

Gospel Chronologies, the Scene in the Temple, and the Crucifixion of Jesus[®]

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How are we to use the stories in the gospels¹ to reconstruct an historically sound view of Jesus of Nazareth? Scholarly agreement on general criteria of authenticity (dissimilarity, multiple attestation, and so on) coexists with widely divergent commitments to methods drawn from various disciplines (literature, sociology and anthropology, economics, archaeology). A wild profusion of “historical Jesuses” has flourished as a result. The controversies that reached their highest pitch in the mid-80s to mid-90s have not subsided so much as settled into position. Perhaps we have just resigned ourselves to talking past each other; or perhaps we have all gotten used to the noise.

This swirl of various images of Jesus and contesting methodological commitments, however, obscures a unique point of consensus that seems to be withstanding all of our other confusions. *Almost* all New Testament scholars concur that Jesus of Nazareth overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple’s court, around Passover, during the final week of his life, that in so doing he symbolically announced the Temple’s impending destruction, and that this action triggered the events that led directly to his death.²

This consensus gives the measure of the profound influence that E.P. Sanders’ fundamental study, *Jesus and Judaism*, has had on all work in the field. Sanders’ Jesus, in that particular study and elsewhere, is an apocalyptic prophet. Other, non-apocalyptic Jesuses also stalk the New Testament terrain, some given to social reform and subversive wisdom (Borg’s), others to egalitarian commensality (Crossan’s), still others to Christocentric anti-Zionism (Wright’s). Yet they all overturn the moneychangers’ tables; they all intend by that gesture a prophecy of the Temple’s destruction; and they all, consequently, end up passing from the chief priests to Pilate to the cross. This scholarly agreement on the causal relation of Jesus’ gesture to his execution, in other words, reveals another: namely, that Mark’s chronology – which this reconstruction fundamentally repeats – provides the key to understanding the circumstances of Jesus’ death.³

I too once held these views. For various reasons, my confidence in them has eroded. Working with the tools, the information, and the style of scholarship that I have learned, at a distance, from Sanders, and for which I remain forever indebted to him, I now find myself standing where Q-people, (The) Jesus Seminarists, and non-apocalyptic Jesuses habitually tread. I question the historicity of the scene in the Temple. I doubt that the historical Jesus ever predicted the Temple’s destruction, and I doubt too that any of his contemporaries ever thought that he had. Finding Mark’s chronology – certainly for Jesus’ mission but also for events around the Passion – not only implausible but fundamentally unlikely, I have begun to think with John.

All this calls for some apology. Let me begin by accounting for my turn from Mark to John.

I. The Synoptic Gospels and John

John's status as an historical source for Jesus has been queried for many reasons. Two prime considerations are the chronology of his gospel, and the character and self-presentation of his protagonist.

The problem with John's chronology relative to that of the Synoptics is chiefly that it is different. Its place within the canon creates the illusion of a three-to-one split. Matthew, Mark and Luke all present Jesus as traveling along a one-way itinerary from his encounter with the Baptist through his mission in and around the Galilee to, finally, his death in Jerusalem at Passover. The period implied is about a year. John's Jesus moves more like a metronome — up and down, back and forth, now in Jerusalem, now in the Galilee, now in Samaria or back in Judea. Because John accounts for Jesus' travels by invoking pilgrimage holidays, it's often said that John's Jesus travels frequently to Jerusalem — and, again depending on the temporal scaffolding provided by these holidays, for a period of over two years. But in fact, most of Jesus' major speeches and the evangelist's dramatic didactic scenes occur near or in the capitol, often in the precincts of the Temple. The fourth gospel hardly presents a Galilean mission at all.

Two details of this chronological difference highlight it: John's placement of the "cleansing of the Temple," and his depiction of Jesus' final interview with the High Priest. In the Synoptics, the Temple scene marks the beginning of the end. A narrative high-point, the action both punctuates the energetic sweep into Jerusalem announced by the Triumphal Entry, and triggers the gospels' climax by bringing Jesus to the hostile attention of Jerusalem's chief priests, who thereafter plot to destroy him. John, however, disconnects the Triumphal Entry from Jesus' disruption in the Temple. That scene he places in his second chapter, right at the beginning of Jesus' mission. Dramatically, it goes nowhere — no priestly plots, no endangerment to the hero, no thickening hostility. And while the Synoptics pair Jesus' "trial" before Pilate with equally dramatic trials before a congested Jewish high court — with the additional drama, in Matthew and Mark, of a pronouncement of Jesus' blasphemy by the High Priest — the correlating event in John is brief, spare, and (unusual for him) austerely non-theological.

Nothing in John's chronology is intrinsically improbable. Many scholars have even noted its superiority on several points to that of the Synoptics, particularly on the duration of Jesus' mission and on the presentation of his final encounter with Annas and Caiaphas. And, of course, the impression that consensus evangelical chronology stands against John is chimerical, since Matthew and Luke both rely on Mark for the linear organization of their respective narratives. On the specific issue of chronology, what we have is not a three-one split, but an even choice, Mark's or John's.

The general lack of confidence in John's historicity, which has affected as well the use that scholars are prepared to make of his chronology, stems, I think, primarily from the way that John suffers in comparison to its canonical companions on the issue of the characterization of Jesus. To put the same point differently: Synoptic chronology enjoys a borrowed respectability because of the substantially greater historical plausibility of the Synoptic Jesus. A recognizably first-century Jewish figure can be sketched from the material available in Mark and Q, one that coheres with material that we have in Paul's letters,⁴ with what we have in Josephus' histories,

and with what can be matched to still later Aramaic Jewish traditions.⁵ The protagonist of the Fourth Gospel, by contrast, is first of all a mouthpiece for the evangelist's peculiar Christology. John's Jesus is always and everywhere the Johannine Christ, tirelessly expatiating on his own unique and very high theological status, often in terms idiosyncratic to the gospel itself. If Jesus of Nazareth during his lifetime really did have anything like a popular Jewish following (as the simple fact of his execution implies), he cannot have been making speeches like this to them. *Nolo contendere*. On this issue — the characterization of Jesus — Synoptic superiority is clear.

What then, finally, of the use to which scholars of the historical Jesus have been prepared to put the Fourth Gospel? Here, the Synoptics dominate reconstructions.⁶ For some scholars, this is a matter of principle. Geza Vermes, whose work has focused particularly on the coherence of certain evangelical phrases, traditions, and titles with material in later Aramaic Jewish sources, sees John's gospel as both symptomatic of and contributory to "the de-Judaization of the pristine gospel in the Graeco-Roman world." John's Jesus only obscures the Jesus of history; his theologically freighted gospel only confuses the historian's enterprise. Vermes, in brief, sees no place for John in any serious reconstruction.⁷ Other scholars, whether their Jesus is an apocalyptic prophet (Sanders, Allison), a social radical variously conceived (Crossan, Borg), or a Christian theologian *avant la lettre* (Wright), to the degree that their Jesus adheres to Mark's chronology, to that degree they do not engage John.⁸

The question of John's historical usefulness turns in part upon the vexed issue of its literary relationship to the other three gospels. The question is usually framed in terms of Mark. Did John depend on Mark? If so, why did he change what he changed? Is he independent of Mark? If so, this enhances the claim of historicity for some of his material, which then shifts from being redactional decisions relevant only to reconstructing the evangelist's intent, to traditions which may count as evidence toward reconstructing the life and times of Jesus.

In his new edition of *John Among the Gospels* (2001), Moody Smith spends approximately two hundred and forty pages surveying the various positions on the question of the literary relations between the four gospels that scholars have taken since 1904. I do not propose to solve the problem here. Innumerable combinations of theories of literary dependence and of evangelical motivations have been proposed and defended with conviction and ingenuity by generations of scholars, among whom some of the greatest names of modern NT scholarship. These theories and reconstructions frequently conflict. Consensus on this issue is elusive or ephemeral. Given the nature of the evidence, any firm conclusion seems impossible.

Still, what do I *think*? I think that John is pretty much independent of Synoptic tradition. I also think that at some point through some means a redactor of John's text became acquainted with some of the traditions evident as well in the other evangelists. I also think that I have little hope of getting much clearer on this question.⁹

But — and here comes something I know, not something I only think — John's independence or lack thereof does not much matter for the argument I am about to make. And what I am about to argue is that John provides us with some critical purchase on the scene at the Temple, and on the way that it functions in what has become a new orthodoxy in Historical Jesus research. I will also argue that, alone of our canonical choices, John provides us with the *sort* of

picture that can point us towards an historically coherent reconstruction of the shape of Jesus' mission, of the circumstances around his death, and of the growth and spread of the earliest movement in the years following his crucifixion. To make these points, however, I shall have to begin at the end.

II. The Death of Jesus and the Scene at the Temple

The single most solid fact we have about Jesus' life is his death. Jesus was crucified. Thus Paul, the gospels, Josephus, Tacitus: the evidence does not get any better than this.¹⁰ This fact, seemingly simple, implies several others. If Jesus died on a cross, then he died by Rome's hand, and within a context where Rome was concerned about sedition. But against this fact of Jesus' crucifixion stands another, equally incontestable fact: although Jesus was executed as a rebel, none of his immediate followers was. We know from Paul's letters that they survived: he lists them as witnesses to the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-5), and he describes his later dealings with some (Gal 1-2). Stories in the gospels and in Acts confirm this information from Paul.

Good news, bad news. The good news is that we have two firm facts. The bad news is that they pull in different directions, with maximum torque concentrated precisely at Jesus' solo crucifixion. Rome (as any empire) was famously intolerant of sedition. Josephus provides extensive accounts of other popular Jewish charismatic figures to either side of Jesus' lifetime: they were cut down, together with their followers.¹¹ If Pilate had seriously thought that Jesus were politically dangerous *in the way that crucifixion implies*, more than Jesus would have died;¹² and certainly the community of his followers would not have been able to set up in Jerusalem, evidently unmolested by Rome for the six years or so that Pilate remained in office. The implication of Jesus' having died alone is that Pilate did not think he was politically dangerous.

If Pilate knew that Jesus were not dangerous, we still have two questions. Why, then, was Jesus killed? And why, specifically, by crucifixion? At this juncture most historians, like the gospel narratives that we all ultimately rely on, turn for explanation to the chief priests. For whatever reason (different reconstructions offer different priestly motivations), the priests decided that Jesus had to go. Both the Synoptic tradition and John, though very differently, posit priestly initiative behind Jesus' arrest. (I'll get back to these differences shortly.) Secondary support for this reconstruction comes from 1 Thes 2:14-15¹³ and from Josephus.¹⁴ Ancillary considerations also support this conjecture, a prime one being that Caiaphas held the office of high priest from 18 to 36 CE. Presumably he had excellent working relations with whichever prefect was in power.¹⁵ If he wanted a favor — like getting Jesus out of the way — Pilate might have been happy to oblige. Priestly hostility to Jesus also obliquely solves the puzzle, “Why only Jesus?” The priests typically were concerned to minimize bloodshed. Jesus alone is the target of their animosity or concern, so Jesus alone, they tell Pilate, need die. Pilate obliges the priests.

Whence their mortal enmity? On this point, despite surpassingly different, indeed incommensurate, portraits of Jesus, his mission, and his message, most scholars agree: Jesus' action in the temple court before Passover moved him into the cross-hairs of Jerusalem's priests,

and sealed his fate.¹⁶ At this point, the quest for the historical Jesus segues into the quest for the historical action in the Temple. What did Jesus do there, and what had he meant by it?

Known in church tradition as the “Cleansing of the Temple,” Jesus’ disruption in the Temple court had long been seen as his protest against commerce in the Temple precincts. When scholars held this view, they took their cue from the evangelists themselves, who (albeit with variations) presented Jesus as protesting against such activity.

And he entered the Temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the Temple, and he over-turned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught to them and said, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mk 11:15-18)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and the oxen, out of the Temple; and he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold pigeons, “Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” (Jn 2:13-16)

It was Sanders, in *Jesus and Judaism*, who did most to dissolve this earlier reading.¹⁷ He did so by pointing out that it made no historical sense. The function of the Temple — as indeed, of any ancient temple — was to serve as a place to offer sacrifices. Money changing and the provision of suitable offerings were part of the support services offered at the Temple to accommodate pilgrims. Did Jesus then mean to repudiate Temple sacrifice itself? That would have made him virtually unique among his contemporaries, whether Jewish or pagan: in antiquity, worship involved offerings. It also would have been tantamount to rejecting the better part of the five books of Torah, wherein God had revealed the protocols and purposes of these sacrifices to Israel. If Jesus targeted not the sacrifices but the support services facilitating them, his gesture would have lacked practical significance. If he were targeting not the support services but some sort of priestly malfeasance that might have stood behind them, no trace of this protest remains either in the gospels (nothing of the sort figures in the accusations against Jesus brought at his “trials”) or in later Christian tradition (Paul, for instance, says nothing of the sort). And finally, on either reconstruction, Jesus would have failed utterly to communicate his message to his earliest followers, who after his death continued, on the evidence, to live in Jerusalem, to worship at the Temple, and to revere the Temple and its cult as a unique privilege granted by God to Israel.¹⁸

Sanders’ analysis moved academic discussion from what Jesus (supposedly) said to what he did, namely, overturning the moneychangers’ tables. The earlier interpretation of this scene as a “cleansing” had seen Jesus’ action through the lens of the — admittedly redactional — lines attributed to him in Mark and in John. Sanders separated the two, focused on the action of

overturning tables, and reinterpreted that action as a symbol of destruction. To make his case, he presented an interpretive context of other predictions of the Temple's destruction and/or restoration culled from the Gospels, from other early Christian writings, and from other early Jewish texts composed in the period to either side of Jesus' lifetime. Sanders then argued that Jesus' reported gesture, not the evangelists' various redactional activity around Jesus' speech, revealed Jesus' actual meaning. By overturning the tables, said Sanders, Jesus symbolically proclaimed the Temple's impending destruction, to be succeeded by its rebuilding, and the establishment of God's kingdom. The content of Jesus' prophecy cohered with and reaffirmed the message of his mission: the Kingdom was at hand.

Other Jesuses followed suit. Jesus the existential Galilean hasid (Vermes), Jesus the wandering Jewish cynic peasant sage (Crossan), Jesus the anti-purity activist (Borg), Jesus the angry critic of separatist, exclusivist, racist, nationalist Judaism (Wright): all enacted a prophecy of the Temple's impending destruction. The meaning attached to that destruction varied according to the message of the particular Jesus.¹⁹ That the historical Jesus did enact this scene in the Temple, and that he thereby prophesied the Temple's destruction, is, in current scholarship, virtually boilerplate. So too, in scholarly opinion, the fundamental consequence of Jesus' action: he thereby alarmed and alienated the priests, who saw his prophecy as a threat. Their alienation in turn explains why Jesus died. The priest signaled Pilate; and Pilate (for whatever reason — these vary, too) complied.²⁰

This new historiographical paradigm has at least two consequences relevant to our present topic. First, by establishing a line that runs straight from the action in the Temple courts to Jesus' death on the cross, it recapitulates the defining elements of Mark's Passion narrative. Second, and again in accord with Mark, scholars focus on an issue that Mark itself dramatically highlighted in its depiction of the Sanhedrin "trial": Jesus' identity. As with Mark, so with these scholarly reconstructions: Who or what *Jesus* thought he was goes far toward explaining, in this view, why he died.

Putting the matter between Jesus and the priests in this way foregrounds a kind of principled, indeed lethal, religious disagreement between them, much of it focused on the issue of Jesus' view of himself. Indeed, some scholars posit explicitly that such a disagreement is necessary for any plausible reconstruction. "Jesus cannot be separated from his Jewish context," Tom Wright has opined, "but neither can he be collapsed into it so that he is left without a *sharp critique of his [Jewish] contemporaries*."²¹ John Meier holds the existence of such a principled disagreement as one of his five criteria of historicity: "The *criterion of Jesus' rejection and execution* looks at the larger pattern of Jesus' ministry and asks what words and deeds fit in with and explain his trial and crucifixion. A Jesus whose words and deeds did not threaten or alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus."²² The temple scene not only makes Jesus conspicuous, then; it hints at the reasons for Jesus' religious offensiveness to the priests. "A Jew from the Galilean countryside who presented himself in Jerusalem during the great feasts as a prophet *possessing charismatic authority over Law and temple* could be assured stiff opposition."²³ "Toward the end of his life, Jesus apparently . . . made symbolic claims to Davidic messiahship."²⁴

The priests, in such reconstructions, really carry the ball. They are alert to Jesus' gesture; they thereby divine what Jesus thinks of himself and his own authority; they are offended; they arrange for his death. Wright, in this connection, explicitly distinguishes Pilate as the "sufficient cause" of Jesus' crucifixion," but the priests as the "necessary cause."²⁵ Taking note of the pattern of killing the leader without molesting his followers, Meier refines this picture, correlating Jesus' death to that of John the Baptist: "Antipas had decided . . . that an ounce of prevention by way of execution was worth a pound of cure by way of military action. A single execution — we hear nothing of subsequent persecution, let alone execution, of John's disciples — forestalled a possible uprising at a later date. At a certain point, after increasing tensions each time Jesus visited Jerusalem during the feasts, and especially after Jesus staged provocative, prophetic acts by his entry into Jerusalem and by his 'cleansing' of the temple just before the Passover of A.D. 30, Caiaphas and Pilate adopted the 'Antipas solution': cut off the head of the movement with one swift, preemptive blow."²⁶

The problems with Meier's description help to clarify the problems with Wright's. The analogue to Antipas' execution of John — off-stage, separated from any followers, in the socially and politically controlled environment of a prison — would have been a similarly off-stage execution of Jesus. Instead, if modes of executions can be said to have opposites, Pilate did just the opposite. He executed Jesus in public, center-stage, with crowds of enthusiasts *in situ*. His decision to execute Jesus as he did is precisely the point at which analogies to the Baptizer's death (*pace* Meier) break down.

Pilate's decision, not to execute, but specifically to crucify, remains opaque, if we try to understand it by taking the priests as our point of orientation. No amount of religious tension between Jesus and the priests can account for Pilate's decision to kill Jesus by crucifixion. Priestly involvement on issues of religious principle — vaguely motivated by Jesus' assertion, somehow, of an alarming religious identity — might seem to answer the question, Why did Jesus die? But it fails to answer — or even to address — the more specific question, namely, Why did Jesus die by crucifixion?²⁷

We are so habituated to knowing that Jesus was crucified that we fail to notice how awkwardly that fact fits with what else we have. If Pilate were simply doing a favor for the priests, he could have disposed of Jesus easily and without fanfare, murdering him by simpler means. (I repeat: Pilate's seriously thinking that Jesus did pose a serious revolutionary threat — the simplest implication of crucifixion — is belied by Jesus' solo death.) So too with the priests: if *for whatever reason* they had wanted Jesus dead, no public execution was necessary, and simpler means of achieving their end were readily available.

Further, Jesus' public death ill accords with the narrative contexts developed by Mark and John, who each insist that Jesus was so popular with the holiday crowd that he had to be arrested by stealth. What we know from Josephus further complicates the question. Both priests and prefects or, later, procurators, always had a vested interest in avoiding noisy popular confrontations because, when trouble erupted, such episodes put them, and their positions, at risk.²⁸ A slow, public execution of an extremely popular figure during a potentially turbulent holiday risked protest. For all these reasons, then, a surreptitious murder — prompted, perhaps, by the priests; effected, quite easily, by Pilate — makes sense. Instead, quite deliberately, and

despite (evidently) having arrested Jesus in secret,²⁹ Pilate chose to execute him slowly, flamboyantly and in public. And then he made no move, at that point or later, against any of Jesus' followers.

How does thinking with John help us address these difficulties?

III. The Temple's Destruction and Jesus' Prophecy

Scholarly consensus, which generally affirms Mark's chronology, holds that a) Jesus predicted the Temple's coming destruction; b) that he symbolically enacted this prediction by overturning the tables in the Temple court; c) that the priests, construing this prediction as a threat against the temple, moved to arrest and execute Jesus and d) that they necessarily involved Pilate, who ordered Jesus crucified. Let's untangle these various threads.

Did Jesus predict the Temple's destruction? John Meier, famously meticulous, states in his most recent volume of *A Marginal Jew* that Mk 11:15-17 and John 2:13-17 "*narrate* [his emphasis] versions of the so-called cleansing . . . *which most likely is a symbolic, prophetic action by which Jesus foretells and, in a sense, unleashes the imminent end of the present temple.*"³⁰ Pointing to sayings material in Mark, Q, L, and John wherein Jesus prophesies the end of the present temple, Meier appeals both to multiple attestation and to coherence. These multiply-attested pronouncements about the temple's destruction, he suggests, establish the historicity of the prediction. Invoking coherence, he then argues that they cast light on the scene at the temple: "The sayings about the Temple explain the otherwise puzzling prophetic action of Jesus in the temple." In short, he concludes, Jesus really did predict the Temple's destruction, and he specifically enacted his prediction by overturning the tables in the Temple court.

Independent attestation is an essential tool in evaluating historicity. The verses adduced by Meier are these:

(1) **Mk 13:2**: "Do you see these great buildings? *There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*"

(2) **Mk 14:58**: "We [Mark designates them as false witnesses] heard him say, '*I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.*'"

(3) **Q (Mt 23:38 // Lk 13:34)**: "Behold, *your [i.e., Jerusalem's] house is forsaken [and desolate].*"

(4) **Lk 19:41-44**: "And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and *they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.*'"

(5) **Jn 2:19**: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”

To these verses we might add several others: (6) the derision of passers-by at the crucifixion in **Mk 15:29-30**: “*Aha! You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!*” (7) the accusation against Stephen brought by “false witnesses” in **Acts 6:13-14a**: “*This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place [=the temple] and the law; for we have heard him say that *Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place;*” and (8) the concern evinced by the chief priests and Pharisees gathered at their council in **Jn 11:48**: “*If we let him go on thus [i.e., performing spectacular signs so that many believe in him, vv. 45-47], everyone will believe in him, and *the Romans will come and destroy both our place [= the temple] and our nation.*”**

Undeniably, all of these taken together represent some sort of multiply-attested tradition. We might note that those places that name Jesus as the agent of destruction, and that shape the prophecy like a threat, specifically disavow the prediction (Nos. 2, 6, 7, all testimony from “false witnesses”), whereas the straightforward predictions simply stand (Nos. 1, 3, and 4, which encompasses the entire city, not only the Temple).³¹ John names different agents altogether, “the Jews” in one instance (No. 5, where “temple” refers to Jesus’ body)³² and the Romans (No. 8).

How do we assess the historicity of this tradition specifically with reference to Jesus? Multiple attestation of itself demonstrates not authenticity, but antiquity: a given tradition predates its various manifestations in different witnesses, if those witnesses are independent. *What* is attested still needs to be critically assessed. Most scholars see traditions about Mary’s virginity at the time of Jesus’ conception, for example, attested independently in both M and L, as evidence for the ways in which early Christians had begun reading the LXX, not evidence for knowing anything about the actual sexual status of Jesus’ mother.³³ Jesus raises the dead both in the Synoptics and in John. Scholars usually do *not* infer, on the strength of this independent attestation, that such traditions preserve historically true reminiscences of what Jesus of Nazareth actually *did*, but of what he was *thought* to have done — a big difference.³⁴ So too here: What our evidence tells us is that traditions about Jesus’ predicting, perhaps threatening, the temple’s destruction predate their appearance in these various post-destruction Christian texts.

Predate by how much? Do they go back to Jesus of Nazareth? Here again we have to sort through the individual sayings, and also consider the date of composition for this literature generally. Which traditions predate the Temple’s actual destruction in 70? Appeal to criteria of authenticity help, but only to a degree. The predictions-as-threat (Nos. 2,6, and 7), might seem to pass not multiple attestation (Luke displaced the Markan trial saying to Stephen’s “trial” in Acts) so much as embarrassment. Jesus was understood to have threatened the Temple’s destruction. These post-70 writers, who for other reasons hold that Jesus will return, know full well that Jesus himself did not return in 70 to destroy the Temple. Titus did that. Their disconfirmed older tradition, domesticated by being disowned, therefore might be authentic.³⁵

No. 3, the Q-saying, seems a good candidate, since Q is generally held to have been assembled earlier than Mark, and the date of Mark’s composition hovers around 70. But the saying itself, reminiscent of Jeremiah and Lamentations, comes in a context where Jesus delivers

a sort of passion prediction, linking the city's impending rejection of him (it does not want to be gathered under his protective wings) with its own impending destruction.³⁶ This prediction thus seems after the fact — or, rather, after two facts, that of Jesus' death c. 30 and after the city's "death" in 70. No. 4 seems contoured fairly obviously in light of the War, a form of "prediction" that Luke also uses in 21:20 ("But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near").³⁷ Nos. 2 and 6, from Mark, by invoking "in three days," explicitly associate the Temple's destruction/rebuilding with Jesus' crucifixion/resurrection; no. 5, from John, minus the motif of the three days, does so explicitly. Here, the destruction/rebuilding of the Temple symbolizes (for those who know) the central Christological drama. Can we realistically set these sayings, which broadcast such pellucid knowledge of Jesus' death or death-and-resurrection and of the city's siege and/or destruction, within Jesus' own lifetime? ³⁸ They state so clearly what the early church believed: God, through Rome, had punished Jerusalem's Jews for their rejection of Christ; the true temple, Christ's body, *had* been raised in three days, and so on. Dissimilarity, too, is an imperfect criterion for establishing authenticity; but surely, at some point, it must come into play.

Of those sayings on our list, then, only Mk 13:2 and Jn 11:48, relatively unadorned by later Christological concerns, have the best chance of fitting back into a context around the year 30. The Johannine passage attributes historically plausible sentiments to its characters. Indeed, like much else in John's handling of issues around Jesus' passion, this scene, unlike its Synoptic counterparts, is surprisingly unfreighted by theological concerns. The feared agent in the potential destruction, however, is not Jesus, but Rome.

Mark 13:2, likewise theologically spare and untethered in any obvious way to later events or theological tropes, may be authentic. Jesus names no agent, but his pronouncement is clear. In favor of the authenticity of Mk 13:2, in a general way, three considerations (all carefully rehearsed and argued by Sanders). First: Jewish apocalyptic literature to either side of Jesus' lifetime also speaks of the current Temple's destruction and occasionally of its replacement by a superior, final Temple. The existence of this motif enhances the possibility that Jesus, preaching the coming Kingdom, may also have spoken in these terms. Second: in Josephus, we have secure evidence of an irrefutably genuine prophecy of the Temple's and the city's destruction by another Jesus — Jesus son of Ananias — in the year 62 CE (*BJ* 6.5.3 (300-303)).³⁹ So: not all predictions come after the fact. Third: Mark's prediction is not accurate in its details, the way inauthentic, post facto prophecies, because they can be, often are. In point of fact, not *every* stone was thrown down: those of the retaining wall supporting the Temple Mount did and do continue atop each other.⁴⁰

Of the longer list of sayings, few emerge as strongly plausible candidates for a pre-70 date of origin. Standard operating procedure when assessing a text's period of composition, further, tends to diminish confidence in a pre-destruction date. Ordinarily, prophecies contained in an ancient text provide scholars with a rough a *terminus a quo*, which is to say, *non ante quem*. Daniel's "abomination of desolation" is the clue to his writing *not earlier than* Antiochus IV's placement of his statue in the Temple. By the same reasoning, the Temple's destruction — linked as it is in so many ways in these stories to Jesus' death, or death and resurrection, and/or to the city's devastation — would itself be the source of evangelical predictions. If the prophecy of destruction, articulated clearly in Mark 13, is indeed after the fact, then the likelihood of that

same prophecy's being encoded in Jesus' Temple action — obscured by the evangelists, revealed in our days by scholarly decoding — diminishes accordingly.

So far I have framed the question of Jesus' prediction, his action, and whether his action encoded his prediction, in terms of the stories and sayings in the gospels and Acts. Straining these texts through the mesh of our various criteria of authenticity, I have argued, leaves us with no residuum securely datable to pre-70 — indeed, to c. pre-30. But before we leave this question, we still have one more source to consider: Paul.

Paul's letters antedate the gospels by one or two generations. He is the *only* writer we have who unquestionably lived before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. He knew Peter, John, and probably others of the original disciples (Gal 1:18, 2:9). His instructions to his gentile congregations on the impending arrival of God's kingdom — associated, in this post-resurrection phase of the movement, with Jesus' glorious second coming — are a vivid and vital part of his gospel. The eschatological trajectory, which we can trace from the Baptizer through Jesus to those of his followers who see Jesus raised, fundamentally animates Paul's message.

Here is the problem. If Jesus had made such a spectacular prophecy (Mk 13:2) or had enacted it (Mk 11:15-18, as decoded by moderns) at such a key moment in his mission; if Paul were colleagues with the men who must themselves have known that prophecy (they'd been with Jesus in Jerusalem); and if Paul himself throughout his letters proclaimed the signs of the coming Kingdom, *then why does Paul evince no knowledge of Jesus' prediction?*

We have only seven letters from Paul.⁴¹ He was an active apostle for close to thirty years. Clearly he dictated more than seven letters in all that time. The greater part of his correspondence is lost — among which, for all we know, his definitive description of Jesus' action in the Temple's court and prediction of the Temple's destruction.

Yet in the letters that we do have, Paul's eschatological teaching represents tradition that, he himself claims, goes back to Jesus and to earliest *paradosis*.⁴² In plenty of places in the letters we do have, where he informs his congregations on what to look for as they await the returning Christ, Paul could easily and naturally have mentioned Jesus' teaching about the Temple — had he known it. Somewhere after 1 Thes 4:15, "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord" — that first the Temple will be destroyed as a sign that Christ is about to return (cf. Mk 13). Or at Philippians 4:5: "The Lord is at hand! Once this Temple is no more, as he said, it will be rebuilt in glory, at the End of the Age." Or somewhere in 1 Corinthians 15, where he reviews the sequence of events at the End. Or in Romans. In chapter 8, where he talks about the transformation of the universe, and the signs that the saved await as they groan. After chapter 11, when all Israel and the full number of the Gentiles are saved. In chapter 15, when he speaks of the offering of the Gentiles that he is about to take to Jerusalem as if he were in priestly service "to this earthly Temple which, as you know, will soon be no more, having been replaced by the glorious final Temple of God." But Paul says nothing of the sort. Anywhere.

Taken by itself, this argument, *ex silentio*, is pretty flimsy. Historical evidence survives through happenstance from this period of the movement, and we should not make too much of Paul's "silence" on this particular point. But neither can we ignore it. There are plenty of things

in Paul's letters that the later gospels do not have, and there are plenty of things the gospels say about Jesus that Paul does not have. But the eschatological traditions in Paul are his clearest, strongest link to the earlier movement around Jesus in both its pre- and post-resurrection phases. It was on the basis of his conviction that God's kingdom approached — which he shared with the original apostles and, *mutatis mutandis*, with Jesus — that Paul (and other Jews like him) dedicated himself to a gentile mission. It was on the basis of the movement's success in the Diaspora in turning gentiles from idols to the God of Israel that Paul held Jesus to be God's "son . . . descended from David according to the flesh," (Rom 1:4: 15:8-13).⁴³ *If* Jesus had predicted the Temple's destruction as a sign of the End of the Age, and *if* Paul himself also speaks of such signs — including those which he insists that he has "by the word of the Lord" — then it is at least odd, I think, that he evinces no knowledge whatsoever of Jesus' prophecy.

If the original context of those prophecies is post-70, of course, then it is not odd at all.

IV: Temple and Messiah

What did Jesus do on the Temple Mount, and what did it mean? Mark and John both seem to have inherited a story about Jesus' overturning the tables of the moneychangers. They place the incident at radically different points in their respective stories, and each gives Jesus different lines to speak. For these reasons, I assume their independence. (That is, I do not think that John read Mark and then decided to disconnect Mark's story about Jesus' action from events in Jesus' final week, bump the episode forward, change Jesus' speech — though not Jesus' point — and then heighten the drama by adding stampeding quadrupeds.) Mark's Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11; John's Jesus, stern and uncharacteristically direct, says simply, "Take these things away. You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." Though each evangelist glossed Jesus' speech differently, both saw in the gesture the same meaning: Jesus condemned this getting and spending in the Temple.

Sanders has argued — I think definitively — that the meaning the evangelists give to this episode is impossible to attribute to Jesus of Nazareth. We then have two historical possibilities. Either the story of Jesus' action is authentic, and each evangelist independently misinterpreted it, with individual variations, in the same way. Or, the story, despite being independently attested in Mark and John, is inauthentic: it does not go back to Jesus, and we may speculate on its origins as we will.⁴⁴

I do not think that Jesus predicted the Temple's destruction. I doubt the authenticity of the action attributed to him in the Temple. But even if the traditions of Jesus' predicting the Temple's destruction *were* authentic, this still would not help us to discern and establish the meaning of Jesus' action in the Temple court — even if that, too, were authentic. Our evangelical witnesses make this point for us. Evidently Jesus' action (saying that it happened) was so obscure that they, its most ancient publicists, completely misunderstood his meaning. Why else would they have so misconstrued it?

If Jesus *had* actually overturned the temple's tables, and if he actually *had* thereby intended to symbolize its destruction, then the evangelists — and the human links in the chain of transmission that brought them this story — missed the point. Ostensibly inheriting two authentic

predictions of destruction, they understood only one of them. They thereby missed as well their opportunity to have Jesus' action state what they otherwise put forthrightly into his mouth, namely, that the Temple's days were numbered. This prompts the question: If the significance of the gesture were so opaque and confusing to these later Christians — and especially to Mark, for whom the destruction of the Temple is a major theme — how clearly could the crowds of Jesus' contemporaries have understood him? And how would the priests become involved?

This connection between Jesus' action (as a prophecy of destruction) and the priests' reaction fuels most of the recent reconstructions of this part of Jesus' mission. It rests on Mark. Thinking with our literary evidence, as I attempted to do above, brings us to an impasse: we cannot settle questions of authenticity. How then can we close the gap between Jesus and the priests? Let us consider these traditions within a different sort of interpretive context. What was the physical environment within which Jesus' action putatively took place?

The circumference of the wall surrounding Herod's man-made mesa ran almost nine-tenths of a mile. The area it enclosed was enormous: approximately 169,000 square feet. Sanders, in his vivid description, translates the square footage of this space into more visualizable units: into this area twelve soccer fields, stands and all, could be fit. When necessary (as during the great pilgrimage holidays especially Passover), it could accommodate perhaps as many as 400,000 pilgrims.⁴⁵ Around the perimeter of the outermost courts, protected from sun or rain by the stoa or the Royal Portico, the tables of those whose sold could be found.

The very size of this place shrinks the significance of Jesus' putative gesture. But the precise circumstances of that gesture — during the days of mandatory purification between the eighth and fourteen of Nisan, in the week before the feast — makes the odds of its having a disturbing impact even less likely. Our visual imagination hampers us here: Gustav Doré set the stage for later cinematographers, and we effortlessly and customarily “see” this scene with dramatic clarity. A better visual analogy might be *The Fall of Icarus* – or *Where's Waldo?* These courts, in this season, during this particular week, would have been jammed with humanity, tens of thousands of people. Imagine Jesus walking over to some of the vendors on the edges of this huge area and overturning their tables. Now ask yourself: How many people would have been able to see him? Those in his retinue and those standing immediately around him. But in the congestion and confusion of the holiday crowd, how many could have seen what was happening, say, twenty feet away? Fifty feet? Shrunk by the size of the Temple's outer court, muffled by the density of the pilgrim crowds, Jesus' gesture — had he made it — would simply have been swallowed up. Hermeneutically inaccessible (on the evidence of the evangelists), Jesus' gesture would have visually inaccessible as well. What, then, on the basis of this gesture, did the priests have to worry about?

Who did Jesus think he was, and what did he think he was doing? The next point along the Markan trajectory is the questioning before the high priest. Various historians, following Mark, will argue that Jesus' gesture provided some sort of clue (whether to the high priest, to the historian, or both) about what Jesus thought about himself. Often, it turns out, Jesus is revealed to have thought of himself as the messiah — a messiah with a difference, but some sort of messiah nonetheless. Interpretations of his action in the Temple are pressed into service to

explain how he understands this role. Once the high priest realizes how Jesus conceives his own mission and message, Jesus' fate is sealed: Pilate, and the cross, are the next stops on the way.

The problem with any of these speculations is not their plausibility or implausibility. Some reconstructions are more plausible, others (much) less so. Trying to figure out how Jesus looked at himself is a normal and legitimate historical question, no less or more exotic than trying to answer similar questions about other figures from the past. The problem with the introduction of this question at this juncture in his story, however, is the way that it confuses and distracts from the effort to attain a plausible answer to the question, Why did Pilate have Jesus (alone) crucified?

This entire historiographical construction is driven fundamentally by the chronology of Mark's gospel. That chronology in turn is driven by Mark's dramatic revelation of the Jesus' christological identity — dramatically foreshadowed from chapter 8 on; expressed with high artistry in his presentation of Jesus' Sanhedrin trial. Christology is a central and appropriate concern of Christian theology. I think, both as an historian of Christian origins and as a student of Christian theology, that historical Jesus research can and should matter to the way that modern theologians do their business.⁴⁶ But Jesus' christological self-identity — *if he even ever had one* — cannot account for his public, political crucifixion. If we want to understand why he died as he did, we have to look elsewhere — which means, we have to free ourselves from the dramatic power of Mark's presentation. Here, thinking with John can help.

1. ***John's narrative chronology.*** Scholars, in a general way, have approvingly noted from time to time that John's presentation of Jesus' making frequent trips back and forth to Jerusalem seems more likely than his going to Jerusalem, as an adult, only once for his final Passover. Various efforts are occasionally made to combine the two chronologies, Mark's and John's, so that one can be accommodated to the other. Some of these efforts occasionally correspond to more ambitious arguments — famously, those of Dodd and Robinson — that urge the superiority or greater antiquity of particular traditions that John preserves.

My argument is much simpler. I have little reason to think that John's chronology in its details is any more historically accurate than Mark's. But the *sort* of itinerary suggested by John helps to make sense of what else we *know* about Jesus. Pilate killed Jesus alone, and none of his followers. This fact implies that Pilate knew that Jesus was not dangerous in any way that a Roman prefect would worry about. Jesus was not advocating armed revolt, he was not fomenting tax rebellion, he was not encouraging resistance, defiance, revolution. *Jesus was not dangerous, and Pilate knew it. The men around Jesus also were not dangerous, and Pilate knew this, too.* The easiest way to explain Pilate's acquaintance with Jesus' non-threatening message is the way that John's gospel supplies. Jesus had repeatedly gone up to Jerusalem for the holidays — precisely when the prefect would have been there too — and proclaimed his message of the coming Kingdom. He did so where he (naturally) would have found the largest audience: in the precincts of the Temple (cf. Jn 18:20).

Thanks to Jesus' multiple trips to Jerusalem, Pilate — and for that matter, the priests also — would have known the content and tenor of Jesus' message well before the trip to the city that proved to be his last. This explains why only Jesus died. But this also means that, when Jesus did

die, neither his message itself nor his view of himself can have been the precipitating factor leading to his execution.

2. *John's Christology* is so theologically developed, and it so monopolizes his story, that it, more than any other single factor, has prevented John's being regarded as a valuable source for reconstructing the historical Jesus. But by offering us the story he does, John provides us with an historiographically useful example to meditate on. On the issues of Christology and the reasons for Jesus' death, John offers a reverse image of Mark, whose reticent, theologically closed-mouthed hero ends up dying on a cross precisely for his Christology.⁴⁷ John's Christologically-vocal Jesus, by contrast, dies for reasons of state.

John's chief priests fear that Rome, spurred by Jesus' mounting popular following, will take aggressive action against the nation. John's Jesus has no Sanhedrin trial, just a brief, even practical interview with Annas, who questions him "about his disciples and his teaching," (18:19). The reasons provided by the Fourth Evangelist for his priests' anxieties, and the depiction he gives of his protagonist's hearing are, by contrast to the Synoptics, extremely non-dramatic, parsimonious and plain. They are intrinsically more realistic. This does not make them *eo ipso* more historical: verisimilitude by itself does not and cannot establish historicity.⁴⁸ But it does mean that, on these issues – and specifically on the irrelevance of Jesus' theological identity to the priests' concern – the sort of picture John gives is more plausible.

John's hypertrophied Christology floats far above his narrative while accounting for none of it; his Jesus and his priests do not even discuss it; Jesus' view of himself is not why the priests worry about him. In brief: John's gospel demonstrates the irrelevance — or perhaps better, the unnecessary — of Christology as a factor in accounting, in an historically credible manner, for the priests' involvement in Jesus' death. The point is made compositionally by the way that John's very high Christology contributes so little to his plot (such as it is); and it is made narratively, by the way that he positions Jesus' action in the Temple in his story.

We could see the same thing by looking directly at Mark. Mark uses the action in the Temple to set up the Sanhedrin trial which in turn sets up the dramatic Christological confession, thence Pilate, thence death. By having John as a counter-story to think with, we see that much more clearly how plot-driven the Markan denouement is,⁴⁹ how Jesus' temple action serves basically to bring the priests on stage, and how the beautifully-crafted, historically impossible Sanhedrin trial serves chiefly as a vehicle for Christological proclamation. John helps us to see — if we are taken in by Mark's artistic power — that Christology simply is not a factor if we want to reconstruct a realistic reason why the priests would want Jesus out of the way.

What, then, of the historical Jesus? How does either of these stories, written some forty to sixty years after his death, help us to understand what happened in Jerusalem during Passover season around the year 30? Here I would turn our attention to an aspect of Jesus' last week mentioned by both Mark and John: his entrance into the city not later than 8 Nisan, the week before the feast. Both evangelists present Jesus as feted into Jerusalem, acclaimed in messianic terms by enthused pilgrims. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!" (Mk 11:9-10). "Blessed is he who comes in the

name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (Jn 12:13). Then, again according both gospels, something curious happens: Nothing.

Why not? How could any reasonably competent prefect let such a messianic demonstration pass? Why aren't the priests on alert? Sanders has proposed one answer: the demonstration, looming large in the gospel stories, may actually have been inconspicuous, quiet, and small. “I can only suggest that Jesus' demonstration was quite modest;” “Perhaps only a few disciples unostentatiously dropped their garments in front of an ass, while only a few quietly murmured ‘Hosanna’.”⁵⁰ The demonstration is so quiet that Jesus, so to speak, slips in under the radar. For Sanders, the Temple action is what alerts the priests, and begins the final stages of the drama.⁵¹

Perhaps. With no better evidence, I propose a different argument.⁵² Once the floating story of Jesus' overturning the tables in the Temple court is bracketed out, the same narrative structure for Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem emerges in both Mark and John. In both, Jesus progresses from the Triumphal Entry (where he is hailed as the harbinger of the messianic kingdom) to teaching in and around the Temple in the days before the feast, to his secret arrest (he is so popular, claim the evangelists, that the priests cannot risk arresting him openly) and thence to his death. Let us take the Triumphal Entry at face value, as the evangelists present it: a joyous, public, eminently visible demonstration of enthusiasm. The crowd of holiday pilgrims loudly endorses both the message (“the Kingdom of our father David that is coming”) and its messenger, Jesus (who “comes in the name of the Lord”).

Why do Pilate and Caiaphas not act? Because they knew from all his other trips to the city that Jesus perennially proclaimed the Kingdom, and that he expected God, not armies, to establish it. In brief, he's harmless and they know it.⁵³ So, even after the Triumphal Entry — an unprecedented show of enthusiasm: pilgrims have not acted like this before — Jesus proceeds, as he always does, to teach to the holiday crowds in the Temple. In the late 20s/early 30s, in Jerusalem, during a holiday, so far, it's still pretty much business as usual.

But within days Jesus will be dead on a cross: *not* business as usual. How is this particular trip up to Jerusalem different? Those who follow the Markan chronology will answer, This year Jesus performs his prophetic action in the Temple, which both announces the Temple's doom and, at the same moment, tips off the priests to his religiously offensive view of himself. I have argued against this reconstruction on several grounds: a) insecurity about whether Jesus ever predicted the Temple's destruction; b) uncertainty about the significance and impact of the gesture at the temple, even if he had made it; c) dissatisfaction with the major question it does not and cannot answer: Why death by *crucifixion*?

At this point, I think that we should turn and face where the cross in any place points us to: this same holiday crowd in Jerusalem. Most scholars attribute to the authorities a fear that Jesus' activities might result in riot: that concern accounts for his death. (I agree.) The precise reasons for this riot remain murky — though, again, Jesus' perceived threat to the Temple, enacted prophetically in its courts, is often mobilized to fill in the blanks. Riot why? Because his prophecy of destruction would upset the crowd? Offend them? Inspire them to some sort of revolt against Rome?⁵⁴ And if the precipitating factor were Jesus' (religiously offensive)

construction of his own (messianic?) identity, the priests and Pilate could have disabused him of his views simply by murdering him, without risking the attention of the labile public.

If we face the crowd, rather than try to peer into the heads of the priests or of Jesus himself, we will start, not at the Temple mount, but on the road up to Jerusalem. A straight line connects the mood and acclamation of the Triumphal Entry to the titulus on the cross. The identification of Jesus as “King of Israel” unites the two. Why would all these things have happened now? Had Jesus proclaimed *this* Passover as the last before the coming of the Kingdom? The acclaim as he went into the city, the traditions about his resurrection that form immediately after his death, his apostles’ decision to remain, after all, in Jerusalem: all these point to an extreme intensity of eschatological expectation.⁵⁵ They prompt the question: Had Jesus, for this Passover, shifted his proclamation of the Kingdom from “soon” (Mark’s *h_ basileia _ggiken*) to “now”?

If so, who would have elided his proclamation of the Kingdom to an identification of Jesus as its king? Jesus himself is one possibility, though in my opinion an unlikely one. His immediate followers? Again, I think this unlikely: Jesus’ charismatic mission would give them plenty of reason to think of him as a prophet, little to think of him as a king. And, as Sanders has pointed out, all the evangelists thought of Jesus as “Christ”/messiah/king, each makes his claim differently, and none can cite secure tradition. Had Jesus himself or his earliest followers in his lifetime claimed the title or role, however he or they might have modified its traditional meanings, the evangelists would have had an easier time making their case.⁵⁶

The most likely candidates for those who identified Jesus as a Davidic sort of messiah on his last trip to Jerusalem are the pilgrim crowds. They are the least familiar with Jesus’ movement, though they are, at this penultimate hour, caught up in expectation of the Kingdom. They are also the ones least socialized to the pacifist tenor of his message. They provide the numbers for the crowds milling about the city when “sedition is most apt to break out,” (*BJ* 1.88). They also account most precisely for Jesus’ mode of death. Had Pilate just wanted to do Caiaphas a favor; had both of them only been concerned to convince Jesus, or Jesus and his inner circle, that his messianic self-designation — wed, as they full well knew, to absolutely no sort of practical seditious intent or plan — was wrong; had they simply wanted to silence a popular figure whose preaching *might* lead to riot, then a quiet, off-stage murder/execution — exactly like Antipas’ move against the Baptizer — would have risked less, and sufficed perfectly well.⁵⁷

But instead, Jesus was crucified. Crucifixion has a different social semiotics. Crucifixion is crowd control. It presupposes — indeed, requires — a watching crowd as its context. (No audience, no reason to bother.) For that reason, it risks riot, if Jesus were so popular (Mk 14:2; Jn 12:19). But it is an elegant, simple and powerful way to disabuse the crowds gathered for the holiday of their burgeoning messianic convictions. Jesus of Nazareth, Pilate announced emphatically though the cross, was *not* the King of the Jews.

* * *

I am clean out of evidence, and have been for a while. I offer the above reconstruction in the effort to get us to think a little more critically about the new orthodoxy regarding Jesus and

the Temple. I urge us to be a little more aware of the degree to which we've all introjected Mark and his concerns. I want to argue that John is useful historically, in many different ways, when trying to assemble the bits and pieces we have into a plausible picture of Jesus of Nazareth.

A preference for John's chronology — rather, a John-like chronology — over that offered by the Synoptics also helps us to attain some explanatory purchase on the other data we have about the early post-Resurrection movement, and thus about Jesus' mission. It also helps us to attain some critical purchase on the consequences of appealing to Galilean regionalism and to non-eschatological kerygmas when we look at this earliest period. John's Jerusalem-centered mission, oft-disregarded, has the undeniable virtue of conforming to what else we know about the post-resurrection Christian movement. It was Jerusalem-centered too. These men might have mostly hailed from the Galilee, but once the community has dug in for the long haul (well, I doubt that they thought the haul would be all that long), the capitol became their home (Gal 1:18, 2:1; Acts passim; Josephus *AJ* 20.9.1 (200)). Within just five years of Jesus' death, evidence abounds for the widespread and rapid dissemination of his mission in its new phase. *Ekklesiastika* appear in the villages of Samaria and Judea as well as in the Galilee (Acts 8:1-4; 9:31; Gal 1:22; cf. Jn 11:18 Bethany in Judea); in Lydda and, on the coast, Joppa (Acts 9:32, 42) and Caesarea (Acts 10); farther north, in the Syrian cities of Damascus (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:10ff.) and Antioch (Gal 2:11; Acts 11:20). For the movement's first generation, Jerusalem remained the hub; and it was from Jerusalem that they fanned out to bring "the word of the Lord" to the rest of Israel, and indeed to the world (Rom 15:19).

Scholars who concentrate on the (undeniably) Galilean roots of the movement see that northern region as its true matrix: chief arena of Jesus' teaching and preaching; home to the Q-communities, groups who preserved or valued primarily the social teachings of Jesus, not stories about him. The origins of the Jesus movement, they say, bear the stamp of the Galilee religiously (in its supposed indifference or even hostility to Temple-oriented purity rules), politically (it articulates the historic, independent Israelite identity vis-à-vis aristocratic, priestly Jerusalem), and sociologically (formed and based in small towns, it was intrinsically peasant and rural). Jerusalem, in this light, only *seems* important because of the theological emphasis of Luke's gospel and Acts. Intensive regional studies of the Galilee are the best way, they argue, to understand the earliest — and in a sense, the most authentic — phase of the Jesus movement .

This orientation reflects the current scholarly preference for the synoptic Gospels in historical Jesus research. It has served as well to give scope to those political, economic and social theories that articulate tensions (imperial or colonial/indigenous, aristocrat/ peasant, literate/oral, city/village) that some scholars have found useful to their reconstructions. It has spurred the growth of one of the great redactional marvels of our age, the Q-industry. It is a principled expression of the simple truth that the Galilee and Judea were two different regions with their own particular histories and traditions, with related but different political profiles, especially once Judea came under Roman rule when the Galilee retained its own Jewish ruler, client of Rome though he was.

Yes, Jesus himself came from the North. Yes, the Galilee doubtless did play an important role in shaping his temperament, his thought, and his teaching. Yes, traditions in Mark and in Q still bear the stamp of that rural environment: In the narrative incidentals of the parables we still

glimpse the world of village marketplaces and small farms. Yet acknowledging these things does not excuse us from making sense of all the data we have from the early movement that pull in a different, non-regionally-specific direction — one that leads us, by many roads, to Jerusalem.

Put simply: the whole — Jesus' mission and message — is greater than its parts. Insisting on some sort of rural quintessence to the movement (whether pre- or post-crucifixion) only makes what we *know* to have been the case that much harder to account for. And what we know is that Galileans routinely made the trip to Jerusalem for the holidays, and that the Temple (as poor Petronius discovered) was of no less concern to them than to their Judean cousins.⁵⁸ What we know — implied even in Mark; stated but not recounted in Luke; broadcast by John — is that Jesus during his mission had taught in Jerusalem more than once — I think, probably repeatedly.⁵⁹ What we know is that, shortly after his death, his movement settled in Jerusalem and spread quickly in both regions, in Judea and the Galilee, in town and country both.

Like the Baptizer before him, then, and like his disciples after him, Jesus himself, I think, envisaged his message extremely broadly. He did not plot his course with individual regions or particular socio-economic strata in mind. He entered into his sense of his own mission through John, by the Jordan in the south; he took his message north to the villages of his native Galilee, through the villages of Judea, and, repeatedly, to Jerusalem, to the Temple, as well. He lived in the religious universe of the *Shm'a*, the covenant, and the prophets; the world of revelation, redemption and realized promise encoded in the seasonal holy days of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. His mission was a mission to Israel. And his disciples, confirmed in that mission by their conviction that Jesus had been raised, continued to preach the coming Kingdom to all Israel, spreading out from Jerusalem, eventually encompassing their known world.

This reconstruction of Jesus' broad conception of his own mission, articulated narratively in the Fourth Gospel by his routinely preaching to all Israel from the Temple during the holidays, coheres well with four *facts* we know about his movement after his death. In the Sandersian manner, I list them here:

- a) Many of Jesus' immediate followers at first perceived, and then proclaimed, that he had been raised from the dead.
- b) They settled in Jerusalem.
- c) They took their message beyond territorially Jewish areas to Jewish communities in the diaspora.
- d) Once they encountered significant numbers of pagan Gentiles in those communities, they extended the mission to include them, too, without requiring that they convert to Judaism.

The historical fact does not exist that cannot be misconstrued by a trained professional. The misconstruals abound, some more obvious, some less so. Resurrection stories are really ways of saying, "Gee, we really miss him." Jerusalem was not the place that mattered: those Q-villages up in the Galilee were the real powerhouse of the movement. Christian Jews, or maybe

just the Hellenists as represented by Stephen, or maybe only Paul and a few of his immediate colleagues, are the first and only ones to come up with the novel — nay, the revolutionary idea that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to participate in Israel's redemption. And so on.

But all these data — beliefs about resurrection, about the religious primacy of Jerusalem, about God's commitment to all Israel, about the inclusion of Gentiles *qua* Gentiles in Israel's final redemption — are native to ancient Judaism, and especially, in their more radioactive modes, to apocalyptic forms of ancient Judaism. Jesus himself was an eschatological prophet; the apocalyptic movement that formed around his memory and message was, to put it simply, an extreme form of Judaism. We can say — colleagues have said — that what Jesus taught and what earliest Christianity later said have only a glancing relationship to each other. I think that they are intimately, causally related. And I think that seeing the strong and coherent apocalypticism that unites this movement in all its phases — the Baptizer; Jesus; the post-Easter-community; the mission in the diaspora that also accommodates Gentiles — goes a long way in explaining why it was what it was.

John helps us here, too. Mark's narrative chronology reinforces and geographically expresses its peculiar Christological theme of concealment and revelation: looked at in this light, I think that Jesus' itinerary ranks among the *least* historically reliable information that we can glean from that gospel. John's chronology, too, betrays evidence of theological shaping, especially in the ways that certain of his Jesus' speeches or acts resonate with a setting in Jerusalem.⁶⁰ Still, not in its details themselves but in its over-all presentation of a mission encompassing multiple trips to Jerusalem, for the historical reasons that I have presented above, John's gospel seems to offer surer ground. Notoriously inattentive to the sequence of Jesus' movements, distracted by its very high, very non-eschatological Christology, the Fourth Gospel allows us to glimpse a shape of Jesus' mission that coheres precisely with those eschatological images and patterns visible in so much of our other data. In a practical way, it solves the historical conundrum of Jesus' solo crucifixion and his intimates' continuing freedom.

And that is how my own very apocalyptic, very Sandersian Jesus ended up not overturning the moneychangers' tables, and saying nothing about the Temple's destruction.

NOTES

⊗ This essay draws substantially on a paper entitled, "The Historical Jesus, the Scene at the Temple, and the Gospel of John." Delivered in the Gospel of John consultation of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto 2002, that earlier essay benefited from the criticisms of Dr. John Ashton, whom I would like to thank here.

¹ By "gospels," I mean primarily the four in the canon. Other scholars, such as Crossan, would give much more weight to sources such as Q, and gospels such as *Peter* and *Thomas*. For contrasting comments on sources and methods, see, e.g. Crossan 1991: xxvii-xxxiv; 427-466; Meier 1991:41-55.

² Cf. Mack 1988: 242f; 288-96, who argues strenuously that the Temple scene is Mark's fiction; also Seeley 1993: 263-283.

³ Fredriksen 1995 b.

⁴ Especially on the issues of eschatology, ethics, and *paradoxa*: see Fredriksen 1999:74-116.

⁵ Exploration of these traditions has been the prime contribution of Geza Vermes, thanks to whom cameo appearances of other charismatic Galilean holy men — Honi the Circle-Drawer, Hanina ben Dosa, Hanan the Rainmaker — now routinely people works on the historical Jesus.

⁶ Noted and objected to by Hedrick 1988. See further M.M. Thompson 1996.

⁷ Vermes 1993: 213. Vermes includes Paul in the same indictment; I will say more above on using Paul as well as John for reconstructing the historical Jesus. See further Vermes 2001: 6-54 for his more recent observations on the gospel.

⁸ Sanders' focus on Jesus' action in the temple as the trip-switch to the Passion requires the chronology in Mark. He notes the superior plausibility of John's description of events around the Jewish hearing before the high priest (1985, ch. 1 and passim on the significance of Jesus' action in the Temple court; 317-18 on John's account of the Jewish "trial"). Q, or some redactional layer imputed to Q, serves the Jesus Seminar as the gospel of choice for reconstructing Jesus: John, again, stands at too many removes to be useful. Crossan, identifies and organizes his primary sources elaborately and creatively (see esp. Crossan 1991). Notwithstanding he originality of some of his evidential choices (such as reliance on gospels such as Thomas, Peter, and a redactional creation of his own, the Cross Gospel), however, Crossan orders the chronology of his Jesus' mission according to the Gospel of Mark. Wright, who renounces both the Jesus Seminar and all its works, likewise draws only lightly on John and says so forthrightly. He notes that the shape of current Historical Jesus scholarship in part compels his selection: "The debate [on the historical Jesus] to which I wish to contribute in this book has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition," 1996: xvi. Meier has advocated John as a usable historical source (1991: 45; 53 n. 22 specifically on Johannine narrative rather than the sayings tradition). In 2001: 501, however, he implies that he will hold to the Markan chronology (scene in the Temple – arrests – execution) in volume IV.

⁹ I note with deepest appreciation John Meier's calm review of these issues, and the simplicity and clarity of his conclusions (another way of saying that I agree with him), 1991: 41-55.

¹⁰ Josephus, *AJ* 18.3.3 (64); Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. See discussion with copious bibliography in Meier 1991: 56-92.

¹¹ John the Baptizer's death does not conform to this pattern. Antipas arrested him, imprisoned him, and executed him: all fairly orderly. See Meier's shrewd remarks 2001: 625. One difference between John and these other charismatic figures may be that John does not seem to have

amassed a standing group of followers. People came and went to him, but did not linger; other charismatics traveling en masse with large groups of followers, drew the immediate and hostile attention of the authorities, on which Sanders 1993; also Fredriksen 1999: 190f., 244; and below, n. 25, on Meier's analogizing of Jesus' death to John's.

¹² I have no reason to question that men other than Jesus were executed at the same time that he was (e.g., the two *l_stai* of Mk 15:27 and parr.). But these men were not part of Jesus' circle: that is the point.

¹³ If the *Ioudaioi* who "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets" are a) the priests and b) not a post-Pauline interpolation. I do not like theories of interpolation, but have yet to find a compelling response to the points raised by Pearson 1971.

¹⁴ *AJ* 18.3.3 (63-64). Josephus is vague, saying only that "leading men" (*protoi*) bring an accusation (of what? Not clear), with the result that Pilate condemned Jesus to the cross. See Meier 1991:63; Fredriksen 1999: 248-49.

¹⁵ "The two leaders, civil [Pilate] and religious [Caiaphas], survived for so long in what were often revolving-door appointments apparently because they worked well together," Meier 2001: 623.

¹⁶ The preference for Mark's chronology over John's, and especially the explanatory importance of Jesus' action in the Temple for his subsequent arrest and execution, provides so far as I know the unique point on which Sanders, Borg, Crossan, Vermes, and Wright all agree. It looks like Meier, in the forthcoming final volume of his study, will join them. Meier endorses John's itinerary (or a John-like itinerary) over Mark's, but will hold to the consensus construction, dependent on Mark, that Jesus' action in the Temple symbolized its destruction and led to his death, 2001: 501.

¹⁷ Sanders 1985: 61-90.

¹⁸ On the absence of criticisms about the way the priests ran the Temple in early Christian tradition, Sanders 1993: 255-56. Both Paul and Luke confirm the earliest community's residence in Jerusalem: Gal 1:17 -2:1; Lk 24:52; Acts 1:12 and passim. Worshiping in the Temple, Lk 24:53; Acts 3:1, 5:12, 42; 21:26ff. (Paul); 22:17 (again). Acts 9:32 mentions the Jesus movement in Lydda within a few years of the crucifixion; Josephus, in *BJ* 2.515 states that, at the beginning of the war, Lydda fell to the Romans because the entire town had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot: these "Christian" Jews exhibited traditional Temple piety. Specifically on sacrificing, Mt 5:23-24. On the Temple as God's earthly dwelling-place, Mt 23:21; Rom 9:4 (in Paul's Jewish Greek, _____ rests on the Hebrew *kavod*); specifically on cult, loc. cit. _____/ *avodah*. On Paul's entirely normative appreciation of the Temple and its cult generally, Fredriksen 2000a: 62-68; on that of Jesus and the early movement, Meier 2001: 498-502.

¹⁹ As I noted above, Sanders' fundamental insight about the traditional interpretation as "cleansing" was that it made no historical sense. His argument was so compelling that it served

as the fulcrum by means of which he levered analysis onto a discussion of Jesus' action rather than his sayings. The subsequent use to which other scholars have put Sanders' insight, and the meaning they have given to Jesus' action as a prophetic enactment of impending destruction, alas, has let the old "cleansing" argument in the back door: see Fredriksen 1995b: 81-91; 94-97; 1995a.

²⁰ The priests construe Jesus' action as a prophetic threat to the temple, and this "seals his fate," Sanders 1993: 265; more vaguely, Vermes 1993: x; Crossan, also vague (Jesus is "killed by religio-political agreement" between the priests and Pilate) 1994:132-33; Wright (who hews close to the evangelists' line that Pilate's compliance was coerced) 1996: 493-611.

²¹ Wright 1996: 98, my emphasis.

²² Meier 1994:6. Same point, made slightly differently, 1991:177; 2001:11-12.

²³ Meier 2001: 618, my emphasis.

²⁴ Meier 2001: 634, where he goes on to state that some of Jesus' disciples "may have harbored [this idea] during his lifetime." The argument will appear in vol. 4 of *A Marginal Jew*.

²⁵ Wright 1996: 552.

²⁶ Meier 2001: 625.

²⁷ Meier combines all these issues: "The precise reason(s) why Jesus' life ended as it did, namely, by crucifixion at the hands of the Roman prefect on the charge of claiming to be King of the Jews, is the starkest, most disturbing, most central of all the enigmas Jesus posed and was," 2001: 646. I doubt that Jesus claimed in any way to be King; but if he did, Pilate could have disabused him of the idea by simple murder. Crucifixion aims to disabuse *others*.

²⁸ On patterns of accountability: Josephus *BJ* 1.652-55; *AJ* 17:149-67, on the incident around Herod's golden eagle on one of the Temple's gates; *AJ* 18.85-89, Vitellius the Syrian legate sent Pilate to Rome, relieved Caiaphas of office and appointed new priests after the bloodshed in Samaria; *BJ* 2:232-44, after another incident in Samaria in 50 CE, the Syrian legate orders the high priest, the chief priests and other high-ranking citizens of Jerusalem to Rome, though none had been personally involved in the violence; *BJ* 2:320-325, the priests attempting to turn the crowd in Jerusalem from violent protest. For a brief and lucid review of this political terrain, Sanders 1993: 15-32; on the high priest in particular as the man in the middle, 266f.; Fredriksen 1999: 252-54.

²⁹ A mote of support: Paul's use of *paredidoto* in 1 Cor 11:23 — "handed over"? "betrayed"? — can be read as suggesting a surreptitious arrest.

³⁰ My emphasis; Meier 2001: 501. Fundamental to both Meier's discussion and my own is Sanders 1985.

³¹ On the “false witnesses,” and on Luke’s general tendency to distance Jesus from seeming to make threats against the Temple, Sanders 1993: 257-58.

³² The change of agency is required by John’s using this verse as a Passion prediction. The oblique reference to Resurrection as “rebuilding” also characterizes Mark’s verses, especially where he invokes “three days.”

³³ The issue, of course, figures more prominently in Catholic treatments of the birth narratives than in Protestant ones. Traditions about Mary’s sexual status *after* Jesus’ birth are examined scrupulously in Meier 1991: 316-332; the classic study is Brown 1977.

³⁴ On miracles generally, Meier 1994: 509-1038, specifically on raising the dead, 773-873. The great theme of Meier’s project is rigorous critical consistency, and let the criteria of authenticity take us where they may. Thus, his chapter on miracles points out again and again that whatever problems modern Westerners may have with the category “miracle,” evidently no such problem afflicted the evangelists, the people standing between the evangelists and the original disciples, the original disciples and even Jesus himself, *on the basis of the ubiquity and broad independent attestation* of traditions of Jesus as a miracle worker. Nevertheless, Meier carefully prescinds from pronouncing the actual historicity of traditions of Jesus’ reviving the dead: “If the story does go back in some way to Jesus’ ministry, then the possibility arises that a *belief* [author’s emphasis] that Jesus raised the dead already existed among his disciples during his lifetime,” 775; similar caution about Jn 11 and the raising of Lazarus, 831.

³⁵ See esp. Sanders 1985: 71-76. For his reconstruction of Jesus’ hearing before Caiaphas, in which Jesus’ threat/prediction figure significantly, 1993: 265-73.

³⁶ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! *Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.* For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Mt 24:37-39//Lk 13:34-35. Luke immediately prefaces this passage with v. 33: “I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem;” and his v. 35 lacks “and desolate.”

³⁷ See too Sanders’ remarks, 1993:256.

³⁸ Scholars will sometimes observe that, since Jesus was in a dangerous line of work (prophet, critic, etc.), it would not have been extraordinary for him to think that perhaps his life were in danger, and for him to confide this concern to his immediate followers. True enough. But these sayings, characterized by precision, follow exactly the narrative line of what, in fact, does happen in the gospels (Jesus’ death and resurrection). And Jesus’ closest followers, even in the gospels, act totally bewildered once the final events unwind. On the passion predictions, Fredriksen 2000b: 107-110.

³⁹ Fredriksen 1999: 229-30. Meier, in his note on this incident, says, curiously, “By the time of Jesus ben Ananias, the situation in Judea and Jerusalem had deteriorated greatly; the final crisis and revolt were looming. Hence the tensions were much more severe,” 2001: 647 n. 7. Evidently, he means to account for why Jesus of Nazareth, supposedly making such predictions, was not arrested, while Jesus ben Ananias was. Josephus, however, specifically says that in 62 CE that, “the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity” (*BJ* 6.300). Whatever the differences between the two Jesuses — and thus between the ways the authorities initially handled them (Jesus son of Joseph, c. 30, continued to teach after making his prophecy; Jesus son of Ananias, in 62, was arrested and flogged) — I doubt that a generalized prescience about the historical moment explains them: people in 62, again on the evidence of Josephus, did not know what awaited them four years down the line.

⁴⁰ This last is Sanders’ argument, 1993:257; he also notes that Mark’s prophecy — further tribute to its authenticity — fails to mention, specifically, fire, which features in Josephus’ description. But in *BJ* 6, though fire does figure prominently, what Josephus emphasizes is total devastation. From Josephus’ eyewitness account, in other words, one still couldn’t know that the retaining walls remained; Mark, not an eyewitness, can perhaps be excused. Also, even according to Josephus’ account, Mark’s Jesus foresaw accurately: None of the *buildings* on the mount remained standings.

⁴¹ This paragraph and the next repeat what I have argued in 1999:231.

⁴² Esp. 1 Thes 4:13-18, which Paul has “by the word of the Lord;” cf. also 1 Cor 15, which begins a list of witnesses to the risen Christ and then segues into a description of Endtime events. See Fredriksen 1999:74-154 for using Paul together with the gospels to trace trajectories back to traditions from Jesus.

⁴³ For the full argument, Fredriksen 1999: 119-37.

⁴⁴ I suggest several possibilities in Fredriksen 1999:229f.

⁴⁵ These figures come from Sanders 1992:47-145. I hope I do not appear ungracious in relying on his work to challenge his interpretation.

⁴⁶ “What does Jesus have to do with Christ? What does Knowledge have to do with Faith? What does History have to do with Theology?” *Christology: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, ed. A. Clifford and A. Godzeiba (Orbis Press, forthcoming 2003). On the specific issue of historical Jesus research an modern Christologies, Loewe 2000; Meier’s concluding remarks 1999: 485f.

⁴⁷ Keenly observed by Smith 2001: 218-19, who also mentions the problems caused by the flamboyance of the Johannine “signs,” 201. Comparing Mark’s and John’s accounts, Smith notes that in the Fourth Gospel, “the grounds for Caiaphas’ recommendation and the Sanhedrin’s condemnation are prudential rather than theological. In this fundamental way John differs from Mark’s rendering, and in a non-Johannine direction,” 221.

⁴⁸ On verisimilitude, Smith 2001: 231.

⁴⁹ For a similar conclusion, from an utterly different starting point, Burton Mack 1988.

⁵⁰ Sanders 1993: 254; 1985: 306, also 308: “I account for the fact that Jesus was not executed until after . . . by proposing that it [scil. the triumphal entry] was an intentionally symbolic act, . . . [that] did not attract large public attention.” D. Catchpole, more radically, argues that the whole story is a fabrication, 1984: 319-34.

⁵¹ While Sanders insists that the most immediate cause of Jesus’ arrest by the priests was his prophetic demonstration in the Temple, he leaves room as well for Caiaphas’ knowing about the messianic acclamation that accompanied his entry into the city. (1993: 265). Sanders also mentions that Caiaphas and Pilate must both have known that Jesus posed no military threat: “The solitary execution of the leader shows that they feared that Jesus could rouse the mob, not that he had created a secret army,” 268. Sanders does not say how Caiaphas and Pilate could have known this; and his allegiance to the Markan chronology seems to foreclose the Johannine solution.

⁵² This section synthesizes my full argument and reconstruction in Fredriksen 1999: 235-66.

⁵³ Independent evidence from the gospels and from Paul converge on and confirm this point: Whatever Jesus’ eschatological message promised in terms of God’s justice ultimately being visited upon the wicked — and there is no shortage of predictions of that kind, whether in the Gospels or in Paul — in the meantime, before the Kingdom came, evil was to be met with non-resistance, the enemy loved rather than hated; injustice endured, vengeance eschewed. See Fredriksen 1999: 243 ff. on the early movement’s “interim pacifism.”

⁵⁴ This sort of speculation — namely, that Jesus’ action in the Temple’s court would have offended, excited, or electrified the crowds, and that therefore, after his action, the priests knew that he posed a serious threat to public order — runs head-on into the problems of hermeneutical and physical visibility already reviewed. If the action were obscure enough to later tradition that both Mk and Jn, independent of each other, misconstrued it; and if the size of the Temple court and of the crowd for all practical purposes drastically limited the number of people who could have seen what Jesus did (whatever they might have thought it meant), it is difficult to understand why, and how, the priests would have gotten so alarmed.

⁵⁵ Once the movement penetrated the Diaspora, its unprecedented and socially disruptive decision to incorporate Gentiles into the *ekkl_sia* by insisting that they give up their native religious practices but *not* convert to Judaism, is a further index of its eschatological conviction: see Fredriksen 1999: 125-37; 173-78.

⁵⁶ Sanders 1993: 240-43. Meier 2001:634 announces that, in vol. 4, he will argue otherwise.

⁵⁷ The posse assembled to arrest Jesus, variously described in our different accounts, is armed: Mt 26:47-56/Mk 14:43-49/Lk 22:47-53 a mob sent from the high priest; Jn 18:3-11 a mixed

group of Roman soldiers (*speira*, usually “cohort,” an implausible number of men for this mission) and officers from the chief priests. (The gospels’ *machaira* should be demoted from “sword” [RSV; Lat. *gladius*] to “knife,” unless we want to picture the LXX’s Abraham poised to decapitate Isaac at the Akedah, Gen 22:6.) Armed against whom, if the authorities, as I’ve argued and as Jesus’ solo death in any case implies, know full well that Jesus and his immediate followers are non-violent? Armed against supporters among the holiday crowds who, if they saw Jesus arrested, would put up a fight — the reason for stealth in the first place.

⁵⁸ On Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem: Rioting on Shavuot, after Archelaus’ succession, *AJ* 17.253; on the sit-down strike against Caligula’s statue hosted and supported by Galileans, 18.263-68; on Galilean pilgrims murdered in Samaria on their way to Judea, and the territory-wide passions that incident inflamed, 20.119-36.

⁵⁹ Jesus’ instructions to his disciples on preparation for the Passover meal presupposed previous contact with people within the city, Mk 14:12-14; Luke’s chief priests charge that Jesus “stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place [Jerusalem],” 23:5.

⁶⁰ Scholars have developed interpretive connections between John’s Jesus’ speeches and their mise-en-scène in Jerusalem, as any commentary will point out. The clearest example of a theologically-motivated chronology is the way that John coordinates Jesus’ death with the Pesach corbanot (19:14), moving the Jewish day of Jesus’ death back from 15 Nisan (Mk) to 14 Nisan. Why? Elsewhere John presents Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:26,35); and, in a burlesque ironic monologue, Jesus taunts his followers that, to live eternally, they will have to eat his flesh (6:51-60). The soldier at the crucifixion who does *not* break Jesus’ legs acts in such a way “that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken,’” (19:33,36-37). The reference to Exodus 12:46 makes explicit the connection between Jesus and other lambs slain for Passover; and of course God insists that the Passover lamb must be eaten. See Fredriksen 2000a: 68-70.

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