

## I Life and Aims of Jesus

DALE C. ALLISON, JR.

Jesus of Nazareth was born in or shortly before 4 BCE, when Herod the Great died. He was executed by order of the Roman State, probably in either 30 or 33 CE. A Galilean Jew, he was a rhetorically gifted teacher adept at composing aphorisms, similes, and parables.<sup>1</sup> He was no less a miracle worker and messianic figure. His chief aim was to promote religious renewal among the Jewish people in anticipation of the kingdom of God, which he believed to be dawning in his ministry. His vision of fundamental change appealed not just to the disaffected but to individuals from different social strata.

Sympathizers remembered him as a commanding, charismatic presence who operated with self-confident authority, worked wonders with a word, and, despite displaying compassion and enjoining love, made radical demands and promulgated rigorous moral standards. Detractors accused him of being allied with evil spirits, breaking the Sabbath, eating and drinking to excess, blaspheming, and befriending unsavory or impious characters.

Jesus appears to have been, before his public ministry, not a peasant or subsistence farmer but an artisan, probably a carpenter (*tektōn*, Mark 6:3; Justin, *Dial.* 88). As such, he likely traveled: Nazareth was too small to require his full-time services. But we know next to nothing about him until his baptism by John the Baptist, which he may have experienced as a prophetic commissioning (Mark 1:9–11). John 3:22–24 reports that Jesus baptized for a time. If so, at some point, perhaps after the Baptist's arrest (Mark 1:14; John 3:24), he discontinued the practice and began his own ministry, with special attention to the ill, the poor, and the marginalized.

Evidently unmarried, Jesus was an itinerant. He had no home but was always a visitor (Matt 8:20 par. Luke 9:58). He frequented Galilean

<sup>1</sup> For the methodological issues surrounding sources and criteria of authenticity, see Allison 2010, 1–30; Keith and Le Donne 2012.

villages, whose average population was 200–400. But he also spent considerable time in Capernaum, which had a few thousand residents (Matt 11:23 par. Luke 10:15; Mark 1:21–2:1; 9:33; John 2:12; 6:17, 24, 59). The sources also have him in Judea (Mark 1:4–9; Luke 4:44; John 2:13–3:36), the region of Tyre (Mark 7:24), the area of Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27), the Decapolis (Mark 5:20; 7:31), Samaria (Luke 9:52), and “beyond the Jordan” (Mark 10:1; John 1:28–29; 10:40).

Apart from Jerusalem, he seems to have skirted urban centers such as Tiberias and Sepphoris. He is never depicted in an agora or marketplace. Perhaps he was alienated not only from the Herodian dynasty (Luke 13:32) and Roman ways (Mark 10:42–44) but more generally from urban commercialization. The focus of his ministry was, in any case, the rural people of Israel (Matt 10:5–6; Rom 15:8), although he was not hostile to gentiles (Mark 5:1–20; 7:24–30; that early Christians missionized gentiles is unexpected if Jesus dismissed them altogether). He was probably more than once in Jerusalem for festivals, as John’s Gospel purports, and he likely met opposition there before his final visit (Mark 3:22; 7:1; John 7:1). The synoptic chronology (i.e. of Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which recounts only a single visit, is compressed.

Jesus was a liminal figure, an outsider who had abandoned ordinary life. He was unallied with established sources of social, economic, or religious authority – he was not scribe, not Pharisee, not priest, not leader of a synagogue – and as his popularity grew, so did the hostility of those who were so allied. Their antagonism is a gauge of his impact. Eventually the opposition of certain Jewish leaders in Jerusalem found common cause with the Roman procurator, and Jesus was arrested and executed. The movement he initiated, despite being centered on and driven by his immediate presence, was not thereby extinguished.

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ESCHATOLOGY

The central theme of Jesus’s public proclamation is “the kingdom of God.” In summations of his message, it has “come near” (*ēngiken*; Mark 1:14–15; Matt 10:7 par. Luke 10:9). This means it will arrive soon, which is consistent with other sayings (Matt 10:23; Mark 9:1; 13:30; Luke 18:8), as well as with the hope of the early church (Rom 13:11; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:13–18). Such expectation also lines up with Jewish sources in which “kingdom” is both an eschatological reality (Dan 7:14; 4Q246 2 5; 4Q521 2 2:7; Sib. Or. 3:46–48; T. Mos. 10:1) and not far off (Dan 12:6–13; 1 En. 94:6–8; 95:6; 4 Ezra 4:26; 5:45; 8:61; 2 Bar. 85:10).

Jesus's eschatology functioned as a practical theodicy. It did not account for evil but prophesied its demise through a series of radical, divinely worked reversals. The hungry will be full, the sorrowful will laugh, the persecuted will be rewarded (Matt 5:3–12 par. Luke 6:20–23). Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first (Mark 10:31; Gos. Thom. 4). The exalted will be humbled, the humbled exalted (Matt 23:12 par. Luke 14:11; 18:14).

"Kingdom" was Jesus's shorthand for the world that divine intervention would soon remake and transform. People will "enter" and "inherit" it, as Israel once entered and inherited the promised land (Matt 5:20; 7:21; 19:29; 25:34; Mark 9:47; 10:15, 17, 24, 25; Luke 10:25; 23:42; John 3:5). Even if the formulation in Matthew 5:5 – "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" – is secondary, it is not misleading. Jesus expected not the destruction and replacement of this world but its renewal, a world in which the promises to Israel would be fulfilled. One may compare 2 Baruch 73, which foresees a world without war, disease, or anxiety, a world full of joy, rest, and gladness, a world in which people will no longer die. Jesus similarly hoped for a radically transfigured world, one in which God's will for earth will be done as it is now in heaven.

While Jesus was not a systematic thinker, the sources suggest a coherent eschatological scenario, a series of closely connected events: a period of great tribulation (Matt 10:34–36 par. Luke 12:51–53; Mark 13:3–23); appearance of the Son of Man (Matt 24:27, 37–39 par. Luke 17:24–30; Mark 13:26; 14:62); resurrection (Matt 12:41–42 par. Luke 11:31–32; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 14:12–14; John 5:28–29); and the last judgment, which will issue in reward in the kingdom for some and punishment in Gehenna for others (Matt 5:12 par. Luke 6:23; Matt 6:19–21 par. Luke 12:33–34; Matt 7:2 par. Luke 6:37; Matt 10:32–33 par. Luke 12:8–9; Mark 12:40; Matt 25:31–46). While these elements appear also in Jewish sources, distinctive of Jesus were his self-identification with the Son of Man (see the section "Self-Conception" later in the chapter) and a link between response to his ministry and judgment (Matt 10:32–33 par. Luke 12:8–9; Matt 11:20–24 par. Luke 10:12–15). Unlike 4 Ezra 7:28–31, the rabbis and perhaps Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, there is little evidence that Jesus distinguished between a temporary messianic kingdom and an eternal world to come.

In Luke 17:20–21, Jesus says that "the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." Some scholars have held that, if the kingdom was future for Jesus, he

is unlikely to have also believed it to be present. For them, either Jesus did not utter Luke 17:21 or it does not signal the kingdom's presence. The saying might mean, for instance: "The kingdom is in your reach, in your power to enter it." But Matthew 12:28 par. Luke 11:20 clearly speaks of the kingdom's presence: "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." There is little reason to deny that Jesus conceived of the kingdom as coming over time and so both present and future. The kingdom is both present and future for Paul (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9–10; 15:50, 24; Gal 5:21) as well as the synoptic evangelists, and the eschaton does not arrive in a moment but rather over a period of time in Deutero-Isaiah, Jubilees 23, the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 En. 93 + 91:12–17), and the Apocalypse of Abraham. It was the same for Jesus. Something greater than Solomon had already appeared (Matt 12:41–42 par. Luke 11:31–32). Even before the resurrection, people could begin to see what prophets only longed to see (Matt 13:16–17 par. Luke 10:23–24).

If the final overthrow of Satan and all evil belong to Jewish eschatological expectation (Jub. 23:29; 50:5; 4Q300 3; 1 En. 54:4–6; T. Mos. 10:1–3), for Jesus the battle has begun, and the devil is losing. A confident sense of eschatological victory appears not only in Matt 12:28 par. Luke 11:20 but also in Mark 3:27 ("the strong man" has been bound) as well as Luke 10:18, which might reflect a visionary experience: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." The healings, too, hold eschatological significance. Jewish texts anticipate that the end time will bring healing (Isa 57:18–19; 58:8; Jer 30:17; Ezek 34:16; Jub. 23:29–30; 1QS 4:6–7), and Matthew 11:4–5 par. Luke 7:22 – "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" – through its borrowing of lines from Isaiah (Isa 26:19; 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 42:18; 61:1; cf. 4Q521 2 2:7–13), claims the realization of that expectation. The blessings of the new age have begun to fall on the world. This is why Jesus, actualizing his own beatitude (Luke 6:21), anticipates the eschatological banquet (Isa 25:6–8; Ezek 39:17–20; 1Q28a 2; Matt 8:11 par. Luke 13:29; Mark 14:25) with celebratory meals (Mark 2:18–20).

If the blessings of the end are already becoming manifest, at the same time the tribulation of the latter days (Dan 12:1; Mark 13:3–23; 4 Ezra 6:24; m. Šotah 9:15) has begun. The citizens of the kingdom suffer violence (Matt 11:12–13 par. Luke 16:16). Persecution and even martyrdom lie ahead (Matt 5:10–12 par. Luke 6:22–23; Matt 10:23; Mark 8:34–35; 13:9–13). It is not yet the era of messianic peace and reconciliation

(Isa 2:4; Mal 4:6) but the time of the sword, and foes are in one's own house (Matt 10:34–36 par. Luke 12:51–53; Gos. Thom. 16). One should pray for deliverance from the time of trial (Matt 6:13 par. Luke 11:4).

According to Mark 1:14–15, the announcement of the kingdom's nearness was coupled with a call to repent (Matt 11:21 par. Luke 10:13; Matt 12:41 par. Luke 11:32; Luke 13:1–5). This association reflects the far-flung belief, grounded in Deuteronomy 4:25–31; 30:1–10, that the return and redemption of scattered Israel at the end of days will coincide with the repentance of God's people (Hos 14:1–3; Joel 2:12–14; Tob 13:5–6; Jub. 1:15, 22–23; 23:26; 4Q398 14–17; T. Mos. 1:18; T. Jud. 23:3–5; T. Dan. 6:4; Philo, *Praem.* 87–98, 162–70). This expectation may explain why the tradition does not reflect imminent expectation alone: Some sayings foresee a span, brief but of unspecified duration, between Jesus's end and the end of status quo history (Mark 2:20; 13:34–35; 14:7, 25; Matt 23:39 par. Luke 13:35; 17:22; 1 Cor 11:24–25). Jesus presumably undertook his work in the hope that he would be heeded. But his reproaches of "this generation" (Matt 12:39–42 par. Luke 11:29–32; Matt 17:17 par. Luke 9:41; Mark 8:38; 9:19) and the woes over Galilean cities (Matt 11:20–24 par. Luke 10:12–15) reveal profound disappointment (cf. Mark 12:1–12). While there is not enough evidence to support the old theory of a Galilean crisis, Jesus likely hoped for a corporate repentance that did not eventuate to his satisfaction; and if he took the promise, "I will return to you," to be contingent on "return to me" (Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7), the possibility of eschatological delay (Hab 2:3–4; 1QpHab 7:10–12) would have been real.

Although Galilee in Jesus's day may have been fairly stable politically, his vision of a restored Israel no doubt stirred up hopes for the end of Roman rule (cf. John 6:15). Some have surmised that he was a revolutionary, like those who rebelled against Rome in the 60s. This would certainly explain why he was crucified with rebellious bandits (Mark 15:27). But the character in the passion narrative is remarkably unaggressive, which accords with the imperatives in Matthew 5:38–48 par. Luke 6:27–36; and Paul's letters, our earliest Christian sources, do not incite violence but feature a savior who is the antithesis of a military leader—humble, meek, mild (2 Cor 10:1; Phil 2:8). We know from Daniel, the Testament of Moses, and 2 Baruch that it was possible to hope for the destruction of an occupying power without calling for violence: One could await divine intervention. Further, although the Baptist was not a violent revolutionary, Josephus reports that Herod Antipas arrested him because he fretted that his preaching would foment political unrest (*Ant.* 18.118). Matters were likely similar with Jesus.

## ETHICS AND TORAH

Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom was deeply ethical and social, and his eschatological expectation added urgency to his demands. Yet the proximity of the end did not of itself generate imperatives. Those came from the Torah and attendant traditions. (Jesus was probably literate. Even if not, his knowledge of Scripture and its interpretation appears to have been considerable.)

Mark 12:28–34 makes the chief duties love of God and neighbor. To conjoin these imperatives from Torah (Deut 6:4–5; Lev 19:18) is to endorse Moses. Indeed, Mark 12:28–34 may assume, as Philo taught, that the decalogue encapsulates all of Torah and falls into two halves, the first enjoining love of God, the second love of neighbor (*Decal.* 19–20, 108–110, 154; *Spec. leg.* 1.1; cf. Rom 13:9). In other words, these two imperatives stand for the entire law. In line with this, Jesus elsewhere affirms the law's abiding validity (Matt 5:18 par. Luke 16:17), endorses Mosaic imperatives (Mark 1:44; 7:21; 10:19; Matt 23:23 par. Luke 11:42), criticizes others for breaking Torah (Mark 7:8–13), and rebuts those who accuse him of acting unlawfully (Mark 2:23–28).

Jesus seemingly was engaged particularly with Leviticus 19, which was so important for Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism. That chapter, in addition to commanding that one not hate but rather love one's neighbor, contains teaching about both retaliation and judging. Picking up on Leviticus 19:18 – “You will not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people” – Matthew 5:38–47 par. Luke 6:27–35 prohibits vengeance and rejects the conventional reciprocity of returning evil for evil. Jesus also endorses the golden rule (Matt 7:12 par. Luke 6:31), which was traditionally associated with Leviticus 19 (Tob 4:14–15; Jub. 36:4; Ep. Arist. 207; Tg. Ps.-J. 19:18; cf. Did. 1:2), and he rewrites Leviticus 19:2, turning “You will be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” into “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). He gives “Love your neighbor” a broad interpretation: It includes enemies (Matt 5:44 par. Luke 6:27; Luke 10:29–37). Provocatively, he amends Leviticus 19:15–17, as though to say: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall judge your neighbor.’ But I say to you, ‘Do not judge’” (Matt 7:1–2 par. Luke 6:37–38).

Tensions between Jesus and the Torah are not confined to Matthew 7:1–2 par. Luke 6:37–38. “Hate your father and mother” (Luke 14:26; cf. Matt 10:37) is formulated over against Exodus 20:12 par. Deuteronomy 5:16: “Honor your father and mother.” The prohibition of divorce and

remarriage (Matt 5:31–32 par. Luke 16:18; Mark 10:2–12; 1 Cor 7:10–11) does not match what Moses said on the subject (Deut 24:1–4). It is the same with the injunction against swearing in Matthew 5:33–37: Jesus disallows what Moses permitted (Exod 20:7; Lev 19:12).

Jesus's apparently inconsistent attitude to Torah reflects his messianic context. According to Matthew 11:13 par. Luke 16:16, the law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom is preached (Luke) or the kingdom has suffered violence (Matthew). The new has arrived; things are different (Mark 2:21–22). The consummation, when sin will be eradicated, is nigh, and to the extent that the law makes concessions to sin, it is postlapsarian and needs revision. If "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8), then it should not be so now (Mark 10:2–12). The ideal future becomes the imperative for life in the present.

Jesus's stance vis-à-vis Torah was messianic in another way. The demands he made on behalf of the kingdom surpassed all other demands, including those in Torah. If following him entailed not burying one's father, then that was the requirement. The Babylonian Talmud (b. Yeb. 90b) teaches, with reference to the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18: "Come and hear: 'You will listen to him,' even if he tells you to transgress some of the commandments in the Torah, as happened with Elijah on Mount Carmel [in 1 Kings 18 the prophet sacrifices outside the temple], obey him in every respect, in accord with the needs of the hour." Imperatives can conflict, and Jesus, who took himself to be the eschatological prophet like Moses (see the section "Self-Conception"), operated with the conviction that the needs of the eschatological crisis sometimes required exceptional demands.

Although Jesus did not require the same of all (see "Itinerants, Householders, and Discipleship"), he called everyone, in the face of the last judgment, to return to God. This is the broad context for observance of Torah and Jesus's moral teaching. Nowhere do his sayings assume that individuals will be saved by virtue of descent from Abraham. In this Jesus followed the Baptist. The latter insisted that descent from Abraham will not guarantee passing the final judgment (Matt 3:7–10 par. Luke 3:7–9), and he conducted a one-time baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Jesus similarly mandated becoming, in effect, a convert. He called for beginning one's religious life anew, for becoming like a little child (Mark 10:15; John 3:3; Gos. Thom. 22; cf. Paul's idea of a "new creation" [2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15] and b. Yeb. 22a and b. Bek. 47a, where the convert to Judaism is "like a new-born child").

## ITINERANTS, HOUSEHOLDERS, AND DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus called some to “become passers-by” (Gos. Thom. 42), to follow him literally by abandoning their ordinary lives to share his itinerant lifestyle (Matt 8:18–22 par. Luke 9:57–62; Mark 1:16–20; 2:13–17). Their dislocation and detachment from ordinary life matched their eschatological orientation: They were not at home in the present.

Jesus was an itinerant largely because he wished to spread his message (Mark 1:38), and this was one reason he called disciples to follow him: They too were to proclaim the kingdom, thereby becoming fishers of people (Mark 1:17). They were to enlarge the scope of his influence (Matt 10:5–16; Mark 6:8–11; Luke 10:1–12). (That they preached what Jesus preached implies that they were already repeating his words before his death. The Jesus tradition began then.)

We do not know how often Jesus and his band were away from hospitable households or how often they ventured beyond day trips and passed the night in the open or how often food and drink were serious issues. But the directive to pray for daily bread (Matt 6:11 par. Luke 11:3) and the counsel to be not anxious about food and clothing (Matt 6:25–34 par. Luke 12:22–32) were heard by people who, because on the road (Mark 1:35; 6:31–35; 8:4; Luke 5:16), must at least on occasion have fretted about such things. (This holds whether or not the Galilean economy in Jesus’s day was generally oppressive, a disputed subject.)

From his sympathizers Jesus selected a group of twelve (Mark 3:13–19; Matt 19:28 par. Luke 22:28–30; 1 Cor 15:5). Collectively they were a prophetic sign and eschatological symbol. Representing the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. 1QM 2.1–3), they reflected Jesus’s hope for the literal restoration of all Israel, including the lost tribes (cf. Matt 8:11–12 par. Luke 13:28–29; Mark 13:27; Hos 11:11; 2 Macc 1:27; 2:18; Bar. 4:37; 5:5; 1 En. 57:1).

Jesus’s entourage included women. There are no call stories for any of them, and it has been argued that his female supporters were all householders, not itinerants. But there was nothing extraordinary about women being out and about – as the Gospels themselves attest – and the proposal goes against Mark 15:40–41 and Luke 8:1–3. It seems likely that at least a few women not only went up with Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover but, earlier on, traveled with him around Galilee. Whether we should call these female coworkers “disciples” is debated. The Gospels do not do so. Given the androcentric focus of the sources, we can say little more except (i) some offered pecuniary support (Luke 8:3); (ii) Jesus is nowhere quoted as making disparaging remarks about women (contrast Sirach 42.14; T. Reub. 5.1; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.201; t. Ber. 6.18);



(iii) multiple sayings pair the activity or circumstances of women with the activity or circumstances of men (e.g. Matt 12:41–42 par. Luke 11:31–32; Matt 13:31–33 par. Luke 13:18–21; Luke 4:25–27; 12:45; Luke 15:4–10); and (iv) one of his female followers, Mary of Magdala, appears to have played a key role in the emergence of belief in Jesus's resurrection (Matt 28:9–10; Mark 16:1–8; John 20:14–18).

In addition to those who literally followed him, Jesus had supporters who stayed at home. He did not, despite harsh words about family ties and possessions (Mark 10:17–31; Matt 6:19–21 par. Luke 12:33–34; Luke 6:24–26; 16:1–31; Gos. Thom. 36, 42, 56; etc.), ask everyone to abandon conventional livelihoods or leave home (Matt 24:17–18 par. Luke 17:31–32/Mark 13:15–16; 2:11; 5:19; 8:26; Luke 19:1–10). His critical comments were relative to circumstance. Although he believed that traditional social structures were passing away and were not of chief importance, he decried them not in principle but precisely when they came into conflict with his cause. The harsh words about families reflect occasions when someone turned down Jesus's call to follow him (Mark 10:17–22) or effected familial strife (Matt 10:35–36 = Luke 12:51–53).

#### HEALINGS AND MIRACLES

The modern quest for the historical Jesus began with Enlightenment thinkers for whom miracles were impossible. With that negation as their starting point, their task was to uncover the original Jesus behind the credulous overlay. While the quest has grown far beyond that, contemporary historians often adopt reductionistic strategies when elucidating miracles: A story may be due to haggadic invention, to mutation of a memory into legend, or to misperception or misinterpretation of real events. But whatever one's take on miracles, the presence of the latter in the Gospels is not of itself reason to infer that they are late and mostly legendary. Countless reports of extraordinary events, however explained, have come and continue to come from eyewitnesses. It is equally undeniable that some religious charismatics, such as the Roman Catholic Saint Don Bosco (d. 1888) and the Indian guru Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), have been trailed by numerous astounding claims while alive. It was so with Jesus. Even some opponents conceded that he could do the extraordinary (Matt 12:27 par. Luke 11:19; Mark 3:22–27; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63).

Jesus appears to have been "the most successful exorcist and healer of his time" (Casey 2010, 107). Distinctive is his unmediated authority. He does not use incantations. Usually he does not even pray. It is

as though he has numinous power in himself. Equally notable is the variety: exorcisms, healings of various afflictions, raisings of the dead, and so-called nature miracles (e.g. calming the sea, feeding a multitude, walking on water, changing water into wine). While it is all but impossible to evaluate the historicity of most of the stories, Jesus presumably drew crowds as much or more for his miracles as his teaching. But the two were intimately related, for the former illustrated the latter in at least two ways: They (i) embodied his insistence on loving and serving others, especially the unfortunate and (ii) were testimony to the dawning of eschatological blessings (Matt 11:2–6 par. Luke 7:18–23).

Among the exceptional abilities reported are foreseeing events, perceiving what others think, and knowing from afar what is happening (Matt 12:22–30 par. Luke 11:14–23; Mark 2:1–12; 6:45–52; 9:33–37; 11:1–10; Luke 5:1–11; 6:6–11; 7:36–50; 9:46–48; John 1:35–52; 2:23–25; 4:4–42; etc.). The large number of relevant texts indicates that some who knew him perceived Jesus to be a clairvoyant prophet.

#### SELF-CONCEPTION

Discussion of Jesus's self-conception has been much affected by theological – as well as anti-theological – interests. Many have desired to bring his ideas as close to later creedal orthodoxy as possible. Others have wished to do the opposite. The truth seems to be that Jesus had an exalted self-perception, which is best understood not in Arian or Athanasian terms but via comparison with divine agents in Second Temple Jewish texts, such as Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek and the Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37–71.

Much modern scholarship converged on the idea that Jesus took himself to be a prophet, more particularly an eschatological prophet. The sources report that others identified him as such (Matt 21:11, 46; Mark 6:15; 8:28; Luke 7:16, 39; 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17; Gos. Thom. 52). They also have Jesus observing, with reference to his ministry, that “prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house” (Mark 6:4; cf. John 4:44; Gos. Thom. 31), as well as avowing, “Today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33). When one adds that others near his time and place, including John the Baptist, were known as prophets (Matt 11:9 par. Luke 7:26; Josephus, *Bell.* 2.261–63), that Jesus, like some canonical prophets (Jer 16:1–2; Ezek 4:1–17; Hos 1:2–8), evidently engaged in symbolic acts (Mark 3:13–19; 6:30–44; 11:1–10, 12–14, 15–19;

14:22–25), and that the Gospels regularly depict him as a seer (Matt 10:23–25; Mark 8:31; 13:2, 5–37; etc.), the common conclusion follows.

Many have hesitated to attribute to Jesus a larger conception than this. On their view, Jesus proclaimed not himself but the kingdom, and more exalted christological ideas were secondary developments. At least two impulses help account for this traditional judgment. One is the historical conviction that all doctrine, including Christology, evolved over time. If there is distance between Origen and Athanasius, and if there is distance between the Synoptics and John's Gospel, then there must be distance between the historical Jesus and the Synoptics, which means development from the lesser to the greater.

A second impulse has been theological, the concern that if Jesus thought too highly of himself, we cannot think so highly of him: That would be reason to fret about his mental health. But whatever one makes of the psychology, nearly insuperable difficulties beset the verdict that Jesus thought less of himself than he reportedly thought of the Baptist, which was that John was "more than a prophet" (Matt 11:9 par. Luke 7:26).

The earliest sources for the Jesus movement are the authentic letters of Paul. In them Jesus is already God's "Son" (Rom 1:9; Gal 4:4; 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 1:10; etc.), the "Lord" (*passim*), pre-existent (2 Cor 8:9), and thoroughly allied with God the Father (Rom 1:7–8; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 1:1, 3; 4:6; etc.). This includes materials that, according to many, are pre-Pauline – the confession in Romans 1:2–4, the Aramaic prayer "Maranatha" (1 Cor 16:22), and the poetic section in Philippians 2:5–11. Paul, then, establishes the early advent of a high Christology. Moreover, while the apostle argues about many things, such as circumcising gentiles and spiritual gifts, he nowhere defends his christological formulations. This implies that those formulations were not idiosyncratic, that his exalted Christology was taken for granted and widespread.

While multiple factors contributed to early high Christology, Jesus's convictions about himself mark the point of origin. Nothing is explained by positing that, soon after Easter, Jesus's admirers, without his help, turned him into someone akin to the Elect One in 1 Enoch 37–71. Rather, positing continuity, which means positing a lofty self-consciousness for Jesus, is the more reasonable path, and it accords with the fact that, in many sayings attributed to him, Jesus is the locus of end-time events. His successful exorcisms inaugurate the end (Matt 12:28 par. Luke 11:20). He is the fulfillment of prophetic texts in Isaiah, especially Isaiah 61 (Matt 5:3–12 par. Luke 6:20–23; Matt 11:2–6 par. Luke 7:18–23; Luke 4:16–21). Those who reject or disobey him will suffer

judgment (Matt 7:24–27 par. Luke 6:46–49; Matt 10:32–33 par. Luke 12:8–9; Matt 11:21–24 par. Luke 10:12–15; Mark 8:38). He will, like the figure in Daniel 7:13–14, come on the clouds of heaven (Mark 13:26–27; 14:62). He will sit on a throne (Matt 25:31; Mark 10:35–40; 14:62). The quantity of materials that gives Jesus star billing is sufficiently large as to compel a choice. Either all of this material is misleading, in which case the tradition is so distorted that a skeptical stance seems in order, or at least some of it fairly represents Jesus, in which case he was the center of his own eschatological scenario.

Beyond this generality, Jesus probably conceived of himself as the eschatological prophet like Moses in particular (Deut 18:15, 18; 1QS 9.11; 4Q175). This is, despite the failure of most scholarship to draw the inference, the best explanation for the series of correlations between traditions about him and traditions about Moses. When Jesus claims to cast out demons by “the finger of God,” he is like the lawgiver, who also worked wonders by “the finger of God” (Exod 8:19). When, at the Last Supper, Jesus uses the phrase, “my blood of the covenant” (Mark 14:24), he is alluding to Exodus 24:8, where Moses dashes blood on the people and says, “Here is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” When, in Matthew 5:21–48, Jesus sets his words beside and even, at points, seemingly over against Moses, his status vis-à-vis Moses is (as the commentaries prove) inevitably posed. When, in Luke 12:35–38, Jesus implores his hearers, whom he likens to slaves, to “Fasten a belt around your waists (*humōn hai osphues periezōsmenai*) and let your lamps be lit,” he is replaying the exodus, which took place at night (Exod 12:42; Tg. Neof., Tg. Ps.-J. and Frag. Tg. [MS Vatican Ebr. 440] on Exod 12:42) and involved Moses commanding the Israelite slaves to gird up their loins (LXX Exod 12:11: *hai osphues humōn periezōsmenai*). When Jesus characterizes his generation as “evil” (Matt 12:39–42 = Luke 11:29–32), “faithless” and “perverse” (Matt 17:17 = Luke 9:41; Mark 9:19), and “adulterous” and “sinful” (Mark 8:38), he is using language associated with the generation in the wilderness, so his day is like Moses’s day (Num 32:13; Deut 1:35; 32:20). The present is again like the past when Jesus bids his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11 par. Luke 11:3), for the phrase recalls Exodus 16, where God “gives” manna, which is called “bread,” and which is sent daily or day by day (Exod 16:4–5, 22–30; Luke’s *to kath’ hēmeran* precisely matches LXX Exod 16:5). These and additional texts, when added together, depict a new Moses in a new exodus.

Jesus also thought himself destined to be Israel’s king: (i) The Romans crucified him. The best explanation is that they worried

about the unrest attending a popular figure some took to be "king of the Jews" (the inscription above the cross: Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26; John 18:33, 39; 19:3, 19, 21). That some imagined Jesus to be an insurrectionist with regal pretensions entails that the issue of kingship was there before Easter (cf. John 6:15). (ii) Belief in Jesus's resurrection would not have moved anyone to identify him as Israel's king, as if to turn him into someone he had not been before. On the contrary, the resurrection functioned to vindicate Jesus, which meant vindicating the hopes his followers already had. (iii) If Jesus selected twelve disciples (Mark 3:13–19) to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28), it is significant that he is not among their number. As the one who chose them, he was rather their leader, which implies his leadership of restored Israel.

(iv) Jesus predicted not only the destruction of Jerusalem's temple but probably claimed that he would build another (Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:13–22). This matters because the idea (based on an eschatological reading of 2 Sam 7:13–14) of a Davidic or messianic figure rebuilding the temple was an eschatological motif (cf. Zech 6:12–13; 4QFlorilegium; Sib. Or. 5:422; Tg. on Isa 53:5). (v) Matthew 19:28 par. Luke 22:28–30 (a promise that implicitly includes Judas and is unlikely pure invention) and Mark 10:35–45 (James and John want to sit on Jesus's right and left) envisage thrones for Jesus's disciples. Given that he is their leader, he too must await a throne (Matt 25:31; Mark 14:62). Such expectation must in part lie behind the conviction, which arose quite early, that Jesus is even now seated at God's right hand: Promise had become fulfillment (Acts 2:34–35; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1). (vi) Some Jews anticipated that Israel's eschatological king would be God's son (cf. 4Q174 1.10–13; 4Q246 2.1). This is the likely matrix for the confession of Jesus as God's "Son," a confession that goes back to Christian beginnings. It was there at the beginning because Jesus himself stirred messianic expectations. If he was nonetheless shy of the title "Messiah," that may have been because his status and role were not his to establish: God alone would grant and proclaim those.

By far the most frequent title Jesus uses in the Gospels is "the Son of man." The Greek (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*) is unusual and must derive from Aramaic. Intense debate over the expression, which is rare outside the Gospels, continues unabated. But attempts to eliminate all allusion to Daniel 7:13–14 from the originating tradition fail, as does the proposal that, for Jesus, the Son of man was not himself but an eschatological person nowhere else hinted at in the tradition. Jesus appears to have found himself, or perhaps himself and his followers, in Daniel 7:13–14,

in the scene where “one like a son of man” comes on the clouds of heaven and receives everlasting dominion, glory, and kingship.

### CONFLICT AND MARTYRDOM

Beside the formal passion predictions in Mark (8:31; 9.31; 10:33–34), a mass of material purports that Jesus anticipated an untimely death (Allison 2010, 423–33). That he spoke about his own demise is already tradition for Paul (1 Cor 11:23–25). The apostle, moreover, believed that Jesus “did not please himself” (Rom 15:3) but “gave himself for our sins” (Gal 1:4; cf. 2:20), that he humbled himself and became “obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). These convictions assume that Jesus did not run from death but embraced it as a martyr.

Perhaps Jesus had real premonitions. Or perhaps he began to contemplate death because he saw, in the late stages of his ministry, which way the wind was blowing: It had become plain that conflict with authorities in Jerusalem, both Jewish and Roman, was inevitable. His tradition emphasized the martyrdom of prophets (Matt 23:29–37 par. Luke 11:48–51; 13:34; the Lives of the Prophets), and Herod Antipas had recently beheaded the Baptist. It is also credible that biblical scripts played a role. Before the one like a son of man comes in Daniel 7, the holy ones, who share his destiny (7:14, 18), suffer persecution (7:21). If, furthermore, Jesus found himself in Isaiah 61, he may likewise have read himself into earlier chapters that feature a suffering servant. Mark 10.45 (“give his life as a ransom for many”) and 14:24 (“poured out for many”) seem to echo Isaiah 53:11–12 (“poured out himself to death,” “bore the sin of many”).

Jesus might at some point have hoped not to taste death before seeing the kingdom in its fullness (Mark 9:1). If so, we do not know when he came to have second thoughts. It is also possible, if memory informs Mark 14:32–42 (Gethsemane), that his conviction never amounted to certainty. However that may be, he will, given his eschatological expectations, have understood his death to be part of the unprecedented “time of anguish” that would mark the latter days (Dan 12:1).

What precisely triggered Jesus’s arrest is unclear. Maybe it was a disturbance in the temple and a prophecy of its destruction that brought things to a head (Mark 11:15–17; 14:58; but the event occurs much earlier in John 2:13–17). Whatever the cause, both Jewish and Roman authorities were involved in the events that led to his crucifixion. According to 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 (which is not a post-Pauline interpolation),

the Jews (or Judeans) “killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets.” Yet in 1 Corinthians 2:8, Paul writes that “the rulers of this age ... crucified the Lord of glory.” “The rulers of this age” are or include the Roman authorities. Paul, then, agrees with the Gospels, where Jesus’s execution trails actions taken by members of the Sanhedrin and then Pilate (Mark 14:53–65; 15:1–15; John 18:12–19:16). Josephus similarly has both Pilate and “men of the highest standing among us” involved in Jesus’s demise (*Ant.* 18.64). While one can detect a tendency in the tradition to lay more blame on the Jews and less on the Romans, the involvement of Jewish authorities cannot be eliminated. Jesus in any case will have appeared, however briefly, before Pilate, just as Jesus son of Ananias appeared before Albinus, and just as James and Simon the sons of Judas the Galilean stood before Tiberius Alexander (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.102; *Bell.* 6.300–309). As Josephus wrote: “Pilate condemned him to the cross” (*Ant.* 18.64).

#### FURTHER READING

- Allison, Dale C., Jr. 2010. *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Casey, Maurice. 2010. *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*. London: T & T Clark.
- Destro, Adriana and Mauro Pesce. 2012. *Encounters with Jesus: The Man in His Place and Time*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Dunn, James D. G. 2003. *Christianity in the Making, Vol. 1: Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hengel, Martin and Anna Maria Schwemer. 2019. *Jesus and Judaism*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- Keith, Chris and Anthony Le Donne, eds. 2012. *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*. London: T & T Clark Continuum.
- Meier, John P. 1991–2016. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. 5 vols. Anchor Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schröter, Jens and Christine Jacobi, eds. 2022. *The Jesus Handbook*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Theissen, Gerd and Annette Merz. 1998. *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Wright, N. T. 1996. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress.