

A Text-Critical Study of John 1.34

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Scholars continue to divide over whether John the Baptist acclaims Jesus as ‘the Son of God’ or ‘the Chosen One of God’ at John 1.34. This article argues that transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities, supported by the testimony of a few early manuscripts, favour the latter reading. However, in adopting this reading, the claims that (a) the variation took place in the course of a battle against adoptionism and (b) ‘the Chosen One of God’ supplies corroboration that the original tradition underlying the Synoptic baptismal accounts was based solely on Isa 42.1, are found to be unnecessary and methodologically problematic respectively.

Keywords: John 1.34, Son of God, Chosen One, Textual Criticism, John the Baptist, Christology

1. Introduction

According to one minority reading of John 1.34, John the Baptist¹ acclaims Jesus as the ‘Chosen One of God’, rather than ‘the Son of God’. Notwithstanding the confidence of the UBS⁴ Committee in the majority reading, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ,² the divide in scholarly literature attests to the remaining uncertainty over the original reading at John 1.34.³ Several other factors provide ample justification for an updated, dedicated text-critical study:⁴

- 1 Admittedly, this ‘title’ is slightly problematic, because the special role he plays in the Gospel is more aptly that of a witness (1.7–8, 15, 19, 32, 34; see also 5.33–35). In my discussion, I continue to use ‘the Baptist’ because of familiar usage, and because he did actually perform the activity in the Fourth Gospel (John 1.25, 28, 31; 3.23).
- 2 The Committee gives this reading the rating {B}; ‘almost certain’. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2d ed. 1994) 172.
- 3 In favour of ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ: T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4; Leipzig: Deichert, 1908) 124–25; A. von Harnack, ‘Zur Textkritik und Christologie der Schriften Johannes’, *Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche, Vol. 1: Zur neutestamentlichen Textkritik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1931) 105–52, esp. 127–32; J. Jeremias, ‘παῖς θεοῦ’, *TDNT* 5.701–2; M. E. Boismard, *Du Baptême à Cana (Jean, I, 19–2, 11)* (LD 18; Paris: Cerf, 1956) 47; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (2 vols.; AB 29–30; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) 1.58; R.

- 1) The publications of P^{106} , which is now the earliest support (first half of the third century) for the reading $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ at John 1.34; and P^{120} , which joins the majority of manuscripts with the reading $\acute{\omicron}\ \upsilon\iota\acute{\omicron}\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$;
- 2) The appearance of the first English translations of the NT to adopt ‘God’s Chosen One’ (TNIV⁵) and ‘the Chosen One of God’ (NET⁶) in their main text; and
- 3) The role this reading plays in the construction of an evolutionary Christology, for it is often cited as corroboration that the original form of the heavenly pronouncement in the Synoptic baptismal traditions was based solely on Isa 42.1, and only later did the reference to Jesus as ‘Son’ come into the tradition/text.

The usual text-critical method will be used in this study. External evidence will be assessed, followed by transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities, with some

Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (3 vols.; ET. Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1968) 1.305–6; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 2d ed. 1978) 178; J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; OTKNT 4.1,2; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979–81) 116; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1991) 152; B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1993) 69–70, L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 134. Non-committed or unsure: B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972) 111–12; A. J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) 71. In favour of $\acute{\omicron}\ \upsilon\iota\acute{\omicron}\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$: J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) 1.52; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 260; F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien II: Les grandes traditions d’Israël, L’accord des Ecritures d’après les Quatrième Evangile* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1964) 71–3; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (ET. Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 92–3 n. 6; E. Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–6* (ET. Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 154; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 172; H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 77; F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998) 59; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2d ed. 1999) 21; B. Aland, ‘Der textkritische und textgeschichtliche Nutzen frühen Papyri, demonstriert am Johannesevangelium’, *Recent Developments in Textual Criticism: New Testament, Other Early Christian and Jewish Literature: Papers Read at a NOSTER Conference in Münster, January 4–6, 2001* (ed. W. Weren and D.-A. Koch; STAR 8; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003) 33–4; C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003) 1.463–4; H. Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 125–6.

- 4 The classic text-critical study is found in Harnack, ‘Textkritik’, 105–52, originally published in 1915.
- 5 The Holy Bible, Today’s New International Version, Copyright 2001 by International Bible Society.
- 6 The NET Bible, New English Translation, Copyright 1996 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C.

comments on two claims that have been made about the preferred reading, before a brief conclusion.

2. External Evidence

The reading $\acute{\omicron}$ $\nu\iota\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ has the support of the vast majority of manuscripts, both Greek and versional.⁷ There is some patristic support, most notably from Origen.⁸

In support of the minority reading $\acute{\omicron}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, the NA²⁷ critical apparatus now lists $\mathfrak{P}^{106\text{vid}} \aleph^* b e ff^{2*} sy^{s.c.9}$ and the UBS⁴ adds the testimony of a couple of Latin Fathers.¹⁰ Tischendorf (repeated by Harnack, Fee, Ehrman and Head) adds the later minuscules 77 and 218.¹¹ More recently, and interestingly, the Münster *Text und Textwert* does not include 77 when it lists the minuscules containing this reading: 187 218 228 1784.¹² The combination of ($\mathfrak{P}^{106} \aleph^*$) and (77? 187 218 228 1784) appears to present some difficulties with respect to

7 The rather full listing in UBS⁴ is $\mathfrak{P}^{66,75} \aleph^2 A B C L W^{\text{supp}} \Delta \Theta \Psi 083 0141 0233^{\text{vid}} f^1 f^{13} 28 33 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505$ Byz [E F G H N P] *Lect* it^{aur, c, f, l, q} vg syr^{p, h, palmss} cop^{bo} arm eth geo slav Origen Asterius Chrysostom Cyril John-Damascus; Augustine^{3/4}. To this should now be added $\mathfrak{P}^{120} = P.Oxy. 4804$, three fragments containing John 1.25–28, 33–39, 42–44, edited by J. Chapa and very recently published in R. Hatzilambrou, P. J. Parsons, and J. Chapa, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri LXXI* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 6–9. Images of this fourth-century fragment can be accessed online at the P.Oxy. Oxyrhynchus Online website at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/index.html>. From the image, YIO and possibly C can be seen at the relevant portion. The editor establishes the reading without any dots below any of the letters.

8 *Comm. Jo.* 2, 35, 217; 13, 59, 405; *Hom. 1 Reg.* 7; *C. Cels.* 1, 48. See B. D. Ehrman, G. D. Fee, and M. W. Holmes, *The Text of the Fourth Gospel in the Writings of Origen: Volume One* (SBLNTGF 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992) 79–80.

9 This is the '8. korrigierter und um die Papyri 99–116 erweiterter Druck 2001' of the NA²⁷.

10 Ambrose and Augustine^{1/4}.

11 Harnack, 'Textkritik', 127–32; G. D. Fee, 'Codex Sinaiticus in the Gospel of John: A Contribution to Methodology in Establishing Textual Relationships', *NTS* 15 (1968) 23–44; Ehrman, *Corruption*, 69; P. M. Head, 'Some Recently Published NT Papyri from Oxyrhynchus: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment', *TynB* 51.1 (2000) 1–16, at 11.

12 K. Aland et al., *Text und Textwert der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments V. Das Johannesevangelium 1. Teststellenkollation der Kapitel 1–10, Band 1,2: Resultate der Kollation und Hauptliste* (ANTF 36; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005) 13. Codex 77 is an eleventh-century four-gospel codex (with commentary) from Vienna, with a Byzantine text. The minuscules 187 (XII, Florence), 218 (XIII, Vienna), 228 (XIV, Escorial), and 1784 (XIII/XIV, Sofia) are Byzantine, though Hatch has described Codex 218 as a thirteenth-century whole Bible codex with a 'Western' text in the Gospels, Catholic Epistles, and the Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews). See W. H. P. Hatch, *Facsimiles and Descriptions of Minuscule Manuscripts of the New Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1951): Plate XXXV, p. 142 for Codex 77; and Plate LXXV, p. 222 for Codex 128.

genealogical ‘coherence’.¹³ Either the minuscules preserved a very early reading, or the reading arose again later independently among Byzantine scribes.

The indirect support of some versional witnesses attesting to a third, obviously conflate, reading, *electus filius* (‘chosen Son’), can be added.¹⁴

Before the publication of \mathfrak{P}^{106} , previous editions of the NA apparatus had \mathfrak{P}^{5vid} in support of the ‘Chosen’ reading, but this has now been deemed too doubtful to be listed in both the critical apparatus of NA²⁷ and UBS⁴.¹⁵ This third-century papyrus fragment is, however, still worth some consideration. Only the ...] C TOY Θ̄Ῡ at the edge of the disputed wording is visible in \mathfrak{P}^5 . However, the argument raised by the original editors has not really been overturned: the lacuna is too large to be filled by the reading υἰός, if it is written as *nomen sacrum*.¹⁶ The problem may be solved if \mathfrak{P}^5 had υἰός in full. However, it seems more likely that *nomen sacrum* was used, because (a) \mathfrak{P}^{66} and \mathfrak{P}^{75} , two papyri that do contain the ‘Son’ reading, employed *nomina sacra* for both ‘Son’ and ‘God’, and (b) \mathfrak{P}^5 itself uses *nomen sacrum* for ‘God’ at John 1.34, and *nomina sacra* for ‘Jesus’, ‘Christ’, and ‘Spirit’ elsewhere.¹⁷

In any case, we now have the testimony of another third-century papyrus, \mathfrak{P}^{106} , which is much less ambiguous. This is a single leaf from a John codex (or perhaps, from a codex that had the Gospel as the first item) containing the text of John 1.29–35 (recto), 40–46 (verso). While the fragment is not easy to read, being both stained and damaged, it is generally accepted that an *epsilon* (reconstructed as the second ε in ἐκλεκτός) can be seen, which can hardly come from υἰός.¹⁸

13 187 and 218 form a group.

14 Found in a ff^{ca}. UBS⁴ also adds some Vulgate and Palestinian Syriac MSS.

15 ‘Die Angabe \mathfrak{P}^{5vid} aus früheren Auflagen des Novum Testamentum Graece muss als eine zu unsichere Lesung gestrichen werden’. Aland, ‘Nutzen’, 19–38, at 33. See also W. J. Elliott and D. C. Parker, *The New Testament in Greek IV: The Gospel according to St. John. Vol. 1, The Papyri* (NTTS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 29.

16 B. P. Grenfell, and A. S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri II* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1899) 7 (\mathfrak{P}^5 = P.Oxy. 208 + 1781).

17 Admittedly, the recent publication of \mathfrak{P}^{120} , which apparently has the reading O ῩΙΟC O TOY Θ̄Ῡ (the article following ‘Son’ is curious and unattested elsewhere), shows that it was possible for ‘Son’ to be written in full and *nomen sacrum* to be employed for ‘God’ here. Among the majuscules, the full υἰός is found in A B Γ Θ 083. The *nomen sacrum* for ‘Son’ is used by in \aleph^2 .

18 The papyrus (\mathfrak{P}^{106} = P.Oxy 4445) was published by W. E. H. Cockle in M. W. Haslam et al., eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri LXV* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1998) 11–14, who establishes the reading ο [ε]κλεκ[το]ς, with dots under all the visible letters except the *epsilon*. The reading is accepted by most, including Head and Aland. Images are available online at the P.Oxy: Oxyrhynchus Online website at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/index.html>.

In short, the reading ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ has manuscript support chiefly of representatives of the ‘Western’ tradition,¹⁹ with one (ϣ^{106vid}) or perhaps two early (third-century) papyri.²⁰ While the ‘Son of God’ reading has the support of the vast majority of the manuscripts, including the heavyweights ϣ^{66,75} A B C L f^{1,13} and the recently published ϣ¹²⁰, the ‘Chosen One of God’ reading is very early, and reflects a measure of geographical diversity, as demonstrated by its attestation in the Greek, Latin, Syriac and, indirectly from the conflate reading, Sahidic.

3. Transcriptional Probabilities

Despite the weaker external support, both transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities favour the minority reading. We begin with transcriptional probabilities. Because the readings are so different phonetically and graphically, clearly the variant could not have been generated by hearing errors in dictation or visual defects in copying.²¹ ‘The Chosen One of God’ is indubitably the more difficult reading. It is easy to conceive a scribal alteration from the unusual ‘the Chosen One of God’ to the more common, and, on the surface, theologically richer term, ‘the Son of God’.²² This could have occurred on the basis of scribal harmonisation with either (a) the Synoptic baptismal accounts (Mark 1.11 and par.), and/or (b) familiar Johannine usage.²³

On the other hand, it is significantly harder to explain why a scribe would change ‘the Son of God’ to a term that never occurs elsewhere in John’s Gospel, only occurs in the NT in Luke 23.35 (see also the use of the verbal cognate in Luke 9.35: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος), and is hardly used of Jesus in the post-apostolic writings.²⁴ It is possible that scribes could have

19 Sinaiticus represents the ‘Western’ tradition in John 1.1–8.38. See Fee, ‘Sinaiticus’, 23–44. D is defective at this point, but it seems reasonable to assume that it probably would have contained the minority reading.

20 Ehrman, *Corruption*, 69, describes ϣ⁵ as an ‘Alexandrian papyri’, but in terms of textual tradition it is most commonly described as ‘Western’.

21 So Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 125.

22 ‘Son of God’ is a favoured Johannine term, cf. John 1.49; 3.18; 5.25; 10.36; 11.4, 27; 19.7; 20.31.

23 So Head, ‘NT Papyri’, 11.

24 The substantive adjective ἐκλεκτός is used in the NT to describe those whom God has chosen from the generality of humankind and drawn to himself; and hence of Christians in particular. Apart from Luke 23.35 and the reading under consideration, it is never used directly of Jesus. There is a possible indirect application in the term ἀκρογωνιᾶν ἐκλεκτὸν (‘chosen cornerstone’) in 1 Pet 2.6, which cites Isa 28.16. Even in the Apostolic Fathers, where there is a significant increase in the use of ἐκλεκτός (see esp. 1 *Clem.* and Herm. *Vis.*), the only possible messianic reference is *Barn.* 6.2, which cites Isa 28.16 in a similar fashion to 1 Pet 2.6 (though 1 *Clem.* 52.2 describes David as ὁ ἐκλεκτός). The verbal cognate ἐκλέγομαι is never affirmed of Jesus in John’s Gospel, though it is used of his disciples (John 6.70; 13.18; 15.16; cf. Mark 13.29; Luke 6.13; Acts 1.2; *Barn.* 5.9; *Pre. Pet* 3b; *Gos. Eb.*

harmonised an original ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ to these Lukan passages, as Barbara Aland argues,²⁵ but that seems less likely, because the context of the John passage would have brought to mind primarily the Synoptic baptismal accounts, not the *Lukan* Transfiguration or the derision on the cross.²⁶ Haenchen's suggestion that scribes altered an original ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ to ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ under the influence of LXX Isa 42.1 (...Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου προσεδέξατο αὐτόν...) is also unlikely.²⁷ Assuming an original 'Son' reading, the most obvious link between John 1.34 and Isa 42.1 would have been via the second half of the Synoptic heavenly declaration (...ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ/σοὶ εὐδόκησα), read with the version of Isa 42.1 found in Matt 12.18.²⁸ Crucially, this middle step involves the observation that Matt 12.18 has ἀγαπητός in place of the LXX ἐκλεκτός. One would therefore expect a harmonisation of John 1.34 toward Isa 42.1 to involve the term ἀγαπητός. That this is found nowhere in the textual tradition of John 1.34 speaks against Haenchen's suggestion.

Furthermore, ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ is also the reading that best explains a third reading, *electus filius* ('Chosen Son [of God]'), found in a ff^{2c}sa.²⁹ This is obviously a conflation of the other two readings, resulting from the addition of υἱός to an original ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ. It is less likely to have resulted from the addition of ἐκλεκτός to an original ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ for the same transcriptional probabilities already argued: why would a scribe add an unfamiliar title to one well-attested elsewhere in the Gospel?

Finally, as Brown has pointed out, the textual history of John 6.69 offers a revealing parallel, since it evidences the same scribal tendency to assimilate

4). It is used to describe God as the one 'who chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him to be his own special people' in 1 *Clem.* 64.1. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.15.3: '... the Father of all chose to [obtain] the knowledge of Himself by means of the Word'. The adjectival participle is used of Christians in 1 *Clem.* 50.7; of the church in Ign. *Eph.* 1.1.

25 Aland, 'Nutzen', 34.

26 And why only Luke's version, if there was such a harmonisation?

27 Haenchen, *John* 1, 154. See also Bultmann, *John*, 92–6, n. 6.

28 Matt 12.18: ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ('Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased'). Admittedly, this is not the *only* or the *necessary* link, for the giving of the Spirit ἐπ' αὐτόν (John 1.33) recalls the language and concepts of Isa 42.1 too. But it remains the most obvious link.

29 According to UBS⁴, this is also supported by some Vulgate and Palestian Syriac MSS. That other Palestian Syriac MSS apparently attest to yet another reading (ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός) speaks of the instability of the text at this point, which may corroborate the existence of a more difficult original reading.

confessions to their perceived Synoptic parallels and introduce ‘Son of God’ into the Johannine text.³⁰

Transcriptional probabilities therefore favour the reading ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ as original.

4. Intrinsic Probabilities

We turn to intrinsic probabilities. At first glance, intrinsic probabilities seem to favour the ‘Son of God’ reading, based on the same observation that made us conclude that ‘the Chosen One of God’ was the more difficult reading. ‘Son of God’ is indeed a favourite Johannine term.³¹ But this need not result in an impasse, for there are other more subtle indications in Johannine usage that point to the originality of ‘the Chosen One of God’.

First, Haenchen observed that with this designation, this chapter contains seven honorific titles for Jesus: lamb of God, elect, rabbi, messiah, son of God, king of Israel, and son of man.³² While it would be hazardous to attach too much significance to the number seven (and Haenchen does not develop his observation), it remains a valid point that John seems to have a predilection for a range of titles here.³³ The ‘Chosen’ reading would be consistent with Johannine variation.

Secondly, if only the honorific titles that come from confessions are taken into account, then clearly the climax of the series is Nathanael’s confession in the double declaration of John 1.49: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, σὺ βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (‘You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’).³⁴ Lindars explains the force of this climax: ‘Son of God’ is ‘the most far-reaching of the messianic titles ... Much of the rest of the Gospel will be concerned with its implications, whereas the explanatory equivalent, King of Israel, will be handled in the trial before Pilate.’³⁵ However, much of the rhetorical power of this climax would be

30 Variants for an original ‘You are the Holy One of God’ include: ‘You are the Christ’; ‘You are the Christ, the Holy One of God’; and ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (cf. Matt 16.16). The last version is the majority reading. See Brown, *John*, 1.59.

31 This is, of course, not the first nor last time that transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities have come out on opposite sides based on the same data. This seems to have been the clinching argument for the UBS⁴ Committee. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 172. See also Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 125–6, for a developed argument from ‘inneren Textkritik’ (i.e. ‘intrinsic probabilities’). The problem is that Thyen does not really offer a reason why and how the ‘chosen’ reading could have come about.

32 Haenchen, *John* 1, 154. So also E. Hirsch, *Studium zum vierten Evangelium: Text, Literarkritik, Entstehungsgeschichte* (BHT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936) 4, though Haenchen does not cite him. But is ‘the one who comes after me’ (John 1.26) yet another honorific title?

33 J. M. Ross, ‘Two More Titles of Jesus’, *ExpTim* 85 (1974) 281.

34 The latter title appears to be an explanation of the former one.

35 Lindars, *John*, 119.

lessened if it were not unique; namely, by reading ‘Son of God’ in v. 34. Therefore, if the evangelist intended John 1.49 to serve as some kind of climax for the series of confessions, it would make better rhetorical sense for him to hold back the ‘Son of God’ title until then. The ‘Chosen One of God’ reading in John 1.34 would then be more consistent with this stylistic and rhetorical intention.

Thirdly, while ὁ ἐκλεκτός does not otherwise occur in John’s Gospel, its use here in John 1.34 is coherent with what we might surmise of John the Baptist and Jesus. This is true whether one speaks of the John and Jesus as presented in the Gospel, or the ‘historical’ John and Jesus, since both tradition and event appear to focus on the Baptist pointing to some kind of exalted, favoured and perhaps messianic status for Jesus.³⁶ Tradition that speaks of an exalted messianic figure as ‘Elect One/Chosen One’ is not uncommon in the Second Temple period. The most notable is found in the *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 En. 39.6; 40.5; 45.3–4; 48.6; 49.2, 4; 51.3, 5; 52.6, 9; 53.6; 55.4; 61.5, 8, 10; 62.1),³⁷ but it is also possibly present in Qumran literature (4Q534 I, 10;³⁸ and 4Q174, in which a peshet connects the plural ‘Chosen Ones of Israel’ with the ‘Anointed One’ of Ps 2.2); and certainly so in *Mart. Asc. Isa.* 8.7; and *Tg. Isa.* 42.1, which is messianic from the context.³⁹

Fourthly, and related to the third point, the designation ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ is consistent with the immediate context, where the Fourth Evangelist appears to be drawing from Second Isaiah. John 1.34 concludes not only John 1.29–34, but the whole of the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus, which takes the form of a ‘diptych’ or a two-part scene (John 1.19–28, 29–34). Linking the two panels of the diptych is the inclusion ‘This is the testimony given by John ...’ (v. 19) and ‘I myself have seen and have testified ...’ (v. 34).⁴⁰ Another link is that both

36 I am developing the brief note in Head, ‘NT Papyri’, 11.

37 See esp. J. C. VanderKam, ‘Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37–71’, *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 169–91; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995) 143; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The One who is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 85.

38 But see J. A. Fitzmyer, ‘The Aramaic Elect of God Text from Qumran Cave 4’, *CBQ* 27 (1965) 349–72; P. Grelot, ‘Hénoch et ses écritures’, *RB* 82 (1975) 481–500; F. García Martínez, ‘4QMess Ar and the Book of Noah’, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran* (STDJ 9; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 1–44; who argue that the figure is Noah. For the arguments that support the old messianic interpretation, see M. G. Abegg, and C. A. Evans, ‘Messianic Passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 191–203, here 202. The authors point out parallels between 4Q534 and Ps 89.4; and, more intriguingly, Isa 11.1–6, but admit that the Noah hypothesis appears ‘the more probable’.

39 From the NT itself, we have Luke 23.35, of course, where ‘Christ of God’ and ‘Chosen One’ are found in parallel.

40 So Brown, *John*, 1.67.

panels betray influence from Second Isaiah. In the first panel, the Baptist accounts for his role as witness with the first explicit scriptural quotation of the Gospel, Isa 40.3 in John 1.23. In the second, the content of the witness/testimony seems to have its background in the Isaianic Servant passages.⁴¹ The ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἀῖρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου appears to recall both the ἄμνός before the shearer of LXX Isa 53.7, which is what the Servant (Isa 52.13) is said to be like, and also the Servant's carrying 'our sins' (Isa 53.4) and bearing 'the sins of many' (Isa 53.12).⁴² Whatever one thinks of what the 'historical' Baptist could have said and meant, it does appear fairly certain that the Fourth Evangelist has weaved in allusions to the Isaianic Servant at this point.⁴³ And so, the designation ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ is probably an allusion to the opening lines of the First Servant Song:

Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου
προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν (LXX Isa 42.1a)

Indeed, Isa 42.1 continues with God putting his Spirit on the Servant who 'will bring forth justice to the nations'. This is paralleled in the Gospel, where the Baptist testifies Jesus' identity as the Chosen One of God precisely because he has seen the Spirit descend and remain on him (John 1.32–34).

Finally, the theme that the disciples of Jesus are chosen by him is found in several places in John's Gospel (6.70; 13.18; 15.16, 19). Carson has argued that this privilege is 'ultimately grounded in the fact that Jesus himself is God's chosen one *par excellence*'.⁴⁴ Similar motifs are found elsewhere in the Gospel: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you' (John 15.9); 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20.21). We also see this dynamic in what is perhaps the only instance in early Christian literature where the ἐκλέγομαι verb is used with Jesus as the accusative of person. In the benediction of *1 Clem.* 64.1, God is described as the one 'who

41 See C. H. Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', *Isaiah in the New Testament* (ed. S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken; London: T.&T. Clark, 2005) 101–16, at 104–5.

42 This does not exclude influence from the Passover lamb imagery at the same time, for the evangelist could have combined both echoes. Cf. A. T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) 62. Isaiah 53.7 is applied to Jesus in Acts 8.32, so this comparison is known to Christians. Furthermore, Isa 53.1 is quoted in John 12.38; Isa 53.4 is present in Matt 8.17; Isa 53.12 in Heb 9.28; with all of them applying the text to Jesus. By the end of the first century, Clement of Rome applied the whole of Isa 53 to Jesus (*1 Clem.* 16).

43 Among those who distinguish between what the Baptist meant and what the Fourth Evangelist does with the testimony are Brown, *John*, 1.59; Carson, *John*, 149–50, who think the Baptist was pointing to the apocalyptic, warrior lamb (*1 En.* 90.9–12; cf. Rev 5.6, 12; 7.17; 13.8; 17.14; 19.7, 9; 21.22–23; 22.1–3).

44 Carson, *John*, 152. The 'elect of God' is a common term for Christians and/or the Church in the post-apostolic writings.

chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him to be his own special people'. The 'Chosen' reading in John 1.34 would be consistent with this theme.

From these more subtle indications, a case can be made out for intrinsic probabilities to favour the reading 'the Chosen One of God'.

5. Two Claims made about the 'Chosen' Reading

Those who accept the reading ὁ ἐκλεκτός as original have sometimes gone on to make one or both of the following claims. I believe both have overreached the available evidence.

Were the scribes motivated by anti-adoptionism? Jeremias, following von Harnack, had argued that the original ἐκλεκτός, attested in the three languages of the ancient church (Greek, Syriac and Latin), was eventually replaced from the fourth century onwards by υἱός in the battle against adoptionist Christology.⁴⁵ The subsequent discovery and publication of Ψ^{66,75} (attesting to υἱός) meant their late dating of the variant was untenable. However, according to Ehrman, the variation occurred already in the third, or more likely, the second century, during the period of the adoptionist debates themselves, as a result of an 'Orthodox Corruption of Scripture'.⁴⁶ Apparently, the designation 'Chosen One' implies a time of choice and was therefore capable of being construed adoptionistically. However, as Aland notes, John 1.29–34 presupposes the Synoptic *Taufbericht*, and the Baptist's testimony states that the Spirit came down and remained on Jesus. Hence, the (mis-) understanding that Jesus was only endued with the Spirit at this point and/or adopted would still have been present even with the reading υἱός. No doubt it is less pronounced, but an adoptionistic understanding of John 1.29–34 is not completely avoided even with the majority reading.⁴⁷ Rather than speculate on the motives of 'proto-Orthodox' scribes within a explicitly Bauerian vision early Christianity, it is better to opt for a simpler (less conspiratorial) explanation. Scribal harmonization to the Synoptic baptism accounts, or to familiar Johannine usage, are two such simpler explanations.

Does this reading preserve the wording of an independent form of the tradition underlying the Synoptic baptismal accounts? It has been argued that the 'eclectic combination of similarities to and differences from the Synoptic versions' suggests that John 1.32–34 contains an independent form of the tradition preserved in the Synoptic baptismal accounts.⁴⁸ From this, a significant body of interpreters

45 Harnack, 'Textkritik', 128; Jeremias, *TDNT* 5.689 n. 260.

46 Ehrman, *Corruption*, 108–9 n. 118.

47 Aland, 'Nutzen', 34.

48 J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992) 54; following the assessment of Brown, *John*, 1.65–6. See also the classic treatment in Dodd, *Tradition*, 259–61.

have thought that the declaration ‘This is the Chosen One of God’ preserves a primitive or even the original declaration of the baptism tradition, in which the only theme is Jesus as the Servant of the Lord.⁴⁹ Certainly the allusion to Isa 42.1 is more overt in John 1.34, for ὁ ἐκλεκτός is closer to both the MT and LXX Isa 42.1 than ὁ ἀγαπητός in the Synoptic accounts (Mark 1.11//Matt 3.17//Luke 3.22). There are, however, some good arguments against arriving too quickly at this conclusion.

First, bracketing aside for the moment the question of whether the Fourth Evangelist was in any way dependent on the Synoptics,⁵⁰ in its present form the Johannine descent of the Spirit and the acclamation of Jesus have clearly become ‘vehicles for Johannine theology’.⁵¹ These theological agendas clearly include the attempt to solve the embarrassment of Jesus submitting to the John’s baptism,⁵²

49 W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 97 n. 70; O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959) 66–7; Jeremias, *TDNT* 5.701–2; C. Maurer, ‘Knecht Gottes und Sohn Gottes im Passionsbericht des Markusevangeliums’, *ZTK* 50 (1953) 1–38; B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London: SCM, 1961) 139; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth, 1965) 169; F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (London: Lutterworth, 1969) 338–9; W. D. Davies, and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; London: T. & T. Clark, 1988–1997) 1.338; Marcus, *Way*, 54.

50 This is a complex issue which cannot be treated adequately here. For a survey of the views, see F. Neiryck, ‘John and the Synoptics’, *Évangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1977) 73–106; F. Neiryck, ‘John and the Synoptics: 1975–1990’, *John and the Synoptics* (ed. A. Denaux; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 3–62; D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and more recently and succinctly, Keener, *John*, 1.40–42. It is sufficient to mention that in recent years the Gardner-Smith consensus that viewed John as independent from the Synoptics has been challenged. The more nuanced view is that the Fourth Evangelist used independent traditions that have contacts with the Synoptics. See esp. Smith, *Among*, 195–241; and D. Moody Smith, *John* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 19. For the view that the Fourth Gospel is dependent on the Synoptics, see esp. Neiryck, ‘John 1990’, 3–62 and the references therein. Obviously, if one takes the view that the Fourth Evangelist used one or more of the Synoptics, then the reading ‘the Chosen One of God’ by itself tells us nothing necessarily of pre-Synoptic tradition. For an attempt to read John 1.29–34 with the presupposition that the Fourth Evangelist knew the Synoptics, and was trying to develop the Synoptic traditions in the light of his situation, see M. D. Goulder, ‘John 1.1–2.12 and the Synoptics’, *John and the Synoptics* (ed. A. Denaux; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 201–37, at 213–14. Goulder, whose view has not been widely adopted, thinks this situation was the Fourth Evangelist’s battle as a Pauline Christian against Jewish Christians (who had a ‘possessivist’ Christology). He accepts the ‘Son of God’ reading in John 1.34.

51 Brown, *John*, 66.

52 Meier, *Marginal* 2, 104.

and, the more positive but not unrelated attempt to portray John the Baptist in the special role he plays in the Fourth Gospel, that of the ‘witness’ to Christ.⁵³ The title ‘the Chosen One of God’ itself probably also underwent Johannine theologising. We remember two observations made earlier. First, this portion of the Gospel seems to prefer a variety of titles for Jesus, and second, John 1.29–34 has clearly been influenced by the Isaianic servant passages. It is probable, in the light of the other instances of Johannine editing, that these two factors played a part in the use of the title here. In other words, the Fourth Evangelist has the Baptist confessing Jesus as ‘the Chosen One of God’, not necessarily because that was *exactly* how it was known in his tradition. He could have wanted variety for stylistic reasons. He could have held the ‘Son of God’ title back until Nathanael’s confession for rhetorical reasons. He could have interpreted the baptismal tradition in terms of the Isaianic Servant and wanted to highlight the point for theological reasons.⁵⁴ This is speculative, of course, but in my opinion no more speculative than thinking that ‘the Chosen One of God’ reflects the original wording in the primitive tradition/s underlying the Synoptic and Johannine baptismal narratives without remainder.⁵⁵

Secondly, the ‘Son’ language is indispensable to the baptismal narrative in one strand of early tradition – the Q tradition. The Q temptation narrative presupposes a prior account in which Jesus’ identity as God’s Son is manifested (hence the tempter/devil’s challenge in Q 4.3, 9: ‘If you are the Son of God ...’). Given this, it seems likely that Q contained some kind of account within which Jesus was identified as God’s Son, which probably occurred in close context with John the Baptist’s preaching and prophecy of ‘one coming’ (Q 3.2b–3, 7–9, 16b–17), and quite possibly functions as the climax of the Q account of the events at the Jordan.⁵⁶ In other words, we have here more than a hint that an early,

53 Dodd, *Tradition*, 260.

54 See O. Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament* (SBT 1; London: SCM, 1950) 20–21.

55 Hidden in this argument are the sometimes unstated presuppositions that a so-called ‘high’ Christology cannot have come from Jesus or the earliest traditions concerning Jesus; and also that ‘Son of God’ (or God’s pronouncement that Jesus is ‘my Son’) somehow reflects this ‘high’ Christology and ‘the Chosen One of God’ or ‘the Servant of God’ a lower one. The evidence, I believe, is not so neat.

56 Robinson sums up the argument trenchantly: ‘Why then are we at the Temptation launched, without any preparation, into a discussion of the validity of Jesus being the Son of God, if he has not even been so designated? The inclusion of Jesus’ being designated God’s Son by the heavenly voice, or some equivalent, is needed in the narrative preface to Q for it to cohere. It is hardly a sober methodology to eliminate the title by eliminating the Baptism of Jesus and then of necessity to reintroduce it, e.g. into a purely hypothetical *incipit* which the devil would have had to read for the story to be coherent.’ See J. M. Robinson, ‘The Sayings Gospel Q’, *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck et al.; BETL; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 361–88, here 384.

pre-Synoptic, pre-Johannine, baptismal tradition contained a reference to Jesus as 'Son'.⁵⁷

For these reasons, it seems prudent not to suppose that John 1.34 supplies a transparent window into pre-Markan baptismal tradition, and conclude that this tradition had no role for the 'Son' language.

6. Conclusion

Transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities, supported by the testimony of a few early manuscripts – including one early papyrus (perhaps two) – with good geographical diversity, favour the reading 'the Chosen One of God' at John 1.34. The 'Son of God' reading clearly entered the textual tradition very early (P^{66,75}), probably as a result of scribal harmonisation with either the Synoptic baptismal accounts and/or familiar Johannine usage. Understandably, this reading becomes widespread because of its resonance with the church's theological and liturgical usage, though some manuscripts continue to attest to the more difficult and older form of the text. One can only assume that the publication of P¹⁰⁶ tilted the committees of the TNIV and NET in favour of 'the Chosen One of God' in their main text, although that has not happened with the NA²⁷. This is clearly an interesting reading in its own right, although some caution is appropriate with regard to the overreaching claims that have been made when this reading is adopted as the original. Both claims are *possible*, of course. However, the claim that the variant 'Son' occurred in the course of a 'proto-Orthodox' battle against adoptionism is unnecessary, since the simpler explanation of scribal assimilation is at hand; and the claim that John 1.34 supplies corroboration that the original tradition underlying the Synoptic baptismal accounts was based solely on Isa 42.1 is methodologically problematic.⁵⁸

The International Q Project initially included the baptism in Q, but only with the lowest degree of probability {D}: M. C. Moreland and J. M. Robinson, 'The International Q Project Work Sessions 31 July–2 August, 20 November 1992', *JBL* 112 (1993) 500–506, here 502. The grade has subsequently been raised to {C}. See the reconstruction and evaluation of Q 3. [21–22] in J. M. Robinson, P. Hoffmann, and J. S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 18–22.

⁵⁷ That is not to say that it is a fully developed category in Q.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to Prof. Graham Stanton and Dr. Peter Head for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.