

THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN JOHN AND JESUS

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In his *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, Joachim Jeremias wrote that John the Baptist and Jesus were alike in that both taught out-of-doors, gave their disciples a special prayer (Lk. 11.1-4), called hearers to repentance, announced the imminent divine judgment, and were open to 'people who had been written off by the synagogue, the Pharisaic covenicles and Qumran'.¹ In brief, Jesus 'followed the Baptist in many ways'.² For Jeremias, however, the parallels he observed were little more than prolegomena to his recovery of Jesus, for a 'fundamental' difference overshadows them. Whereas John demanded repentance in the face of the judgment, Jesus instead announced the dawning of the kingdom. Jeremias put it this way: 'John the Baptist remains within the framework of expectation; Jesus claims to bring fulfillment. John still belongs in the realm of the law; with Jesus, the gospel begins.'³

The strategy of elucidating Jesus by contrasting him with John, a tactic that early Christian texts already use to Jesus' advantage, remains a commonplace of critical scholarship. According to John Dominic Crossan, Jesus' submission to John's baptism tells us that the former initially believed much as the latter did, an inference supported by Q 7.24-26, which Crossan thinks 'reads like an attempt to maintain faith in John's apocalyptic vision'.⁴ But things changed. Q 7.28, which makes the Baptist less than the least in the kingdom, contradicts Q 7.24-27 and so reflects a significant modification of opinion. What that modification involved appears from Mk 2.18-

1. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 48.

2. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 47.

3. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 49.

4. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 47.

20 and Q 7.33-34, both of which draw a 'contrast between a *fasting John* and a *feasting Jesus*'.⁵ John 'lived in apocalyptic asceticism', which Jesus at some time abandoned.⁶ Indeed, Jesus became 'almost the exact opposite of John the Baptist'.⁷

Whether one agrees with Crossan's assessment or thinks, as I do, that it is overdone, at least two difficulties beset attempts to understand Jesus by using the Baptist as a rhetorical foil. The first is simply that, in our eagerness to stress the undoubted and important differences, we may run the risk of not heeding the significant continuities, that is, we may underestimate the extent of Jesus' debt to his predecessor. We have here potentially the same bias that has commonly afflicted application of the criterion of dissimilarity: we may be so anxious to find what was distinctive about Jesus that we ignore or downplay what he shared with others or learned from them.

The other difficulty, which derives not from ourselves but from our sources, is that we know far less about John the Baptist than we are wont to imagine. It is ironic that we expect John to shed light on Jesus, for the forerunner is the darker figure.⁸ Apart from a passing summary in Josephus (*Ant.* 18.116-19) and a handful of pertinent passages in the Jesus tradition, we just do not have much to go on. Perhaps the very paucity of the relevant texts sometimes fosters the illusion that finding John is easier than finding Jesus. But when did having fewer sources ever help us to recover more history?

Despite the problems indicated, it would be foolish to eschew the utility of contrasting John and Jesus, and I wish to do no such thing. It remains useful, however, to remind ourselves of just how difficult it can be to make broad generalizations about the differences between the two figures, and this is my goal in the first part of this essay. In the second part, I shall call attention to some crucial continuities that the secondary literature has sometimes neglected.

5. Crossan, *Jesus*, p. 48.

6. Crossan, *Jesus*, p. 48.

7. Crossan, *Jesus*, p. 48.

8. Cf. Robert L. Webb, 'John the Baptist and his Relationship to Jesus', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 179-229 (226): 'Our data concerning John is much more limited than is our data concerning Jesus, so that it is impossible to make actual comparisons in areas where we have no information concerning John'.

The Standard Disjunctions

In *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, coauthored with Annette Merz, Gerd Theissen conveniently sets forth what are, in his judgment, five 'of the most important differences' between Jesus and John.⁹ Because his analysis is typical of much modern scholarship, a critical review is instructive.

The first difference Theissen espies concerns eschatology. John threatened people with the coming wrath. Jesus did the same, except that he, in Theissen's words, 'seems to have put more emphasis on the offer of salvation (even to sinners) bound up with the preaching of the βασιλεία'.¹⁰ This sentiment appears in dozens of recent books and articles on Jesus,¹¹ and one can scarcely disprove it. And yet, does it not presuppose that we have a far better idea of John's proclamation than we do? Are not the sources too constricted for such a large generalization? Josephus, who transforms John 'into a popular moral philosopher of Stoic hue, with a somewhat neo-Pythagorean rite of lustration',¹² sums up the Baptist's message in two short sentences (*Ant.* 18.117). Q contains no narrative material about the Baptist aside from Q 7.18-19, and it attributes to him words that, in both Matthew and Luke, span only six verses (Lk. 3.7-9, 16-18//Mt. 3.7-10, 11-12). Q also has Jesus speak about John a few times, but the relevant sayings are scarcely rich with useful detail (7.24-28, 31-35; 16.16). In Mark, we find a scant three-verse synopsis of John's ministry (1.4-6), an account of his martyrdom that has 'something of the character of the fairy tale'¹³ (6.14-29), and a couple of words of Jesus that add next to nothing to our modest store of knowledge (9.13; 11.27-33). And John's own speech occupies just two verses (1.7-8)—verses that fail to expand our knowledge because they are variants of sentences already found in Q. Matthew for his part adds two further utterances (3.2: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'; 3.14: 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'), but these are widely and rightly suspected of being Matthean redaction and are probably

9. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 208-11.

10. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 208.

11. E.g. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. II. *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 124 (Jesus' 'message becomes much more a joyful announcement of the offer and experience of salvation...'); and Helmut Merklein, 'Die Umkehrpredigt bei Johannes dem Täufer und Jesus von Nazaret', *BZ* 25 (1981), pp. 29-46 (37).

12. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, p. 21.

13. D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (WPC; London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 173.

without any basis in his tradition. As for Luke, he contributes to our sparse store solely three short sentences that, even if they represent things John said, do little more than show him to have been a sponsor of generosity and fairness (Lk. 3.10-14). Finally, John's Gospel has an intriguing notice in 3.23 that may be well be historical (John baptized at Aenon near Salim), and it gives the Baptist a bit more to say. Yet most of the lines in the Fourth Gospel so well serve apologetical interests that one hardly feels comfortable using them to reconstruct the authentic Baptist (see Jn 1.20-23, 26-27, 29-34; 3.27-30). Many would assign to Christian reflection all but the variant of Q 3.16/Mk 1.7-8 in Jn 1.26-27 (cf. 1.15, 30).

Given the sparseness of the data, when Theissen affirms that Jesus put more emphasis upon the offer of salvation than did John, and adds, in implicit contrast, that for Jesus that offer was bound up with the βασιλεία, is this not a leap of faith? The brief summary descriptions of the Baptist are just that, brief summary descriptions,¹⁴ and we have beyond them at best only a handful of sentences with a claim to reflect things John really said (Q 3.7-8, 16-18 are the best candidates); and how do we know to what extent those sentences fairly represent the whole of what he had to say? Unless he was exceedingly boring or was akin to the Jesus, son of Ananias, in Josephus, *War* 6.301-302, who uttered the same refrain over and over again, the Baptist must have said much more than the few utterances our sources have preserved.

Neither Josephus nor anyone who contributed to the Jesus tradition was interested in passing on an objective, dispassionate summary of John's proclamation. Beyond that, much, even much of importance, must be missing. This follows simply from the short space Josephus and the evangelists allowed for their task. Selection inevitably distorts. Maybe the little bits that we do have are not unlike those annoying synopses of TV shows that appear in the daily papers: even when they are strictly true, they leave so much out of account as to be practically useless. Or, to choose an ancient analogy, what do we make of the fact that not one of the traditions about Hillel explicitly refers to God? Does not good sense warn that this may be an artificial upshot of happenstance and/or the narrow focus of the relevant rabbinic traditions, not a sure indicator of something important about Hillel or his teachings?

Now with regard to the Baptist and Theissen's comment about the βασιλεία, if John sometimes or even often spoke of 'the kingdom of God', we have no reason to think that our small number of abbreviating sources would have taken note. Should then sober historical judgment not

14. They are all reviewed by Edmondo F. Lupieri, 'John the Baptist in New Testament Traditions and History', *ANRW* 2.26.1 (1992), pp. 430-61.

reluctantly concede that we just do not know whether John ever proclaimed the kingdom of God, or what exactly he might have meant if he had? It is, in the end, possible that Jesus' focus upon the kingdom was inherited from John (although for this there is no evidence, if we leave aside the redactional Mt. 3.2). It is equally possible that John never once spoke of the kingdom (again, there is just no evidence). Should we not, then, prudently eschew an opinion on the matter? How can we justify equating John's textual silence with an historical silence and then go on to highlight Jesus' originality? One might as well observe that whereas John nowhere mentions Adam or Moses or David or Solomon or any other biblical person, Jesus sometimes does, and then infer that the latter but not the former cared about the scriptural story. Would that not be silly reasoning?

Theissen's assertion that Jesus laid more stress upon salvation than John also comes up against our ignorance. Unless, by some miracle, our sources accurately summarize everything the Baptist had to say, what do we really know about him and this subject? How much can we infer from the tiny bits or abridgements that we do have? Is there not, to repeat yet again the obvious, a danger of generalizing from too few instances? While we may have the impression that John was primarily a preacher of judgment, this impression comes from Q, not Josephus, Mark, or John; and while it would be unwise to doubt that John proclaimed the imminent eschatological judgment, is it not Q's interest in such judgment that explains why Matthew and Luke, in dependence upon the Sayings Source, highlight this aspect of his proclamation? But Q's main interests need not exhaust what was front and center in John's ministry. Maybe the Baptist was, as Josephus and Lk. 3.10-14 have it, also much interested in social reform, even though this dimension is altogether missing from Q. Proclamation of a near and retributive end does not, to judge from the record of world-wide millenarian movements, preclude social concern. Again, perhaps, like Jesus, John preached not only judgment but also had much to say or at least something to say about salvation and its experience in the here and now. Here we are in the dark, for while the absence of something from the traditions about John may reflect its absence from his ministry, it may equally reflect a lack of potential Christian utility. When Jürgen Becker says of John that 'nothing even approaching a promise of salvation crosses his lips',¹⁵ has he not forsaken good sense and forgotten the truly meager nature of our sources?

Theissen makes the interesting conjecture that Jesus experienced eschatological delay when John's imminent expectation went unfulfilled. This may well be. But perhaps John already had the same experience. We have no idea how long his ministry lasted. Was it weeks or months or years?

15. Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), p. 38.

Maybe he also at some point had to grapple with the problem of receding fulfillment.¹⁶ One can believe that the night is far spent only so long before pangs of doubt make themselves felt. But again, how would we ever know?¹⁷

Theissen's second contrast concerns what he calls 'messianic preaching'. He says that John expected the *ἰσχυρότερος*, which, before Christian interpretation, may have been either God or 'a judge figure (like the Son of Man)'.¹⁸ Jesus, by contrast, spoke about the coming Son of man, which he may have identified with himself or his circle. The assumption here seems to be that the Baptist spoke about a 'stronger one' but not about the Son of man, a term Jesus by contrast used. Yet where is the evidence? We have no knowledge of whether John used one messianic title or many, or even whether he expected one figure or two or three. Nothing demonstrates or even hints that he could not have spoken of the 'Messiah' or of 'the Son of David' or of 'the Son of man' or of the coming Elijah. One certainly doubts that John used 'the stronger one' exclusively. The term in and of itself, as the secondary literature makes clear, is ambiguous. Scholars debate whether the Baptist was speaking of God, an angelic deliverer, or an exalted human being. So unless John was riddler as much as baptizer, he

16. Cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, pp. 132-33.

17. W. Barnes Tatum, 'The Jewish Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet or Subversive Sage?', *The Fourth R* 14.1 (2001), pp. 8-10 (8), exploits another alleged contrast in order to characterize Jesus' eschatology—a contrast that, like Theissen's, also oversteps the boundaries of what we know. Many have surmised, from his submission to John's baptism, which amounts to an endorsement, and from Paul's eschatological orientation, which tells us so much about the early Church, that Jesus must have been a millenarian or apocalyptic prophet. In countering this argument, Tatum contends, following the Jesus Seminar, that 'Jesus' parables...represent a critique of an apocalyptic world-view', and further that 'neither John the Jew nor Paul taught in parables'. This generalization about Paul, from whom we have several letters, some of them very long, seems fair enough. But what is the basis for making the assertion about John? How does Tatum, who makes his observation as though it were obvious to all, know that John did not use parables? Is it because the four or five sentences Q attributes to John feature no parable? This seems a large supposition from so small a starting point. What would Tatum infer if Q did, on the contrary, contain a parable from the Baptist? Would he guess that John used parables often, only sometimes, or only once? Obviously none of these conclusions would be safe, and it is the same with Tatum's inference from there being no parable at all. One remembers that Mark's two-verse summary of what Jesus proclaimed (1.14-15) omits that Jesus spoke in parables, even though the evangelist knew the fact well enough. The failure of the canonical Baptist to employ parables should not be equated with the historical John's failure to use parables, from which therefore nothing follows about Jesus' eschatology.

18. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 209. Cf. p. 211: 'This mediator figure bore none of the usual messianic titles'.

must have clarified 'the stronger one' for his hearers, and perhaps he did so by speaking of the coming of God or the Son of man or the davidic Messiah or the high priestly Messiah or some other stock figure from prophecy.¹⁹ Our sources, however, do not preserve whatever clarification he may have offered.

The one thing we do know is that 'the stronger one', which shows up in the summaries in Q and Mark, is the one title (if that is the right word) that in and of itself makes a comparison. While John may have used other titles for the eschatological figure or figures he expected, it is precisely 'the stronger one' that clearly demotes the speaker even as it promotes another, and what could have better served Christian interests? The reason for the appearance of this title as opposed to some other is manifest. And certainly, if John (like some of the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls) expected more than one eschatological figure, we need not wonder why the Christian tradition kept discreet silence about it and remembered him speaking of one alone.

'Imminent futurist eschatology' is the subject of Theissen's third distinction. John believed the eschatological consummation to be close to hand: the axe was laid at the root of the tree.²⁰ Jesus shared the same conviction. Yet he also looked back on John as 'a decisive turning point' (cf. Q 7.28; Lk. 16.16; *Gos. Thom.* 46), and he had 'a present eschatology' as well as a 'future eschatology'.²¹ This dissimilarity, like those already considered, holds only if our records preserve all of the major themes in John's repertoire. But Josephus (who purges John's proclamation of eschatology) is defective on this subject; and, to belabor the obvious again because it needs belaboring, our Christian sources, even if one imagines them to be reasonably accurate, are not likely in their brief recaps to introduce us to John in his entirety. They are firstly testimonies to Jesus, not reports about the Baptist as he was in and of himself. So one wonders how Theissen knows that John, unlike Jesus, other Jews, and many early Christians, did not believe in a present or partially realized eschatology as well as in

19. Contrast Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, p. 35, who conjectures that John intended to be vague. Against this, see Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup, 62; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 288-89. Webb himself suggests instead that maybe 'John did not wish to identify himself with any one particular form of Jewish expectation, but wished to emphasize the divine nature of the imminent judgment and restoration. To have engaged in eschatological speculation as to the type of agent may have sidetracked his audience from the prime issue at hand: repentance in the face of imminent judgment.'

20. Even Origen, *Homily on Luke 23*, recognized that John's words in Lk. 3 most naturally refer to 'the end of time'.

21. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 209.

imminent judgment. Followers of Jesus had a keen interest in keeping John's vision focused on the future, so that they could locate the realization of all expectations in Jesus, who came after John. It follows that, if the Baptist had laid any emphasis upon fulfillment, or if he had thought of his own ministry as the beginning of the era of redemption, one would not expect Christian sources to inform us on the matter. Once again, then, we are left with a silence we should respect, not a silence from which we may draw far-reaching inferences.

Theissen's fourth antithesis concerns baptism. John administered an eschatological sacrament associated with the confession of sins, a sacrament that brought salvation if accompanied by fruits of repentance. Jesus, on the other hand, although he recognized John's baptism, did not, Theissen thinks, himself baptize (cf. Jn 4.2). Jesus rather detached 'the notion of repentance from baptism'. Theissen explains that Jesus' notion of purity (cf. Mk 7.15) stood 'in tension with the sacrament of baptism'.²²

The appeal here to Jn 4.2 ('it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized') is odd, for it is likely an apologetical qualification of the truth preserved in 3.22: 'Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside and he spent some time there with them and baptized'. Maybe Jesus baptized for a while, or maybe longer than a while.²³ Indeed, maybe he baptized throughout his ministry, and maybe the synoptic tradition, like Jn 4.2, found this fact less than edifying.²⁴ The synoptic silence cannot be the last word because it is no word at all. Once more, then, we have no guidance.

Neither can any supposed tension with Jesus' notion of purity prove that he did not baptize. Such a contradiction is not spelled out in the sources, and it may exist nowhere but in the mind of a modern scholar. Jesus was no systematic theologian or analytic philosopher, nor can we expect that things ill-fitting for us did not go together for him. We have, as an illustration of this, some pretty good evidence that he believed in both a good, loving God and some sort of fiery hell, two things that many of us find all but impossible to reconcile. But our difficulty in this matter is no criterion for figuring out what an ancient Jew believed or did not believe.²⁵ Similarly, with regard to purity and baptism, a better guide than Theissen may be the evangelist Matthew, who passed on the command to baptize (28.16-20) as well as a version of Mk 7.15 ('there is nothing outside a person

22. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 209.

23. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, pp. 116-30, offers a helpful overview of the issue.

24. See Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, pp. 126-29.

25. Although scholars have again and again made the attempt. The most egregious example of this is the instructive because so insistent work of Lily Dougall and Cyril W. Emmet, *The Lord of Thought: A Study of the Problems which Confronted Jesus Christ and the Solution he Offered* (London: SCM Press, 1922).

that by going in can defile that person; but the things that come out are what defile'; see Mt. 15.17-18). Matthew evidently could hold the two things together. So maybe Jesus uttered Mk 7.15 and at the same time baptized. Or, if he ceased to baptize, maybe this had nothing at all to do with his ideas about purity. Who knows?

The final distinction Theissen draws between John and Jesus is that whereas the former was an ascetic, as evidenced by his food, clothing, and dwelling in the desert, the latter was not. Jesus lived in such a way as to be called a 'glutton and drunkard' (Q 7.34), and he carried on his ministry in populated areas. John's asceticism was self-stigmatization intended as a criticism of society. With Jesus, asceticism appears only in the missionary discourse, where it is 'a means of mission'.²⁶

The main problem here is not our ignorance of John, whose ascetic credentials admit of no question.²⁷ It is rather that the missionary discourse is not, as I read the facts, anomalous, that is, it is not the only ascetic feature of the original Jesus tradition.²⁸ Jesus himself was almost certainly unmarried,²⁹ and he composed several demanding sayings about guarding sexual desire.³⁰ He also issued strident warnings about money and property, and he and his followers lived, at least some of the time, as itinerants.³¹

26. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 209.

27. Although whether he ever challenged others to take up his ascetical lifestyle we do not know.

28. In addition to what follows see Dale C. Allison, Jr, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 172-216.

29. Mt. 19.12, which probably goes back to Jesus, is best explained as his own retort to those who mocked his single state; see J. Blinzler, 'Εὐνοῦχοι', *ZNW* 48 (1957), pp. 254-70. That the saying uses the plural 'eunuchs' probably indicates that some of his followers were also unmarried.

30. See esp. Mt. 5.27-28 and Mk 9.43-48. For the authenticity of these complexes, see Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 185-88; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (HTKNT, 1.2; Freiburg: Herder, 1988), I, pp. 163-64; and Werner Zager, *Gottesherrschaft und Endgericht in der Verkündigung Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zur markinischen Jesusüberlieferung einschließlich der Q-Parallelen* (BZNW, 82; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 210-23. On the original application of the latter to sexual sins, see Will Deming, 'Mark 9.42-10.12, Matthew 5.27-32, and b. Nid. 13b: A First Century Discussion of Male Sexuality', *NTS* 36 (1990), pp. 130-41; and Kurt Niedermwimmer, *Askese und Mysterium: Über Ehe, Ehescheidung und Eheverzicht in den Anfängen des christlichen Glaubens* (FRLANT, 113; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 29-33. On Mk 12.18-27, which envisages the possibility of human nature without the sexual impulse, see W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997), III, pp. 221-34.

31. Cf. Peter Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (TU, 95; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966), pp. 6-7. Relevant

Some of them abandoned families and business.³² Jesus himself, in the language of Q 9.58, had nowhere to lay his head. The tradition, furthermore, found no difficulty depicting him fasting and seeking to be alone³³—all of which harmonizes nicely with the ascetic demands of the missionary discourse. It is hard to avoid thinking that religious self-discipline and rigorous self-denial were characteristic of the historical Jesus (cf. Q 14.11, 27; 17.33; Mk 8.34; 9.43-48; *Gos. Thom.* 55). Contemporary exegetes, living in an age nonplussed by or antagonistic to even mild asceticism, have read far too much into Q 7.33-34's rhetorical differentiation between a caricatured Jesus and a caricatured John, as though that passage were a dispassionate depiction rather than a piece of clever, hyperbolic rhetoric occasioned by slander ('and you say').³⁴ Nothing contradicts the canonical picture of a Jesus who sometimes feasts and sometimes fasts, of a Jesus who is sometimes put up for the night and sometimes without a place to lay his head, of a Jesus who is sometimes joyful and sometimes stern.

At this juncture I should like to state clearly that all of Theissen's antitheses need not be false. Nor, with the exception of the last disjunction, have I tried to refute them. My point is not that he must be wrong but rather that he is not clearly right, and that the cause of his failing is typical. Again and again discussions of the Baptist and Jesus manifest a superfluity of inference; they fail to persuade not because they go against the evidence but because they go beyond it. Our unfortunate ignorance, which so inconveniences us, sets large question marks over several of the conventional contrasts so often drawn between the two men. More caution is called for. Extrapolating from what our all-too-brief sources fail to say about the Baptist is a risky business.

texts include Q 10.4, 7-8; 12.22-31, 33-34; 16.13; Mk 1.16-20; 2.13-14; 10.17-27; *Gos. Thom.* 42. Lk. 8.1-3 remembers that certain women provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their resources.

32. Q 9.59-60; 12.51-53; 14.26; Mk 1.16-20; 2.14; 10.28-31; Lk. 9.61-62.

33. Texts which place Jesus in the wilderness and/or depict him seeking solitude include Q 4.1; Mk 1.35, 45; 6.31-44; 8.1-10; and Jn 3.22.

34. On its stereotypical character, and indeed scriptural background in Deut. 21.20, see David Daube, *Appeasement or Resistance and Other Essays on New Testament Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 23-26. Also helpful is James M. Robinson, 'Galilean Upstarts: A Sot's Cynical Disciples?', in William L. Petersen, Johan S. Vos and Henk J. de Jonge (eds.), *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical. Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 223-49. Certainly nothing in the tradition contradicts Clement of Alexandria's claim that Jesus ate and drank in moderation: *Paed.* 2.2.32.2-3.

Elements of Continuity

But what then of the continuity between John and Jesus? Needless to say, the dearth of evidence hampers us here also. Furthermore, Christians may have been inclined to attribute sentiments to Jesus alone that John also expressed. It is, for instance, possible in theory to imagine that the Baptist composed some of the sayings in the sermon on the plain and that Jesus learned them from John, and that Christians, for understandable reasons, preferred to forget this fact.³⁵ In such a case, however, the truth would be beyond our ability to discover it: the historical continuity would have left no trace in the records. One can likewise imagine that John and Jesus were indeed, as Luke has it, relatives, and that they talked about theology off and on over the years, so that they influenced each other in manifold ways no longer recoverable. Such a suggestion, while baseless and fanciful, does serve to remind us how little we know.

The only historical continuity we can recover is, to state the obvious, limited to what the extant sources, imperfect as they are, actually say, both about John and about Jesus. Given this, and given how little those sources tell us about the Baptist, we might anticipate that the outcome of a comparison would yield little. Yet what in fact emerges is, as I shall now seek to show, unexpectedly suggestive. Jesus appears to have been fundamentally indebted to John throughout his ministry.

1. Descent from Abraham and Judgment

m. Sanh. 10.1 declares that all Israel has a place in the world to come. The text goes on to list exceptions, these being various apostates, heretics, etc. Now whether or not, as Ed Sanders has argued, this view characterized what he calls 'common Judaism', we can scarcely doubt that more than a few Palestinian Jews near the turn of the era held something close to what Sanders has dubbed 'covenantal nomism'.³⁶ Such people hoped that descent from Abraham would, as long as they did not abandon the Torah, gain them entry into the world to come.

John rejected this hope. The chief evidence is Q 3.8, which has a fair

35. Recently, Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 151-53, has raised the possibility that John composed the Lord's Prayer, or something close to it.

36. E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), pp. 262-78. For critical discussion, see D.A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism. I. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

chance of remembering something the Baptist said.³⁷ 'Do not presume to tell yourselves: We have Abraham as our father! For I tell you: God can produce children for Abraham right out of these stones.' This line, which appears to set aside Isa. 51.1-2,³⁸ seems to oppose precisely what Sanders has called 'covenantal nomism'. Indeed, one could scarcely hope to find a more straightforward rejection of the notion that to be born into the covenant with Abraham is to be saved. As David Daube remarked, John the Baptist's words mean that 'you must acquire him [Abraham] just like strangers'.³⁹ Daube, to be sure, assumed that John's water rite was a transmutation of Jewish proselyte ritual, so that in calling for baptism he was asking Jews to think of themselves as Gentiles, as people outside the covenant community. This may or may not be correct. Recent discussion has come to no certain conclusion as to whether such baptism appeared already in pre-Christian Judaism, although perhaps most experts currently guess it had not. Yet even if we are to look elsewhere for an explanation of John's baptism, Daube's exegesis of Q 3.8 stands. It is not enough to be descended from Abraham. One must, according to the saying of the Baptist, be 'born again'. Deliverance comes not by belonging to the Jewish people but only by a radical turning around, by a repentance that produces good fruit. One cannot inherit the merit of the patriarchs; rather, such 'has to be earned individually in the present time by each person in his or her own life; only then can s/he truly continue the spirit of Abraham'.⁴⁰

John's warning about confidence in Abrahamic descent is the context for his warnings about judgment in Q 3.9 and 17—'And the axe already lies at the root of the trees. So every tree not bearing healthy fruit is to be chopped down and thrown on the fire'; 'His pitchfork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn on a fire that can never be put out'. The Baptist did not

37. See below, n. 46. All quotations from Q herein are from James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg (eds.), *The Critical Edition of Q* (Leuven: Peeters; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

38. 'Look to the rock from whence you were hewn and to the quarry whence you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you. For when he was but one I called him and blessed him and I caused him to increase.' See Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 101-104.

39. David Daube, *Ancient Jewish Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 10.

40. Taylor, *The Immerser*, p. 130. See further, R. Menahem, 'A Jewish Commentary on the New Testament: A Sample Verse', *Immanuel* 21 (1987), pp. 43-54. There are Hebrew Bible parallels to this sort of warning; see, e.g., Jer. 9.24-25 and the exposition of Richard C. Steiner, 'Incomplete Circumcision in Egypt and Edom: Jeremiah (9.24-25) in the Light of Josephus and Jonckheere', *JBL* 118 (1999), pp. 497-505.

believe that, except for heretics who had put themselves outside the covenant, all Israelites would enter the world to come. He uttered his sweeping, earnest warnings about damnation precisely because he denied the hope, held by some, that those born of Abraham could for that reason alone hope to pass the final judgment.

What does all this have to do with Jesus? He shared John's rejection of what Sanders takes to have been a common idea.⁴¹ The original Jesus tradition nowhere leaves the impression that good Jews are saved by virtue of being good Jews, that is, because they are descended from the patriarchs. From beginning to end it presupposes, rather, that the question of salvation is open and that Jesus' audience, notwithstanding their heritage, should fret about their fate in the world to come. They should not presume to be safely in and OK as opposed to out and still in danger. When Mk 1.15 summarizes Jesus' message with words that include 'repent', this rightly catches the spirit of the authentic tradition. Mark 10.15 remembers Jesus as saying, 'Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it'. Although some have thought that Jesus was here calling for trust or humility, or for the ability to say 'Abba', it is far more likely that, when he urged people to become children, he was, like the Baptist in Q 3.8-9, telling them to start their religious lives over, telling them to go back to the beginning. In later Judaism, the convert is 'like a new-born child',⁴² and the Fourth Gospel clearly takes our saying to mean that one must be born again, or from above (3.3).⁴³ Jesus' saying about becoming children is akin to John's call for repentance and baptism: one has to start from scratch.

The context for Jesus' call to begin one's religious life anew was the same as that of the Baptist, namely, eschatological judgment. Both prophets were looking to the future judgment. Both believed its arrival time to be sooner rather than later. And both believed that some or many of their Jewish audience might flunk the coming assize. The evidence with regard to John is in Q 3, on the common assumption that it preserves something of his message. With regard to Jesus, the evidence for these assertions is considerable, and I have introduced it elsewhere.⁴⁴ More importantly, three

41. In addition to what follows, see my article, 'Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E.P. Sanders', *JSNT* 29 (1987), pp. 57-78; repr. in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *The Historical Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 61-82.

42. *b. Yeb.* 22a; cf. 48b, 62a; 97b; *b. Ber.* 47a; etc.

43. Barnabas Lindars, 'John and the Synoptic Gospels: A Test Case', *NTS* 27 (1981), pp. 287-94. Cf. 2 Cor. 5.17.

44. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 131-36, 147-50; also my response to critics on

recent German monographs have all concluded that a strong and recurring sense of imminent eschatological judgment cannot be eliminated from the original tradition.⁴⁵ Jesus was, as the Synoptics depict him, an eschatological prophet who urgently warned hearers to prepare for the coming judgments. For him the judgment was, as it was for John, looming, and it was threatening, and precisely because Abrahamic descent guaranteed nothing. In this respect at least Jesus' ministry continued John's mission, and on this fundamental point there is no hint that Jesus ever departed from the Baptist.

2. *Shared Images*

Several sayings attributed to John share images with sayings attributed to Jesus:

1. In Q 3.8, the Baptist commands his hearers to 'bear fruit worthy of repentance', and in 3.9 he warns of the peril of not bearing 'healthy fruit'.⁴⁶ In Q 6.43-45 (cf. Mt. 7.16-21; 12.33-35), Jesus also calls upon human beings to bear fruit: 'No healthy tree bears rotten fruit, nor does a decayed tree bear healthy fruit. For from the fruit the tree is known. Are figs picked from thorns, or grapes from thistles? The good person from one's good treasure casts up good things...'
2. John, according to Q 3.9, declared that 'the ax already lies at the root of the trees. So every tree not bearing healthy fruit is to be chopped down...' In Lk. 13.6-9, Jesus tells a parable about a fruit-bearing tree that does not bear fruit. The owner orders it to be cut down. The vinedresser then pleads for the tree, that it be given a little more time before it is destroyed.
3. At the end of Q 3.9, the tree that is cut down is then 'thrown on the fire'. This image of being *thrown* into eschatological fire appears several times in the Jesus tradition: Mt. 7.19 (redactional); 13.40 (M); Mk 9.47-50; Jn 15.1-16.
4. Q 3.16 contains the striking image of baptizing not with water but

pp. 83-105 of Robert J. Miller (ed.), *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001).

45. Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Christian Riniker, *Die Gerichtsvorkündigung* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 23; Theologie, 653; Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); Zager, *Gottesherrschaft und Endgericht*.

46. For the case that 3.7-9 preserves teaching of the Baptist, see Jürgen Becker, *Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), p. 109; and Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, pp. 28-32.

with fire.⁴⁷ The same image reappears in Lk. 12.49-50, where lines about fire and baptism stand in nearly synonymous parallelism: 'I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!'

5. John speaks, in Q 3.17, of the eschatological judgment as a harvest: 'His pitchfork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn on a fire that can never be put out'. The comparison of eschatological judgment to harvesting appears in the Jesus tradition in Q 10.2 (the plentiful harvest; cf. Jn 4.35-38); Mt. 13.24-30//Gos. Thom. 57 (the parable of the weeds and wheat); Mk 4.1-9 (the parable of the sower); and 4.26-29 (the parable of the growing seed).

What should we make of these parallels? The picture of people bearing fruit and the likening of the last judgment to a harvest are well attested in Jewish sources, so much so that we cannot justifiably hold that Jesus must have gotten them from John.⁴⁸ But the other parallels have a different character. The image of people being *thrown* into a fire, which goes back to Jesus in at least Mk 9.47-50,⁴⁹ does occur in Daniel 3, in the story of the three young men and the fiery furnace, but that story is not about eschatological judgment. The closest Jewish parallels are seemingly confined to the Enoch traditions: *1 En.* 54.2-6; 90.25; 91.9; 98.3 v. 1; and *2 En.* 63.4 J.⁵⁰ Given that Jesus heard John preach, does not the relative rarity of the violent image common to Q 3.9 and Mk 9.47-50 encourage one to surmise that maybe the one teacher was borrowing from the other teacher?

It is the same with Q 3.9 and Lk. 13.6-9. Cutting down a fruitless tree to represent the last judgment occurs, to my knowledge, in Mt. 3.10//Lk. 3.9 (Q), in Lk. 13.6-9, in literature influenced by the canonical Gospels, and nowhere else. There are, to be sure, Jewish texts in which chopping a tree

47. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, pp. 32-40, reviews the arguments for assigning Q 3.15-17 to the Baptist and finds them convincing.

48. For the figurative use of 'fruit' in ethico-religious speech see Ps. 1.3; Prov. 1.31; Isa. 3.10; Hos. 10.1; Eccles. 23.25; Rom. 6.22; Jas 3.18; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.48; *2 Bar.* 32.1; *Apoc. Adam* 6.1; *b. Qidd.* 40a; etc. For imagery of the harvest in connection with judgment, see Isa. 41.14-16; Jer. 15.7; 51.33; Hos. 6.11; Mic. 4.12-13; Joel 3.13; Rev. 14.14-20; *4 Ezra* 4.30, 38-39; Targ. Ps.-Jon. on Isa. 28.28; on 33.11; etc.

49. See n. 30.

50. The latter two may be Christian. For Christian texts see, in addition to Mt. 7.19; 13.40 (M); Mk 9.47-50; and Jn 15.1-16, also Rev. 19.20; 20.10, 14-15; and John of Damascus, *Parall.* PG 96.344C.

down illustrates divine judgment,⁵¹ but these do not attribute that judgment to a failure to bear fruit, which is what Q 3.9 and Lk. 13.6-9 both do; and the interesting parallel in *Ahiqar* Syr. 8.35 (Arabic 8.30)⁵² does not concern eschatological judgment and might in any case be Christian. So Theissen seems entitled to suggest, on the assumption that Lk. 13.6-9 comes from before Easter,⁵³ that Jesus may well have had in mind John's words.⁵⁴ In line with this, Theissen is far from the only reader for whom Lk. 13.6-9 has evoked John's warning. Codex Bezae (D), for example, adds φέρε τὴν ἄξιον to Lk. 13.7, surely in recollection of John's prophecy. And Matthew Henry thought that Jesus' parable 'enlarges upon' the Baptist's saying while Alfred Nevin spoke of Jesus' 'personal application' of the same utterance.⁵⁵ Others have simply assimilated the two texts without comment; thus Peter of Alexandria, *Can. ep.* 3.23, in interpreting the parable of the barren fig tree, uses the phrase, ἐνδειξάμενοι καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας, which is from Mt. 3.8/Lk. 3.8.

As for Q 3.16, Lk. 12.49-50, and being baptized in fire, there are certainly many texts that, perhaps under Zoroastrian influence, envisage the eschato-

51. See, e.g., Isa. 6.13; 10.33-34; Dan. 4.11, 19-23.

52. 'My son, you have been to me like that palm-tree that stood by a river, and cast all its fruit into the river, and when its lord came to cut it down, it said to him, "Let me alone this year, and I will bring you forth carobs". And its lord said to it, "You have not been industrious in what is your own, and how will you be industrious in what is not your own?"' (Charles). The parallel in *Cologne Mani Codex* 94 presumably depends upon Luke.

53. There do not seem to be strong arguments for the authenticity of Lk. 13.6-9, but equally there is no evidence of a post-Eastern origin. Some observations: (1) There are linguistic signs of a pre-Lukan origin; see Joachim Jeremias, *Die Sprache des Lukas-evangeliums* (MeyerK: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 198), pp. 227-28. (2) The parallel in Gos. Pet. E 2 may be independent of Luke; so Richard Bauckham, 'The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter', *JBL* 104 (1985), p. 269-87. (3) Jesus was fond of agricultural parables. (4) The theme of unexpected grace is at home in Jesus' proclamation, as is the concern with judgment. (5) Lk. 13.6-9 is not likely to derive from either the story of the withered fig tree in Mk 11.13-14, 20-21 or the parable in Mk 13.28-29. Indeed, the opposite has sometimes been alleged, that the story of the withered fig tree derives from the parable.

54. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 210.

55. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible. V. Matthew to John* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 721; Alfred Nevin, *Popular Expositor of the Gospels and Acts* (Philadelphia: Ziegler & McCurdy, 1872), p. 856. Cf. Origen, *Hom. on Jer.* 18.5 (SC, 238; ed. Nautin), p. 194; Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Luke* 96; Albert Magnus, *Ennarationes in Prim. Part. Ev. Lucae (I-IX)* (ed. Borgnet), p. 282; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 275; and Peter Böhleemann, *Jesus und der Täufer: Schlüssel zur Theologie und Ethik des Lukas* (SNTSMS, 99; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 163-64.

logical fire as a flood that comes upon the world. But the juxtaposition of this stream with the language of baptism does not seem to have any close pre-Christian parallels. If, then, as argued below, Lk. 12.49-50 goes back to Jesus, one suspects that John's proclamation of a coming flood of fire inspired the Lukan text. Again, commentators down through the centuries have linked the two passages.⁵⁶

I submit that these results, meager as they might appear upon initial scrutiny, are on the contrary not so meager. If we keep in mind how little we have from the Baptist, then to find two or three instances in which a saying of Jesus seems to betray John's influence is significant. We can reasonably presume that, had more of John's teaching been preserved, Jesus' debt to him would appear even larger. We would then see all the more that 'Jesus' vision, message, and tactics were shaped by John'.⁵⁷

3. *Jesus and John's Coming One*

If Q 3.16-17 is reliable, John spoke of an eschatological figure yet to come in these terms: 'I baptize you in water; but the one to come after me is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to take off. He will baptize you in holy Spirit and fire. His pitchfork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn on a fire that can never be put out.' Modern scholars, as already noted, cannot agree upon what figure John had in mind. Some have even imagined that the Baptist was purposely unclear. The Gospel writers and Christian tradition, however, have had no second thoughts on the matter. For them, John was obviously thinking of Jesus. What I would like to propose here is that, in so interpreting John's prophecy, they have followed, not necessarily the interpretation of the Baptist, but the interpretation of Jesus.⁵⁸ That is, whoever John had in mind, Jesus himself believed that he was the fulfillment of John's expectation, that he was the stronger one who would baptize with fire.

The evidence for this conclusion, which has far-reaching implications for Jesus' self-conception, is first of all to be found in the little episode in Q

56. E.g. Origen, *Sel. in Ps.* PG 12.1236C; *idem*, *Hom. on Luke 26.1* (GCS, 49; ed. Rauer), p. 153; Jerome, *Comm. on Mt.* 3.11 (CS 242; ed. Bonnard), p. 92; Theodore of Heraclea, *Matt.* (ed. Reuss), frag. 18; Albert Magnus, *Ennarationes in Prim. Part. Ev. Lucae (I-IX)* (ed. Borgnet), p. 153; Henry, *Commentary*, p. 27; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 547; Böhlemann, *Jesus und der Täufer*, pp. 168-70.

57. Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 4.

58. Cf. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, p. 211: 'Jesus identified himself with the mediator figure announced by John'.

7.18-23. Notwithstanding the difficulties of reconstructing the narrative setting in Q, the gist of the story is clear. John sends disciples to ask Jesus if he is the coming one of John's prophetic scenario. Jesus answers indirectly yet affirmatively with a list of items from his ministry, a list that clearly alludes to prophecies from Isaiah: the blind see (cf. Isa. 29.18; 35.5; 42.7, 18; 61.1), the lame walk (cf. Isa. 35.6), the deaf hear (cf. Isa. 29.18; 35.5; 42.18), the dead are raised (cf. Isa. 26.19), and the poor have good news preached to them (cf. Isa. 29.19; 61.1). The declaration ends with, 'and blessed is whoever is not offended by me'.

There is no space herein to rehearse the arguments about the origin of this pericope, which so unexpectedly depicts a doubting Baptist and contains no record of his response. All I can do is direct readers to John Meier's thorough examination of the question, which fairly concludes that the 'most probable origin' of Q 7.18-23 'is in the life of Jesus'.⁵⁹

Those of us who accept this judgment will be impelled to two further judgments. The first is that if John did in fact wonder whether Jesus might be the coming one, then this establishes beyond doubt that the Baptist's words about an eschatological figure were not about God or an angel but about a human agent of God.⁶⁰ The other sure inference is that Jesus identified himself with that agent. Not only is he the one through whom the miracles are being worked, but the declaration, 'blessed is whoever is not offended by me', puts him at the center of things. In other words, if Q 7.18-23 is not misleading, John's eschatological expectation partly informed Jesus' self-conception.

At least a couple of other texts seem to offer some support for this inference. One is Lk. 12.49-50: 'I came to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed.' Although found only in Luke, these two sentences—which should not be dissolved into two separate sayings with separate tradition-histories⁶¹—have some claim

59. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, II, p. 136. His discussion runs from pp. 131-37. Cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, pp. 278-82; and Walter Wink, 'Jesus' Reply to John: Matt 11:2-67/Luke 7:18-23', *Forum* 5.1 (1989), pp. 121-28. Contrast Joseph Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation—Geschichte—Wirkungsgeschichte* (BZNW, 53; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 315-19.

60. Moreover, John's question in Q, if historical, implies that he 'at the very least entertained the possibility that the answer might be "Yes"'. So T.W. Manson, 'John the Baptist', *BJRL* 36 (1954), p. 399. On the issue, see further now, Joel Marcus, 'John the Baptist and Jesus', in Daniel Harrington, Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner (eds.), *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini* (Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, forthcoming 2003).

61. Synonymous parallelism—from Origen, *Exh. mart.* 37, on commentators have

to go back to Jesus. There are no clear signs of Lukan redaction,⁶² and a pre-Lukan origin is further supported by the difficult $\tau\acute{\iota}$ $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$, which is best explained as a Semitism.⁶³ The saying hints that Jesus shrank from his prospective fate, a detail not readily assignable to the early Church; and the use of baptism with reference to coming martyrdom has its parallel in Mk 10.38-39, which appears to be an unfulfilled prophecy.⁶⁴ Finally, there are partial parallels in *Gos. Thom.* 10 ('I have cast fire upon the world, and see, I guard it until it is afire', cf. v. 16) and in an another extra-canonical saying attributed to Jesus: 'Whoever is near to me is near to the fire; whoever is far from me, is far from the kingdom' (see Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 20.3 and Didymus of Alexandria, *Frag. Ps.* ed. Mühlenberg frag. 883//PG 39.1488D). Some such saying was widely thought to go back to Jesus.

Regarding the meaning of Lk. 12.49-50 for Jesus himself, the line almost certainly concerned the eschatological judgment.⁶⁵ Not only does the Tanak link fire with God's wrath, eschatological destruction, and the Day of the Lord,⁶⁶ but the same is true of later literature.⁶⁷ More importantly, everywhere else in the Synoptics, with the exception of Mk 9.21 (the possessed boy who throws himself into the fire) and Lk. 22.25 (Peter warming himself in the courtyard), $\pi\acute{\upsilon}\rho$ has to do with the last assize.

How does Lk. 12.49-50 relate to the proclamation of the Baptist? Three times in Q John refers to eschatological fire (Q 3.9, 16, 17). Evidently he

often understood vv. 49 and 50 to be roughly synonymous—is a feature of the original Jesus tradition (Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 14-20); and in Lk. 17.26-30(Q), whose substance goes back to Jesus, the threat of fire is paired with the threat of a flood. Fire and water are, further, traditionally associated with judgment: Ps. 66.10-12; Isa. 30.27-28; 30; 43:2; *Sib. Or.* 3.689-91; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.70; *LAE* 49.3; etc. They indeed are sometimes joined to become one—a stream or lake of fire: Dan. 7.10; 1QH 3.29-36; *1 En.* 14.19; 17.5; 67.13; *Sib. Or.* 3.54, 84; Rev. 19.20; 20.10, 14-15; 21.8; *4 Ezra* 13.10-11; *2 En.* 10.2; *Mek.* on Exod. 18.1; *b. Zeb.* 116a; etc.

62. See Jeremias, *Die Sprache des Lukasevangeliums*, p. 223.

63. F.H. Seper, 'KAI TI $\Theta\epsilon\lambda\omega$ $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ $\text{H}\alpha\text{H}$ $\text{A}\text{N}\text{H}\Phi\Theta\text{H}$ (Lc 12, 49b)', *VD* 36 (1958), pp. 147-53.

64. Davies and Allison, *Commentary on Matthew*, II, pp. 90-92.

65. In addition to what follows, see esp. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Paternoster, 1986), pp. 247-52; also François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 9,51-14,35)* (EKKNT, III.2; Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), p. 350.

66. See, e.g., Isa. 66.24; Mal. 3.19; Jth 16.17; additional texts and discussion in Vinzenz Hamp, *WNT, TDOT* 1 (1977), pp. 424-28; and Friedrich Lang, $\pi\acute{\upsilon}\rho$ $\kappa\lambda.$, *TDNT*, VI (1968), pp. 934-37.

67. E.g. *Jub.* 9.15; *1 En.* 10.6; 54.1-2, 6; 90.24-25; 91.9; 100.9; 102.1; *Pss. Sol.* 15.4-5; *Sib. Or.* 3.53-54; 4.159-60; *4 Macc.* 9.9; 12.12; *T. Zeb.* 10.3; *T. Jud.* 25.3; *4 Ezra* 7.36-38; 13.10-11; *2 Bar.* 37.1; 44.15; 59.2; *3 Bar.* 4.16.

imagined that the eschatological judgment would, as in Zoroastrian eschatology, fall upon the world as a fiery stream. He spoke, moreover, of a baptism in fire. Now if Jesus similarly spoke of baptism and of fire in the same utterance, it is altogether likely that conceptions similar to those of the Baptist were on his mind.⁶⁸ Jesus, it seems, anticipated going through the eschatological baptism himself—as his submission to John's prophylactic baptism probably attests. In the language of Mk 9.49, he expected to 'be salted with fire', to suffer the eschatological trial and judgment, to enter the fire that 'will test what sort of work each person has done' (1 Cor. 3.13).⁶⁹

But Lk. 12.49-50 says more than this. It makes Jesus himself the dispenser of that fire: 'I came to bring fire upon the earth' (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 10). On the assumption that Jesus and his hearers were familiar with John's proclamation of an eschatological figure who would baptize with fire, is Jesus not making a stupendous if implicit claim? If he has come in order to cast fire upon the earth, then must he not be the eschatological figure of judgment that John prophesied? 'I came to cast fire on the earth' seems to be, as Jerome saw,⁷⁰ Jesus' answer to John's 'he will baptize you with fire'. It is L's analogue to Q 7.18-23. The coming one, ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Q 7.19; cf. 3.16; Mk 1.7; Jn 1.15, 27), has come: ἦλθεν (Lk. 12.49).

There is yet one more text that may—I do not say does but only may—link Jesus with the figure of John's expectation. The parable of the binding of the strong man, preserved in Mk 3.27; Lk. 11.21-22 (= Q); and *Gos. Thom.* 35, runs as follows in its Markan form: 'But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered'. Clearly, as most commentators from patristic times to the present have seen, ὁ ἰσχυρός is the devil, Satan. The designation is unusual, because whether or not Isa. 49.24-25 and 53.12 lie behind the parable (cf. *Ps. Sol.* 5.3), there do not appear to be any pre-Christian texts that refer to Satan as 'the strong one'.⁷¹

Within its parabolic context, ἰσχυρός emphasizes the power of the householder, which in turn becomes a statement about the strength of the other figure in the parable, the one who can bind the strong man, who can tie him up and plunder his goods. Now there can be no doubt as to who this

68. See also James D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit. II. Pneumatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 103-17. On pp. 109-11 he evaluates Lk. 12.49-50 as a 'reinterpretation' of John's expectation.

69. See further Dale C. Allison, Jr, *The End of the Ages has Come* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), pp. 124-28.

70. Jerome, *Comm. on Mt.* 3.11 (CS, 242; ed. Bonnard), p. 92. See further those cited in n. 56.

71. The closest parallels are in the late magical papyri, in which demons are occasionally strong; see BDAG, s.v., ἰσχυρός, 1a.

second character is. Jesus, in his successful ministry of exorcism, has overcome the power of the devil. He is the one who is stronger than the strong man. He is, one could say, and as Luke does say, ὁ ἰσχυρότερος (cf. Lk. 11.22, perhaps reproducing Q). Although the strong man may overcome human beings, he himself is overcome by the stronger Jesus. So the parable of the binding of the strong man is christological. It is a declaration about Jesus the exorcist, about his strength, about his being stronger than the strong one.

But what might that imply coming from one who had heard John and so presumably knew his prophecy of a stronger one to come? Given that Jesus also, as I have argued, said that he had come to cast fire upon the earth (Lk. 12.49), and that he answered a question about his identity with an implicit claim to be 'the coming one' of John's expectation (Q 7.18-23), Mk 3.27 may have been composed not just to make a statement about Jesus' exorcistic power but to provoke thought about his eschatological role: Can this be the stronger one who is to come? The indirect claim to be such, which some exegetes have recognized,⁷² is analogous to the implicit claims in Lk. 12.49 and Q 7.18-23. In the extant sources Jesus never says, in so many words, 'I am the one John was talking about'. He rather makes this claim implicitly, by depicting himself as the dispenser of a fiery baptism (Lk. 12.49), as the fulfiller of eschatological prophecies in Isaiah (7.18-23), and, perhaps, as the one who is so strong that he can best the strong man (Mk 3.27).

All this, if accepted, means that it is not enough to say that Jesus' eschatological expectations were congruent with those of the Baptist. Rather, and much more than this, Jesus' very self-conception was informed by his predecessor's vision of one coming who would baptize with fire. Moreover, it is just such a result that, I submit, explains to some degree why the Gospels reveal both significant continuity and significant discontinuity between Jesus and John. If the former took up the latter's expectations, indeed largely lived within them, he also creatively reinterpreted them by reapplying them to his own person and ministry. He became for himself and for his followers the fulfillment of what John expected. In his person John's

72. Commentators who have linked the two texts include Albert Magnus, *Ennarationes in Prim. Part. Ev. Lucae (I-IX)* (ed. Borgnet), p. 282; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament. I. The Four Gospels* (London: Rivingtons, 1983), p. 553; William Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 143 n. 92; Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1976); p. 72; Leopold Sabourin, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (Bombay: St Paul's Press, 1982), I, pp. 263-64; Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, p. 110; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB, 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 283; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 200, 205 n. 72.

eschatological prophecies were coming to realization. Something momentous was transpiring, so momentous that it demoted, at least rhetorically, the greatest one born of woman to less than the least in the new order (Q 7.28).

Final Remarks

Paul Hollenbach has written that the difference between Jesus and John 'was so deep that it was not so much a matter of Jesus disagreeing with John as it was a matter of John's actions and message becoming irrelevant to Jesus'.⁷³ This seems altogether unlikely. Even in Christian texts, which promote Jesus far beyond John, the two are made out to be similar. In Mark's Gospel, Herod Antipas supposes that Jesus might be John the Baptist risen from the dead (6.14), and the populace at large also likens the two figures (8.28). Mark himself, in his editorial work, makes the ends of John and Jesus parallel: both are arrested, both are bound, both are executed, and both are laid in a tomb (6.17-29; 14-15). Q offers something similar, for Q 7.31-35 suggests that Jesus and John had similar goals and proclamations, and even that their differences were more in the delivery than in the substance. Parallels between John and Jesus likewise appear in Lk. 1.5-25, 26-38, 57-80; 2.1-52 (the infancy narratives for John and Jesus mirror each other) and in Mt. 3.2 and 4.17 (John and Jesus proclaim the very same message). This tradition of linking and comparing John and Jesus is striking in view of the Christian tendency to exalt the one over the other, and surely the *synkrisis* originated (1) because Jesus so much reminded people of John and (2) because the historical Jesus related himself to John's ministry and expectations in positive ways. One should always come back to the nearly incontrovertible fact that Jesus underwent John's baptism, an act that constitutes theological endorsement.

All of this is definitely not to say, as stressed earlier, that there were not important differences between Jesus and John. These last, however, are less obvious and less easy to establish than often imagined. Further, they should not eclipse the vital similarities, which bespeak Jesus' large indebtedness to his predecessor.

73. Paul W. Hollenbach, 'The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer', *ANRW* 2.25.1 (1982), pp. 196-219 (217).