear that they see in μικρότερος a reference to the *historical* Jesus’ discipleship, they surely all must do so: because they believe it refers to Jesus’ discipleship, those who believe this part of the logion stems from Jesus obviously have to, and for those who believe it is inauthentic, it is not reasonable to suppose that they believe the early church invented Jesus’ discipleship; i.e., they must surely believe that the church was referring to a historical fact.

one as regards the original sense of the logion and/or the sense in Q, it is still only a possibility that there would have been any allusion to Jesus' discipleship. My conclusion will therefore be that this logion does not provide any substantive evidence to support the view that Jesus was once John's disciple.

## 8.1 Texts

In Matt 11.11 the text of the logion runs as follows:

οὐκ ἐγήγερται ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν μείζων Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ· ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

The first half can be translated:

‘Among those born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist, . . .’

In Luke 7.28 the text is:

μείζων ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν Ἰωάννου<sup>6</sup> οὐδεὶς ἐστίν. ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

The first half can be translated:

‘Among those born of women no one is greater than John, . . .’

The similarities between these texts, combined with the close similarities in the preceding verses, show that Matthew and Luke have both taken the logion from a

---

<sup>6</sup> Preceding Ἰωάννου some MSS have προφήτης. Others have τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ following it, and others make both these additions. These references to John being a ‘prophet’ and ‘the Baptist’ are likely to be secondary. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 119.

common source, which I will take to be Q.<sup>7</sup> Our initial task is therefore to attempt to determine the text of Q 7.28, although, as it happens, the texts of Matthew and Luke agree on everything of importance for our purposes, so this can be done quite briefly. First, as is his wont, Matthew seems clearly to have replaced an original reference to the kingdom of God with one to the kingdom of heaven. We can therefore confidently take τοῦ θεοῦ, and not τῶν οὐρανῶν, as the reading in Q. Second, Matthew's τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ is more likely to have been added as a clarification of which John is in view than omitted by Luke. Third and most importantly, Matthew's Semitic 'there has not arisen one greater than John'<sup>8</sup> should be preferred to Luke's 'no one is greater than John'. W. D. Davies and Dale Allison think that Matthew, who is fond of the verb ἐγείρω (found in the form ἐγήγερται in Matt 11.11) and of Semitisms, might have changed the Q text at this point.<sup>9</sup> However, it is easier to believe that Luke (who is not overly fond of Semitisms) chose to omit a Semitic sounding phrase than that Matthew felt it worthwhile to alter the plain 'no one is greater'.<sup>10</sup> The text of Q 7.28 for which the strongest case can be made is therefore:

**28a** οὐκ ἐγήγερται ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν μείζων Ἰωάννου· **28b** ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.<sup>11</sup>

The first half can be translated:

'Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John, . . .'

A variation of this logion appears in the *Thomas*, saying 46, as:

'From Adam to John the Baptist, there is among those born of women no one who is greater than John the Baptist, so that his eyes will not be broken

<sup>7</sup> See above, pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> See Casey, *Q*, 122-123; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.142; Siegfried Schulz, *Q: Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), 229-230.

<sup>9</sup> Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.250.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Nolland, *Luke*, 1.337.

<sup>11</sup> This is the text of Q that Robinson et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 136-137; Fleddermann, *Q*, 358-36; and Casey, *Q*, 107, all prefer.



(lowered?). But I have said that whoever among you becomes a little (one/child) will know the kingdom and will be greater than John.’

The end of the first sentence may be corrupt. Nevertheless, there is enough that is clear to allow us confidently to reject the authenticity of this version as compared to the Q form: (a) The twofold repetition ‘John the Baptist’ in the first half of the logion is hardly likely to be original. (b) ‘From Adam to John the Baptist’ seems to be a change designed to avoid the difficulty of John and not Jesus being the greatest among those born of women. (c) Importantly too, the Gnostic motif of saving knowledge in the phrase ‘know the kingdom’ (a concept never found in the NT) speaks volumes for a later development.<sup>12</sup>

Our focus in what follows will therefore be on the Q form of the logion.

## 8.2 Is the logion authentic?

Before turning to consider how the logion should be interpreted, it will be helpful at this stage to consider its authenticity. Does this saying stem from the historical Jesus or not? Although we have not yet discussed how it ought to be interpreted, that is not actually a hindrance to determining its authenticity at this point, because the key issues do not depend on any particular interpretation. The first thing to note is that the logion gives the impression of being an isolated saying that later became attached to similar material, either before or at the time Q (or an earlier edition of Q) was written.<sup>13</sup> Looking at its context in Q for clues as to its authenticity is therefore not something we will attempt. All the clues must be found within the logion itself. Broadly speaking, scholars divide into three groups: those who accept the authenticity of both halves of the logion (as a single saying); those who accept that

---

<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise that the logion in *Thomas* is widely believed to be more developed than the Q form. See, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.207-208 n. 129; Casey, *Q*, 124; Taylor, *Immerser*, 302; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (9<sup>th</sup> edn.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), 166.

<sup>13</sup> See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.250. Catchpole, ‘Beginning of Q’, 208-209, thinks that v. 28a originally directly followed Q 7.26 and expanded on the assertion that John was more than a prophet, but this seems rather less likely.

only v. 28a is authentic; and those who see the whole logion as a product of the early church.<sup>14</sup> I side with the first of these groups, for the following reasons:

(1) It is surely very implausible that the early church would have invented a saying in which Jesus states (in v. 28a) that John is the greatest human being ever, when an essential belief of the church was that Jesus was the greatest.<sup>15</sup> Even if the second half of the logion had immediately unambiguously qualified this statement by saying that Jesus was an exception, it would be an odd thing for the church to have done. As it happens, there is no unambiguous qualification, regardless of how v. 28b is interpreted. That the church created a problem for itself in this way can be virtually ruled out. The first half of the logion should therefore be seen as authentic.

(2) Although v. 28a can make sense on its own, the antithetic parallelism between v. 28a and v. 28b speaks in favour of the original unity of the logion.<sup>16</sup> As Joachim Jeremias points out, antithetic parallelism is a major feature of the sayings of the historical Jesus, one that is attested very frequently in all strata of the Synoptic tradition.<sup>17</sup> Even some of those scholars who reject the authenticity of the logion are impressed by how well the two halves go together and believe that it always existed as a unity.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> With varying levels of conviction, the following accept the authenticity of the whole logion: Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.142-144, 155; Casey, *Q*, 121-124; Becker, *Johannes der Täufer*, 75; idem, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 113-114; Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.159-161; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 451-452; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 142-162, esp. 157; Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 213-214; Nolland, *Luke*, 1.337; Dapaah, *Relationship*, 119-122, esp. 122; Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 46; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.250; and J. C. O'Neill, *Messiah: Six lectures on the ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cochrane, 1980), 9-12. Those who accept the authenticity only of v. 28a include Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 220, 223; Catchpole, 'Beginning of Q', 207-213; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 24-25; Schenk, *Synopsis*, 43; Bultmann, *History*, 164-165; and Carl H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Scribner's, 1951), 138-140. Those who reject authenticity include Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 63; idem, 'War Jesus ein Schüler', 26; Schulz, *Q*, 233-236; and Benedict T. Viviano, 'The Least in the Kingdom: Matthew 11:11, Its Parallel in Luke 7.28 (Q), and Daniel 4:14' (*CBQ* 62 [2000], 41-54), 47-53.

<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.142, 144; Catchpole, 'Beginning of Q', 209; Nolland, *Luke*, 1.337.

<sup>16</sup> So Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 14-20, esp. 15-16; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.250; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 451; Marshall, *Luke*, 293; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.142; Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.160. Although all these scholars adopt the usual interpretation of the logion, there is antithetic parallelism regardless of how we interpret it.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremias, *Proclamation of Jesus*, 14-20, esp. 17.

<sup>18</sup> This is the position of Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 62; Schulz, *Q*, 233; and Viviano, 'Least', 47, 53.

(3) If v. 28b stems from the early church, we might expect whoever composed it to have made a better job of dealing with the difficulty presented in v. 28a of John and not Jesus being the greatest human, perhaps by making it explicit that Jesus is an exception. Even if we adopt an interpretation (such as Dibelius') that sees a reference to Jesus in v. 28b, the fact of John's being the greatest human is not explicitly contradicted. It is simply said in addition that in the kingdom of God Jesus is greater than John. If we accept an interpretation (such as the usual exegesis) that does not even refer directly to Jesus, then any alleviation of the difficulty is probably even more unclear.<sup>19</sup>

(4) All other things being equal, the phrase 'the kingdom of God', so characteristic of the preaching of the historical Jesus, should probably be seen as some (albeit not strong) support for authenticity.<sup>20</sup>

These points are sufficient to make it likely that the logion is an authentic saying of Jesus. Furthermore, if the logion in Q – or, precisely, the underlying Aramaic equivalent – is authentic, it should be seen as authentic in its entirety: regardless of how we interpret it, it is so concisely worded that every part of each half of the saying seems to be necessary to complete the sense.

### **8.3 The interpretation of the logion**

Having determined that the logion probably stems from the historical Jesus, our next step involves trying to determine how to interpret it. Because interpreting its meaning as it stood in Q is not (unlike the logion in the previous chapter) something that can easily be attempted apart from looking at the original meaning, we will not have a section devoted to the meaning in Q but will turn immediately to analysis of its original sense. Importantly, there is no reason whatever for believing that the sense of the logion in Q would have been any different from its original Aramaic sense,

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.143-144, 155.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.143; Nolland, *Luke*, 1.337.

and in the absence of any reason for suspecting that a change might have taken place, we are far better to assume that one did not. Furthermore, the presence of Semitisms (that occur in Aramaic) in the logion – ‘there has not arisen one greater than John’ and ‘those born of women’<sup>21</sup> – may well suggest that the Greek of the whole logion in Q adhered closely to the underlying Aramaic.

Most of the analysis in what follows will therefore be based on the Greek text that we are hypothesising for Q, in the high likelihood that it accurately represents the original logion. When we bear in mind too that in every way that is relevant for our analysis in this chapter the Greek texts of Matthew and Luke, from which we have derived our Q text, agree, we seem to be on fairly secure ground as we attempt to determine the original meaning of the logion. As with analysing the logion’s authenticity, so with discussing its interpretation, because it seems to be an isolated saying which has been attached to similar material, looking at its context in Matthew, Luke or Q for clues is not something we will attempt. Again, all clues must come from within the logion itself.

Before setting out the possibilities of interpretation and the strengths and weaknesses of each, there are two preliminary matters that need to be dealt with. The first is the fact that the key word μικρότερος is comparative and not superlative in form. Although it is undisputed that in NT Greek comparative-form adjectives often have a superlative sense, the question arises whether the absence of μικρότατος (the superlative form) from the logion is significant.

The answer to this seems clearly to be that it is not. In NT Greek superlatives in –τατος appear by and large to have fallen out of use, being replaced by the comparative form in –τερος.<sup>22</sup> As we might expect, then, μικρότατος is not found in the NT; outside Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28, μικρότερος occurs three times, on each occasion with a superlative sense (Mark 4.31 // Matt 13.32; Luke 9.48). μικρότερος,

---

<sup>21</sup> On the former, see the references in n. 8. On the latter see Casey, *Q*, 121; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 40-41; Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 298.

<sup>22</sup> See BDF, §§ 60, 244; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (4<sup>th</sup> edn.; Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 667-669 (cf. 278-281).

then, can easily mean either ‘least’ or ‘lesser’, and its presence in the logion does not help us to decide between any of the interpretations outlined below.

The second preliminary point has to do with how the usual interpretation of the logion should be understood. In this interpretation, as we have seen, the logion reads:

‘**28a** Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John,  
**28b** but the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’

Let us assume for the moment that this is the correct interpretation. The key question for our purposes is whether both halves of the logion combined picture people (a) in a single scale of greatness or (b) in two distinct scales of greatness:

(a) There would be a single scale of greatness if each half of the logion is referring to part of the same scale, and each human being has one degree of greatness. Those outside the kingdom have differing degrees of greatness, but even the greatest (John) is less great than the lowest ranking member of the kingdom. Those within the kingdom also have differing degrees of greatness, with Jesus presumably being the greatest. In other words, there is a single scale of greatness from Jesus down through all those in the kingdom to the least in the kingdom, then down again to John, and finally down through all the others outside the kingdom to the very least of all.

One problem with this interpretation is that v. 28a states that John is the greatest among ‘those born of women’, but this would have to mean ‘those born of women apart from anyone in the kingdom of God’ (= ‘those outside the kingdom of God’). It is true that the Semitic mind would probably have been less prone to seeing a contradiction than a modern Western mind.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it still seems a rather unnatural way of taking the words.

---

<sup>23</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.142-143, 207 n. 126, draws attention to John 1.11-12; 3.32-33; 8.15-16; 12.37, 42, where truths are stated that appear to be universal, but then exceptions are given. These examples are not exactly parallel to what we would have under a single scale of greatness in the logion, but they are similar to a certain extent.

Another problem is that in speaking the logion Jesus would have to have excluded John from the kingdom of God. We need to ask how likely that is.

A further question arises at this point: is the kingdom that Jesus referred to in the logion the future, eschatological kingdom or the kingdom that was present in his ministry?<sup>24</sup> The answer to this question is inevitably bound up closely with how to interpret the logion. In order to avoid any circular reasoning, I will limit myself here to saying that the present tense ἐστίν ('is') means that, all other things being equal, a reference to the present kingdom is to be somewhat preferred.

So, would Jesus have excluded John? Firstly, if, rather improbably, the kingdom of the logion was the future, eschatological kingdom, it seems unlikely that Jesus would have used words to the effect of 'there has never been a greater human being than John' and have believed that he would be excluded from that kingdom. Secondly, if the kingdom is the kingdom that arrived with Jesus' ministry, it is more difficult to decide. Whether the historical Jesus viewed John as the one who completed the era prior to the advent of the present kingdom, who began the era of the kingdom or who was the pivot between the two eras is something that is difficult to determine.<sup>25</sup> If he did regard John's work as part of the ministry of the present kingdom, he would probably have seen John himself as included in the present kingdom of God. However, on the other hand, if he saw John as pre-kingdom in terms of his ministry, we might suppose that he would probably have seen John the man as someone who was excluded from the present kingdom. In view of the difficulty of deciding how Jesus viewed John in relation to the present kingdom we are probably best to say that the support for each position is fairly evenly balanced and, all other things being

---

<sup>24</sup> On these aspects of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.289-506; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 383-487. Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.162-164; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 457; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 157; and Hollenbach, 'Conversion of Jesus', 214, see the present kingdom in the logion. Casey, *Q*, 122-124; Catchpole, 'Beginning of Q', 212; and O'Neill, *Messiah*, 9-12, see the future kingdom. In actual fact there is some uncertainty over the legitimacy of distinguishing too rigidly between these two aspects of the kingdom as preached by Jesus (see, e.g., Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 123-156), but making this simplification – if simplification it is – will help our discussion here.

<sup>25</sup> See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.157-163, esp. 162-163. In the discussion on pp. 177-178 we found that it is very unclear whether or not John preached the kingdom of God.

equal,<sup>26</sup> it is very unclear whether Jesus would have viewed John as excluded from the present kingdom or, if he was dead at the time the logion was spoken, as someone who had been excluded while he was still alive.<sup>27</sup>

(b) There would be two distinct scales of greatness if each half of the logion is referring to a different scale. The first half would have in view every human being as they stand before the kingdom of God has been factored in: John is the greatest when people are looked at in this way. The second half would have in view only those in the kingdom of God: the least in the kingdom is greater than John is without factoring in the kingdom. A ‘popular’ way of envisaging these two scales, if we think of the kingdom as the future, eschatological kingdom, might be: ‘On earth no one is<sup>28</sup> greater than John, but in heaven even the least will be greater than John is on earth.’ A ‘popular’ way of envisaging the two scales, if we think of the kingdom as the present kingdom, might be: ‘If we think about people on earth without taking the kingdom into account, John is the greatest, but if we think about people on earth after taking the kingdom into account, even the least in the kingdom is greater than John is when it is not taken into account.’ Importantly here, those who are in the kingdom would have a place in each scale of greatness.

Although the problems encountered by seeing a single scale of greatness are not present (since those born of women does not exclude those in the kingdom, and John himself can have a place in the second scale of greatness and is therefore not necessarily excluded from the kingdom), one problem that does arise with seeing two scales of greatness is that v. 28a most naturally reads as if in the first scale everyone *including Jesus* would have to be inferior to John. However, it is very difficult to conceive of the historical Jesus believing that John was greater than himself, since, as we saw in chapter four, there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus held both himself

---

<sup>26</sup> Again, in order to avoid circular reasoning, we cannot use evidence from the logion itself here.

<sup>27</sup> The story of John’s question to Jesus and Jesus’ reply in Matt 11.2-6 par. (a story that is probably essentially authentic – see above, pp. 102-104) makes it unlikely that John died before the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 157; and Hollenbach, ‘Conversion of Jesus’, 214, believe that in the logion Jesus is excluding John from the present kingdom.

<sup>28</sup> In this and the next ‘popular’ version, the wording I have used – ‘is – suggests that John was still alive when Jesus spoke it. If John had already died, we would need to replace ‘is’ with ‘was’.

and his ministry in extremely high, unparalleled, regard.<sup>29</sup> We would therefore have to assume that Jesus was excluding himself from consideration in v. 28a, although this is not the most natural way of taking the words.

When all these factors are taken into account, in my view the difficulties with each approach are approximately equal. If the usual interpretation is the correct one, I therefore believe it is quite possible that either one or two scales of greatness are in view.<sup>30</sup> This conclusion will be made use of below.

We are now ready to begin looking at the possible interpretations of the logion. Let us remind ourselves of the Greek text of Q for which the strongest case can be made:

**28a** οὐκ ἐγήγερται ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν μείζων Ἰωάννου· **28b** ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

Because potentially μικρότερος can mean ‘least’ or ‘lesser’/‘younger’,<sup>31</sup> and because potentially ‘in the kingdom of God’<sup>32</sup> can either modify μικρότερος or be part of the predicate of its clause, the options are as follows:

(1) ‘Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John, but the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’

---

<sup>29</sup> See above, pp. 86-95.

<sup>30</sup> Although I am not aware of scholars using this terminology, many do clearly see a single scale or two scales of greatness in the logion. Those who see one scale include Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.143, 155; Casey, *Q*, 122-124; Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 113-114; Nolland, *Matthew*, 456-457; Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 157; and Hollenbach, ‘Conversion of Jesus’, 214. Those who see two scales include Taylor, *Immerser*, 303-304; O’Neill, *Messiah*, 9-12; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.306.

<sup>31</sup> Strictly speaking, it can also mean ‘quite lowly’ but this would be a very forced way of taking the word in the logion. Casey, *Q*, 105-107, 122, translates ὁ μικρότερος and the underlying ܣܚܝܘܬܝܐ as ‘a junior (person)’. However, this is a very unnatural way of taking μικρότερος and certainly not the most natural way of taking ܣܚܝܘܬܝܐ either. On the Aramaic of the logion, see below, pp. 236-237.

<sup>32</sup> Instead of ‘in’ for Greek ἐν (= Aramaic ܕܝܢܐ), it has been argued by Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.162, that the word should be taken causally with the sense ‘because of’. This would be a grammatically possible reading for interpretations (3) and (4) below: ‘. . . the least/lesser is, because of the kingdom of God, greater than he’. However, ‘because of’ is a relatively uncommon meaning for Greek ἐν and Aramaic ܕܝܢܐ, and it is much more natural to take the word locally, with the sense ‘in’, i.e., ‘in the sphere of’. The parallelism with the first half of the logion, where ἐν is also local, supports this (noted by Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.251).



As I have already said, this is the usual interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

(2) ‘Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John, but the one who is lesser [than John] in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’

This can be subdivided into (2a) for Jesus as the lesser, and (2b) for an average/typical person (whether specifically one born of women or not) as the lesser.

(3) ‘Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John, but the one who is least is greater than he in the kingdom of God.’

Under this interpretation, the one who is least would be understood either specifically as the least among those born of women or as the least of people considered generally.

(4) ‘Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John, but the one who is lesser/younger [than John] is greater than he in the kingdom of God.’

This can be subdivided into (4a) for Jesus as the lesser/younger (Dibelius’ interpretation), and (4b) for an average/typical person (whether specifically one born of women or not) as the lesser/younger.

In what follows, we will ask how likely each option is to be correct in comparison with the usual interpretation. To begin with, (2a) and (2b) can be immediately ruled out. Jesus would hardly have described himself as lesser than John in the kingdom of God. Furthermore, it would be nonsensical to say that someone who was lesser than

---

<sup>33</sup> A large majority of scholars accept this interpretation. Viviano, ‘Least’, *passim*, accepts the usual interpretation but perplexingly prefers to see ‘the least in the kingdom of God’ as a reference to Jesus, a description he believes is likely to have been invented by the early church! However, it is highly implausible that Jesus would ever have referred to himself – in any context – as the least in the kingdom. It is even more implausible that an early Christian would have done so. Viviano’s theory is based on a supposed connection between the logion and Dan 4.14(17) (see esp. 47-54). However, in Dan 4.14(17) ‘the lowliest of people’ rules in the kingdom (an earthly kingdom), while in the logion God by implication rules (a non-earthly kingdom) and the one who is least is merely under his rule. The connection should certainly be regarded as spurious.

John in the kingdom of God would also be greater than he outside the kingdom, where we have in any case just been told that John is the greatest.

(4b) is also much weaker than (1). Knut Backhaus, who supports interpretation (4b),<sup>34</sup> argues that because μικρότερος is in a complementary position to μείζων ('greater'), it is best read as 'lesser'.<sup>35</sup> This is a valid point. However, taken together, the contrary arguments are stronger:

(i) If μικρότερος is taken to be 'least', we have the attention-grabbing paradox of the least being greater than the greatest, which sounds like a word-play that Jesus would have been happy to make.

(ii) (4b) reads most naturally as if in v. 28b both the person in question and John are in the kingdom of God, and the person is greater than John there. However, it clearly makes no sense to say that someone lesser (or younger) than John (without factoring in the kingdom) is greater than he in the kingdom. Why would that necessarily be the case? Under (4b) John would therefore have to be outwith the kingdom of God in v. 28b and we would need to understand 'the one who is lesser [than John] in human terms is, by virtue of being in the kingdom of God, greater than he', but this is not the most natural way of reading the Greek.

(iii) There is the very strong point that it looks very redundant, after saying in v. 28a that John is the greatest, then to begin v. 28b by saying that an average/typical person is lesser than he. Bearing in mind that under interpretation (4b) John must be outwith the kingdom, we would have expected simply, 'but the one who is in the kingdom of God is greater than he'.

Interpretation (3) is also weaker than (1):<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Backhaus, "Jüngerkreise", 42.

<sup>35</sup> He does not actually say whether he means the μείζων in v. 28a or in 28b. His point would actually be valid for both μείζωνs, especially the latter.

<sup>36</sup> Nolland, *Luke*, 1.334, 338, accepts interpretation (3) in Luke 7.28 (preferring 'littlest' in place of 'least'), although in *Gospel of Matthew*, 452-453, 456-457, he accepts the usual exegesis in Matt 11.11, and has apparently changed his view about Luke 7.28 too. Schlosser, *Règne de Dieu*, 1.164-165,

(i) The second argument given against interpretation (4b) applies here too: for the same reasons, (3) is only possible if John is outwith the kingdom of God, which means v. 28b would have to be interpreted ‘the one who is least in human terms is, by virtue of being in the kingdom of God, greater than he’, but this is a rather unnatural way of reading the Greek.

(ii) More importantly, the word order of the Greek much more naturally suggests the usual interpretation. For ‘the one who is least is greater than he in the kingdom of God’, we would probably expect ὁ δὲ μικρότερος μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν or ὁ δὲ μικρότερος μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ. Even ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐστίν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ or ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐστίν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ would be more expected than the text we have.

Finally, we need to compare Dibelius’ interpretation (4a) with the usual interpretation.<sup>37</sup> To begin with, there are a number of objections have been levelled against the usual exegesis by those who support Dibelius’ exegesis:

(i) Dibelius himself objects that if we adopt the usual exegesis, there is a contradiction between the statements that John is the greatest among those born of women and he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he, since those in the kingdom of God themselves are clearly born of women like anyone else. He also believes it is impossible that Jesus would have excluded John from the future kingdom of God, which he takes to be the kingdom referred to in the logion.<sup>38</sup>

---

believes interpretation (3) (with ἐν translated ‘because of’) is a possibility. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 182, also thinks it is possible. On the precise views of Schlosser and Robinson, see n. 5.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to the scholars mentioned in n. 5, the following accept Dibelius’ exegesis: BDF, § 61 (on Matt 11.11; Luke 7.28 is not mentioned); Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Lukas*, 166; A. R. C. Leaney, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St Luke* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; London: Black, 1966), 58, 143, 145; Alfred Loisy, *Les Origines du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Nourry, 1936), 137; Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 76-77, 111-112 (cf. *Giovanni e Gesù*, 40). Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.675, thinks that if the whole logion is authentic, this interpretation is to be preferred. For patristic writers who agree with Dibelius’ interpretation, see nn. 55, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Dibelius, ‘Zwei Worte’, 190-191. Hoffmann, *Logienquelle*, 221-222, makes very similar objections. Cf. Michel, ‘“Diese Kleinen”’, 413; Catchpole, ‘Beginning of Q’, 212-213; Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Lukas*, 166; Leaney, *St Luke*, 58, 145; Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 77 n. 57.

However, Dibelius assumes that if the usual exegesis were the correct one, the logion ought to be interpreted as referring to a single scale of greatness rather than two scales. But as I have argued, it may well have had two scales of greatness in view.<sup>39</sup> If it did, those in the kingdom of God would have a place in each scale, and there would be no difficulty in having John as the greatest in v. 28a and the least in the kingdom greater than he in v. 28b; moreover, John himself could, as far as we know, have a place in the kingdom. Even if we should see a single scale of greatness in the logion, it is possible that Jesus could have said that John was the greatest of those born of women with the understanding that anyone within the kingdom is an exception; furthermore, the kingdom may well be the kingdom present in Jesus' ministry, meaning that John's exclusion from it is not so difficult. When these possible solutions to the perceived contradiction are noted, Dibelius' objection becomes weak.

(ii) M. Jack Suggs argues that the usual interpretation almost certainly involves seeing the logion as polemic against a Baptist sect, but that Q had no interest in such a polemic.<sup>40</sup> However, regardless of whether Q was or was not interested in a polemic of this kind, there are two problems with Suggs' argument. First, he assumes that the usual interpretation would have to connote a single scale of greatness, but we may well be supposed to see two scales in the logion, as I have just mentioned. Second and more importantly, even with a single scale of greatness, the usual interpretation does not in any way need to be seen as polemic against a Baptist sect. It can simply be showing how exalted Christians are: John was extremely great in God's sight but those in the kingdom of God are even greater.

(iii) Edmondo Lupieri argues that Dibelius' interpretation is preferable to the usual interpretation, because this allows us to give to μικρότερος the comparative sense it would have had in classical Greek.<sup>41</sup> This, however, is an odd argument, insofar as when exegeting the NT it is the sense of Koine Greek – sometimes specifically as

---

<sup>39</sup> See above, pp. 228-231.

<sup>40</sup> Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology*, 46-47.

<sup>41</sup> Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 77 n. 57.

opposed to the classical sense – that is important. Classical Greek may have been (and may still be) held in high regard by some for its literary qualities, but these qualities count for nothing as far as determining meaning is concerned.

In support of Dibelius' interpretation it is true that the point that was used to support interpretation (4b) is valid: if μικρότερος means 'lesser' (but not 'younger'), it complements well the μείζων – 'greater' – of v. 28b and also to a lesser extent, the μείζων of v. 28a.

However, the arguments supporting the usual interpretation against Dibelius', together, are much stronger:

(i) As we saw when dealing with (4b), if μικρότερος is taken to be 'least', it allows the attention-grabbing paradox of the least being greater than the greatest.

(ii) Referring to himself as 'the one who is lesser [than John]' or 'the one who is younger [than John]' would have been a very obscure and rather unexpected way for Jesus to say 'I'. 'The one who is least in the kingdom of God' is by contrast a more straightforward concept.

(iii) If Dibelius' interpretation were the correct one, we might expect an αὐτοῦ (genitive of comparison) to be present after μικρότερος to make its comparative sense clear, since the αὐτοῦ would have to be understood anyway, and there would be an obvious danger that someone might translate 'the one who is least in the kingdom of God' (as the words have been translated most commonly throughout the history of the church).

When we consider the original Aramaic, the absence of an αὐτοῦ after μικρότερος could be even more significant as support for the usual interpretation. Although in the Q text an αὐτοῦ, while preferable, is not strictly necessary for Dibelius' exegesis to hold, in Aramaic the word ܐܘܬܘܘܗܘܐ, which would underlie the αὐτοῦ, is necessary: ὁ δὲ μικρότερος [αὐτοῦ] is in Aramaic ܕܗܘܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܐܘܬܘܘܗܘܐ or possibly just

וְזַעֲיָרָא מִנְהָ. By contrast, under the usual interpretation ὁ δὲ μικρότερος is in Aramaic וְזַעֲיָרָא,<sup>42</sup> i.e., there is no מִנְהָ. If there was a מִנְהָ in the Aramaic (i.e., if in the Aramaic Dibelius' interpretation were correct and the usual interpretation were wrong), we might more naturally expect this to appear as an αὐτοῦ in Greek. That there is no αὐτοῦ in our Q text after μικρότερος may therefore suggest that there was no corresponding מִנְהָ in the Aramaic, and that Dibelius' interpretation – unlike the usual interpretation – was not possible in the original logion.

It is true that the Aramaic underlying v. 28b (regardless of how the logion is interpreted) would almost certainly have had another מִנְהָ in it (which has been translated into Greek as αὐτοῦ – the αὐτοῦ following μείζων),<sup>43</sup> and that for stylistic reasons the translator might not have wanted two αὐτοῦs in his Greek clause. However, firstly, the αὐτοῦ after μείζων is not necessary for the sense; secondly, as we have just seen, having one after μικρότερος would have helped to avoid ambiguity; thirdly, all other things being equal, it is more likely that the translator would have kept the first potential αὐτοῦ in his sentence than the second. Hence, if מִנְהָ occurred twice in his Aramaic (i.e., if the Aramaic conformed to Dibelius' interpretation) and he decided to translate only one of these with an αὐτοῦ, the odds are that he would have kept the αὐτοῦ after μικρότερος. Even after taking stylistic factors into account, then, the absence of an αὐτοῦ after μικρότερος remains some support for the usual interpretation.

(iv) Probably the strongest reason for preferring the usual exegesis to Dibelius' is the word order.<sup>44</sup> For 'the one who is lesser/younger [than John] is greater than he in the kingdom of God', even without an αὐτοῦ after μικρότερος, just as for interpretation (3) we would most likely expect ὁ δὲ μικρότερος μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ

<sup>42</sup> See Casey, *Q*, 105-107. In conversation with me, the Aramaic scholar Timothy Lim has also endorsed this retro-translation.

<sup>43</sup> ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστιν is in Aramaic בְּמַלְכוּתָא דְּיֵהוּא רַב מִנְהָ. Casey, *Q*, 105, 107, has this retro-translation; it is also one that Lim has told me he supports.

<sup>44</sup> The word order is seen to support the usual interpretation by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.208 n. 132; Marshall, *Luke*, 297; Nolland, *Matthew*, 457; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* (3 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-2007; ET of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [4 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990-2002]), 2.139.

τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν οἱ ὁ δὲ μικρότερος μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ.  
Failing that, even having ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων  
αὐτοῦ οἱ ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐστὶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ would be  
more expected than the text we have.

It is true that Origen, John Chrysostom, Tertullian and Hilary of Poitiers all found a comparative sense of μικρότερος, and an exegesis of v. 28b that agreed with Dibelius', to be compatible with this word order.<sup>45</sup> However, we must remember that, although spoken Greek in patristic times was closer to NT Greek than to classical Greek, most patristic authors tended to classicise in their own Greek usage when dealing with what they regarded as a literary text.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, in classical Greek μικρότερος could not be a de facto superlative. This classicising tendency may well therefore be sufficient to explain mistranslation by these authors. Besides, it is not the case that all patristic authors agreed with Dibelius' interpretation of the logion. Others had no problem accepting the usual exegesis.<sup>47</sup>

When all these points are taken into account, the usual interpretation of the logion – both on the level of the Q text and the original Aramaic – is to be strongly preferred.

#### **8.4 Dibelius' exegesis does not necessarily imply Jesus' discipleship**

Even if Dibelius' exegesis were the correct way of interpreting the logion, it would still only be a possibility that the saying – in Q or the original Aramaic or both – had anything to do with Jesus' discipleship. Let us imagine for a moment that Dibelius' interpretation is the correct one on the levels of the Q text and the underlying Aramaic.

---

<sup>45</sup> See nn. 55, 57. Cf. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 112 n. 38.

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted to the patristic scholars Paul and Sara Parvis for insight here.

<sup>47</sup> The usual interpretation is accepted by Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew 2* (text in *PL*, 26.73-74); and apparently by Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew 29* (text in *PG*, 72.397-398).

(1) That Jesus can be found in the Gospels apparently referring to his disciples (or a sub-group of his disciples?) as ‘little ones’, using the word μικροί,<sup>48</sup> hardly supports seeing the logion in its Q or Aramaic form as a reference to Jesus’ discipleship. It is true that because Aramaic did not have a comparative adjective, a positive adjective meaning ‘little’ or ‘young’<sup>49</sup> is likely to have been used (along with ܠܗܘܢ – the preposition ܠܗܘܢ with the third person singular pronominal suffix) to mean ‘lesser [than him]’ or ‘younger [than him]’ in the logion. At first sight it may seem more than a coincidence that a positive adjective meaning ‘little’<sup>50</sup> is also what would exist in the Aramaic equivalent of Jesus’ reference to his disciples. It might be thought, then, that when Jesus spoke the logion, in addition to the straightforward comparative sense of the word he used (imagining that Dibelius’ interpretation is the correct one), there could have been an allusion to his discipleship.

However, even if the historical Jesus did in fact use the term ‘little ones’ to refer to his disciples,<sup>51</sup> (a) Jesus must have used words meaning ‘little’ often in many contexts, and we ought not to think that he always or even usually had discipleship (even tangentially) in mind; (b) If ‘the little one’ or ‘the young one’ in the logion meant ‘the lesser’ or ‘the younger’, this sense would I think have been what the reader/hearer fully concentrated on, and any additional allusion to discipleship seems out of place; (c) Even if ‘little one(s)’ was a term Jesus used for his disciples or some of his disciples, it was probably a ‘pet name’ for them specifically, and he is very unlikely to have used it also to allude to his own discipleship under John (if that existed).

(2) Under Dibelius’ exegesis, there are a number of ways in which μικρότερος can be understood other than as a reference to Jesus’ being John’s disciple. Phrasing things in this way would, after all, have been a very obscure way for Jesus to allude

---

<sup>48</sup> This seems to be the case in Matt 10.42; Matt 18.6 // Mark 9.42; Matt 18.10, 14; Luke 17.2. It is widely held that all or most of these texts should be understood in this way. See especially Michel, ‘“Diese Kleinen”’, passim; idem, ‘μικρός κ.τ.λ.’ (in *TDNT*, 4.648-659), 650-654.

<sup>49</sup> Probably ܠܗܘܢ; in the determined state it would be ܠܗܘܢܐ, meaning either ‘the little one’ or ‘the young one’.

<sup>50</sup> Again, probably ܠܗܘܢ; in the plural absolute state ܠܗܘܢܐ.

<sup>51</sup> Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2.228-229 think he probably did.



to his discipleship.<sup>52</sup> Instead, there are several other possible interpretations of the logion under this exegesis,<sup>53</sup> although they are all, admittedly, obscure ways of stating things too:

(a) The logion could have something to do with Jesus being lesser in terms of what he has achieved thus far for God vis-à-vis John at the time the words are spoken.<sup>54</sup> (b) It could have in mind Jesus being lesser than John in public perception.<sup>55</sup> (c) It is not impossible that comparative μικρότερος (and Aramaic ܘܢܝܘܬܝܢ) in the logion could mean either ‘younger’<sup>56</sup> or ‘lesser’ with a connotation of ‘lesser in age’,<sup>57</sup> although only in Luke’s infancy narrative do we find any clear assertion that Jesus was younger than John.<sup>58</sup>

It is apparent, then, that if Dibelius’ exegesis were the correct one, seeing an allusion to Jesus’ discipleship in the logion is only one possible way of interpreting it.

---

<sup>52</sup> So Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.208 n. 132.

<sup>53</sup> I will assume that Jesus would not have referred to himself simply as lesser than John, i.e., without any connotation of being lesser in a special sense (contra Dibelius, ‘Zwei Worte’, 191-192). As we saw on pp. 86-95, the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus held himself in extremely high, unparalleled regard.

<sup>54</sup> Leaney, *St Luke*, 58, 143, 145, speaks of Jesus as ‘John’s junior . . . in service of the kingdom’ as one way in which Jesus is lesser (see n. 57 for how else Leaney sees Jesus as lesser in the logion).

<sup>55</sup> This is how Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Lukas*, 166, interprets the logion. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 37.3 (in *PG*, 57.421), has ‘lesser in the opinion of the majority’ as one way in which Jesus is lesser than John (see n. 57 for another way in which he sees Jesus as lesser in the logion). Origen, *Scholium on Matthew* 11 (in *PG*, 17.293), has ‘lesser [than John] in the opinion of those who listened [to him]’. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew* 11.6 (in *PL*, 9.980-981), also seems to see Jesus as lesser in the way he was seen. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.18 (in *PL*, 2.403), who is undecided whether μικρότερος refers to Jesus or not (although he takes it in a comparative sense), seems to believe that if it should be applied to Jesus, it would have to do with the way he was perceived.

<sup>56</sup> There are, however, particular difficulties with this translation. Firstly, the word we would more naturally expect for ‘younger’ in Greek is νεώτερος. Secondly, the contrast between the ‘lesser’ and the ‘greater’ in the logion would be lost.

<sup>57</sup> Loisy, *Origines*, 137, clearly takes it in one of these ways. So too does Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista*, 76-77, 111-112 (cf. *Giovanni e Gesù*, 40). ‘Younger’ is read in Matt 11.11 by BDF, § 61 (Luke 7.28 is not mentioned). Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.675, thinks if ‘lesser’ is the correct interpretation, it may mean lesser in age. Leaney, *St Luke*, 58, 143, 145, has lesser in age as one connotation of the logion. As I have already noted, Cullmann’s earlier view was that the meaning is lesser in age; see n. 5. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 37.3, has ‘lesser in age’ as one way in which Jesus is lesser.

<sup>58</sup> Noted by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.208 n. 132.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In view of the points just noted, and given that the usual interpretation of this logion is to be much preferred anyway, it is clear that any evidence for Jesus' discipleship in Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28 (and *Thomas* 46) is at best very weak. As in the previous chapter, we have here a saying that holds no real clue for answering the question that we are attempting to answer.

## 9. Conclusion

Such, then, are the arguments that can be made for and against the thesis that Jesus was once a disciple of John the Baptist, where by ‘disciple’, as I have said, I mean someone who was in a close personal relationship to John as their leader and teacher and who would have spent considerable time in his presence. If I had more pages to fill, it would have been possible also to analyse more fully some of the other topics mentioned in chapter three. However, as I have noted already, I am confident that none of these other issues would shed more than a little light on Jesus’ potential discipleship. Even if this study had been twice the length, therefore, the conclusion would not be essentially different.

Before reaching a final conclusion, let us recap the conclusions of the last five chapters:

### Chapter four

We saw in chapter four that there are very good reasons for believing that even early in his ministry the historical Jesus had a profound confidence in his beliefs across a range of religious issues, beliefs that were sometimes distinctive and that in part concerned his own extremely important place in God’s plan. We saw too that if he was ever John’s disciple, he would very probably have to have first become his disciple no more than a matter of months before beginning his own ministry. Because a radical change in Jesus’ confidence in his beliefs in the space of some months seems unlikely, we found that if he ever became John’s disciple, he would probably have chosen to take this step despite having at least a fairly deep assurance of what he believed, including beliefs about his own crucial role in God’s purposes. Because we know of no reason why Jesus would have done this, the far easier solution is simply to suppose that he never became John’s disciple.

In this chapter we looked too at whether the historical Jesus might have had a spiritual experience at his baptism, that would have involved an awareness of being

singled out by God for an exceptionally close relationship with him and being gifted for a very special future ministry, or something very similar to this. We cautiously concluded that he may well have had an experience of this kind, and that if he did, it would not fit well with a decision then to have become John's disciple.

We also saw that Jesus may have spent some weeks alone in the wilderness shortly after his baptism, and that this might suggest that he did not become John's disciple immediately or very soon after he was baptised, since going alone into the wilderness for weeks means that he would have been unable to relate to John as a disciple for a surprisingly long period of time. Nor would a stay of this kind in the wilderness cohere easily with a decision to become John's disciple weeks or months after being baptised, because it seems to show a surprising degree of confidence for a person who would later go on to be someone's disciple.

## Chapter five

In chapter five we dealt with issues involving the Fourth Gospel (apart from those discussed in chapters six and seven) that have been seen as support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship.

We saw firstly that the fact that in the Fourth Gospel's narrative Jesus makes his debut appearance in John's vicinity counts for little as evidence that he was once his disciple.

Next, we considered the transfer of disciples from John to Jesus that is portrayed in John 1. We found that there are good reasons for thinking that the transfer is likely to be historical. However, we found too that although Jesus' discipleship would cohere well with the transfer, there are other plausible ways in which the transfer could be explained. Our conclusion was therefore that support for the thesis of Jesus' discipleship that can be gained from considering the transfer of disciples is relatively minor.

In this chapter we also examined the clause in John 3.26b, where John's disciples refer to Jesus as 'he who was with you [John] on the other side of the Jordan'. We concluded that there is no real evidence for Jesus' discipleship in this text.

Finally, we looked at M.-É. Boismard's theory that the Aramaic underlying John 3.30 – 'He must become greater but I must become less' – would have contained a play on words that alluded to Jesus' discipleship. We discovered a number of reasons for believing that any evidence for Jesus' discipleship in this verse is at best weak.

## Chapter six

Chapter six dealt with the topic that is most commonly used to support the thesis of Jesus' discipleship under John, namely Jesus' baptising ministry. We examined the evidence at length and found, firstly, that it is highly likely that the historical Jesus baptised. We discovered also that it is more likely than not that he performed a baptism that had the same significance as John's baptism. However, instead of assuming that a performance of John's baptism automatically suggests that Jesus was once John's disciple, we saw that there are good reasons for thinking that Jesus may well have administered John's baptism without receiving his authorisation. Furthermore, we found good reasons for believing that even if he did receive his authorisation, that does not necessarily mean he was ever his disciple. Nevertheless, it should be conceded that Jesus' discipleship under John is certainly one way that we could account for his performance of John's baptism. We therefore concluded that if Jesus performed John's rite of baptism, we should see some support for his discipleship in this, although no more than a weak or moderate amount. The last part of chapter six involved bringing into the equation the degree of doubt over whether Jesus did actually perform John's baptism. The final conclusion was that an examination of Jesus' baptising ministry provides real but fairly weak support for the view that he was once John's disciple.

## Chapter seven

In chapter seven we examined the logion attributed to John, in which he speaks of a character who is ‘coming after’ him. We found that this logion almost certainly has nothing to do with Jesus’ discipleship and cannot help us answer the question we are asking in this study.

## Chapter eight

Finally, in chapter eight we examined another logion, the one attributed to Jesus in Matt 11.11 // Luke 7.28, in which he speaks of the greatness of John and then qualifies his greatness in some way. Again, we found that this logion almost certainly has nothing to do with Jesus’ discipleship.

Obviously, the conclusions in these chapters do not all point in the same direction. That is not a surprise, since rarely do all the surviving scraps of information on a historical subject fit harmoniously together.<sup>1</sup> Given the nature of these conclusions, we cannot hope, therefore, to reach anything approaching certainty about whether Jesus was or was not ever John’s disciple.

However, we are in a position to make a judgement of probability. When all the support on each side is added up, the scales tip noticeably towards the likelihood that Jesus was never John’s disciple. The profound confidence about his religious beliefs that he demonstrated shortly after the time when he would potentially first have become John’s disciple, along with the shortness of the time in which this confidence could have developed, is the most telling factor in reaching the final conclusion. If Jesus had great confidence in his beliefs, we simply would not expect him to have chosen to submit himself to John’s leadership. The possible baptismal experience and time in the wilderness strengthen this conclusion. Furthermore, we have seen that even the traditions that might most plausibly point towards Jesus’ discipleship –

---

<sup>1</sup> Something similar happens frequently in law courts. Using what pieces of evidence are available, the prosecution and defence teams will bring to bear what arguments they can to support the case they are making. Rarely, if ever, does all the evidence a jury hears point in one direction; almost always each side will have at least something it can say to support its case.

i.e., his baptising and the transfer of disciples from John to Jesus – can easily be explained in other ways.

If the historical Jesus was never John's disciple, there is clearly a need for some re-evaluation of certain aspects of his life. Firstly, the early part of his career would have to be re-written. The standard pattern of Jesus' early career in scholarly reconstructions is: (1) He spent his childhood in Nazareth. (2) As an adult he continued to live there working as a craftsman. (3) When John began his baptising ministry, Jesus went to receive baptism. (4) He then spent some time with John as his disciple. (5) Finally, he began his own independent ministry. If my conclusion is correct, part (4) of this story would therefore need to be excised.

Secondly, if Jesus was never John's disciple, there are implications for how we understand the man himself. In chapter four I argued at length that Jesus had a much deeper confidence about where he stood on a whole range of religious issues, including his own role in God's plan, than many scholars seem to have recognised. If he was never John's disciple, this would tie in with the analysis in that chapter. In much popular imagination Jesus seems to be thought of as a very 'meek and mild' character. Perhaps some scholars have been unduly influenced by this picture, at least to an extent. The fact that so many seem to take it for granted that he would have had no qualms about submitting himself to John's leadership may suggest that they have. If my conclusion in this study is correct, however, he was probably a far more confident figure than is often realised.

It is important for me to stress that my conclusion here is not one that should be taken to imply that the historical John's and Jesus' ministries were unconnected. In fact I have already accepted that Jesus seems consciously to have aligned his ministry with John's in some ways.<sup>2</sup> My quest in this study has been simply and specifically to discover how likely it is that Jesus was ever John's disciple, with a view to determining how confident a person he was. Points of contact between Jesus' and John's ministries there undoubtedly were. However, in the light of my findings, I

---

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 55.

would submit that these are much more likely to have arisen, not because Jesus learned from John, but because in his independent spiritual experience he came to the conclusion that God was calling him to align his ministry with John's in some respects.



# Bibliography

## Biblical texts

Canonical Gospels:

Aland, Kurt, ed. *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 13<sup>th</sup> edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988.

New Testament:

Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland et al., eds. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993 (Nestle-Aland).

Old Testament:

Elliger, K., W. Rudolph & A. Schenker, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.

Septuagint:

Rahlfs, Alfred, ed. *Septuaginta*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979.

## Primary literature

Agobard:

In *PL*, vol. 104.

‘Apostolic Fathers’:

Holmes, Michael, W., ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on Matthew*):

In *PG*, vol. 72.

Dead Sea Scrolls:

Fitzmyer, Joseph A., ed. *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. & Daniel J. Harrington, eds. *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts (Second century B.C.-Second century A.D.)* Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978.

Vermes, Geza, ed. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, revised edn.  
London: Penguin, 2004.

Wise, Michael O., Michael G. Abegg Jr. & Edward M. Cook, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996.

Dio Chrysostom:

Cohoon, J. W. & H. Lamar Crosby, eds. *Dio Chrysostom* (5 vols.). LCL.  
London: Heinemann, 1932-1951.

Diodorus of Sicily:

Oldfather, C. H. et al., eds. *Diodorus Siculus* (12 vols.). LCL.  
London: Heinemann, 1933-1967.

Epiphanius (*Panarion*):

In *PG*, vols. 41-43.

Williams, Frank, ed. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* (2 vols.).  
Leiden: Brill, 1987-1994.

Amidon, P. R., ed. *The Panarion of St Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Selected Passages*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1990.

Hilary of Poitiers (*Commentary on Matthew*):

In *PL*, vol. 9.

Jerome (*Commentary on Matthew*):

In *PL*, vol. 26.

John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Matthew*):

In *PG*, vol. 57.

Josephus:

Feldman, Louis H., ed. *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, Books XVIII-XIX*.  
LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1965.

———, ed. *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, Book XX*. LCL. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard University, 1965.

Marcus R. & A. Wikgren, eds. *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, Books XIV-XV*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998.

Thackeray, H. St. J., ed. *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books I-II*. LCL.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997 (originally 1927).

———, ed. *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books III-IV*. LCL. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard University, 1997 (originally 1927-1928).

———, ed. *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books V-VI*. LCL. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard University, 1997 (originally 1928).

———, ed. *Josephus: The Life, Against Apion*. LCL. Cambridge MA:  
Harvard University, 2004 (originally 1926).

Justin Martyr:

In Aland, Kurt, ed. *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (13<sup>th</sup> edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 27.

Mandaean Literature:

Lidzbarski, Mark, ed. *Ginza: der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925.

Mishnah:

Neusner, Jacob, ed. *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. New Haven: Yale University, 1988.

Origen:

In *PG*; vol. 17: *Scholia on Matthew*; vol. 14: *Commentary on John*.

Philo:

Colson, F. H. & G. H. Whitaker, eds. *Philo* (10 vols.). LCL. London: Heinemann, 1969.

Philostratus:

Jones, Christopher P, ed. *Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, Books I-IV*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005.

Pseudo-Clementines (*Recognitions, Homilies*):

Irmscher, Johannes & Georg Strecker, eds. 'The Pseudo-Clementines'. In R. McL. Wilson, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Clarke, 1991-1992; ET with revisions of part of W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1989-1990]), 2.483-541.

Jones, F. Stanley, ed. *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE RECOGNITIONS 1.27-71*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1995.

Rehm, Bernhard, ed. *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Rekognitionen In Rufinus Übersetzung*. Berlin: Akademie, 1965.

Talmud of Babylonia:

I. Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (multiple vols.). London: Soncino, 1960-1994.

Neusner, Jacob, ed. *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (multiple vols.). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005.

Tertullian

In *PL*, vol. 2.

*Thomas (Gospel of):*

- Aland, Kurt, ed. *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 13<sup>th</sup> edn. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 517-530.
- Koester, Helmut & Thomas O. Lambdin, eds. 'The Gospel of Thomas (II, 2)'. In J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 124-138.
- Layton, Bentley, ed. *The Gnostic Scriptures: a new translation with annotations and introductions*. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1987.

## Secondary literature

- Albright, W. F. 'The Names "Nazareth and "Nazoraean" '. *JBL* 65 (1946), 397-401.
- Allison Jr., Dale C. 'Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1-13 and Mark 1:12-13'. In B. Chilton & C. A. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (NTTS 28.2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195-213.
- . *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.
- . 'The Continuity between John and Jesus'. *JSHJ* 1 (2003), 6-27. A lightly revised version of the majority of this essay can be found in Allison's *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, AND History* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, forthcoming 2010).
- Anderson, Paul N., Felix Just & Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History*. Vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*. Vol. 2: *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*. SBLSymS 44. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007-2009.
- Anderson, Paul N. *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered*. LNTS 321. London: Clark, 2006.
- Arens, Eduardo. *The HAΘON-Sayings in the Synoptic Tradition: A Historico-critical Investigation*. OBO 10. Fribourg (Switzerland): Biblical Institute of the University of Fribourg, 1976.
- Argyle, A. W. 'The Accounts of the Temptations of Jesus in Relation to the Q Hypothesis'. *ExpTim* 64 (1952-1953), 382.
- Ash, Anthony L. 'John's Disciples: A Serious Problem'. *ResQ* 45 (2003), 85-93.
- Backhaus, Knut. *Die "Jüngerkreise" des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums*. PTS 19. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991.
- Badke, William B. 'Was Jesus a Disciple of John?' *EvQ* 62 (1990), 195-204.
- Baldensperger, W. *Der Prolog des vierten Evangelium: Sein polemisch-apologetischer Zweck*. Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1898.
- Baldet, Jacques. *Histoire de Rabbi Jésus*. Paris: Imago, 2003.
- Bammel, Ernst. 'The Baptist in Early Christian Tradition'. *NTS* 18 (1971-1972), 95-128.
- Barnes, Douglas F. 'Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis'. *JSSR* 17 (1978), 1-18.

- Barrett, C. K. *Acts* (2 vols.: I-XIV and XV-XXVIII). ICC. Edinburgh: Clark, 1994-1998.
- . ‘Apollon and the Twelve Disciples of Ephesus’. In W. C. Weinrich, ed., *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (2 vols.; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984), 1.29-39.
- . *The Gospel according to St John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: SPCK, 1978.
- . ‘The Historicity of Acts’. *JTS* 50 (1999), 515-534.
- Barton, Stephen. ‘The Believer, the Historian and the Fourth Gospel’. *Th* 96 (1993), 289-302.
- Bass, Bernard M. *Leadership, Psychology, and Organizational Behavior*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965 (originally 1960).
- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Bauder, W. ‘ὀπίσω’. In *NIDNTT*, 1.492-494.
- Bauer, Hans & Pontus Leander. *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäisch*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1927.
- Bauer, Walter, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000 (based on Kurt & Barbara Aland, eds., Walter Bauer’s *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des neuen Testament und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn. [1988]). (BDAG)
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. *Baptism in the New Testament*. London: MacMillan, 1962.
- Becker, Jürgen. *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: de Gruyter, 1998. ET of *Jesus von Nazaret* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996).
- . *Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth*. BibS(N) 63. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972.
- Black, C. Clifton. ‘The Quest of Mark the Redactor: Why Has It Been Pursued and What Has It Taught Us?’ *JSNT* 33 (1988), 19-39.
- Black, Matthew. *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967.
- Blass, F., A. Debrunner & Robert W. Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961. (BDF)
- Blendinger, C. ‘ἀκολουθέω’. In *NIDNTT*, 1.480-483.
- Blinzler, Josef. *Der Prozess Jesu*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Regensburg: Pustet, 1969.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: issues and commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- . *Luke* (2 vols.: 1:1-9:50 & 9:51-24:53). BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994-1996.
- . *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.
- Boismard, M.-É. ‘Aenon, près de Salem (*Jean*, III, 23)’. *RB* 80 (1973), 218-229.
- . ‘Les Traditions Johanniques concernant le Baptiste’. *RB* 70 (1963), 5-42.
- Bond, Helen K. ‘The Quest of the Historical Jesus: An Appraisal’. In D. Burkett, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 337-354.

- Borg, Marcus J. *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998 (originally 1994).
- . *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
- . ‘The Historical Study of Jesus and Christian Origins’. In M. J. Borg, ed., *Jesus at 2000* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 121-147.
- Borg, Marcus J. & N. T. Wright. *The Meaning of Jesus: 2 Visions*. San Francisco: Harper, 1999.
- Bornkamm, Günther. *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> impression. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963. ET based on *Jesus von Nazareth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (no details given).
- Bovon, François. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9.50*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002. ET of *L’Évangile selon saint Luc (1,1-9,50)* (CNT 3a; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991).
- Bretschler, Paul G. ‘“Whose Sandals?” (Matt 3 11)’. *JBL* 86 (1967), 81-87.
- Brooks, James A. *Mark*. NAC 23. Nashville: Broadman, 1991.
- Brooks, James A. & Carlton L. Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek*. Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1978.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (based on the lexicon of William Gesenius). Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2001. (BDB)
- Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. F. J. Moloney). ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 2003.
- . *An Introduction to the New Testament*. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- . ‘Did Jesus Know He Was God?’ *BTB* 15 (1985), 74-79.
- . ‘Jesus and Elisha’. *Perspective* 12 (1971), 85-104.
- . *Jesus God and Man*. London: Chapman, 1968.
- . *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- . *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave – A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols). ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- . *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.: I-XII and XIII-XXI). ABC 29, 29A. New York: Doubleday, 1966-1970.
- Brownlee, W. H. ‘John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls’. *Int* 9 (1955), 71-90.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Leicester: Apollos, 1990.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. ‘Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums’. *ZNW* 24 (1925), 100-146.
- . *Jesus and the Word*. London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934. ET of *Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1934).
- . *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971. ET of *Das Evangelium des Johannes*. KEKNT. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964, 1966).
- . *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, revised edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1972. ET of *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931).

- Burney, C. F. *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1922.  
 ———. *The Poetry of Our Lord*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1925.
- Burns, James MacGregor. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Cambe, Michel. 'Jésus Baptise et Cesse de Baptiser en Judée: Jean 3/22-4/3'. *ETR* 53 (1978), 98-102.
- Carson, D. A. 'Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?' In R. T. France & D. Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980-1981), 2.83-145.  
 ———. *The Gospel according to John*. Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991.
- Casey, Maurice. *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. SNTSMS 122. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002.  
 ———. 'An Aramaic Approach to the Synoptic Gospels'. *ExpTim* 110 (1999), 275-278.  
 ———. *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*. SNTSMS 102. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998.  
 ———. *Is John's Gospel True?* London: Routledge, 1996.
- Catchpole, David R. *Jesus People: The Historical Jesus and the Beginnings of Community*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006.  
 ———. 'The Beginning of Q: A Proposal'. *NTS* 38 (1992), 205-221.
- Chilton, Bruce D. 'Friends and Enemies'. In M. Bockmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 72-86.  
 ———. 'Gamaliel'. In *ABD*, 2.904-906.  
 ———. *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing: His Personal Practice of Spirituality*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.  
 ———. *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.
- Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (multiple vols.). Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-.
- Cogan, Mordechai. *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. ABC 10. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Collins, John J. *Daniel*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.  
 ———. *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Conzelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.  
 ET of *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1972).
- Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994.  
 ——— (interviewee). 'The Historical Jesus: An Interview with John Dominic Crossan'. *ChrCent* 108 (1991), 1200-1204.  
 ———. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.
- Cullmann, Oscar. 'Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος'. *ConNT* 11 (1947), 26-32. This essay is in French. It is also in German in *Vorträge und Aufsätze 1925-1962* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1966), 169-175; and in ET in *The Early Church* (London: SCM, 1956), 177-182.  
 ———. *Christology of the New Testament*. London: SCM, 1959. ET of *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1957).

- . *The Johannine Circle: Its Place in Judaism, among the disciples of Jesus and in early Christianity*. NTL. London: SCM, 1976. ET of *Der johanneische Kreis: Sein Platz im Spätjudentum, in der Jüngerschaft Jesu und im Urchristentum* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1975).
- . ‘The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity’. *JBL* 74 (1955), 213-226. Also in K. Stendahl, ed., *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (COL; New York; Crossroad, 1992 [originally 1957]), 18-32.
- Culpepper, R. Alan. *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-school Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools*. SBLDS 26. Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975.
- Dalman, Gustaf. *The Words of Jesus*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1909. ET of *Die Worte Jesu*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1898.
- . *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels*. London: MacMillan, 1929. ET of *Jesus-Jeschua: Die Drei Sprachen Jesu* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922).
- Dapaah, Daniel S. *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth: A Critical Study*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005.
- Davies, W. D. & Dale C. Allison Jr. *Matthew* (3 vols.: I-VII, VIII-XVIII and XIX-XXVIII). ICC. Edinburgh: Clark, 1988-1997.
- de Boer, Martinus C. ‘Jesus the Baptizer: 1 John 5:5-8 and the Gospel of John’. *JBL* 107 (1988), 87-106.
- de Jonge, Marinus. *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.
- DeVries, Simon J. *1 Kings*. WBC 12. Nashville, Nelson, 2003.
- Dibelius, Franz. ‘Zwei Worte Jesu’. *ZNW* 11 (1910), 188-192.
- Dibelius, Martin. *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911.
- Dittenberger, W., ed. *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum* (2 vols.). Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903-1905.
- Dodd, C. H. *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963.
- . *The Founder of Christianity*. London: Collins, 1971.
- Donfried, Karl P. ‘Chronology’. In *ABD*, 1.1011-1022.
- Drower, E. S. *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1937.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- . *The Evidence for Jesus: The Impact of Scholarship on Our Understanding of How Christianity Began*. London: SCM, 1985.
- Dupont, Jacques. *Les Tentations de Jésus au Désert*. StudNeot 4. Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968.
- Earl, Douglas. ‘(Bethany) beyond the Jordan’: the significance of a Johannine motif’. *NTS* 55 (2009), 279-294.
- Ekenberg, Anders. ‘The Fourth Gospel and the History of Jesus’. *CV* 44 (2002), 182-191.
- Enslin, Morton S. ‘John and Jesus’. *ZNW* 66 (1975), 1-18.
- Ernst, Josef. *Johannes der Täufer - der Lehrer Jesu?* BB 2. Freiburg: Herder, 1994.
- . *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation, Geschichte, Wirkungsgeschichte*. BZNWKAK 53. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989.



- . ‘Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth in historischer Sicht.’ *NTS* 43 (1997), 161-183.
- . ‘War Jesus ein Schüler Johannes’ des Täufers?’ In H. Frankemölle & K. Kertelge, eds., *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus. Joachim Gnilka Festschrift* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 13-33.
- Farmer, William R. ‘John the Baptist’. In *IDB*, 2.955-962.
- Fascher, Erich. ‘Jesus der Lehrer: Ein Beitrag zur Frage dem “Quellort der Kirchenidee”’. *TLZ* 79 (1954), 325-342.
- Feather, Robert. *The Secret Initiation of Jesus at Qumran: The Essene Mysteries of John the Baptist*. London: Watkins, 2006.
- Finegan, Jack. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, revised edn. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *A Wandering Aramean*. SBLMS 25. Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979.
- . *The Acts of the Apostles*. ABC 31. New Haven: Yale University, 1998.
- . *The Gospel according to Luke* (2 vols.: I-IX and X-XXIV). ABC 28, 28A. New York: Doubleday, 1981-1985.
- . *The One Who Is To Come*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Fleddermann, Harry T. ‘John and the Coming One (Matt 3:11-12//Luke 3:16-17)’. In K. H. Richards, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1984 Seminar Papers* (SBLSPS 23; Chico: Scholars, 1984), 376-384.
- . *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary*. BTS 1. Leuven: Peeters, 2005.
- Flusser, David with R. Steven Notyer. *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Foster, Paul. *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*. WUNT 2.177. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.
- . ‘The M-Source: Its History and Demise in Biblical Scholarship’. In P. Foster, A. Gregory, J. Kloppenborg & J. Verheyden, eds., *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 595-620.
- France, R. T. ‘Jesus the Baptist?’ In J. B. Green & M. Turner, eds., *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 94-111.
- . *The Gospel of Mark*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Fredriksen, Paula. *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- Funk, Robert W. & Roy W. Hoover, eds. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*. New York: Polebridge, 1993.
- Gerhardsson, Birger. *The Testing of God’s Son (Matt 4:1-11 & Par.): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash*. ConBNT 2. Lund: Gleerup, 1966.
- Glanville, G. Corrie. ‘Gamaliel’. *ExpTim* 30 (1918-1919), 39-40.
- Gnilka, Joachim. *Jesus von Nazaret: Botschaft und Geschichte*. HTKNTSup 3. Freiburg: Herder, 1990.
- Goguel, Maurice. *Au seuil de l’évangile: Jean-Baptiste*. Paris: Payot, 1928.
- . *The Life of Jesus*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933. ET of *La Vie de Jésus* (Paris: Payot, 1932).
- Goranson, Stephen. ‘Nazarenes’. In *ABD*, 4.1049-1050.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Green, William Scott. ‘Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition’. In *ANRW* 2.19.2.619-647 (this vol. 1979).

- Grobel, Kendrick. ‘“He That Cometh After Me”’. *JBL* 60 (1941), 397-401.
- Grundmann, Walter. *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 9th edn. THNT 3. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1981.
- Guelich, Robert A. *Mark 1-8:26*. WBC 34A. Dallas: Word, 1989.
- Gündüz, Şinasi. *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaean and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur’an and to the Harranians*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1994.
- Gundry, Robert H. *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- . *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Guyénot, Laurent. *Jésus et Jean Baptiste: Enquête historique sur une rencontre légendaire*. Chambéry: Éditions Exergue, 1999.
- . *Le roi sans prophète: L’enquête historique sur la relation entre Jésus et Jean-Baptiste*. Paris: Pierre d’Angle, 1996.
- Haenchen, Ernst. *Der Weg Jesu: Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen*. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966.
- . *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1971. ET, with revisions, of *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 14<sup>th</sup> edn. (KEKNT 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).
- Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew* (2 vols.: 1-13 and 14-28). WBC 33A, 33B. Dallas: Word, 1993-1995.
- . ‘The New Testament, History, and the Historical-Critical Method’. In D. A. Black & D. S. Dockery, eds., *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 73-96.
- Hengel, Martin. *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1981. ET of *Nachfolge und Charisma* (BZNWKAK 34; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968).
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. CEP. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.
- Hoffmann, Paul. *Studien zur Theologie der Logienquelle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. NTAbh 8. Münster: Aschendorff, 1982.
- Hollenbach, Paul W. ‘The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer’. In *ANRW* 2.25.1.196-219 (this vol. 1982).
- Holmén, Tom. ‘Doubts about Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the main criterion of Jesus-of-history research’. In B. D. Chilton & C. A. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 47-80.
- Hooker, Morna D. *The Gospel according to St Mark*. BNTC. London: Black, 1991.
- Horsley, Richard A. & John S. Hanson. *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.
- House, Robert J. & Jane M. Howell. ‘Personality and Charismatic Leadership’. *The Leadership Quarterly* 3 (1992), 81-108.
- Hughes, John H. ‘Disciples of John the Baptist: An Examination of the Evidence for Their Existence, and an Estimate of Their Significance for the Study of the Fourth Gospel’. M.A. Thesis. Durham University, 1969.
- . ‘John the Baptist: The Forerunner of God Himself’. *NovT* 14 (1972), 191-128.
- Hughes, Richard, Robert Ginnett & Gordon Curphy. *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London; McGraw-Hill, 1999.

- Hurtado, Larry W. 'A Taxonomy of Recent Historical-Jesus Work'. In W. E. Arnal & M. Desjardins, eds., *Whose Historical Jesus?* (SCJ 7; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1997), 272-295.
- . *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- . *Mark*. NIBC. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995 (originally 1983).
- Hurtado, Larry W. & Paul Owen, eds. 'Who Is This Son of Man?': *The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus*. London: Clark, forthcoming 2011.
- Hutch, Richard A. *Religious Leadership: Personality, History and Sacred Authority*. New York: Lang, 1991.
- Hutton, Jeremy M. '“Bethany beyond the Jordan” in Text, Tradition, and Historical Geography'. *Bib* 89 (2008), 305-328.
- Jacobson, Arland D. *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q*. FFRS. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992.
- Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005 (originally 1926).
- Jeremias, Joachim. *The Proclamation of Jesus* (vol. 1 of *New Testament Theology*). NTL. London: SCM, 1971. ET of *Neutestamentliche Theologie, I Teil: Die Verkündigung Jesu* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971).
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Sacra Pagina 5. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.
- . *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Jones, F. Stanley. 'Clementines, Pseudo-'. In *ABD*, 1.1061-1062.
- Judge, Timothy A., Joyce E. Bono, Remus Ilies & Megan W. Gerhardt, 'Personality and Leadership: A Qualitative and Quantitative Review'. *JApplPsychol* 87 (2002), 765-780.
- Kannengiesser, Charles. *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*. BAC 1. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Keck, Leander E. *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971.
- Keener, Craig S. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- . *The Gospel of John* (2 vols.). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Kennard Jr., J. Spencer. 'Nazorean and Nazareth'. *JBL* 66 (1947), 79-81.
- . 'Was Capernaum the Home of Jesus?' *JBL* 65 (1946), 131-141.
- Khouri, Rami. 'Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan'. *BAR* 31 (2005), 34-43.
- Kittel, Gerhard. 'ἀκολουθέω κ.τ.λ.' In *TDNT*, 1.210-216.
- Kloppenborg, John S. *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*. SAC. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999 (originally 1987).
- Kloppenborg Verbin, John S. *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*. Edinburgh: Clark, 2000.
- Koehler, Ludwig & Walter Baumgartner. *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (5 vols.; J. J. Stamm et al., eds.) Leiden: Brill, 1967-1995.

- Kraeling, Carl H. *John the Baptist*. New York: Scribner's, 1951.
- Kraft, Heinrich. *Die Entstehung des Christentums*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981.
- Kraft, R. A. 'Septuagint'. In *IDBSup*, 807-815.
- Krieger, Norbert. 'Fiktive Orte der Johannes-Taufe'. *ZNW* 45 (1954), 121-123.
- Kundsinn, Karl. *Topologische Überlieferungsstoffe in Johannes-Evangelium*. FRLANT 39. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925.
- Kysar, Robert. 'Christology and Controversy: The Contributions of the Prologue of the Gospel of John to New Testament Christology and their Historical Setting'. *CurTM* 5 (1978), 348-364.
- Lambrecht, J. 'John the Baptist and Jesus in Mark 1.1-15: Markan Redaction of Q?' *NTS* 38 (1992), 357-384.
- Lane, William L. *The Gospel of Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Leaney, A. R. C. *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St Luke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. BNTC. London: Black, 1966.
- Leivestad, Ragnar. *Jesus in His Own Perspective: An Examination of His Sayings, Actions, and Eschatological Titles*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987. ET of *Hvem ville Jesus være?* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1982).
- Lichtenberger, Hermann. 'Reflections on the History of John the Baptist's Communities'. *FO* 25 (1988), 45-49.
- . 'Täufergemeinden und frühchristliche Täuferpolemik im letzten Drittel des 1. Jahrhunderts'. *ZTK* 84 (1987), 36-57.
- Lidzbarski, Mark. 'Mandäische Liturgien' (originally 1918/1920). In G. Widengren, ed., *Der Mandäismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 155-161.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *The Gospel according to St John*. BNTC. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Lindars, Barnabas. *The Gospel of John*. NCBC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981. Originally 1972.
- Linnemann, Eta. 'Jesus und der Täufer'. In G. Ebeling, E. Jüngel & G. Schunack, eds., *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1973), 219-236.
- Lohmeyer, Ernst. *Johannes der Täufer* (vol. 1 of *Das Urchristentum*). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932.
- . *Markusevangelium*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953.
- . 'Zur Evangelischen Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer'. *JBL* 51 (1932), 300-319.
- Loisy, Alfred. *Les Origines du Nouveau Testament*. Paris: Nourry, 1936.
- Lührmann, Dieter. *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle*. WMANT 33. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969.
- Lupieri, Edmondo. *Giovanni Battista fra Storia e Leggenda*. BCR 53. Brescia: Paideia, 1988.
- . *Giovanni e Gesù: storia di un antagonismo*. Milan: Mondadori, 1991.
- . 'John the Baptist in New Testament Traditions and History'. In *ANRW* 2.26.1.430-461 (this vol. 1992).
- . *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. ET of *I Mandei. Gli ultimi gnostici* (1993).

- Luz, Ulrich. *Matthew* (3 vols.: 1-7 [revised edn.], 8-20 and 21-28). Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-2007. ET of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (4 vols.: 1-7 [5<sup>th</sup> edn.], 8-17, 18-25 and 26-28; EKKNT 1/1-1/4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990-2002).
- Malina, Bruce J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Mann, C. S. *The Gospel according to Mark*. ABC 27. New York: Doubleday, 1986.
- Manson, T. W. *The Sayings of Jesus*. London: SCM, 1937.
- . *The Servant-Messiah: A Study of the Public Ministry of Jesus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953.
- Marshall, I. Howard. 'Historical Criticism'. In I. H. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 126-138.
- . *I believe in the Historical Jesus*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977.
- . *The Gospel of Luke*. NIGTC. Exeter: Paternoster, 1978.
- Marxsen, Willi. *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1969. ET of *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (FRLANT 49; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).
- Mason, Steve. 'Fire, water and spirit: John the Baptist and the tyranny of canon'. *Studies in Religion* 21 (1992), 163-180.
- . *Josephus and the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992.
- Mayer, Günter. *Index Philoneus*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974.
- McNeile, A. H. 'τότε in St Matthew'. *JTS* 12 (1911), 127-128.
- McKnight, Scot. *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory*. Waco: Baylor University, 2005.
- Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991); vol. 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994); vol. 3: *Companions and Competitors* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001); vol. 4: *Law and Love* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University, 2009).
- . 'John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel'. *JBL* 99 (1980), 383-405.
- Merklein, Helmut. 'Die Umkehrpredigt bei Johannes dem Täufer und Jesus von Nazaret'. *BZ* 25 (1981), 29-46.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.
- Meyer, Ben F. *The Aims of Jesus*. London: SCM, 1979.
- Michaels, J. Ramsey. *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.
- Michel, Otto. 'μικρός κ.τ.λ.'. In *TDNT*, 4.648-659 (German original 1942).
- . '“Diese Kleinen” – eine Jüngerbezeichnung Jesu'. *TSK* 108 (1937-1938), 401-415.
- Moberly, R. Walter L. 'Biblical Criticism and Religious Belief'. *JTI* 2 (2008), 71-100.
- Moloney, Francis J. 'The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History'. *NTS* 46 (2000), 42-58.
- Montgomery, James A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*. ICC. Edinburgh; Clark, 1927.

- Moore, George F. 'Nazarene and Nazareth'. In F. J. Foakes Jackson & K. Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols.; London: MacMillan, 1920-1933), 1.426-432.
- Moreland, Milton C. & James M. Robinson. 'The International Q Project: Work Sessions 31 July-2 August, 20 November 1992'. *JBL* 112 (1993), 500-506.
- Morris, Leon. 'Disciples of Jesus'. In J. B. Green & M. Turner, eds., *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 112-127.
- Moule, C. F. D. *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959.
- Moulton, James H. & George Milligan. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: illustrated from the papyri and other non-literary sources*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930.
- Moulton, James H. & W. F. Howard. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (vol. 2: *Accidence and word-formation with an appendix on Semitisms in the New Testament*). New York: Scribner's 1929.
- Müller, D. 'μαθητής'. In *NIDNTT*, 1.483-490.
- Müller, Ulrich B. *Johannes der Täufer: Jüdischer Prophet und Wegbereiter Jesu*. BG 6. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. 'John the Baptist and Jesus: History and Hypotheses'. *NTS* 36 (1990), 359-374.
- Nelson, P. D. 'Similarities and Differences among Leaders and Followers'. *JSocPsychol* 63 (1964), 161-167.
- Nodet, Etienne. *The Historical Jesus? Necessity and Limits of an Inquiry*. JCTCRS 3. New York: Clark, 2008.
- Nolland, John. *Luke* (3 vols.: 1-9:20, 9.21-18.34 and 18.35-24.53). WBC 35A, 35B, 35C. Dallas: Word, 1989-1993.
- . *The Gospel of Matthew*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Oakes, Len. *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1997.
- O'Neill, J. C. *Messiah: Six lectures on the ministry of Jesus*. Cambridge: Cochrane, 1980.
- Paget, J. Carleton. 'Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity'. *JTS* 52 (2001), 539-624.
- Painter, John. 'Christology and the History of the Johannine Community in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel'. *NTS* 30 (1984), 460-474.
- Parratt, J. K. 'The Rebaptism of the Ephesian Disciples'. *ExpTim* 79 (1968), 182-183.
- Powell, Mark Allan. *The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ*. Oxford: Lion, 1998.
- Price, Robert M. *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003.
- Pryor, John W. 'John the Baptist and Jesus: Tradition and Text in John 3.25'. *JSNT* 66 (1997), 15-26.
- Reiser, Marius. *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. ET of *Die Gerichtspredigt Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zur eschatologischen Verkündigung Jesu und ihrem frühjüdischen Hintergrund* (NTAbh 23; Münster: Aschendorff, 1990).
- Rengstorff, Karl H. 'μαυθάνω κ.τ.λ.' In *TDNT*, 4.390-461 (German original 1942).

- . *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (4 vols.). Leiden: Brill, 1973-1983.
- Reumann, John. 'The Quest for the Historical Baptist'. In J. Reumann, ed., *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in honor of Morton S. Enslin on the Hebrew Bible and Christian Beginnings* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972), 181-199.
- Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. ET of *Het Evangelie naar Johannes. Proeve van een theologische Exegese* (2 vols.; Kampen: Kok, 1987-1992).
- Riesner, Rainer. 'Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) – Topography, Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel'. *TynB* 38 (1987) 29-63.
- . *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. ET of *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus* (WUNT 71; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994).
- Robertson, A. T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Nashville: Broadman, 1934.
- Robinson, James M. *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. SBT 43. London: SCM, 1959.
- Robinson, James M., Paul Hoffmann & John S Kloppenborg. *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Robinson, John A. T. 'Elijah, John and Jesus: An Essay in Detection'. *NTS* 4 (1958), 263-281.
- . *The Priority of John* (ed. J. F. Coakley). London: SCM, 1985.
- Rodd, C. S. 'Talking Points from Books'. *ExpTim* 99 (1988), 289-292.
- Rodgers, Zuleika, ed. *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*. JSJSup 110. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Rothschild, Clare K. *Baptist Traditions and Q*. WUNT 1.190. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
- Rudolph, Kurt. 'Mandaeism'. In *ABD*, 4.500-502.
- Rüger, Hans Peter. 'ΝΑΖΑΡΕΘ / ΝΑΖΑΡΑ ΝΑΖΑΡΗΝΟΣ / ΝΑΖΩΡΑΙΟΣ'. *ZNW* 72 (1981), 257-263.
- Sanders, E. P. *Jesus and Judaism*. London: SCM, 1985.
- . *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- . *The Question of Uniqueness in the Teaching of Jesus*. London: University of London, 1990. Also available at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/uniqueness\\_sanders.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/uniqueness_sanders.pdf)
- Schaeder, Hans Heinrich. 'Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος'. In *TDNT*, 4.874-879 (German original 1942).
- Schenk, Wolfgang. 'Gefangenschaft und Tod des Täufers: Erwägungen zur Chronologie und Ihren Konsequenzen'. *NTS* 29 (1983), 453-483.
- . *Synopse zur Redenquelle der Evangelien*. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1981.
- Schiffer, Irvine. *Charisma: a psychoanalytic look at mass society*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973.
- Schlosser, Jacques. *Le Règne de Dieu dans les Dits de Jésus* (2 vols.). Paris: Gabalda, 1980.

- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel according to St John* (3 vols). London: Burns & Oates, 1980-1982. ET of *Das Johannesevangelium* (3 vols.; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965-1975).
- Schottroff, Luise & Wolfgang Stegemann. *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987. ET of *Jesus von Nazareth: Hoffnung der Armen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978).
- Schulz, Anselm. *Nachfolge und Nachahmen*. Munich: Kösel, 1962.
- Schulz, Siegfried. *Q: Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten*. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972.
- Schürer, Emil. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, revised edn. (2 vols; eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar & M. Black). Edinburgh: Clark, 1979.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. London: SCM, 1983.
- Schütz, Roland. *Johannes der Täufer*. ATANT 50. Zurich: Zwingli, 1967.
- Scobie, Charles H. H. *John the Baptist*. London: SCM, 1964.
- Segert, Stanislav. *Altaramäische Grammatik*. Leipzig: Enzyklopädie Leipzig, 1975.
- Seesemann, H. ‘ὀπίσω, ὀπίθεν’. In *TDNT*, 5.289-292.
- Smalley, Stephen S. *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1978.
- Smith, D. Moody. *John among the Gospels*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2001.
- Sokoloff, Michael. *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University, 1990.
- Spawforth, Antony J. S. ‘Apollonius of Tyana’. In *OCD*, 128.
- Stanton, Graham N. *The Gospels and Jesus*. OBS. Oxford: Oxford University, 1989.
- Stauffer, Ethelbert. *Jesus and His Story*. London: SCM, 1960. ET of *Jesus: Gestalt und Geschichte* (Berne: Francke, 1957).
- Stegemann, Hartmut. *The Library of Qumran*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. ET of *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993).
- Stein, Robert H. ‘The “Criteria” for Authenticity’. In R. T. France & D. Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980-1981), 1.225-263.
- Steinmann, Jean. *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition*. New York: Harper, 1958. ET of *Saint Jean-Baptiste et la spiritualité du désert* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).
- Stowasser, Martin. *Johannes der Täufer im Vierten Evangelium: eine Untersuchung zu seiner Bedeutung für die johanneische Gemeinde*. ÖBS 12. Klosterneuburg: Verlag Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992.
- Strack, Hermann L. & Paul Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (5 vols.) Munich: Beck, 1922-1961.
- Strange, W. A. ‘The Text of Acts 19.1’. *NTS* 38 (1992), 145-148.
- Strauss, David Friedrich. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. New York: MacMillan, 1898. ET of *Das Leben Jesu*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (Tübingen: Osiander, 1840).
- Strecker, Georg. ‘The Historical and Theological Problem of the Jesus Question’. *TJT* 6 (1990), 201-223.



- Stuckenbruck, Loren T. 'An Approach to the New Testament through Aramaic Sources; The Recent Methodological Debate'. *JSP* 8 (1991), 3-29.
- Suggs, M. Jack. *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970.
- Taylor, D. B. 'Jesus – of Nazareth?' *ExpTim* 92 (1980-1981), 336-337.
- Taylor, Joan E. *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*. SHJ. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Tatum, W. Barnes. *John the Baptist and Jesus: A report of the Jesus Seminar*. Jesus Seminar Series. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994.
- Theissen, Gerd & Annette Merz. *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. London: SCM, 1998. ET of *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).
- Theissen, Gerd & Dagmar Winter. *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. ET of *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung* (NTOA 34; Fribourg [Switzerland]: Fribourg University, 1997).
- Thompson, Marianne M. 'The Historical Jesus and the Johannine Christ'. In R. A. Culpepper & C. C. Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 21-42.
- Tilly, Michael. *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten: die synoptische Täuferüberlieferung and das jüdische Prophetenbild zur Zeit des Täufers*. BWANT 137. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994.
- Torrey, C. C. *Our Translated Gospels*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937.
- . *The Four Gospels: A New Translation*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934.
- Turner, David L. *Matthew*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- van Henten, Jan Willem. 'The First Testing of Jesus: A Rereading of Mark 1.12-13'. *NTS* 45 (1999), 349-366.
- Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: SCM, 2001.
- . *Jesus and the World of Judaism*. London; SCM, 1983.
- Vielhauer, Philipp. 'Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu'. In W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Festschrift für Günther Dehn, zum 75. Geburtstag am 18. April 1957* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1957), 51-79.
- Viviano, Benedict T. 'The Least in the Kingdom: Matthew 11:11, Its Parallel in Luke 7.28 (Q), and Daniel 4:14'. *CBQ* 62 (2000), 41-54.
- Walsh, Jerome T. *1 Kings*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996.
- Webb, Robert L. 'Continuing Historical-Jesus Studies'. In W. E. Arnal & M. Desjardins, eds., *Whose Historical Jesus?* (SCJ 7; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1997), 269-271.
- . 'Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications'. *BBR* 10 (2000), 261-309. this is also available at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/jesus\\_webb.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/jesus_webb.pdf).
- . 'John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus'. In B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (NTTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 179-229.
- . *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*. JSNTSup 62. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991.

- Weierter, Stuart J. M. 'Who Wants to Play "Follow the Leader"? A Theory of Charismatic Relationships Based on Routinized Charisma and Follower Characteristics'. *The Leadership Quarterly* 8 (1997), 171-193.
- Wilckens, Ulrich. *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte: Form- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. WMANT 5. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974.
- Wilcox, Max. 'Semitisms in the New Testament'. In *ANRW*, 2.25.2.978-1029 (this vol. 1984).
- Wilkins, Michael J. *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής*. NovTSup 59. Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- Wilkinson, Jo. 'The One Crying in the Wilderness: A Historical-Critical Investigation of John the Baptist and His Relationship with Jesus'. M.Phil. Thesis. Newcastle upon Tyne University, 2000.
- Wink, Walter. 'John the Baptist'. In *IDBSup*, 487-488.
- . *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*. SNTSMS 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968.
- Wise, Michael O. 'Nazarene'. In *DJG*, 571-574.
- Witherington, III, Ben. *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1995.
- . *The Christology of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.
- Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*). London: SPCK, 1996.
- Yamasaki, Gary. *John the Baptist in Life and Death: Audience-Oriented Criticism of Matthew's Narrative*. JSNTSup 167. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970.
- Yarbro Collins, Adela. *Mark: A Commentary*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.
- Zerwick, Maximilian. *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*. SPIB 114. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963.
- Zimmermann, Frank. *The Aramaic Origins of the Four Gospels*. New York: KTAV, 1979.