8-1-2011

The Quest for the Historical Jesus' Use of Gehenna: A Critical Appraisal of the Work of N. T. Wright and His Portrayal of the Eschatology of the Historical Jesus

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A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE WORK OF N.T. WRIGHT AND HIS PORTRAYAL OF
THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

BY

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B.A., Olivet Nazarene University, 2009

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Biblical Studies
in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies
Olivet Nazarene University, 2011.

Bourbonnais, Illinois

OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY
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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND CONTINUING STUDIES

August 2011

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Ian Christian Cole

ENTITLED

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INTRODUCTION

The present study is this author's first attempt at entering the 250 year-old scholarly fray that is known as the *Quest for the Historical Jesus*. It contains what I now, near the end of the project, am quite confident is a rather humble appraisal of this colossal body of scholarly work and the questions this work has raised. I try to make no pretense of being an historical Jesus scholar, and have attempted to relegate my criticism to a very small sliver of the field with which I have become familiar. That sliver has a name; it is Nicholas Thomas Wright. The historical Jesus research of N. T. Wright forms the starting point for this study.

The purpose of the present paper is to engage in critical dialog with Wright's historical Jesus research—namely, his most extensive historical Jesus work, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (*JVG*).[1] As I shall show, Wright is a critical player in a fascinating, compelling, and relatively new branch of the Quest—the so-called *Third Quest*. Ultimately my purpose is to appraise Wright's work on the historical Jesus, specifically with regard to the eschatological outlook of Jesus. In particular, the fourth and final chapter of this study will make the case that Wright's description of the historical Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna* (γέεννα) is inadequate and lacks support from the Synoptic evidence that Wright relies on for his portrait of the historical Jesus.

This study will begin with a review of the history of the Quest for the Historical Jesus both from its inception to the 1980s (chapter 1) and in its current phase of research since the 1980s (chapter 2). Such historical backdrops are the hallmark of historical Jesus research, and the work must be done so that the reader has a proper sense of my own appraisal of the field and how the critique of Wright presented here fits into it. Following the presentation of the history of the Quest this study will proceed to analyze the work of Wright himself, and an argument will be made that Wright's novel definitions of *eschatology* and *apocalyptic* are the key to his work on the historical Jesus (chapter 3). Having completed this task, research on Jesus' use of *Gehenna* necessary to establish the thesis of this study will be presented (chapter 4).

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[1] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF THE QUEST

The Quest for the Historical Jesus is a specifically *modern* phenomenon. Within a generation or two following the earthly ministry of Jesus, and until the later creeds of the early church in the 4th and 5th centuries, the Patristic Period of the Church was dominated by Christological debates (Docetism, Apollinarianism, Arianism, etc.) in which the central questions asked about Jesus concerned his *nature*.[2] Was Jesus Christ (his identity as "Christ" being often assumed) truly *divine* or merely *human*, or somewhere in between? Chalcedon secured the orthodox answer for the Western Church: Jesus Christ was one *persona/hypostasis* with two complete *natures*—both human and divine. Theological reflection during the medieval period stretching from Chalcedon to the 16th century Reformation took these orthodox creedal confessions for granted, consolidating and enumerating the implications thereof.[3] While the 16th century Reformers certainly brought significant challenges to the orthodoxy of the day, none questioned the essential dogma of the creedal claims; in fact, the Reformers thought they were *recapturing* the Patristic outlook from corrupted, human traditions that had grown up around it.[4] That is to say that while the Reformers challenged Church dogma, they never seriously questioned the Church's central Christological confessions. It was not until the 18th century that anyone in the Western world had both the political freedom and the motivation to challenge the central Christological claims of the Church. It was thus that the Quest for the Historical Jesus was born.

Not only is the Quest a *modern* phenomenon; it was birthed as a *reactionary* movement. It was precisely because of the conflict between the emerging modern worldview and the inherited dogma of centuries of ecclesiastical rule that *critical* study of the biblical texts[5] immediately gave birth to a Quest for a Jesus who did *not* look like the Jesus confessed by the Church. As prominent *Third Quest* author and New Testament scholar N. T. Wright has said: "The 'Quest' began as an explicitly anti-theological, anti-Christian, anti-dogmatic movement. Its

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[2] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (4th ed.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 16–17, 281–91; Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (3d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 257–83.

[3] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 22–64, 291–92.

[4] David C. Steinmetz, "The Intellectual Appeal of the Reformation," *ThTo* 57.4 (2001): 459–72.

[5] Here I am referring to the rise of historical criticism in Enlightenment Germany during the 18th century.

initial agenda was *not* to find a Jesus upon whom Christian faith might be based, but to show that the faith of the church (as it was then conceived) could not in fact be based on the real Jesus of Nazareth."[6] Thus, for example, David Friedrich Strauss, one of the most prominent German scholars involved in the original Quest, writes at the close of his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*:[7]

> The results of the inquiry which we have now brought to a close, have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Savior Jesus, have uprooted all the animating motives which he has gathered from his faith, and withered all his consolations. The boundless store of truth and life which for eighteen centuries has been the aliment of humanity, seems irretrievably dissipated; the most sublime leveled with the dust, God divested of his grace, man of his dignity, and the tie between heaven and earth broken.[8]

The Quest began as an explicit attempt by modern, Enlightenment intellectuals to *disprove* the Christological dogma of the Church by means of historical investigation.

Over the past 25 years or so, however, it has become increasingly common to speak not of *one* Quest, but of at least three. The present study is primarily interested in the most recent incarnation of the Quest, the so-called *Third Quest for the Historical Jesus*, and more specifically with the work of N. T. Wright. I hope to demonstrate that the research being produced by at least a handful of these Third Quest scholars presents the Academy with perhaps the most compelling critical reconstruction of the historical Jesus that the Quest has yet produced in its 200+ year history. This brief survey will hardly settle the question of which of the hundreds of reconstructions is the best. My purpose is to engage in critical dialog with the work of N. T. Wright. Before attempting this, however, I will set the Third Quest (of which Wright is a pivotal player) in its modern, historical context—that is, I will briefly survey the developments of the first two Quests, demonstrating how these previous attempts at portraying the historical Jesus have led up to the Third Quest. Naturally, only that which is of particular importance for the

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[6] Wright, *JVG*, 17.

[7] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. (trans. George Eliot; 1840; repr., ed. Peter C. Hodgson; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

[8] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 757. Cp. the sentiments of Bruno Bauer, quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, (trans. W. Montgomery; 1911; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005): " 'The expression of his contempt,' [Bruno] declares, 'is the last weapon which the critic, after refuting the arguments of the theologians, has at his disposal for their discomfiture; it is his right to use it; that puts the finishing touch upon his task and points forward to the happy time when the arguments of the theologians shall no more be heard of.' " (Schweitzer, 153)

shaping of the aims and interests of the Third Quest will be treated in this *brief* survey of the history of the Quests up to the 1980s. This chapter is not offered as a comprehensive survey.[9]

The First Quest

Ironically, the *First Quest* is best remembered for its demise at the hands of a young German scholar by the name of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). It was Schweitzer who (at the age of 31) wrote a brilliant and often praised survey of the First Quest that also served as a crushing critique, effectively bringing the First Quest to an end.[10] In it, Schweitzer identifies the beginning of critical portrayal of the historical Jesus with a German scholar named Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). "Before Reimarus," writes Schweitzer, "no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus."[11] While Reimarus taught and published works of biblical scholarship during the first half of the 18th century, the work that Schweitzer mainly refers to[12] was published ten years after Reimarus's death, in 1778, by the German Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. This connection with Lessing is not unimportant and shall be explored further later on in this chapter. Despite these publishing efforts, Schweitzer says that Reimarus's work did not become well-known until Strauss brought him to the attention of the scholarly community in the mid-19th century.[13]

Reimarus wrote, as did most First Quest authors, with an explicit aim at undermining the Church's portrait of Jesus. A product of the burgeoning German Enlightenment, where rationalism sought to vanquish supernaturalism and deism sought to enlighten the crass religion of the Church, Reimarus offered a portrait of Jesus that was completely devoid of the miraculous and the "divine." Reimarus portrayed Jesus as a Jewish revolutionary who sought the overthrow of the Roman occupiers of 1st century Palestine. Jesus preached the Kingdom of God and taught his disciples to do so in order "that the Jews who groaned under the Roman yoke and had long cherished the hope of deliverance should be stirred up all over Judea and assemble themselves in

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[9] For a much more thorough survey see, among *many* others, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

[10] Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. For an example of the commonplace recognition of Schweitzer's pivotal role in the demise of the *First Quest* see Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 5–6.

[11] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 13. See David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying about the Historical Jesus?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 4 for the view that even Reimarus' work on the historical Jesus had predecessors.

[12] Hermann Samuel Reimarus's "The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples," published in Charles H. Talbert, *Reimarus: Fragments* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

[13] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 14.

the thousands."[14] Ultimately, this revolution was unsuccessful, and upon Jesus' death, his disciples stole his body and reinterpreted Jesus' message about his *parousia* (cf. Mk 13 and pars.) in such a way as to warrant the apparent "delay" in Jesus' return to establish his kingdom. Of course, Jesus never intended anything other than that his revolution should lead to the establishment of the Kingdom of God during his lifetime, and the reinterpretation of his message by his disciples after his death demonstrates that the entirety of "Christianity rests upon a fraud."[15] With such a portrait of Jesus, Reimarus truly was "the great iconoclast."[16]

Schweitzer's principal praise of Reimarus is that he recognized that Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God was an essentially *eschatological* message. This point is of massive importance to the entire history of the Quests, and especially to the Third Quest currently in progress. While Schweitzer disagrees with Reimarus's interpretation of Jesus' eschatology, both men used the term *eschatology* to describe an expectation of the imminent end of human history.[17] For Reimarus, Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Schweitzer, and many scholars even today the fact that Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God was *eschatological* means that Jesus expected the end of human history and/or the world during his lifetime or shortly thereafter. The disagreement between Reimarus, Schweitzer, and others who accept this definition of eschatology is only in regard to *how* the imminent end of the world was to take place in Jesus' view, not *that* it was to take place. In Reimarus's portrait, Jesus expected the end of the world and the beginning of the Kingdom of God to be brought about by means of *political revolution*. This is where Schweitzer disagrees.[18] Schweitzer will ultimately argue that Jesus' eschatology— that is, Jesus' message of the end of the world and the beginning of the Kingdom of God—was essentially *apocalyptic* in nature; the end would come not through political revolution, but through a decisive intervention by God. Though Schweitzer disagrees with Reimarus over the *how* of Jesus' eschatology, his praise of Reimarus is unadulterated because "Reimarus was the first, after eighteen centuries of misconception, to have an inkling of what eschatology really

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[14] Reimarus, quoted in Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 17.
[15] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 22.
[16] Wright, *JVG*, 16.
[17] Cf. Schweitzer's famous quote on p.10 of this study.
[18] "[T]he sole mistake of Reimarus [was] the assumption that the eschatology [of Jesus] was earthly and political in character." (Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 23)

was."[19] The importance of the discussion about Jesus' eschatology for the Quest for the Historical Jesus simply cannot be overstated.

The First Quest reached its next peak with the work of the aforementioned Tübingen scholar David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874). Schweitzer's central praise for Strauss is "that prior to him the conception of myth was neither truly grasped nor consistently applied."[20] Strauss defines a myth as "the representation of an event or of an idea in a form which is historical, but, at the same time characterized by the rich pictorial and imaginative mode of thought and expression of the primitive ages."[21] Strauss found in the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels (he was one of the first to reject any historical role for the Fourth Gospel[22]) the kernel of a moderately historically accurate portrait of Jesus overlaid with the pericopes addressing the ecclesiastical concerns of the later Evangelists. That is to say that the majority of the material presented in the Synoptic Gospels—Jesus' miraculous deeds, his discourses, even the parables—is to be understood as later, mythological invention by the early church, attached to the historically accurate account of Jesus, who perceived himself as the Messiah and Son of Man who would inaugurate the Kingdom of God when God acted decisively to commence the Kingdom. In identifying Jesus' eschatological vision as contingent upon God's direct intervention, Strauss initially embraced the *apocalyptic* portrayal of Jesus' eschatology that would be later developed by Johannes Weiss and Schweitzer. Before the end of his career, however, "in his 'Life of Jesus for the German People' (1864) . . . he renounced his better opinions of 1835, eliminated eschatology, and, instead of the historic Jesus, portrayed the Jesus of liberal theology."[23] Nevertheless, Strauss anticipated the work of later historical Jesus scholarship that attempted to place Jesus squarely within the context of 1st century apocalyptic.

Schweitzer's main concern was to trace this development in understanding Jesus' eschatological vision from Reimarus, through the early Strauss, to Johannes Weiss, and ultimately to his own portrait of Jesus. This discussion about the eschatology of Jesus is central to the developments of the Third Quest; nevertheless, several First Quest scholars who took non-eschatological paths in painting their portraits of Jesus are also of great significance to developments in the later Quests.

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[19] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 23.
[20] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 78.
[21] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 53.
[22] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 85.
[23] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 96.

Among such scholars are Bruno Bauer (1809–1882) and Martin Kähler (1835–1912). In reviewing their work,[24] we must again mention Reimarus's posthumous publisher, Lessing. It was Lessing's philosophical conception of the "great ugly ditch" between history and faith that gave shape to Bauer's and Kähler's distinction between the *Jesus of history* and the *Christ of faith*.[25] In Bauer's multiple works on the Gospels[26] he contends that the Gospels are *purely literary compositions*—inventions of the Evangelists—and that there is no historical Jesus to be found therein. The portraits of Jesus in the Synoptics are the projections of the experiences of the early Church. Both the claim that Jesus was Messiah and the messianic expectations of first century Jews were invented by the Gospels' authors (Matthew and Luke following Mark, and John as a separate tradition equating the Messiah with the more developed Greek concept of the Logos). The Jesus of history, then, is simply unknowable; the Christ of faith, the literary invention of the Evangelists. It is no surprise, then, to encounter foretastes of Bultmann in Bauer's appraisal of the Gospels: "Jesus could only be held to be the Messiah in consequence of doing miracles; but He only began to do miracles when, *in the faith of the early Church*, *He rose from the dead as Messiah*, and the facts that He rose as Messiah and that He did miracles, are one and the same fact."[27] Kähler explicates this distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith even farther in his 1892 work *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*.[28] To some extent, the perception of the distinction between Jesus as an historical figure and the Christ that the Church worships has been the central driving force of the Quest since Reimarus, but it was Bauer and Kähler who gave shape to the hypothesis that the historical sources we have (that is, the canonical Gospels) do not even aim to give us an historical picture of Jesus; rather, they aim to give us a picture of the Christ of faith.

Among other critical issues first wrestled with in a substantial way during the First Quest was the Synoptic Problem, but before the specific Synoptic Problem was addressed, the broader problem of the historical reliability of *any* of the four Gospels was posed. We have already seen

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[24] Schweitzer himself only reviews Bauer's work (Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 137–60), but Kähler's work is both related to Bauer's and falls within the chronological parameters of the First Quest as well.

[25] This dichotomy is already anticipated in the work of Strauss, to some extent. (Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 783–84)

[26] E.g. Bruno Bauer *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes* (Bremen, 1840); *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* (2 vols.; Leipzig, 1841); *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs* (3 vols. Berlin, 1850–1851).

[27] Quoted in Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 149, emphasis mine.

[28] Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (ed. and trans. Carl E. Braaten; 1896; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

that skepticism regarding the historicity of the Gospel narratives stretches back all the way to Reimarus, who argued that the disciples who had stolen Jesus' body at Easter also reinterpreted his revolutionary message in the Gospels. This skepticism of the historicity of the Gospels has been a hallmark of the Quest since its inception. Christian Hermann Weisse (1801–1866) did not set out to debunk this skeptical view of the Gospel's historicity, although to some extent this was the agenda of the later Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1832–1910). Despite possible divergent agendas, however, both scholars came to the conclusion that Mark was to be viewed as the earliest Gospel and as the primary source for the compositions of both Matthew and Luke.[29] This theory of *Markan Priority* has retained a broad consensus in the scholarly community to this day.

Once Mark had been established as the first written canonical Gospel, the issue of what has come to be known as the "messianic secret" in Mark came to be addressed. The key work is William Wrede's (1859–1907) *The Messianic Secret* (1901).[30] In it, Wrede builds upon the skepticism of Bauer and Kähler—who had argued that Mark and the other Gospels were essentially of very little *historical* use because they were theologically motivated works of literature—as well as the Markan Priority hypothesis of Weisse and Holtzmann. Wrede proposed that there was an incongruity that had not been historically accounted for between the early church's contention that Jesus was Messiah and the apparent lack of compelling historical evidence that Jesus ever made this self-claim. Wrede's thesis was that Mark solved this tension by inventing the "messianic secret"—the idea that Jesus *did* know himself to be Messiah and acknowledged as much among his close disciples, but hushed anyone outside the inner circle who figured out this secret. Thus, in the many texts in Mark where demons who are about to be exorcized by Jesus, people who have been healed by him, and even his own disciples proclaim that they know him to be the Messiah or make some equivalent declaration, we see that they are in turn immediately hushed by Jesus (Mk 1:23–25, 34, 43–45; 3:11f.; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26; cf. 8:30). The key text is Mark 9:9, where, immediately after the Transfiguration, Jesus orders Peter, James, and John "to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead." This is how Mark reconciled the historical fact (according to Wrede) that *Jesus*

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[29] Christian Hermann Weisse. *Die Evangelische Geschichte Kritisch und Philosophiscb Bearbeitet* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Breitkopf and Hartel, 1838). Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien. Ihr Ursprung und Geschichtliche Character* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1863).

[30] William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (trans. J. C. G. Greig; Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. LTD., 1971).

never publicly claimed to be Messiah with the fact that he was, immediately following Easter, proclaimed to be such by his disciples. The idea that Jesus kept his role as Messiah secret during his public career is, according to Wrede, a pure invention of Mark.

This particular thesis of Wrede, which has had a huge influence on the New Testament scholarly community over the past century, is indicative of a larger attitude of skepticism toward the Gospels that has perhaps had an even more comprehensive effect on scholars. This is, in fact, what Wrede has become most well-known for within the Third Quest—namely, what Schweitzer referred to as "Thoroughgoing Skepticism."[31] Wrede's basic stance toward the Gospels is one of mistrust. He begins his work on Mark's Gospel by saying that "it is indeed an axiom of historical criticism in general that what we have before us is actually just a later narrator's conception of Jesus' life and that this conception is not identical with the thing itself. But the *axiom exercises much too little influence*."[32] Wrede would have historians take a thoroughly skeptical stance toward the historical nature of the Gospels. They are to be treated as theological literature, not as historical documents; therefore, they cannot provide the historian with accurate information regarding the historical Jesus.

This "thoroughgoing skepticism" was identified by Schweitzer as the major competing paradigm for the continuing Quest at the turn of the century, over against Schweitzer's own "thoroughgoing apocalyptic."[33] This emphasis on apocalyptic did not originate with Schweitzer; it was first hinted at by Strauss (see p.6 above) and fully developed by Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) in his 1892 work entitled *Jesus' Preaching of the Kingdom of God*.[34] It was Weiss who, according to Schweitzer, forced the question of eschatology fully upon the scholarly community: either Jesus was to be understood eschatologically or he was not.[35] Weiss argued for "the transcendental and apocalyptic character of Jesus' idea of the Kingdom of God."[36] Jesus did not attempt to start a revolution to bring about the eschatological Kingdom of God, as Reimarus had

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[31] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 328–95.

[32] Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 5, emphasis original.

[33] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, chapter 19. That is not to suggest that Schweitzer and those who sought to locate Jesus within an eschatological paradigm did not approach the canonical Gospels with some measure of skepticism. It is to say only that this skepticism was not so comprehensive as to dissuade them from performing historical reconstructions of Jesus' life and ministry, as it had been for Wrede.

[34] Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (ed. and trans. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), trans. of *Die Predigt jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

[35] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 237.

[36] Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation*, 129.

proposed, but instead "wait[ed] like others for God to bring about the coming of the Kingdom by supernatural means."[37] The Kingdom would begin with a decisive, supernatural—i.e. apocalyptic—act of God. Schweitzer agreed with Weiss completely on this point. The most compelling portrait of the historical Jesus was, according to Weiss and Schweitzer, one that placed Jesus firmly within the context of apocalyptic eschatology. This Jesus could be deduced from the biased, yet (mostly) historically reliable Synoptic Gospels—especially the earliest of these compositions, Mark.

So what of Schweitzer's own evaluation of this apocalyptic eschatological Jesus? His poetic sentiments have been often cited, but they are worth citing again:

> Soon after that [the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry] comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution *which is to bring all ordinary history to a close*. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.[38]

Two brief comments on this appraisal of Jesus by Schweitzer are of significant importance for the later Quests, and in particular for the Third Quest. First, as I have highlighted with italics in the passage itself, Schweitzer identifies Jesus' aim as in some way being that "which is to bring all ordinary history to a close." That is to say, Schweitzer understood Jesus' apocalyptic eschatological outlook to entail the end of the world, the end of human history. This point is of extreme importance to the Third Quest insofar as several members of the Third Quest, including N. T. Wright, will directly question Schweitzer's appraisal of apocalyptic eschatology.[39] Second, Schweitzer appraised Jesus' mission as essentially a failed one. Jesus failed to accomplish that which he set out to execute. Specifically, Jesus' death did not bring about the Eschaton as he had—according to Schweitzer—thought that it would.

"But the truth is," concludes Schweitzer, "it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical

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[37] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 238.
[38] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 369–70, emphasis mine. Gowler notes that Schweitzer omitted this entire passage from the 1913 revision of his work. (Gowler, *WATSA Historical Jesus*, 13)
[39] I will return to this point in chapter 3 of this study, in which I examine Wright's critique of Schweitzer's understanding of apocalyptic.

Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world."[40] Ultimately, this Jesus "comes to us as one unknown."[41] That is not to say that we cannot know about the historical Jesus; we certainly can and do, according to Schweitzer, within the historical study of 1st century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. The historical Jesus certainly can be known, but the Jesus that can help modern man is not the historical Jesus. "Jesus as a concrete historical personality remains a stranger to our time, but His spirit, which lies hidden in His words, is known in simplicity, and its influence is direct."[42] It is precisely our now knowing the historical Jesus—as one who mistakenly believed that his actions would be the immediate harbinger of the apocalyptic act of God—that makes him an unhelpful "stranger" to our modern times.

This is how the First Quest comes to a decisive end. Schweitzer's insistence that the Quest comprehensively embrace either thoroughgoing skepticism or thoroughgoing apocalyptic was heard loud and clear by the next generation of Questers. The next generation, with the eminent Rudolf Bultmann at the helm, resolutely chose the former option.

The *Via Negativa*

Of the next two phases of the Quest—the *Via Negativa* and the *New/Second Quest*—I will highlight only a few major themes. We may roughly date the period currently under consideration—the so-called *Via Negativa*—from the time of the publishing of Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) to the time of Ernst Käsemann's presentation of his paper entitled "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" in 1953.

This period has come to be known as the *Via Negativa* or the *No Quest* precisely because Schweitzer's critique of the First Quest had been so devastating that there was little to no motivation during this time to renew a fervent effort at reconstructing the Historical Jesus. Wrede's attitude of thoroughgoing skepticism was embraced by the major contributors of this period, which saw the rise of *Formgeschichte* (form criticism). Soulen and Soulen define the role of form criticism in NT studies: "The purpose of NT form criticism as traditionally defined was to rediscover the origin and history of the individual units and thereby to shed some light on the history of the tradition before it took literary form, that is, to determine whether the various

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[40] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 399.
[41] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 401.
[42] Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 399.

units are traceable to Jesus, to the EARLY CHURCH, or to the redactional (editorial) activity of the Gospel writers."[43] The consistent conclusion of the form critics of this period—with Rudolf Bultmann[44] being the chief of them—was that little to nothing found in the final form of the canonical Gospels could be directly attributed to Jesus.[45]

While Rudolf Bultmann is arguably the greatest NT scholar of the 20th century, the bulk of his accomplishments and influence falls outside the scope of this study. What is important to note about Bultmann in relationship to the Quest for the Historical Jesus can be summarized thusly: (1) Bultmann renewed and became the chief articulator of Bauer's and Kähler's distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith;[46] (2) Bultmann embraced the thoroughgoing skepticism of Wrede and infamously concluded that "we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."[47] These observations led Bultmann to the conclusion that the Christ of faith's message was essentially an existential call to decision. Bultmann's existential Christology, demythologized reading of the Gospels, and form critical methodology dominated the field of NT scholarship on Jesus during this period, and have remained influential to this day.

Marcus Borg, an influential scholar of the current phase of historical Jesus research, has summarized the sentiments concerning the Historical Jesus present during this period of the Quest:

> Throughout this period, three central convictions operated strongly in the collective consciousness of New Testament scholars and those they taught . . . . First, there was a strong sense of the theological irrelevance of historical Jesus research. . . . Second, there was a strong conviction that little could be known about the historical Jesus. . . . A third conviction [held that] the minimalist picture of Jesus' message that could be recovered was eschatological: Jesus expected and proclaimed the imminent end of the world.[48]

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[43] Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 63.

[44] Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (2d ed.; trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

[45] Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook*, 63.

[46] Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, passim. Cf. Emil Brunner's claim that "the Christian faith does not arise out of the picture of the historical Jesus" and that "the Jesus of history is not the same as the Christ of faith" (*The Mediator* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], 159).

[47] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 8.

[48] Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 3–4.

This is an apt summary of the attitudes toward the Historical Jesus during this period of the Quest. In a way, the third conviction concerning the eschatological nature of Jesus' ministry (the product of Schweitzer's investigation) drove the scholarship of this period to "thoroughgoing skepticism," which gave birth to the first two convictions Borg lists. It was precisely *because* Schweitzer had so thoroughly demonstrated Jesus' eschatological intentions that Bultmann and others of the *Via Negativa* period of the Quest downplayed the importance of an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus. Not only would the redactional Gospel accounts hinder gathering such information, but, more importantly, an apocalyptically- or eschatologically-minded Jesus simply could not be helpful to the modern world, which had (rightly, argued Bultmann) abandoned the eschatological worldview held by 1st century Jews.

The New/Second Quest

Such were the conclusions of the Quest until a pupil of Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, revolted, at least in part. On October 20, 1953, Käsemann presented a lecture[49] to a group of fellow students of Bultmann in which he argued *both* that writing anything like a 19th century *Life of Jesus* was an impossibility given the redactional nature of our sources *and* that the Jesus of history must, nevertheless, be investigated lest Christians become docetists and the name Jesus a meaningless symbol that could be used to legitimate any claim made about the Christ of faith.[50] Käsemann revolted against the Bauer-Kähler-Bultmann line that argued that the Jesus of history was unknowable and, in any case, unrelated to the Christ of faith; he did not revolt, however, against the essential Wrede-Bultmann stance of "thoroughgoing skepticism." That is to say that Käsemann inherited his teacher's basic form critical assumption—that the texts of the Gospels were highly redactional, encasing more than anything else the *kerygma* of the early church in identifiable "forms," over against a portrait of the Historical Jesus. He agreed with the form critics that "we can learn nothing at all about the historical Jesus except through the medium of primitive Christian preaching and of the Church's dogma which is bound up with it."[51] This did *not* lead Käsemann, however, as it did Bultmann, to the conclusion that the Jesus of history simply cannot be known. Rather, Käsemann embraced the claim that "we can no

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[49] Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, Inc., 1964).

[50] Wright argues that it was precisely the Nazi's use of "Jesus" for their own program that Käsemann feared was the result of having declared the Jesus of history irrelevant to the Christ of faith. (Wright, *JVG*, 23)

[51] Käsemann, 17.

longer detach [the Jesus of history] neatly and satisfactorily from the Christ of preaching and of faith,"[52] and advocated moving the Quest for the Historical Jesus forward through the use of source-, form-, and redaction-critical "tests for authenticity." By means of such tests, scholars could hope to identify with reasonable certainty that kernel of historical information in the Gospels (particularly Jesus' *sayings*) that was truly authentic to the historical Jesus, and not simply the product of later theological redactions by the Evangelists.

Käsemann told his colleagues, "My own concern is to show that, out of the obscurity of the life story of Jesus, certain characteristic traits in his preaching stand out in relatively sharp relief, and that primitive Christianity united its own message with these."[53] This concern became the concern of the post-Bultmannian school of scholars who comprised what was then known as the New Quest and has, since the advent of the Third Quest, come to be sometimes referred to as the Second Quest. These scholars—most notable among them being Bornkamm,[54] Robinson,[55] and Schillebeeckx[56]—became professionals in applying the tests for authenticity to the canonical Gospels. In truth, Käsemann and these New Quest scholars were simply rising to the challenge posed by Wrede at the turn of the century: "How do we separate what [in the Gospels] belongs properly to Jesus from what is the material of the primitive community?"[57] Their answers to Wrede's question were the multiple tests for authenticity.

The question that dominated this period of the Quest was, *What are the proper criteria to be used in testing for authentic historical Jesus material in the Gospels?* N.T. Wright reviews four major criteria used during the New Quest.[58] The first was the "criterion of double dissimilarity." This criterion proposes that material from the Gospels that is dissimilar both to that which is found in contemporary Jewish sources and that which is found in early church sources can be deemed authentic. The obvious critique is that this makes Jesus a completely unique phenomenon, detached from both his cultural environment and his followers' intentions. As Wright says, "sayings discovered by such means are unlikely to have been central to Jesus' purpose. He was, after all, working in a Jewish setting, and the church did claim to be following

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[52] Käsemann, 17.

[53] Kasemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, Inc., 1964), 46.

[54] Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

[55] James A. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1959). It was Robinson to whom is attributed the first use of the title "New Quest."

[56] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

[57] Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 4.

[58] Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 9.

his teaching, not inventing something new."[59] A second criterion was "multiple attestation," which asserts that something is authentic historical Jesus material if it is found in more than one independent strand of tradition. "This sounds fine," says Wright, "until it is actually applied; for in any given case, if a saying is found in two different places, some critic somewhere will claim that one of the passages depends on the other."[60] A third and similar criterion is that of "consistency." A saying is authentic historical Jesus material if it fits consistently with other material discovered to be authentic historical Jesus material. This of course raises the question, How do we know that what we are comparing this saying to is *itself* historical Jesus material? The fourth criterion comprises "linguistic and cultural tests," most of which were designed to test whether or not a saying fits in the Aramaic-speaking context of the historical Jesus. The Gospels' presentation of Jesus' calling God "Abba" (Father) is the classic example. The critique of this criteria is largely that it "flies in the face of the first one (dissimilarity), which starts by looking for the sayings which do *not* fit into the cultural milieu of the time."[61] It is not difficult to see how this approach to doing historical Jesus research led to significantly more bickering about methodological concerns than to actual progress in presenting an historically compelling portrait of Jesus of Nazareth.

The works of this period tend to be voluminous, focusing on the methodologies for properly determining authentic Jesus material, while only giving the most meager of conclusions concerning what the historical Jesus actually said, let alone what he *did*.[62] The New Quest produced "lengthy histories of tradition out of which could be squeezed one or two more drops of authentic Jesus-material . . . ."[63] Such a meager Quest could not sustain itself for very long, and by the early 1970s—with the exception of Schillebeeckx's work in the late 70s—it had essentially run its course.

Conclusions Thus Far

This brings us to the front door of the Third Quest, and so it will be profitable to take stock of the Quest up to this point before proceeding to the second chapter of this study. I

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[59] Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*, 9.

[60] Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*, 9.

[61] Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*, 9.

[62] Again, the focus during this period was upon the *sayings* of Jesus; reports of his *actions* were not easily assessed by the "tests for authenticity."

[63] Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861–1986* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 379.

propose a summary of the Quest from its origins in the 18th century up to the 1970s that identifies three key questions that had become essential to the Quest up to this point: (1) The basic historical question: Can we even know the Jesus of history, or are we consigned to know the Christ of faith alone? (2) The question of sources, which is tightly related to the basic historical question: To what extent, if any, do the canonical Gospels provide reliable historical information about Jesus? (3) The all-important eschatological question: To what extent was Jesus' ministry eschatologically driven and to what extent did he expect eschatological events to occur during his life and/or death?[64] The way in which authors answer these questions largely determines how compelling a portrait of the historical Jesus they are able to offer. Taking into account these three questions, a brief summary of the authors thus far considered follows below.

In regard to the first, the basic historical question, it is clear that the Quest initially came into being precisely because Reimarus answered "yes" to this question, as did the major stream of First Quest authors—e.g. Strauss, Holtzmann, Weiss, and Schweitzer. The Jesus of history *could* be known apart from the Christ of faith. In fact, this dominant stream of the First Quest, originating with Reimarus, had proposed that it was precisely *apart* from the Christ of faith that the Jesus of history would be accurately identified; the Jesus of history surely *did not* look like the Christ that Church dogma confessed. This belief that the Jesus of history could be recovered lapsed during the *Via Negativa* period of the Quest, and was only partially revived by Käsemann during the New Quest. The New Quest authors essentially tried to answer the basic historical question in both the affirmative and the negative. The Jesus of history *could* be known, but only in a very minute way, since the Gospels' historical information was heavily overlaid with theological confession of the Christ of faith. Thus, by the 1970s there had been no robust "Yes!" answered to this basic historical question since the time of the First Quest. There was, however, an influential minority in the First Quest who answered "no" to this first question. Struass's work on "myth" in the Gospels had paved the way for Bauer and Kähler to make this negative response. The only primary documents available on the historical Jesus are documents composed with the specific theological aim of converting hearers and readers to faith in *Christ*. Therefore, the Jesus of history was simply unknowable. Some lamented this fact; most rejoiced

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[64] A century after Schweitzer, Gowler says that the answer to the question about "whether Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who preached the imminent end of the world . . . may be, in fact, the single most important historical answer about Jesus, because it is tied directly to the essential nature of his person, message, and mission." (Gowler, *WATSA Historical Jesus*, 15)

in it (Lessing's ditch was a comfort to those wanting to maintain the faith). Wrede buttressed this negative response with his work on the "messianic secret," and Bultmann institutionalized the negative response in his form critical work during the *Via Negativa*. As we saw, even Käsemann's New Quest partially answered this basic historical question with a "no."

The second question, regarding the historical reliability of the Gospel sources, has been addressed in surveying authors' responses to the first, basic historical question. Those like Bauer, Kähler, Wrede, and Bultmann embraced a thoroughgoing skepticism that denied the historical reliability of the Gospels; those like Reimarus, Weiss, and Schweitzer—while embracing a certain skepticism of their own toward the canonical Gospels—still saw them as sources from which an historically reliable portrait of Jesus could be reconstructed.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by examining these First, No, and New Quest authors' responses to the third key question: the eschatological question. The major point of Schweitzer's work was to demonstrate that Jesus' public ministry was eschatologically driven from beginning (his baptism by John) to end (his death in Jerusalem). Jesus thoroughly expected, according to Schweitzer, that his actions—culminating in his death—would bring about the necessary conditions for the apocalyptic inbreaking of God's kingdom. Jesus was to be understood as an historical figure with an eschatological agenda. This was the answer given by the stream of the First Quest including Reimarus, (the early) Strauss, Johannes Weiss, and Schweitzer himself. In a way, the skepticism of the Bauer-Kähler-Wrede stream of the First Quest answered this question ambiguously: "We *can*not (or perhaps *will* not) know much about the historical Jesus anyway, so no real answer can be given concerning whether or not his agenda was eschatological." During the *Via Negativa*, as we saw, most scholars *accepted* Schweitzer's positive answer to the eschatological question, but it was largely *because* they recognized the eschatological dimension of the historical Jesus that they ignored the historical Jesus. Eschatology was reworked to the existential call to decision, and the crass 1st century apocalyptic worldview was denounced as unhelpful and downright strange to the modern world. Käsemann's New Quest essentially answered the eschatological question in exactly the same way Bultmann had. In this way Käsemann did not deviate from his teacher; the historical Jesus probably *was* eschatological, but surely that was not what was important about him.

Having briefly surveyed the first 200 years of the Quest, this study will proceed to briefly consider the immediate historical context of N.T. Wright's work: the so-called Third Quest.

CHAPTER 2

THE THIRD/RENEWED/POST-QUEST

Most New Testament scholars today agree that a new phase of historical Jesus studies began in the opening half of the 1980s. No consensus has been reached, however, concerning how best to define or describe this new phase of research. Three terms often used to identify this phase of research are *Third Quest*, *Renewed Quest*, and *Post-Quest*. The purpose of the present chapter is to identify the major characteristics of this current phase of research, to summarize the major contributions that comprise it, and to present the two dominant streams of scholarship currently emerging within it—one of which paints a much more compelling portrait of the historical Jesus than the other. This brief survey will serve to illuminate the specific reconstruction of the historical Jesus by N.T. Wright, so that a summary of his particular contributions (chapter 3) and a critique of one facet of his work (chapter 4) may be better understood.

What is the Third Quest/ Renewed Quest/ Post-Quest Anyway?

First, the terms must be defined and their origins explained. "Third Quest" is a term coined by N.T. Wright[65] to designate the sum of the research being performed by "those who follow Schweitzer in placing Jesus within apocalyptic Jewish eschatology."[66] This is the category where, in Wright's opinion, "the real leading edge of contemporary Jesus-scholarship is to be found."[67] It would be presumptuous to assume that each scholar Wright includes in this Third Quest—he lists twenty specific writers who, at least at the time of *JVG*'s publishing (1996), he believed to be a part of this Third Quest[68]—would agree with his adding them to such a list or with his description of what the basic thrust of Third Quest research looks like, but it has become a common designation nonetheless. "Renewed Quest," on the other hand, is a term

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[65] Many scholars seem to think that Wright's first use of this term was his article in the *ABD* (N. T. Wright, "Quest for the Historical Jesus," *ABD* 3:796–802) or his 1988 revision of Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). My research has led me to identify the term's origins in an article Wright wrote for McGill University's Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies's periodical in 1982: N.T. Wright, "Towards a Third 'Quest': Jesus Then and Now," *Arc* 10:20–7.
[66] Wright, *JVG*, 84.
[67] Wright, *JVG*, 84.
[68] Wright, *JVG*, 84.

coined by Jesus Seminar co-founder Robert Funk, who uses the term in polemical exchanges with Wright and other Third Questers.[69] The use of the term Renewed Quest intentionally draws a connection between the current research being done by Funk and other Jesus Seminar scholars and the so-called New Quest initiated by Käsemann. In Wright's opinion the New Quest has basically failed and has been superseded by the current Third Quest. In Funk's opinion, however, the New Quest had not nearly run its course, but after a lull was "*re*newed" by the current scholarship of the Jesus Seminar.[70] Wright says that the two key differences between the Renewed Quest and the Third Quest are hermeneutical and historical method on the one hand and historical focus on the other.[71] In an understandable attempt to avoid entering the fray of polemic like that tossed between Wright and Funk, some scholars have looked for a neutral term to describe the current phase of historical Jesus research. Tatum has opted for the term "Post-Quest," which he believes was inaugurated by two specific events in 1985: (1) the publishing of E.P. Sanders's *Jesus and Judaism* and (2) the first meeting of the Jesus Seminar.[72] No matter what term is used, however, almost all involved agree that historical Jesus research took on, if not a new, at least a fresh form beginning in the early- to mid-1980s.

So what essentially characterizes this new phase of historical Jesus research? Dale Allison argues that "the 'third quest' [by which he means to refer to what I have called all "current historical Jesus research"] has no truly distinguishing features. The most striking fact about recent research is that it resists easy generalization precisely because of its vast diversity. Contemporary work has no characteristic method. It has no body of shared conclusions. And it has no common set of historiographical or theological presuppositions." Allison proceeds to chide those who wish to oversimplify and categorize this current phase of historical Jesus research, saying that "[t]hose who continue to speak of the 'third quest' risk paying due heed to the present fragmentation and pluralism. At any rate, the age of the authentic consensus or the

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[69] The term is the title of chapter four of Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (New York: HaperCollins, 1996). For an example of Funk's polemic against the Third Quest see specifically Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 65, where Funk writes: "Third questers are really conducting a search primarily for historical evidence to support claims made on behalf of creedal Christianity and the canonical gospels. In other words, the third quest is an apologetic ploy." See also Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 64 where Funk says that there are two main groups in the current phase of historical Jesus research: his own group, the "reNEWed questers" and those like Wright, the "pretend questers."

[70] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 64 Cf. Wright, *JVG*, Ch.2: "Heavy Traffic on the Wredebahn: The 'New Quest' Renewed," 28–82.

[71] N. T. Wright, introduction to *The Aims of Jesus*, by Ben Meyer (London: SCM Press, 1979), 9e.

[72] W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 102.

easy generalization is gone."[73] Allison is right to highlight the diversity of research currently being conducted on the historical Jesus, but many scholars would disagree with his rejection of *any* overarching similarities among at least the majority of the research.

In fact, Allison's attempt at a non-categorization is actually quite close to the attempts by other authors at categorizing the current phase of historical Jesus research. It is precisely, as Allison has said, the lack of a "common set of . . . theological presuppositions" that several scholars point to as an overarching theme in current historical Jesus research. For example, in 1994 Walter Weaver said that "at this stage what seems more characteristic of this new movement is a lack of any special interest in the theological significance of its subject."[74] W. Barnes Tatum concurs that most current historical Jesus scholarship believes that its research should be "methodologically possible and theologically neutral."[75] This is not to suggest that current scholarship has sidled into the old positivist myth of historical objectivity,[76] but rather to highlight the fact that—to the contrary—scholars of this phase of research routinely state their theological positions and presuppositions and then conduct historical research in a way that is largely unrelated to those presuppositions.[77] Add to this the fact that there are more and more non-Christian participants conducting research into the historical Jesus that is not theologically motivated, and we can conclude that one of the themes of current historical Jesus research is a general *theological disinterestedness*.

This last sentence points toward another theme in current Jesus research—namely, *the application of diverse, non-theological disciplines, especially social sciences, to the study of the historical Jesus*. It will suffice for the present discussion to cite the reviews of other scholars on this issue. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz have argued that one of the common themes in Third Quest research is that "sociological interest" has replaced "theological interest."[78] Ben Witherington says that a "sort of 'thick' description of Jesus' social, economic and religious

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[73] *NIDB*, 264.

[74] James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver, eds., *Images of Jesus Today* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), xiv.

[75] W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 104.

[76] In fact most current scholars go out of their way to reject this positivistic view. Cf. for instance N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), passim, but especially Part II, pp.29–144.

[77] Cf. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 334: "I am a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant, brought up in a church dominated by low Christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it, or that he died for the sake of its principles."

[78] Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 10-11.

world is characteristic of the Third Quest and reflects a reaction to the Second [i.e. New] Quest, which had a certain culturally detached way of analyzing Jesus."[79] Richard A Horsley's *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (1987) is often cited as one of the most important works on the sociological milieu of Jesus in 1st century Palestinian Jewish society, and it is characteristic of the types of concerns of current historical Jesus scholars.[80] Equally, if not more, important is Geza Vermes's *Jesus the Jew* (1973), which is the first of a trilogy of books[81] written by Vermes that asserts that "Jesus is to be seen as part of first-century charismatic Judaism and as the paramount example of the early Hasidim or Devout,"[82] who, like the characters Honi and Hanina ben Dosa,[83] produces miraculous deeds beheld by the common folks of Galilee. Vermes's depiction of Jesus throughout all three books—though highly controversial—includes a detailed description of the world of 1st century Judaism in Galilee. This is precisely the kind of sociological research that the current phase of historical Jesus research thrives on. Such a comprehensive interest in sociological reconstruction of 1st century Jewish life pervades the current research that at least one notable scholar has concluded that "the quest for the historical Jesus 'is rapidly in danger of becoming the quest for the historical Galilee.' "[84]

The field of *archaeology* has also become more important than ever in historical reconstructions of Jesus and his world. Scholars participating in this new phase of historical Jesus research have begun to argue that an historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus that is informed by textual evidence alone—even if it works well beyond the confines of the canonical Gospels—and *not* also by current archaeological evidence is an inadequate reconstruction. In a book entitled *Excavating Jesus*, John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed lay out what they

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[79] Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. (2d ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 15. Presumably Witherington here refers to the New Quest's propensity for analyzing the sayings of Jesus in isolation from their narrative and/or historical context.

[80] Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987).

[81] Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphis: Fortress Press, 1984). Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

[82] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 79.

[83] Both of whom are discussed in Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 69–78.

[84] Sean Freyne, "The Geography, Politics and Economics of Galilee," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: The Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 76.

deem as the top ten most important archaeological discoveries that relate to the historical Jesus.[85] Discoveries such as the ossuary of the high priest Caiaphas in 1990; the inscription naming Pontius Pilate as *prefect*, not *procurator*, in 1962; and the first-century boat discovered in the Sea of Galilee in 1986 must all come to bear on the historian's reconstruction of the life of Jesus as a first-century Palestinian Jew. The use of various interdisciplinary techniques for studying the historical Jesus is, then, a hallmark of the current phase of historical Jesus research.

Finally, for those who align themselves with the Third Quest, although perhaps not those who align themselves with the Renewed Quest, there has also been a renewed interest in spelling out *a rigorous historical methodology*.[86] One late-70s work in particular has been of key importance to spelling out what a more rigorous historical methodology might look like in terms of historical Jesus research. This work was Ben Meyer's *The Aims of Jesus* (1979),[87] which has exercised a great influence upon two prominent Third Quest authors—E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright. In *The Aims of Jesus*, Meyer draws upon the epistemological work of Bernard Lonergan[88] to propose a definition of *history* that he believes the majority of Jesus scholarship—including Strauss, Wrede, and Bultmann[89]—has ignored: "History," says Meyer, "is reconstruction through hypothesis and verification."[90] This simple proposal is fleshed out by Meyer throughout the first half of his book and put into practice in Meyer's own brief reconstruction of Jesus in the second half. This reconstruction is not unlike those proposed by Sanders and Wright, and hence, while Meyer's name may not be a prominent one in all reviews of the Third Quest, his impact via this pair of scholars resonates long and clear throughout recent historical Jesus research. His essential contribution is the notion that scholars must produce a comprehensive hypothesis concerning the *framework* within which Jesus ought to be understood, and then test that hypothetical framework against the evidence.

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[85] David Gowler presents a convenient list in a footnote on pp.173–74 of *WATSA the Historical Jesus*. Cf. also Ch.5 of James Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), which is entitled "The Jesus of History and the Archaeology of Palestine."

[86] Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 65 disdainfully but accurately describes this concern of Third Questers: "For third questers there can be no picking and choosing among sayings and acts as a way to determine who Jesus was [something Funk promotes heavily]. Instead, one must present a theory of the whole, set Jesus firmly within first-century Judaism, state what his real aims were, discover why he died, when the church began, and what kind of documents the canonical gospels are."

[87] Ben Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979; repr., San Jose, CA: Pickwick Publications, 2002).

[88] Ben Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 16f.

[89] Ben Meyer, *Aims of Jesus,* 19.

[90] Ben Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 19.

This may seem like an obvious and simplistic way to proceed in historical reconstruction, but the fact of the matter is that most historical Jesus research before Meyer (and some still today[91]) had proceeded in a very different fashion. At the risk of oversimplification, one could say that First Quest authors, like Strauss, conducted their reconstructions of Jesus by trimming off the fat of myth and miracle found in the Synoptics and attempting to piece together what was left into a coherent portrait of Jesus. That is, they began with certain Enlightenment presuppositions about what was possible and what was not and used only the data that they deemed credible for their reconstructions of the historical Jesus.   By the time of Käsemann the criteria of authenticity dominated the process of historical Jesus reconstruction. During this period it was essentially only the *sayings* of Jesus that were in view, and scholars reconstructed their respective canons of authentic Jesus *sayings* material by utilizing these complex criteria of authenticity. This methodology, characteristic of the New Quest, is also characteristic of the Jesus Seminar and its participant scholars (whom I will return to in the next section of the chapter). In opposition to these reconstructive procedures, Meyer proposes that reconstruction of the historical Jesus should proceed by simple hypothesis and verification. That is, scholars should propose an overarching portrait of Jesus and test this portrait against the evidence they encounter. This basic reconstructive methodology—adopted most notably, as mentioned above, by Sanders and Wright—may seem simple, but it has a real novelty about it within the field of historical Jesus studies.

This brief survey of the characteristics of this current phase of historical Jesus research leads me back to the first of three questions that were identified at the end of the first chapter of the present work—that is, what I called the "basic historical question." It was shown in the first chapter how this basic question—Can we reconstruct an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus?—largely received a negative answer during the majority of the 20th century. The Wrede-Bultmann line had, to some degree, accepted Schweitzer's notion that Jesus was a confused apocalypticist, but had basically taken a stance of thoroughgoing skepticism with regard to the historical reliability of sources concerning the historical Jesus (specifically the canonical Gospels), dismissing the pursuit of historical Jesus research in favor of reconstructing the *kerygma* of the early church. The answer to the question *Can we reconstruct an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus?* may have been at times—for instance, during the New Quest—

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[91] See supra. fn. 87 from Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 65.

tentatively answered in the affirmative, but the thoroughgoing skepticism that dominated the 20th century up until the late 70s and early 80s prevented anyone from ever answering with a robust affirmative, "Yes!" By the early- to mid-1980s, however, the situation was changing. The fetters of theologically motivated inquiry were being left behind. New interdisciplinary techniques were being applied to the study of the historical Jesus. Fresh archaeological data was emerging. Innovative and compelling proposals for how to conduct historical reconstruction were being formulated. Each of these factors contributed to "new enthusiasm that historical research did not need to lead to a dead end."[92] What we call the Third Quest, Renewed Quest, or Post-Quest began with scholars once again believing that accurate historical reconstruction of the historical Jesus could, in fact, be conducted.

What of the other two questions that were proposed at the end of chapter one? The second question is what I called "the question of sources": To what extent, if any, do the canonical Gospels provide reliable historical information about Jesus? The third question was highlighted as the most important of all the questions—the "eschatological question": To what extent was Jesus' ministry eschatologically driven and to what extent did he expect eschatological events to occur during his life and/or death? While almost all current historical Jesus research emphatically answers the basic historical question in the affirmative, the two broad streams of current historical Jesus research—the Third Quest and Renewed Quest[93]—part company over how to answer these other two questions.

The Renewed Quest: The Non-Eschatological Jesus of the Extra-Canonical Sources

As was mentioned earlier, W. Barnes Tatum dates the beginning of what he calls the "Post-Quest" from two events that occurred in 1985[94]—one of which was the first meeting of the Jesus Seminar, convened by co-founders Robert Funk and J. Dominic Crossan. Funk, Crossan, and the Seminar's scholars in general agree that an accurate reconstruction of the historical Jesus is possible, but—in an unprecedented move within historical Jesus scholarship—they have collectively concluded that greater historical reliability is to be attributed to *Thomas* and their

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[92] Witherington, *Jesus Quest*, 12–13.
[93] What I am here referring to as the "Third Quest" broadly corresponds to what N.T. Wright has identified as the "Schweitzerbahn"; what I am here referring to as the "Renewed Quest" broadly corresponds to what Wright has identified as the "Wredebahn." (Wright, *JVG*, 28–124)
[94] Cf. p.19.

own hypothetical reconstructions of *Q* than to the canonical Gospels.[95]   The Seminar's infamous and widely criticized color-coded system of voting[96] led to the bold conclusion that "[e]ighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the [canonical] gospels were not actually spoken by him."[97]   The very few sayings of Jesus that are retained by the Seminar from both the canonical Gospels and from *Thomas* portray a Jesus who was, as Richard Hays has critically posed, little more than "a talking head."[98]   He was, as Funk and Crossan similarly propose in separate monographs, Jesus the parable-teller, the teacher of subversive wisdom, the adamantly *non-apocalyptic sage.*

Robert Funk, co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, has produced few substantial works separate from the Jesus Seminar, but Part 2 of his previously cited *Honest to Jesus*, presents a comprehensive overview of his own individual reconstruction of the historical Jesus. In large part, the individual reconstruction is the same as the corporate reconstruction of the Jesus Seminar Funk leads; and, of course, this comes as no real surprise. Interestingly, however, Funk's distinct reconstruction of the historical Jesus depends heavily upon two parables—the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30–35) and what he calls "Profligate and Proper Sons" (Lk 15:11–32)—both of which the Jesus Seminar accepts as authentic despite the parables' inability to meet the Seminars own explicit criteria of authenticity.[99]   These parables—despite the Seminar's shaky declaration of their authenticity—are the key to understanding Jesus, according to Funk. Funk's portrait of Jesus and his description of Jesus' ministry end up in essentially the same place as the

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[95] A major part of the reason for the Seminar's unprecedented dependence upon these texts is the collective conclusion of the Seminar that the *hypothetical Q* document (which it assumes had a written form, though there is no written form of *Q* extant) and the first edition of the *Thomas* were written before the earliest canonical Gospel, Mark, probably in the 50s CE. (Robert Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993], 1–38, esp. 18)

[96] Funk et al., *Five Gospels*, 36–7. The abbreviated explanation is stated thusly:
"red: That's Jesus!
pink: Sure sounds like Jesus.
gray: Well, maybe.
black: There's been some mistake." (*Five Gospels*, 37)

[97] Funk et al., *Five Gospels*, 5.

[98] Quoted in Witherington, *Jesus Quest*, 42.

[99] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 170–196. For the parables' inability to meet the Seminar's own criteria of authenticity see, for instance, Funk et al., *Five Gospels*, 25: "In sorting out sayings and parables attributed to Jesus, gospel scholars are guided by this fundamental axiom: Only sayings and parables that can be traced back to the oral period, 30–50 C.E., can possibly have originated with Jesus. Words that can be demonstrated to have been first formulated by the gospel writers are eliminated from contention." Neither of these two parables can meet that criterion if the Seminar has already decided that *Q* and *Thomas* best represent the early oral period. Despite the contention that the Seminar is guided by this "fundamental axiom," the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is unique to Luke alone, gets a red rating [!] in *The Five Gospels*, 323; the parable of the 'Profligate and Proper Sons' (a.k.a. the Prodigal Son), which is also unique to Luke alone, gets a pink rating, *The Five Gospels*, 356–7.

Seminar's. Jesus was "a subversive sage,"[100] not an apocalypticist,[101] who was *irreligious, irreverent*, and *impious*,"[102] and who simply invited people into "an unbrokered relationship to God."[103] Jesus' "kingdom of God" was, according to Funk, essentially Jesus' own "new logic" expressed in his parables, his "imagined world [in which] normal, everyday expectations are regularly frustrated."[104] It is something completely devoid of what is often referred to as *Jewish eschatology* or *apocalyptic*. Everything that the canonical Gospels and the orthodox tradition of the church present Jesus to be is essentially wrong—even the crucifixion of Jesus is not historically indubitable.[105] One wonders how Funk can sustain an argument against the historical credibility of an event as widely accepted—both in ancient and modern times—as the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, while presenting what he believes to be an historically accurate portrayal of Jesus the "subversive sage" on the basis of evidence his own criteria ought to reject as inauthentic. Funk's portrait fails to convince, and his personal revisionist agendas shine through as clearly in *Honest to Jesus* as the Seminar's do in the *Five Gospels*.[106]

The independent work of John Dominic Crossan—most notably his 1991 work confidently entitled *The Historical Jesus*[107]—once again echoes the major themes of the Jesus Seminar. His particular contribution, however, centers on a theme already mentioned in the work of Funk: Jesus' preaching of a "brokerless kingdom." The first of three parts of *The Historical Jesus* paints a picture of the Greco-Roman Empire of Jesus' day as a "brokered empire"—an empire that had a top and a bottom and clear distinction between the two. Those on the bottom were the "slaves" and/or "clients"; those on the top were the "masters" and/or "patrons."[108] Masters/Patrons brokered the surpluses of the kingdom to their slaves/clients; those at the bottom could only hope to access economic or social advancement through entering into slave-master/client-patron relationships with those at the top. Part Two of *The Historical Jesus*

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[100] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 302.

[101] Cf. especially Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 314, where the second to last thesis of Funk's "new age" is: "Exorcise the apocalyptic elements from Christianity."

[102] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 302. Emphasis is original.

[103] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, passim, but especially 311.

[104] Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 165.

[105] Funk, *Honest to Jesus,* passim, but especially Part Three. For the comment of the lack of evidence for Jesus' crucifixion, see pp.219–40.

[106] For a portrait of the historical Jesus summarily opposed to Funk's, yet still developing the notion of Jesus as "sage," see Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

[107] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

[108] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 43–71.

surveys several ways in which this brokered kingdom was resisted by various groups in the ancient world, including those Crossan refers to as the "magician and prophet,"[109] the "bandit and messiah,"[110] and the "rebel and revolutionary."[111] The third and final part of *The Historical Jesus* presents Crossan's understanding of Jesus' own message—the message of a "brokerless kingdom." Through his parable telling, the "magic" of his healings, and his table fellowship with the most marginalized of the brokered kingdom, Jesus preached a "brokerless" and "sapiential kingdom of God," which Crossan sets in direct contrast to the apocalyptic kingdom of God of Schweitzer and the Third Quest.[112] Ultimately then, once again, Jesus is distanced from apocalyptic motifs, and portrayed as a teacher of subversive wisdom—wisdom which essentially promoted egalitarianism over against the extreme social stratification of the "brokered kingdom/empire."[113]

To summarize, the portraits of Jesus that emerge from this stream of scholarship—the Renewed Quest—are founded upon an unprecedented reliance on extracanonical sources— especially *Thomas* and hypothetical reconstructions of *Q*. Further, these portraits propose that Jesus had anything *but* an eschatological and/or apocalyptic worldview—at least in anything like the way that previous scholarship has defined *eschatology* or *apocalyptic*. Instead, Jesus was a preacher of aphoristic, subversive wisdom—wisdom that undermined the political interests of the elite of his day, promoted egalitarianism, and called others to stand up to social injustice. Perhaps most importantly, the historical Jesus was really nothing like the Jesus found in the canonical Gospels and in the Christian creeds.

The Third Quest: The Eschatological Jesus of the Canonical Gospels

If the Third Quest began in the 1980s and has been marked by the work of those like E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright, its seeds were already being planted and watered 20 years prior by

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[109] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, ch.8.

[110] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, ch.9.

[111] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, ch.10. Crossan sees Jesus' ministry illuminated by each of these categories but not equal to any one of them.

[112] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 287–91.

[113] Crossan's portrait also encompasses a theme developed by other scholars who could be categorized as a part of the Renewed Quest. The scholars of whom I speak are American Burton Mack (Cf. esp. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988].) and Englishman F. Gerald Downing (Cf. esp. F. G. Downing, *Christ and the Cynics: Jesus and Other Radical Preachers in First Century Tradition* [Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1988].)—each of whom proposes a portrait of Jesus as a wandering Hellenistic Cynic. In slight contrast, Crossan describes Jesus as a "peasant Jewish Cynic" (Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 421–22).

G.B. Caird. Caird, who studied at Cambridge under C.H. Dodd and also at Oxford during the 1930s and 40s, who taught at Oxford for most of his career, and who eventually held the post of Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture (which Sanders was to hold next after him), was an influential mentor to both Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright (among others) during his career at Oxford. Caird's direct influence upon the Third Quest includes most notably a lecture delivered in 1965 entitled *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*,[114] in which he argued that despite the Evangelists' seeming disinterestedness with Jewish politics "the Gospels contain a very large amount of material which links the ministry and teaching of Jesus with the history, politics, aspirations, and destiny of the Jewish nation."[115] Especially Wright's portrait of Jesus has been greatly informed by Caird's portrait of a Jesus whose prophetic ministry was an attempt to call Israel to national repentance for the purpose of averting the coming national judgment on Jerusalem and its temple. Throughout *JVG* Wright often echoes Caird, who wrote:

> Jesus believed that Israel was called by God to be the agent of his purpose, and that he himself had been sent to bring about that reformation without which Israel could not fulfill her national destiny. If the nation, so far from accepting that calling, rejected God's messenger and persecuted those who responded to his preaching, how could the assertion of God's sovereignty fail to include an open demonstration that Jesus was right and the nation was wrong [by which Caird means the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70]? [116]

Caird's brief portrait of Jesus in *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* is in many ways the basis for Wright's own portrait. Further, Caird's conceptualization of the eschatology of Jesus and other

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[114] G. B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1965). See Wright, *JVG*, xviii–xix for Wright's explicit indebtedness to Caird's work.

[115] Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 5.

[116] Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* , 20. While Caird only hints at it, Wright develops this point of Caird's into a full blown critique, by Jesus, of the violent tendencies present within the Judaism of Jesus' day. Wright argues that Jesus presented himself as the center of a new way of being the covenant people of God. It was characteristically a way of peace—at least with regard to the Roman occupiers. Jesus' way of peace was, according to Wright, proposed by Jesus in opposition to the way that the nation of Israel had chosen—a way of violent rebellion against Rome. While not every individual Jew was openly violent toward Rome, Wright argues that most Jews' sentiments were with those who engaged in open, violent rebellion. Wright—building upon Caird and Sanders—depicts Jesus performing an "acted parable of destruction" (*JVG*, 413) upon the temple. This acted parable of judgment was a public sign to the Jews of Jesus day concerning where rejection of Jesus' way and an ultimate embrace of the way of violent resistance against Rome would take them as a people—to the destruction of their temple, among other horrors. Jesus was, it turns out, right about the consequences of this choice, says Wright. The Jews rejected Jesus and embraced violent rebellion against Rome (66–70 C.E.), with the result being that the destruction of the temple occurred just as Jesus had prophesied. Cf. esp. Wright, *JVG*, chapter 9. For example, Wright says on p.372: "the kingdom Jesus was announcing was undermining, rather than underwriting, the revolutionary anti-pagan zeal that was the target of much of Jesus' polemic, the cause (according to him) of Israel's imminent ruin, and the focal point of much (Shammaite) Pharisaic teaching and aspiration." Further, Wright lists on p.417, as one of the main reasons why Jesus believed judgment would come upon Jerusalem's temple: "Israel's large-scale commitment to national rebellion."

Jews (a conceptualization which was not altogether new, but was at least neglected by much of the scholarly world at the time) as foreseeing "a future in which the circumstances of history are changed to such an extent that one can speak of a new, entirely different, state of things, without, in so doing, necessarily leaving the framework of history"[117] has also had a substantial effect upon Wright's thought.[118] This particular eschatology is referred to as "restoration eschatology," and it is the kind of eschatological thought within which, most notably, both Sanders and Wright perform their historical Jesus research.

All of this is to say that when Sanders's monumental work, *Jesus and Judaism*, arrived on the scene in 1985 his insights were not entirely novel.   Rather, what was unique was Sanders's methodological approach. In contrast to the source, form, and redaction criticism of the previous half century, which focused primary attention upon the *sayings* of Jesus and their possible authenticity, Sanders chose a methodology that focused upon the *actions* of Jesus and their historical plausibility. From the outset, Sanders proposes that "there are several facts about Jesus' career *and its aftermath* which can be known beyond doubt."[119] The following are Sanders's list of these "almost indisputable facts":

1. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.
2. Jesus was a Galilean who preached and healed.
3. Jesus called disciples and spoke of there being twelve.
4. Jesus confined his activity to Israel.
5. Jesus engaged in a controversy about the temple.
6. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities.
7. After his death Jesus' followers continued as an identifiable movement.
8. At least some Jews persecuted at least parts of the new movement (Gal 1.13, 22; Phil 3.6), and it appears that this persecution endured at least to a time near the end of Paul's career (II Cor. 11.24; Gal. 5.11; 6.12; cf. Matt. 23.34; 10.17).[120]

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[117] Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 18.

[118] More on this in chapter 3.

[119] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11. Emphasis is original.

[120] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11. In a later publication—E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), which was basically a popular-level revision of *Jesus and Judaism*—Sanders slightly modifies this list, splitting it into a list about Jesus himself and a second list about the aftermath of Jesus' life. The first list includes the following: "Jesus was born *c.* 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great; he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village; he was baptized by John the Baptist; he called disciples; he taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not the cities); he preached 'the kingdom of God'; about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover; he created a disturbance in the Temple area; he had a final meal with the disciples; he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest; he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate." The second list includes: "his disciples at first fled; they saw him (in what sense is not certain) after his death; as a consequence, they believed that

From this list, Sanders chooses as the starting point for his reconstruction of the historical Jesus the controversy about the temple, "about which," he says, "our information is a little better and which offers almost as good an entry for the study of Jesus' intention and his relationship to his contemporaries as would a truly eye-witness account of the trial."[121] Explicitly drawing upon the methodology of Ben Meyer,[122] Sanders proceeds to propose a portrait of the historical Jesus which portrays Jesus as acting "within the general framework of Jewish restoration eschatology . . . ."[123] After describing Jesus' temple action, Sanders proceeds by way of an examination of Second Temple Jewish literature to demonstrate that expectations of national restoration were ubiquitous in the Palestinian Jewish culture of Jesus' day.[124] The rest of the book entails a look at the ministry, kingdom proclamation, and death of Jesus, which leads Sanders to the conclusion that, rather than looking to national repentance and return to the Torah as the means through which national restoration would be brought about, Jesus expected an apocalyptic act of God in the immediate future to bring about the national restoration—i.e. the kingdom of God. Jesus believed himself to play a particularly important role in bringing about this outcome. As Sanders concludes, "Jesus saw himself as God's last messenger before the establishment of the kingdom. He looked for a new order, created by a mighty act of God. . . ."[125] The parallels with Schweitzer's conclusions are considerable. Sanders unique contribution, however, was to build a case for an apocalyptically minded Jesus, not on the basis of the sayings of Jesus, but on the basis of what he considered to be the "almost indisputable facts" about Jesus' career—including, especially, the temple controversy. As previously alluded, however, Caird had to a minor degree anticipated this focus upon the temple action of Jesus in *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* when he wrote that "the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple are best interpreted as symbolic preaching, like the symbolic acts of the ancient prophets, by which Jesus was making his last appeal to the city not to sign the death warrant which would be both his and hers."[126]

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he would return to found the kingdom; they formed a community to await his return and sought to win others to faith in him as God's Messiah" (Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 10–11).

[121] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11–12.

[122] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 47.

[123] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 340.

[124] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chapter 2.

[125] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 319.

[126] Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 16. Cf. supra. fn. 117.

It would be instructive to also consider here the massive work of the Catholic historian John P. Meier, whose four-volume series *A Marginal Jew*[127] portrays Jesus as an eschatological prophet in the way of Elijah, and the work of Dale Allison, whose several works on the historical Jesus, including most recently *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*,[128] portray Jesus as a millenarian movement leader. Both of these historians share the broad consensus of the Third Quest that the historical Jesus is rightly understood only within a Jewish eschatological matrix. Since Wright is in much more direct dialog with Sanders and Caird, however, I will pass over these works and proceed straight into a description of Wright's own portrait of the historical Jesus.

At the present moment I will only summarize briefly the portrait of the historical Jesus painted by the work of N. T. Wright. The following chapter will explore this portrait more thoroughly and will argue that it is Wright's peculiar definitions of *eschatology* and *apocalyptic* which give his portrait of the historical Jesus its distinctiveness and persuasiveness. While Wright has written several works on the field of historical Jesus studies, his *summa* is a 1996 publication entitled *Jesus and the Victory of God*, which has already been cited previously in this paper.[129] This volume is the second in a proposed six volume series entitled *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; three volumes are complete,[130] with a fourth volume on Paul expected to be published very soon.

In *JVG* Wright builds upon G. B. Caird's emphasis on Jewish nationalism, Ben Meyer's historical methodology, and Ed Sanders's restoration eschatology and emphasis on the "temple action." The result is a full-fledged and compelling portrait of Jesus, which emphasizes eschatology as the climax of Israel's narrative contained in the OT.[131] The entire task of portraying the historical Jesus is undergirded by Wright's "critical realism"—a methodological attitude toward doing history, inspired by the work of Ben Meyer, that attempts to hold in tension

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[127] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (4 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009).

[128] Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

[129] See supra. fn. 1. A list of other important historical Jesus publications which Wright either authored or participated in writing include: N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999); N. T. Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). N. T. Wright, "Quest for the Historical Jesus," *ABD* 3:796–802.

[130] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[131] This particular take on *eschatology* is the subject of the third chapter, as I have previously mentioned.

the positivistic quest for objectivity with the recognition of the historian's indivertible subjectivity. The Jesus of *JVG* is an eschatological prophet, who sees himself in the line of Israel's great prophets and whose perceptible aims and intentions lead the historian to conclude that he had a grand and distinct sense of prophetic vocation. His prophetic ministry was directed to all of Israel, and he was specifically concerned to call Israel to national repentance for the purpose of bringing about the national restoration from exile. Jesus perceived—as Wright claims most Jews of his time did—that Israel had yet to be fully restored from the exilic situation that began with the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of the people at the hands of the Babylonians in the early 6th c. B.C.E. Jesus believed that the time for restoration was at hand, and that he played a vital role in its consummation. His ministry—chiefly characterized, as the Synoptics claim, by the proclamation of the "kingdom of God"—was a combination of a call to national repentance and belief; a challenge to Israel to be the people of the renewed covenant;[132] an enactment of the character of the kingdom (especially in Jesus' open table fellowship with "sinners"); the audacious proclamation that he *himself* was to be the center of the renewed and restored covenant people (not the Torah, not the Temple, not the land); and a stern warning to Israel that refusal of Jesus himself would result in a cataclysmic destruction at the hands of Israel's political enemies, the Romans, that would resemble the destruction suffered by Israel at the hands of the Babylonians and Assyrians at the beginning of the exile. Insofar as Jesus presented himself as the center of the renewed covenant people (e.g. Jesus gathered around himself 12 disciples to symbolize the ingathering of Israel's dispersed tribes—an eschatological expectation of Israel's Second Temple period), and insofar as he believed that his rejection by Israel would mean the punishment of the nation by the hand of God via the Roman military, Jesus' prophetic vocation seems to have had a distinctly messianic flavor to it. Further, insofar as Jesus saw his own triumphal entry in Jerusalem and his temple action (which Wright believes, as the Synoptics present it, occurred immediately following the triumphal entry) as the fulfillment of the eschatological expectation that YHWH would return to Zion when the exile had come to its conclusion (cf. Ezekiel 1–10; 40–48), it becomes clear that—to summarize using Wright's own words—Jesus "believed he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, that which according to scripture only YHWH himself could do and be."[133]

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[132] Cf. especially Wright's treatment of the Sermon on the Mount in Wright, *JVG*, chapter 4.

[133] Wright, *JVG*, 653; cf. Borg and Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus*, 166.

It is my belief that the Third Quest has formed the most compelling portrait of Jesus yet to be produced by any incarnation of the Quest. It has done so precisely by identifying and honing a compelling framework for the historical Jesus—that of an eschatological prophet of the restoration of Israel. The Third Quest stream of historical Jesus scholarship pays homage to Schweitzer's perennially persuasive portrait of the historical Jesus, yet moves beyond it with a refined historical methodology and the insights of recent archaeological, sociological, anthropological, and other non-theological disciplines. The Renewed Quest stream of scholarship, on the other hand, largely continues in the Wrede-Bultmann line of overindulgent skepticism (concerning the historical reliability of the canonical Gospels, though seemingly *not* of the non-canonical sources) and the New Quest's preoccupation with idiosyncratic criteria of authenticity, thus producing a portrait of Jesus that looks more like its authors than like a 1st century Palestinian Jew. The Jesus of the Renewed Quest is a sage of subversive wisdom, who promotes radical egalitarianism, has no interest in apocalyptic eschatology, and who would utterly disdain the movement of canonical Christianity that continued in his name; in a word, the Jesus of the Renewed Quest looks much like the Renewed Questers.

Of course the history of the Quest has thoroughly demonstrated that every endeavor to paint a portrait of Jesus is prone to the error of looking down the well of history and finding one's own reflection. Nevertheless, the Jesus of the Third Quest remains someone other than the Third Questers themselves. The Jesus of the Third Quest is an eschatological prophet, immersed in the expectations of the national restoration of Israel, who utilized apocalyptic imagery and who warned of impending doom for those who rejected his proclamation; in a word, the Jesus of the Third Quest looks more like a 1st century Palestinian Jew and not all that much like the modern liberal[134] Protestant and Catholic scholars who portray him. It is surely naïve to conclude positivistically that the Third Quest has discovered Jesus as he was while the Renewed Quest has discovered Jesus as the Renewed Questers would like him to be. Of course both streams of scholarship have illuminated both the historical Jesus and themselves (to greater or lesser degrees). It is my judgment, however, that the Jesus of the Third Quest is historically preferable to the Jesus of the Renewed Quest, and that the Jesus of the Third Quest is the most compelling portrait of Jesus yet to be painted by *any* incarnation of the modern Quest for the Historical Jesus.

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[134] I use the word *liberal* primarily because Sanders uses it as a self-description. See supra. fn. 78, p. 20.

For this reason I have engaged with one of the most prominent members of this Third Quest, N .T. Wright, and seek in the rest of this paper to analyze his specific contributions to the field of historical Jesus studies (chapter three) and critique one aspect of his portrait that has as of yet received little attention (chapter four). To these endeavors we now proceed.

CHAPTER 3

N.T. WRIGHT: REDEFINING ESCHATOLOGY, RECONSTRUCTING
THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Having surveyed the Quest for the Historical Jesus in its various manifestations up to the present time, we will be better able to appreciate the place of N.T. Wright's work within the gamut of historical Jesus scholarship. Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus—specifically in his most extensive historical Jesus work, *Jesus and the Victory of God*—has garnered extensive praise and criticism,[135] including most recently an entire conference dedicated to probing the continued significance of *JVG*.[136] One would be hard pressed to find a survey of historical Jesus studies from the past decade that does not devote considerable attention to Wright's portrait of Jesus. In the present chapter I will argue that Wright's peculiar redefinitions of *eschatology* and *apocalyptic* are the key to the distinct and compelling character of his portrait of the historical Jesus.

Redefining Eschatology & Apocalyptic

For Wright, as for most scholarship, apocalyptic is to be understood as a sub-set of eschatology. Something that is apocalyptic is, by definition, eschatological, but the reverse is not true. One can speak *eschatologically* without speaking *apocalyptically*. When studying Wright, this conclusion is, however, not reached without some difficulty, as shall be demonstrated presently. When discussing Jesus and the New Testament, Wright sometimes conflates his definitions of eschatology and apocalyptic. Nevertheless, he does recognize a distinction between the terms: eschatology is the broader term, apocalyptic the narrower. Because of Wright's own ambiguity, however, it will take some leg work to demonstrate this distinction, as well as the unique definition he offers for each term.

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[135] See supra. fn. 70 for an example of some of the criticism; see the following fn. for a work that contains several responses of both praise and criticism.

[136] The conference was held on April 16–17, 2010 at Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL and hosted Wright, Richard Hays, Marianne Meye Thompson, Brian Walsh, Nicholas Perrin, Kevin Vanhoozer, and others. Major presentations from the conference are published in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

In Part II of *JVG*, Wright says that there are at least seven different ways that the term eschatology is employed by modern scholarship;[137] by the time of his publishing *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (*RSG*) seven years later, he identifies *ten* different uses of the term.[138] In *JVG* Wright explicitly lists each of the seven definitions of eschatology that he believes various scholars employ, placing them along a spectrum from the "traditional" scholarly definition (eschatology = end of the space-time universe) to the more recent position of some in the Jesus Seminar who say that eschatology essentially refers to social critiques. Wright's spectrum of definitions is worth setting out fully here in order to better understand where Wright places *himself* along this spectrum:

1. Eschatology as the end of the world, i.e. the end of the space-time universe;
2. Eschatology as the climax of Israel's history, involving the end of the space-time universe;
3. Eschatology as the climax of Israel's history, involving events for which end-of-the-world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase *within* space-time history;
4. Eschatology as major events, not specifically climactic within a particular story, for which end-of-the-world language functions as metaphor;
5. Eschatology as 'horizontal' language (i.e. *apparently* denoting movement forwards in time) whose *actual* referent is the possibility of moving 'upwards' spiritually into a new level of existence;
6. Eschatology as critique of the present world order, perhaps with proposals for a new order;
7. Eschatology as critique of the present socio-political scene, perhaps with proposals for adjustments.[139]

Wright identifies the first definition as the "traditional" scholarly reading of eschatology. He identifies the second definition with Schweitzer himself (although Schweitzer has, according to Wright, been misunderstood by scholarship to have meant the first definition), the fifth with Bultmann, a combination of the sixth and seventh with John Dominic Crossan (who distinguishes eschatology in this sense sharply from apocalyptic, by which Crossan and the Jesus Seminar mean the first definition, according to Wright), and the fourth definition with Marcus Borg. Wright identifies the third definition as his own.

It is difficult here to parse out Wright's definition of eschatology from his definition of apocalyptic.   Wright says that this third definition of eschatology "takes very seriously the

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[137] Wright, *JVG*, 208.
[138] Wright, *RSG*, 26.
[139] Wright, *JVG*, 208.

actual referent of the Jewish 'apocalyptic' language which Jesus seems to have shared."[140] The fact of the matter is, however, that Wright could just as easily have used this third definition of eschatology to define his understanding of the genre of apocalyptic. In fact, it is possible to argue on the basis of Wright himself that what he *meant* to define in this list of descriptions (at least in the first four definitions) is not eschatology but apocalyptic. I say this for two reasons. First, Wright is here specifically addressing—among other positions—Schweitzer's definition of eschatology (definition #2) and how Schweitzer has been traditionally understood to have defined eschatology (definition #1). Elsewhere, however, his reaction to Schweitzer is expressed as a critique of Schweitzer's definition of *apocalyptic*, not *eschatology*.[141] Second, Wright argues elsewhere that there were some *non-apocalyptic*, *eschatological* stories told in Second Temple Judaism, as well as apocalyptic ones.[142] Speaking eschatologically meant, in Second Temple Judaism, telling the story of *the climax of Israel's history*; this did not *necessarily* mean that "end-of-the-world" language was employed to tell such an *eschatological* story. Eschatology could be done—and was done, in Wright's opinion—in Second Temple Judaism without employing the language of apocalyptic, although apocalyptic was increasingly employed to this end by the time of Jesus.

These considerations lead me to conclude that the first four definitions in Wright's list are in actuality definitions of apocalyptic, while the last three in the list are, admittedly, definitions of eschatology, *not* apocalyptic.[143] If Wright's work is considered in its entirety, it becomes clear that eschatology is a *very* broad term that refers generally to any attempt to tell the story of the climax of Israel's history.[144] On the other hand, apocalyptic refers more narrowly to the *type* of eschatological language that utilizes "end-of-the-world metaphors" to tell the story of the climax of Israel's history. Understanding apocalyptic as a subset of eschatology is not a novelty in modern scholarship. What is novel about Wright's approach is exactly *how broad* his understanding of eschatology is, and how *this-worldly* his definition of apocalyptic is. As such, I

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[140]Wright, *JVG*, 209.

[141] Cf. for example Wright, *NTPG*, 284 & 334. Obviously Wright is, in fact, critiquing Schweitzer's definition of *both* apocalyptic *and* eschatology precisely because Schweitzer does not distinguish between these terms in the same way that Wright does. This, however, only illustrates the point that Wright sometimes interchanges these terms precisely because of the way they have been used by the scholars to which he is responding.

[142] Wright, *NTPG,* 217–18. The examples given there are Josephus, Sirach, and the Maccabees.

[143] Perhaps the first four definitions could be understood as a conflation of definitions of *both* eschatology and apocalyptic, but on the basis of Wright himself, they are not *only* definitions of eschatology.

[144] Cf. Wright, *NTPG*, ch.9.

will first consider Wright's redefinition of eschatology, then progress to consider his redefinition of apocalyptic.

Eschatology

What Wright's definition of eschatology *includes* is nearly all-encompassing. One could easily argue that, for Wright, *everything is eschatology*—everything, at least, related to Second Temple Judaism, and specifically the 1st century world of Jews and Christians. When Wright speaks of 1st century Judaism—its worldview and consequent beliefs[145]—practically every aspect of this historical survey is in some way tied to the question of eschatology. Any survey of Wright's understanding of eschatology will, as a result, have to be *very* abbreviated. In short, I argue that Wright understands eschatology *very* broadly, encompassing *any attempt to tell the climax of Israel's story*.

This, of course, assumes that Jews of the Second Temple period had a central story. The first third of Wright's eighth chapter in *NTPG* summarizes Wright's understanding of the basic story of Second Temple Judaism.[146] "The foundation story of Judaism . . ." says Wright, "was of course the story in the Bible."[147] This is the story of Creation, of Adam's fall from grace, of the call of Abraham, Moses and the Exodus, the Judges, monarchs, divided kingdom, prophets, exile, and promises of a new exodus. Despite the return to the land and the "post-exilic" work of people like Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah), the prophetic promises of a *full* restoration from exile were not realized in the biblical period. "The great story of the Hebrew scriptures was therefore," according to Wright, "inevitably read in the second-temple period as a story in search of a conclusion."[148]

Attempted conclusions to the story were being written frequently during the second-temple period—both apocalyptic conclusions and non-apocalyptic ones. For Wright, each of these attempted conclusions to Israel's story was an attempt at eschatology. Eschatology, then, is not primarily a discussion about what happens at the end of the world or after one dies, but rather it is an attempt at talking about what happens at *the climax of Israel's story*. The story demands a conclusion. To say more than this at the current juncture would, however, lead too

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[145] See Part II of Wright, *NTPG* for Wright's descriptions of what are in his work technical terms: "worldview" and "consequent beliefs."

[146] Cf. the discussion of "story" as a technical term in Wright, *NTPG*, Part II.

[147] Wright, *NTPG*, 216.

[148] Wright, *NTPG*, 217.

far afield. Suffice it for now to say that as we move closer to the time of Christ, these eschatological stories—stories told as the climax to Israel's own biblical story—begin to increasingly take on a particular flavor: the flavor of apocalyptic.

Apocalyptic

If Wright's definition of eschatology is very broad, encompassing *any attempt to tell the climax of Israel's story*, Wright's definition of apocalyptic is a bit more manageable. For Wright, apocalyptic is a type of eschatological language that employs cosmic language to *invest historical events with their theological meaning*.[149] Much of Wright's description of apocalyptic proceeds as an engaged dialog with Albert Schweitzer, whose work, as has been mentioned before, Wright sees continuing in the Third Quest. Wright says that Schweitzer was right to identify Jesus within his 1st century Jewish apocalyptic context, but wrong in identifying what precisely apocalyptic was. Wright concludes: "Schweitzer was right, I believe, when at the beginning of the twentieth century he drew attention to apocalyptic as the matrix of early Christianity. It is now high time, as the century draws towards it close, to state, against Schweitzer, what that apocalyptic matrix actually was and meant."[150]

In critiquing Schweitzer, Wright is largely following the scholarship of his former Oxford mentor and professor, George B. Caird.[151] The critique is essentially that Schweitzer failed to recognize the *this-worldly* nature of apocalyptic language, of which Jesus' proclamation of the "kingdom of god"[152] is characteristic. Wright argues that apocalyptic language did *not* attempt, as Schweitzer believed it did, to speak of the imminent end of the space-time universe. In regard to Jesus' proclamation, "the 'kingdom of god' has nothing to do with the world itself coming to an end."[153] The cosmic and cataclysmic language of apocalyptic writings was meant to represent a great, theologically significant event (or events) that was (or were) to occur *within history*, as the climax of Israel's story. Wright observes that

> within the mainline Jewish writings of this [Second Temple] period, covering a wide range of styles, genres, political persuasions and theological perspectives, *there is virtually no evidence that Jews were expecting the end of the space-time*

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[149] Wright, *NTPG*, 284.
[150] Wright, *NTPG*, 334.
[151] Wright, *NTPG*, 285.
[152] Wright intentionally leaves the word *god* uncapitalized throughout the *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series as a point of methodology. His purpose for doing so is explained in Wright, *NTPG*, xiv–xv.
[153] Wright, *NTPG*, 285.

universe. . . . They believed that *the present world order* would come to an end—the world order in which pagans held power, and Jews, the covenant people of the creator god, did not.[154]

Apocalyptic language spoke of this great change of events with "end-of-the-world" metaphorical language, but it did not intend to refer to an actual end of the world, but rather an end of *this kind* of world.

Wright's understanding of the metaphorical language of apocalyptic needs to be explored a bit more thoroughly. "Apocalyptic language," according to Wright, "uses complex and highly coloured metaphors in order to describe one event in terms of another, thus bringing out the perceived 'meaning' of the first."[155] Wright uses the analogy of the modern English phrase "earth-shattering event." When we speak of an "earth-shattering event" we are obviously *not* speaking of an event which literally caused the planet earth to split into pieces. We are, rather, speaking about the *significance* of the historical event with language that recognizes its enormous importance.[156] Apocalyptic language is not *mere* metaphor, as some scholars have assumed, but neither is it intended as a *literal* description of "end-of-the-world" events. It is *metaphorical* language that speaks of *historical* events of enormous importance, using the only language appropriate to the enormity of these events—namely, "end-of-the-world" language.

We can now return to the definition of eschatology that Wright laid out as his own, and which I identified as actually a conflation of Wright's definitions of both eschatology and apocalyptic: "Eschatology as the climax of Israel's history, involving events for which end-of-the-world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase *within* space-time history."[157] This is Wright's understanding of 1st century apocalyptic eschatology.

These redefinitions of eschatology and apocalyptic lead Wright to some unique and compelling conclusions about the historical Jesus and the eschatological nature of his proclamation of the kingdom of God. For Wright, understanding Jesus means following Schweitzer's counsel to put him in his original (properly defined) apocalyptic, Jewish context.

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[154] Wright, *NTPG*, 333.
[155] Wright, *NTPG*, 282.
[156] Wright, *NTPG*, 282.
[157] Wright, *JVG*, 208.

The Eschatology of Jesus: The Kingdom of God

Wright is aware of the fact that the phrase "kingdom of God" does not appear frequently in texts of Second Temple Judaism. Nevertheless, he argues that

> when it occurs, [it occurs] as a crucial shorthand expression for a concept which could be spoken of in a variety of other ways, such as the impossibility of having rulers other than Israel's god, or the divine necessity of reversing the present political situation and re-establishing Israel, Temple, Land and Torah. This complex concept picks up and joins together the whole social, political, cultural and economic aspiration of the Jews of this period, and invests it with the religious and theological dimension which, of course, it always possessed in mainline Jewish thinking.[158]

The belief that YHWH, Israel's god, would one day become king over all nations was, according to Wright, simply the eschatological outworking of Israel's central beliefs: monotheism and election.[159] It was believed that the one true god, YHWH, had chosen Israel to be a light to the nations. The exile had challenged these beliefs, as Israel was dispersed amongst the nations for her sins, but the prophets foretold a day in which a great restoration would occur. When the people physically returned to the land, however, the great restoration did *not* occur. Second Temple Judaism is characterized by the hopes and expectations that someday this great restoration would finally occur. "Kingdom" language in the 1st century, then, alluded to this entire narrative. Wright argues that the three main hopes wrapped up in "kingdom" language were: (1) The final and complete end of Israel's Exile (which Second Temple Jews believed continued, despite their having returned to the land and rebuilt the temple); (2) The Defeat of Israel's Enemies (which would include any pagan or corrupt Jewish overlords); (3) The Enthronement/Return of YHWH (who, it was believed, had departed from Zion/Jerusalem/the Temple just before the exile [cf. Ezek 1–10] and had yet to return by the 1st century).[160]

Enter Jesus of Nazareth, and his central proclamation: "The Kingdom of God has come near!" (Mk 1:15 and pars.) Obviously, Wright sees this proclamation as specifically addressing the eschatological expectations of Second Temple Judaism: the end of exile, the defeat of Israel's enemies (which Jesus redefines as 'the satan', not any political entity), and the enthronement/return of YHWH. Wright says, however, that it is not only when Jesus explicitly

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[158] Wright, *NTPG*, 303.
[159] Wright, *JVG*, 204.
[160] Wright, *JVG*, 205–206.

speaks of the "kingdom of God" that he is addressing this central Second Temple story with its consequent hopes and expectations. Wright reads *Jesus' entire* ministry in light of the Second Temple worldview he has identified, with its stories, symbols, praxis, and beliefs.[161]

This is perhaps one of the most distinctive and insightful aspects of Wright's work on the historical Jesus. By placing Jesus' *entire* ministry—both his words and his deeds—in the light of the Second Temple worldview and its eschatological expectations, Wright brings forth fresh and illuminating interpretations of Jesus' words and deeds. Familiar parables, obscure aphorisms, and controversial actions of Jesus all take on a new light when read within the picture of Second Temple eschatological expectations, as Wright identifies them. A few examples will illustrate Wright's approach.

Wright argues that Jesus' parables, set in their original, historical context, must be understood as "apocalyptic allegories," which attempt to take the hidden reality of the kingdom of God and reveal it.[162] They are, however, not *mere* words; Jesus' "parables are not simply *information about* the kingdom, but are part of the *means of* bringing it to birth."[163] According to Wright, the parables of Jesus function as "subversive retellings" of Israel's story[164] which put a new twist on its climactic resolution.[165] In his parables, Jesus is speaking in an apocalyptic eschatological way, telling the story of Israel as leading up to his own understanding of its climactic resolution—the inbreaking kingdom of God—and, in a way, actually *enacting* the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

One of the first parables of Jesus that Wright addresses at length in *JVG* is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32).[166] Traditionally, this parable has been read in the modern world as a story of the individual sinner who spurns the grace of his loving heavenly Father, but who ultimately repents and returns to find his Father graciously and joyously receiving him back—in other words, granting him personal salvation. Wright says, however, that "this is an explosive narrative, designed to blow apart the normal first-century reading of Jewish history and to

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[161] Again, each of these terms are technical terms for Wright, which are addressed in Wright, *NTPG*, Part II.

[162] Wright, *JVG*, 180.

[163] Wright, *JVG*, 176.

[164] Note the contrast of "subversive retellings" of *Israel's story* to Funk, Crossan, and the Seminar's "subversive wisdom" of radical egalitarianism and the like.

[165] Cf. for example Wright, *JVG*, 181.

[166] Wright, *JVG*, 126–131.

replace it with a different one."[167] It is a subversive retelling of Israel's story. It is, according to Wright, "the story of Israel, in particular of exile and restoration."[168] The prodigal son who spurns his Father and leaves the Father's home to live a life of debauchery amongst the Gentiles is exilic Israel. The Jews of Jesus' time would have regarding their exile as basically still continuing, despite their physical return to the land.[169] Jesus is, however, declaring that their full return from exile is occurring, and it is coming to pass as the result of nothing more than the extravagant (Wright says "prodigal") love of the Father. What is more, Jesus is saying that "the real return from exile . . . is taking place, in an extremely paradoxical fashion, in Jesus' own ministry."[170]

For the traditional, modern commentator the story could easily end right here, with the acceptance of the son back into the house of the Father, but Wright argues that the subversive nature of Jesus' retelling of the story is largely to be found precisely in the discussion of the elder brother's reaction to the grace of the Father. The elder brother represents those who oppose the way in which the Father is bringing the exile to an end—in other words, those who oppose Jesus and his announcement of the kingdom of God. "Those who grumble at what is happening," says Wright, "are cast in the role of the Jews who did not go into exile, and who opposed the returning people. They are, in effect, virtually Samaritans. The true Israel is coming to its senses, and returning to its father . . . and those who oppose this great movement of divine love and grace are defining themselves as outside the true family."[171] "True Israel" is being reconstituted around Jesus himself. Wright summarizes the thrust of the story: "Israel's history is turning its long-awaited corner [the eschatological nature of the parable]; this is happening within the ministry of Jesus himself; and those who oppose it are the enemies of the true people of god."[172] A familiar parable, then, is illuminated in a fresh and intriguing way as a result of Wright's reading of the eschatological expectations of Second Temple Judaism.[173]

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[167] Wright, *JVG*, 126.

[168] Wright, *JVG*, 126.

[169] Wright, *JVG*, 126.

[170] Wright, *JVG*, 127.

[171] Wright, *JVG*, 127. Cf. Ezra 4 for an example of the type of Samaritan opposition to post-exilic Israel that Wright is referencing.

[172] Wright, *JVG*, 127.

[173] This is surely a radically novel interpretation of the parable, and Wright has not escaped critique over it. Cf. Richard B. Hays, "Knowing Jesus: Story, History and the Question of Truth," in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 55–56.

Wright's eschatological vision of Second Temple Judaism not only illuminates the major parables of Jesus, it sheds new light on more obscure sayings and passages. For example, consider the confrontation Jesus and his disciples face in the Synoptic tradition concerning the matter of fasting (Mk 2:18–19 and parallels).[174] In all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is approached and asked why he and his disciples do not participate in regular fasting in the way that both John's disciples and the Pharisees do. Jesus responds that his disciples cannot fast "while the bridegroom is with them." Traditional, modern commentary often reads this passage as an indicator of Jesus' attitude toward ritualistic practices of groups like the Pharisees.[175] While this could be a *part* of the importance of the passage, Wright illustrates that its importance goes much deeper.

Once again, the light by which Wright illuminates Jesus' words is the context of Israel's exile and the prophetic promises of her restoration still being awaited by Jews in the time of Jesus. Wright, drawing on Zechariah's discussion of fasting in Zech 7–8, argues that "fasting in this period was not, for Jews, simply an ascetic discipline, part of the general practice of piety. It had to do with Israel's present condition: she was still in exile. More specifically, it had to do with commemorating the destruction of the temple."[176] The reason that Jews had fasted in Zechariah's time, and the reason they continued to fast in Jesus' time, was because they were mourning their exilic situation. Specifically, the "fast of the fifth month" spoken of in Zech 7 seems to have been a fast commemorating the destruction of the Temple at the hands of the Babylonians. Jesus' *feasting* with his disciples, coupled with his self-identification as the "bridegroom," makes a very *eschatological* claim. The message, according to Wright, is: "The time is fulfilled; the exile is over; the bridegroom is at hand. Jesus' acted symbol, feasting rather than fasting, brings into public visibility his controversial claim, that in his work Israel's hope was being realized; more specifically, that in his work *the Temple was being rebuilt*."[177] There is much more that could be unpacked here, but perhaps it is better to consider one final part of Jesus' ministry that, for Wright, has extreme eschatological significance.

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[174] Wright, *JVG*, 433–37.

[175] See e.g. Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIB 8; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 555, where Perkins says of this pericope: "Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving were signs of a righteous person (cf. Tob 12:8–9). The Pharisees were said to fast twice a week (Luke 18:12; *Did*. 8.1). Therefore, outsiders expect Jesus' disciples to observe the pious custom of fasting as do the members of other Jewish sects devoted to holiness."

[176] Wright, *JVG*, 433.

[177] Wright, *JVG*, 433–34.

Wright believes that it is not only the *words* of Jesus that must be reconsidered in light of the eschatological worldview of Second Temple Judaism; it is also his *deeds* which need to be reviewed. For Wright, arguably the most important deed of Jesus' ministry—one that is replete with eschatological significance—is the clearing of the Temple (Mark 11:15–17 and parallels). Following the lead of Sanders before him,[178] Wright spends much time discussing this symbolic action of the latter days of Jesus' public career.[179]

Wright sides historically with the Synoptic Tradition over against John's account of the timing of Jesus' clearing of the Temple. Whereas John places this event early in the ministry of Jesus, during his first of three visits to Jerusalem (John 2:13–22), each of the Synoptics places it at the end of Jesus' ministry, during his final visit to Jerusalem, and portray it as the catalyst that ultimately leads to his crucifixion. This is the strength of the Synoptics' account, according to Wright—namely, that it makes sense both as the climax of Jesus' ministry and as the reason for his being handed over by the Jews to the Romans for execution.

Wright identifies Jesus' actions in the temple as an "acted parable of judgment."[180] Wright compares it to prophetic actions such as "Isaiah's nakedness, Jeremiah's smashed pot, and Ezekiel's brick . . . ."[181] The judgment that Jesus, according to Wright, saw coming upon the temple was divine judgment. A time would soon come when disobedient and recalcitrant Israel would be judged, though a remnant of Israel would be saved. Jesus, for Wright, believed that this judgment would come upon Israel for three reasons: "Israel's failure to obey YHWH's call to be his people [specifically, the call present in Jesus' own ministry]; more narrowly, Israel's large-scale commitment to national rebellion, coupled with her failure to enact justice within her own society, not least within the Temple-system itself."[182] Because of these things, Wright argues, Jesus believed the wrath of YHWH was about to be poured out on Jerusalem, and especially her temple. YHWH would use the Romans similarly to how he had used the Babylonians before them to bring about the destruction of the temple, the judgment of God.

Lest the message of restoration be lost, a word of clarification is in order: The restoration of true Israel would occur, in Wright's thought, at the same time as the judgment of recalcitrant and apostate Israel. When Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and its

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[178] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chapter 1.
[179] Cf. for example Wright, *JVG*, 413–28, 430, 490–3, 614, and 651.
[180] Wright, *JVG*, 416.
[181] Wright, *JVG*, 415.
[182] Wright, *JVG*, 417.

temple had come to pass, true Israel—the followers of Jesus—would be vindicated for having trusted him and his message. The remnant of Israel would rise from the ashes of the destruction as the vindicated and restored covenant community. This moment of judgment/restoration would be, according to Wright, not simply one more moment in Israel's history, but "*the climax of Israel's whole history*."[183] This is the eschatological judgment Jesus saw impending for Jerusalem's temple, and this is the judgment he proleptically anticipated in his "acted parable of judgment," his clearing of the temple.

Much more could be said about Wright's analysis of Jesus' actions in the temple, considering how central Wright understands this action to be within Jesus' ministry and proclamation of the kingdom. Instead of continuing to focus on the temple action itself, however, I turn to Wright's interpretation of Mark 13 and parallels—passages he obviously believes are inextricably tied to Jesus' actions in the temple.[184] Mark 13 and its parallels are obviously also a huge part of the debate concerning New Testament eschatology, and understanding Wright's interpretive stance toward these passages is necessary in an appraisal of Wright's eschatological vision.

I will have to summarize several facets of Wright's lengthy interpretation of Mark 13.[185] To begin with, Wright argues that describing this passage as a "little apocalypse" has led to the erroneous implication that the rest of Jesus' words and deeds are *not* apocalyptic.[186] Redefining apocalyptic in his own way, Wright disagrees with this assessment. Secondly, Wright argues at length that modern scholarship has not understood the references to the "son of man" in the New Testament. Here in Mark 13, the "coming [παρουσια] of the son of man" does *not* refer to the "second coming" of Jesus, but rather to his vindication as king in Jerusalem.[187] In short, Wright argues that the disciples would have heard all of Mark 13 as "[Jesus'] prophetic announcement of the destruction of the Temple [and] as the announcement, also, of his vindication; in other words, of his own 'coming' – not floating around on a cloud, of course, but of his 'coming' *to Jerusalem as the vindicated, rightful king*."[188] Ultimately, Wright interprets this passage as

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[183] Wright, *JVG*, 417. Emphasis mine.
[184] Wright, *JVG*, 339–66.
[185] What is said here of Wright's appraisal of Mk 13 applies to the passage's parallels in Matthew and Luke as well.
[186] Wright, *JVG*, 340.
[187] Wright, *JVG*, 341–42.
[188] Wright, *JVG*, 342. To clarify, Jesus' vindication as "son of man" consists in the fulfillment of his prophecy concerning his being rejected by the people of Israel leading to the destruction of the temple and the city.

Jesus' prophetic announcement that Jerusalem was to be destroyed in judgment for her obstinacy and rebellion, and that when this happened—confirming Jesus' prediction of the event—Jesus would be recognized as the vindicated "son of man," the rightful king of Israel. Wrapped up in Mark 13 is also a warning Jesus gives to his followers to "flee to the mountains" when this destruction begins; true Israel was not to stand and fight the Romans, but instead flee the city that was fated for judgment because of its rejection of YHWH (who had been present in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem).[189]

Wright argues that this is the quite obvious historical reading of Mark 13, and proposes that "the obvious way of reading the chapter has been ignored for so long [because of] the fact that in a good deal of Christian theology the fall of Jerusalem has had no theological significance."[190] Mark 13, however, tells the climax of Israel's story (eschatology), and uses apocalyptic language to do it. Israel's rightful king, according to Mark, has come. YHWH has returned to Jerusalem and the Temple (in Jesus). The people do not accept their king, however, and instead continue in rebellion and waywardness. Therefore, judgment is coming upon the city and the temple specifically. This judgment is foretold by Jesus, who will be vindicated as the rightful king of Israel when what he has prophesied comes to pass. When the destruction begins, his followers—the true remnant, faithful Israel—are to leave the city to its appointed destruction. Thereafter, the restored covenant people of true Israel will no longer be tied to any specific location.

Conclusions

This chapter has been dedicated to presenting a brief summary of the historical reconstruction of Jesus undertaken by N. T. Wright and to arguing that his specific redefinitions of eschatology and apocalyptic are what enable his distinctive historical reconstruction. The historical Jesus, according to N. T. Wright, presented himself as the climax of Israel's story—that is, he was an eschatological and messianic prophet, who believed that in his ministry the long awaited reign of YHWH was finally manifesting itself. This is Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus, and to substantiate this summary I would conclude by presenting the recent

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The fact that things unfolded as Jesus' said they would demonstrates that he has, as the "son of man," ascended to his throne over the kingdom of the Ancient of Days. (cf. Dan 7)

[189] Wright, *JVG*, 353.
[190] Wright, *JVG*, 343.

abstracts of Wright's work by two New Testament scholars who have worked closely with him and have offered their critiques: Marianne Meye Thompson and Richard Hays. Thompson summarizes Wright's reconstruction:

> Jesus is a prophet who not only announced but enacted the kingdom of God, by which is meant the return of YHWH to Zion; the real end of Israel's exile; the forgiveness of Israel's sin; the reconstitution of Israel around Jesus who, together with his movement, constituted a new or alternative temple; a concomitant call to faith centered on him and not in Torah and temple; and the fulfillment of God's promise to the Gentiles. The end of exile and the 'rebuilding' of the temple indicate the Messiah has come at last and that the new age, Israel's redemption, the resurrection from the dead, is coming into being. In order to accomplish his ends, Jesus gave himself to death on the cross, and allowed evil to do its worst, and so to be the means by which God would finally deal with evil. Most pithily summarized, "Jesus believed he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, that which according to scripture only YHWH himself could do and be."[191]

Again, Hays also gives his synopsis of Wright's work:

> [T]he Jesus of Tom's historical reconstruction is a Jewish eschatological prophet who comes proclaiming the long-awaited coming of God's kingdom, the end of Israel's exile and the return of Yahweh to Zion. Indeed, Jesus is not just proclaiming the return of Yahweh to Zion, he is embodying it, enacting it in such a way that his journey to Jerusalem actually is the long-awaited eschatological coming of Israel's God.[192]

With this clear summary of Wright's reconstruction of the historical Jesus and the redefinitions of eschatology and apocalyptic that inform and shape it, it is time to proceed to a critique of one scarcely scrutinized suggestion included in this reconstruction.

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[191] Marianne Meye Thompson, "*Jesus and the Victory of God* Meets the Gospel of John," in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 28.

[192] Richard B. Hays, "Knowing Jesus," 49; cf. *JVG*, 653.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEYING JESUS' USE OF γέεννα (*GEHENNA*)

As we have seen, N. T. Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus centers upon Jesus' eschatological outlook—specifically, Wright asserts that Jesus intentionally engaged in a ministry of restoration eschatology. In Wright's understanding of eschatology, this means that Jesus told Israel's story and how that story was coming to a climax in and through his own words and deeds. A major part of that story was a prophetic warning to Israel that the Holy City of Jerusalem, with the Temple at its center, would not last beyond the present generation if Israel continued to embrace her way of violence and reject Jesus' way of peace. Embracing Jesus as Messiah, his program of peace, and the Kingdom of God was the only way to avoid the destruction foretold. Yet Jesus knew, according to Wright, that upon his entrance into and rejection within Jerusalem that Israel had chosen *against* him.[193] Jesus wept over Jerusalem because "you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Lk 19:44). Even on his way to Golgotha he told the "daughters of Jerusalem" not to weep for him but to "weep for yourselves and for your children. . . . For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Lk 23:28a, 31). According to Wright, a major part of Jesus' ministry to Israel was his prophetic warning that his own rejection would mean the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.[194] As we saw, Mark 13 and its parallels are understood by Wright as Jesus' prediction of these events and his vindication as the "son of man" when they occurred.

As I have already said, I believe that the overarching themes of this portrait of the historical Jesus are very convincing. It is a portrait, though, that needs further testing. One eschatological topic that is almost entirely unaddressed in *JVG* as well as other important monographs by Wright is the issue of Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna* (γέεννα). The brief mentions Wright does make of Jesus' use of *Gehenna* suggest that he thinks that this was an important part of Jesus' eschatological warning to the people of Israel. Wright, however, only hints at his understanding of this term and its use by Jesus, and specifically says, "The extent to

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[193] See e.g. Wright, *JVG*, 331: "Jerusalem is about to face the equivalent of a devastating farmyard fire, seen from the point of view of the livestock; Jesus has longed to do what mother hens do in such circumstances, but the chicks are refusing to come under his wings. As a result, the Temple is abandoned by its rightful inhabitant, left to its oncoming fate, just as in the prophecies of Ezekiel (13.34–5).
[194] Wright, *JVG*, passim, but especially chs.8–9.

which it [the term *Gehenna*] is used in the gospels metaphorically for an entirely non-physical place of torment, and the extent to which, in its metaphorical use, it retains the sense of a physical conflagration such as might accompany the destruction of Jerusalem by enemy forces, ought not to be decided in advance of a full study of Jesus' meaning."[195] This chapter is dedicated to providing just such a study.

First I will make note of the brief comments Wright does make about *Gehenna*. Then these comments will be used as a base from which to begin examining the term and its use by Jesus. Finally, I will use the information gathered to ascertain whether a full study of Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna* accentuates or undermines Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus.

Wright's first comment on *Gehenna* occurs in a footnote on p.183 of *JVG*. As a point of clarification for Mt 5:29–30//Mk 9:43–48, Wright asserts that "*Gehenna* was Jerusalem's smouldering rubbish-heap, and thence became a metaphor for the place of fiery judgment after death."[196] This succinct definition of *Gehenna*, as we will see, has much packed into it, including an identification of *Gehenna* with Jerusalem's garbage dump and a suggestion concerning the development of the meaning of *Gehenna* as a result of the site's use as a dump.

The second mention of *Gehenna* occurs in the eighth chapter of *JVG*—a chapter entitled "Stories of the Kingdom (3): Judgment and Vindication." In the context of building Wright's portrait of Jesus as a prophet (Part II of *JVG*), chapter 8 deals specifically with the warnings of judgment present in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, as recorded in the Synoptic Tradition. In this chapter, Wright implies a connection between Jesus' warnings concerning *Gehenna* and past prophetic warnings about the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem.

> Assyria and Babylon had been the instruments of YHWH's wrath before; now it would be the turn of Rome. Would this, then, be the end of the story? Would all that was left of Israel's dreams and aspirations be a heap of rubble, with Jerusalem as a whole turned into a large, smoking extension of *Gehenna*, her own rubbish-heap? In a sense, yes. In so far as Israel cherished nationalist ambition, it would end up on the fire.[197]

A few observations are in order here. First, Wright clearly identifies *Gehenna* as the garbage dump of the city of Jerusalem. Second, he connects Jesus' prophetic ministry with the prophets

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[195] Wright, *JVG*, fn. #47 on pp.454–55.

[196] Wright, *JVG*, fn. #142 on p.183. Twelve years after publishing *JVG*, Wright says the same thing about Gehenna in a more popular level monograph entitled *Surprised by Hope* (*SBH*): "Gehenna . . . was the rubbish heap outside the southwest corner of the old city of Jerusalem" (N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* [New York: HarperOne, 2008],175).

[197] Wright, *JVG*, 336.

of Israel's past, especially those who had warned of the coming destruction of Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians (e.g. Amos) and those who had warned of the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians (e.g. Jeremiah). Finally, Wright seems to identify *Gehenna* as a very *this-worldly* possibility—that is, the threat here is about Jerusalem's immediate, physical future, not necessarily any individual's post-mortem existence. Special note should be made of this last implication, especially because it seems to conflict with Wright's assumption—noted previously[198]—that *Gehenna* was at least sometimes "used in the gospels metaphorically for an entirely non-physical place of torment." A survey of Wright's brief comments regarding Jesus' use of *Gehenna* shows that Wright's emphasis falls upon *Gehenna* as an eschatological warning about a very *this-worldly* possibility for Jerusalem, rather than as a warning about a place of post-mortem, non-physical judgment.[199] Wright says this even more clearly in *SBH*: "Rome would turn Jerusalem into a hideous, stinking extension of its own smouldering rubbish heap. When Jesus said, 'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,' [i.e. Lk 13:5] that is the primary meaning he had in mind."[200] The primary focus of scrutiny in this chapter will be the bold, overarching claim that Jesus' threats concerning *Gehenna* were made mainly about a *this-worldly* punishment, *not* a post-mortem one.

Furthermore, recalling once again Wright's call for a more thorough study of Jesus' use of *Gehenna*,[201] it is also important to note that he inquires as to "the extent to which, in its metaphorical use, it [*Gehenna*] retains the sense of a physical conflagration."[202] This inquiry concerning *retention* of a particular use of the term assumes that the term *Gehenna* was, in fact, at some time prior to Jesus, used in "the sense of a physical conflagration." Consequently, the history of the term *Gehenna* prior to Jesus obviously must be investigated.

Let us now briefly summarize what Wright has said about *Gehenna*: (1) It was in ancient times the "smouldering rubbish heap" of Jerusalem; (2) As such, it became a place

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[198] See supra. fn. 196 and the quote from Wright to which it refers.

[199] Recall Wright's definition of *apocalyptic* as metaphorical language that "invests historical events with their theological meaning" (Wright, *NTPG*, 284).

[200] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 176. In an endnote at the end of the sentence, Wright refers the reader to ch.8 of *JVG*. In reality, Wright means to call to mind here pretty much everything Jesus says in the way of warnings, not just Jesus' use of *Gehenna*, despite his explicit connection of the this particular warning and Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. As an investigation of *every* warning made by Jesus would require more time and space that can be devoted in this study, I will focus my attention here solely on the bold claim that the warning concerning *Gehenna* was a primarily *this-worldly* warning.

[201] See supra. fn. 196 and the quote to which it refers.

[202] Wright, *JVG*, fn. #47 on pp.454–55.

metaphorically tied to post-mortem judgment, but Jesus primarily did not use the term in this way; (3) Jesus, in a way similar to Israel's prophets before him, used the term *Gehenna* in speaking of the imminent threat of "physical conflagration" posed to Jerusalem by the pagan armies of Rome. Except for Wright's exegesis of one specific logion (Mt 10:28//Lk 12:4–5) in which the term *Gehenna* appears[203] and his brief footnote in *RSG* referencing the reader back to *JVG* ,183, n. 42,[204] this is everything that Wright explicitly says about *Gehenna* in the more than 2000 pages of the *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series as well as his more recent *Surprised by Hope.* Wright's relative lack of attention to this quite important eschatological element of Jesus' ministry is somewhat surprising considering Wright's concern with understanding Jesus thoroughly within his 1st century Jewish apocalyptic eschatological context.

The brief comments we have noted here do not, however, seem to suggest that Wright is uninterested in the subject. On the contrary, Wright seems to believe that Jesus' warnings concerning *Gehenna* were integrally tied to his prophetic utterances concerning the imminent fate of Jerusalem. On this basis I would suggest that Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus— specifically, Wright's analysis of Jesus' eschatological outlook—has quite a bit riding on an accurate appraisal of Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. If the *Gehenna* threats were primarily about individuals' post-mortem existence, then Jesus' eschatological outlook might be quite different from what Wright has suggested. If these threats involving *Gehenna* really did focus on Jerusalem's immediate fate, then Wright's portrait of Jesus as the eschatological prophet of restoration eschatology is surely strengthened. Thus, Wright's own words will serve as a starting point for this inquiry into Jesus' use of *Gehenna*.

Gehenna: Fiery Garbage Dump?

First of all, we may ask the simple question, *Was Gehenna the smoldering rubbish heap of Jerusalem in the time of ancient Israel and Jesus?* Wright, along with many other commentators[205], assumes that this is the case. Lloyd Bailey, one of the commentators Wright

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[203] Wright, *JVG*, 454–455. I will return to this exegesis later on in this chapter. Wright also mentions this passage briefly in *RSG*, p.431.

[204] Wright, *RSG*, 407.

[205] Wright, *JVG* 183 fn. #142, 336; *SBH* 175–76; Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 117; William Barclay. *The Gospel of Matthew* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 141; Benjamin C. Chapman, "Hinnom," *NIDBA*: 239; G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 126; Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount (*Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 188; Ralph Earle, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1964), 75; R.

himself cites in his first comment on *Gehenna* in *JVG*[206], takes issue with this identification, though. In an article from 1986[207], Bailey notes that this identification of *Gehenna*/The Valley of Hinnom with Jerusalem's smoldering garbage dump depends upon a rabbinic commentary that dates from around 1200CE. At that time Rabbi David Kimhi wrote: "*Gehenna* is a repugnant place, into which filth and cadavers are thrown, and in which fires perpetually burn in order to consume the filth and bones; on which account, by analogy, the judgement of the wicked is called '*Gehenna.*' "[208] Bailey continues by citing both *The Jewish Encyclopedia*'s and *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*'s dependency upon this medieval rabbinic tradition, and follows this by stating: "Kimhi's otherwise plausible suggestion, however, finds no support in literary sources or archaeological data from the intertestamental or rabbinic periods. There is no evidence that the valley was, in fact, a garbage dump, and thus his explanation [for why it came to metaphorically refer to a place of eschatological judgment] is insufficient."[209] It is surprising both how many commentators, including Wright, assume this tradition's accuracy without further investigations and also that Wright, citing this source, seems to take no notice of the argument contained therein. Bailey clearly argues that there is no evidence to support this 13th century tradition concerning *Gehenna*. Unless someone can provide evidence to the contrary this means that, according to Bailey, a vast amount of commentators, including Wright, have founded their understanding of *Gehenna* upon little more than an unsubstantiated comment from a source written more than 1,000 years after Christ.

Since this first point—that *Gehenna* was the smoldering garbage dump of Jerusalem in ancient times—seems uncertain, Wright's second comment concerning *Gehenna*—that this use of the valley to burn refuse gave birth to the metaphorical identification of *Gehenna* as the fiery place of final judgment—is of course called into question. This is precisely the question that Bailey attempts to answer in his article: If *Gehenna* was *not* a smoldering rubbish heap, then what about that location caused it to be associated with post-mortem judgment? For the fact that it *was* associated with post-mortem judgment is hardly in question. Even if we demonstrate that Jesus never used the term in this way—and that would be quite difficult—other intertestamental

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T. France, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 125; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 678. Furthermore, in conversation with several pastors and other students of theology, I have found that opinion seems to not only be a scholarly consensus, but a popular one as well.
    [206] Wright, *JVG*, fn. #142 on p.183.
    [207] Llyod Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *BA* 49.3 (September 1986): 187–91.
    [208] Quoted in Bailey, "Gehenna," 188.
    [209] Bailey, "Gehenna," 189.

sources and later rabbinic sources certainly *do* use *Gehenna* in this way.[210] Bailey's brief argument is quite thoroughly researched and detailed: He basically concludes that altars built to underworld deities (e.g. Molech and Baal) in the Valley of Hinnom eventually became "perceived as gates to the realm of such deities"—with the ultimate result that *Gehenna* became synonymous with the underworld (viewed negatively) itself.[211] That the Valley of Hinnom/*Gehenna* could have been perceived particularly as a *gate* to the underworld seems to be supported by the important Talmudic comment on *Gehenna* in ʿErubin 19a: "R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar further stated: *Gehenna* has three gates; one in the wilderness, one in the sea and one in Jerusalem." The "one in Jerusalem" could have referred to the Valley of Hinnom, which lies just outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

Over 100 years ago, now, James Montgomery argued that it was the combination of this tradition of there being a gate to the underworld in the Valley of Hinnom; reflection upon the well-attested pagan sacrificial worship of Molech,[212] which included the sacrifice of children by fire; and simple geographical proximity to Jerusalem that gave rise to the association of *Gehenna* with the place of eschatological judgment.[213] While it is intriguing to inquire as to what probable combination of aspects of this physical location caused it to be metaphorically associated with the place of eschatological judgment, the fact of the matter remains that—for whatever reason(s)—it was. Of more immediate importance for our evaluation of Wright's view of *Gehenna* is simply recognizing that the usual attestation of *Gehenna* as the burning garbage dump of Jerusalem has been called into question, and other alternative explanations for why it came to be associated with the place of eschatological judgment have been offered for over 100 years now. Wright is not the only commentator that seems to have been unaware of this discussion—most that I have encountered have been.

The question arises as to whether there is any weightier evidence beyond Kimhi's medieval rabbinic comment that *Gehenna* was a smoldering rubbish heap of the city in the times of ancient Israel. The fact is that recent archaeological evidence may substantiate the notion that

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[210] See e.g. *b. ʿErub. 19a*; *b. Roš Haš. 16b–17a. 4 Ezra* 7:36; *2 Bar.* 59:10; 85:13; *Sib. Or.* 2:293; 4:186; *As. Mos.* 10:10; cf. *1 En.* 90:26; 27:1 f.; 54:1 f.; 56:3 f., where these texts from *1 En.* refer to an unnamed "valley" that is often identified as *Gehenna*.

[211] Bailey, "Gehenna," 191.

[212] Montgomery repeatedly refers to *Melek* (מֶלֶךְ) instead of *Molech* (מֹלֶךְ)—a confused reading of the Hebrew that seems to have been common in Montgomery's time.

[213] James A. Montgomery, "The Holy City and Gehenna," *JBL* 27.1 (1908): 24–47.

fires were kept burning (perhaps not perpetually, but regularly) in the Valley of Hinnom during the first century. In the 1970s Gabriel Barkay, a veteran archaeologist in Jerusalem, made some astonishing discoveries at the dig site known as Ketef Hinnom ("shoulder of Hinnom"), which is situated on the south-western slope of the Valley of Hinnom. His findings since the '70s have recently been published in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*.[214] Perhaps the most important discovery occurred in 1979, when two silver amulets on which the oldest Hebrew Bible inscriptions (late 7th/early 6th centuries BCE) ever found were uncovered.[215] Also discovered were cremation chambers from the Tenth Roman Legion. Barkay recounts what his team uncovered beneath the remains of a Byzantine era church:

> While digging under the remains of the church, we discovered several concentrations of burnt soil and ash that appeared in the balks (sides) of the excavated squares. Later, we found some complete and intact ceramic cooking pots that had been put into the ground in an upright position, as though on purpose. These pots contained crushed and burnt bones and ash, as well as some small iron nails. This was no doubt a cemetery of cremation tombs. The concentrations of ash and burnt soil probably mark the place where the bodies were cremated. The cooking pots, typical of the Late Roman period, served as urns for the remains of the dead. Similar evidence for cremation has been found near the Damascus Gate and along the northern wall of the Old City, as well as in Binyanei Ha'ūma, west of Jerusalem, and at Ramat Rah.el to the south of the city. At all these sites we have evidence for the presence of soldiers from the Tenth Roman Legion, mainly roof tiles stamped with that legion's name. No other group in the history of ancient Jerusalem is known to have practiced cremation. The Tenth Roman Legion was stationed in Jerusalem from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. until the reign of Emperor Diocletian in the late third century. This was confirmed by a clay roof tile stamped with the letters "LXF," an abbreviation of *Legio X [Decima] Fretensis,*the official name of the Tenth Legion. The tile appears to date from the third century C.E.[216]

Obviously, 70 C.E. is after the time of the historical Jesus, though probably before the time of the authorship of at least two of the Synoptics—Matthew and Luke. The evidence here only points indirectly to the conclusion that *Gehenna* was a smoldering rubbish heap. The argument could be made that since the Roman army chose this particular spot out of all available options to

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[214] Gabriel Barkay, "The Riches of Ketef Hinnom: Jerusalem Tomb Yields Biblical Text Four Centuries Older than Dead Sea Scrolls," *BAR* 35.4–5 (July–Oct, 2009): 22-35, 122–26.

[215] Barkay, "The Riches," 24; Cf. Andrew G. Vaughn, et al. "The Challenges of Ketef Hinnom: Using Advanced Technologies to Reclaim the Earliest Biblical Texts and Their Context." *NEA* 66.4 (Dec 2003): 162-171 and Gabriel Barkay, "The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," *TA* 19 (1992): 139–192 for more information on the amulets themselves and the inscriptions on them.

[216] Barkay, "The Riches," 26–7.

cremate the bodies of their soldiers, by 70 C.E. something about this place lent itself to this kind of act. That is to say, if by 70 C.E. the spot had already become a common spot for burning refuse, it would make sense for the Tenth Roman Legion to choose this spot to burn its corpses.

Of related interest, Barkay notes that "during the Second Temple period, the Roman general Pompey most probably built his camp in this area, opposite the city, when he attacked Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. Later, in 70 C.E. during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome, the Roman army built a section of its siege wall here."[217] That is to say that at two of the most crucial points in Second Temple Jewish history—one preceding Jesus' life, one following it—the place known as *Gehenna* had been used by Rome's armies as a place from which to launch attacks that led to the capture (in the first case) and the destruction (in the second) of Jerusalem.

A final piece of interesting evidence mentioned by Barkay is the fact that numerous (20+) burial caves have been discovered at the site, which were in use as early as the 7th c. B.C.E. and as late as immediately before the Roman siege of Jerusalem began in the 60s C.E.[218] Rounding out the archaeological evidence concerning this site is this identification of its use as a burial place for several centuries prior to the life of Jesus—evidence that we will see is confirmed when we come to the examination of the prophet Jeremiah's remarks about the Valley of Hinnom later in this chapter.

It is now time to bring all of the above-cited evidence to bear on Wright's claim that *Gehenna* was a "smouldering rubbish heap" in the days of ancient Israel and Jesus. First we must say that the accepted maxim that scholars of all stripes routinely employ—namely, *Gehenna* was the fiery garbage dump of ancient Jerusalem—is not nearly as settled a matter as their confident assertions would suggest. Most scholars, including Wright himself, seem unaware of the surprisingly small amount of evidence in favor of this conclusion or of the challenges that have been brought against it by those like Montgomery and Bailey. A scholar commenting on *Gehenna* who does not address such challenges should not build too much of a case upon this identification of *Gehenna*. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to at least hold this conclusion tentatively. First, there is the literary evidence of Rabbi Kimhi himself. Though written long after the time of Christ, it is the only literary evidence that attempts to address our question, and as such it must be weighed. This statement is not, however, in itself sufficient to

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[217] Barkay, "The Riches," 24–25.
[218] Barkay, "The Riches," 24–35.

establish the identification of *Gehenna* as a fiery garbage dump. Recent archaeological evidence seems to add to the case, though. Barkay's discovery of the Tenth Roman Legion's regular practice of burning bodies in this location lends credence to the notion that fires had also burned the city's refuse in this place.

Further in this paper we will also consider portions of the Book of Jeremiah that provide more evidence that the city's garbage ended up in the Valley of Hinnom/*Gehenna*. I anticipate this examination of Jeremiah only briefly here by noting that in the Book of Jeremiah the Valley of Hinnom is said to be accessible by the "Dung Gate," which was also known (only in Jer 19) as the "Potsherd Gate," and in that valley Jeremiah is instructed to smash a clay pot. The fact that the place was accessible by a gate the name of which was associated with dung and potsherds also suggests that the city's garbage was tossed here (though it suggests little about whether or not it was set ablaze). All of this suggests that a definitive answer cannot yet be provided to the original question, *Was Gehenna the smoldering rubbish heap of Jerusalem in the time of ancient Israel and Jesus?* There is both supporting and undermining evidence. As I see it, the evidence weighs slightly in favor of the traditional ascription. The burden of proof seems to lie upon the shoulders of those who wish to establish the identity of *Gehenna* as something other than the traditional "smouldering rubbish heap," and this burden is not fully borne. Therefore, I conclude that *Gehenna may* have been the perennially burning garbage dump of Jerusalem in the time of ancient Israel and Jesus, but that this point has been overstressed and under-supported. The evidence presented here from recent archaeological digs, however, gives more credence to this identification than can be found in most scholarly works.

Gehenna as a Warning of "Physical Conflagration" in Israel's Prophets

Next we will examine Wright's contention that, following in the use of Israel's prophets, Jesus used the term *Gehenna* to speak of a coming "physical conflagration" threatening the Holy City. To provide clarity here it is necessary to survey the Hebrew Bible's use of the term. The Greek word γέεννα[219] is a transliteration of the Aramaic term גֵּיהִנָּם, which in turn derives from

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[219] And its cognates.

the Hebrew גֵּי־הִנֹּם (The Valley of Hinnom), which is an abbreviation of either גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם (The Valley of the Son of Hinnom) or גֵּי בְנֵי הִנֹּם (The Valley of the Sons of Hinnom).[220]

The long history of biblical references to this location begins in the Book of Joshua.   In Josh 15:8, the Deuteronomist describes a portion of the boundary marking out the territory of the tribe of Judah: "then the boundary goes up by the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם) at the southern slope of the Jebusites (that is, Jerusalem); and the boundary goes up to the top of the mountain that lies over against the valley of Hinnom (גֵּי־הִנֹּם), on the west, at the northern end of the valley of Rephaim." (NRSV) This Valley of Hinnom is often identified with the site that is currently called the Wadi er-Rababeh[221] (this name is transliterated in a number of different ways; e.g. Wadi er-Rababi[222], Wadi al-Rababah[223]), which is a valley[224] to the immediate south and southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. (Cf. the picture in the Appendix of the valley as it appears to today.) Joshua 18:16 says essentially the same thing in the course of discussing the boundaries of the tribe of Benjamin. These brief references are the earliest biblical references to the physical location that would come to be known in Greek as γέεννα. Here in Joshua the Valley of (the son of) Hinnom is simply a physical location that marks a boundary between two of the tribes of Israel—Judah and Benjamin—during the distribution of tribal territories. The Valley of Hinnom seems to carry no theological overtones whatsoever—whether positive or negative—at this point in Israel's history. It is simply a point on the map that is mentioned as a boundary marker.

All of this changes, however, during the period of the divided monarchy. The next time we see the Valley of Hinnom mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is in 2 Kgs 23:10. Chapter 23 of 2 Kings describes the sweeping reforms of the zealous King Josiah. Josiah takes it upon himself to violently purge the land of Judah of its idolatrous practices and worship sites. One of these sites seems to have been located in the Valley of Hinnom. Second Kings 23:10 reads: "He defiled Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת), which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם), so that no one would make a

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[220] Joachim Jeremias, "γέεννα," *TDNT* 1:657–8.
[221] Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua* (AB 6; New York: Doubleday, 1982), 368.
[222] Jeremias, *TDNT* 1:657.
[223] Frants Buhl, "Ge-hinnom," *JE* 5:584.
[224] The American reader must remember that "valley" and "mountain" in the Bible often refer to heights we would call "hills" and depths those in West Virginia like to call "hollers." Cf. the picture of the Valley of Hinnom in the appendix.

son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech." (NRSV)[225] A new and related term is introduced here: Topheth. Cogan and Tadmor say that "Topheth was the cultic installation at which children were offered to the god Molech. Probably the word refers either to the stand over the fire upon which the child was placed or to the hearth as a whole; etymologically, it may be cognate to Ugaritic *ṯpd* and to Aramaic *špt*, 'to set (on the fire)' . . . ."[226]

This understanding of the referent "mak[ing] a son or a daughter pass through fire" as burning child sacrifices to the god Molech is further supported by both the book of Kings and the later history of Chronicles. Second Kings 16:3 reads: "but he [Ahaz] walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. In 2 Chr 28:3–4 we are told more specifically that this occurred in the Valley of Hinnom: "he [Ahaz] made offerings in the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם), and made his sons pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree" (NRSV). Likewise the same indictments are brought against King Manasseh in both Kings and Chronicles: "He made his son pass through fire . . . " (2 Kgs 21:6a NRSV). "He made his son pass through fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם) . . . " (2 Chr 33:6 NRSV). This association of the Valley of (the Son[s] of) Hinnom with child sacrifice is the obvious origin of at least a negative theological overtone being added to the mention of the name of this physical location nearby Jerusalem.

Other than a brief mention of the "valley of Hinnom" (גֵּי־הִנֹּם) in Nehemiah 11:30—where it once again serves as a simple location to demark the settlements of the tribe of Judah—the only other book in the Hebrew Bible that mentions the Valley of Hinnom by name is the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah began prophesying during the reign of Josiah (Jer 1:2; 25:3) and continued into the beginning of the exilic period. In Jeremiah 7, the prophet stands before the people on the steps of the Temple Mount and directs one of his sharpest speeches at them (vv.1–15), condemning their neglect of the Torah and their haughty confidence in the indestructibility

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[225] Cf. Lev 18:21 & 20:2–5 for specific commands against offering children up to Molech.

[226] Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmore, *II Kings*, (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988); cf. Jacob Meyers, *II Chronicles*, (AB 13; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 160–61, where he says of the Valley of Ben-hinnom, "In Jeremiah's day there was a *tōpet* there (vii 31–32) where children were sacrificed (cf. II Kings xxiii 10)."

of the Temple of the Lord. Within the edited context of that same chapter appears an oracle of the LORD directed specifically against the Valley of Hinnom:

> For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. And they go on building the high place of Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת), which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם), to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת), or the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם), but the valley of Slaughter (הַהֲרֵגָה גַּיְא): for they will bury in Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת) until there is no more room. The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste. (Jer 7:30–34 NRSV)

In this passage we see a clear condemnation of this specific place, the Valley of Hinnom, presumably because of its close association with such hideous idolatrous practices. Instead of a place to sacrifice, says Jeremiah, it will become a burial ground—one that swells with corpses to the extent that they stick up out of the ground, providing carrion for the birds of the air. The last verse of this passage indicates that, not only the condemnation of the Valley of Hinnom, but also the broader devastation of Judah is in view here. Apparently, when this broader destruction starts taking place the people of Judah will bury their dead in the Valley of Hinnom. It is worth asking, then, whether not this might suggest that this valley was already being used for the purpose of burial in Jeremiah's day. As discussed earlier, Barkay's archaeological investigations confirmed that at least some of the burial caves discovered at the location probably date from as early as the 7th c. B.C.E.—the time of Jeremiah.[227] Even if Barkay's dating of these sites is too early, we have here in Jeremiah's first mention of the Valley of Hinnom a strong association of death with the location. Not only that, but of particular interest for our discussion of N. T. Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus is the fact that Jeremiah's prophetic condemnation of the Valley of Hinnom is integrally tied to his prediction concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem. We shall return to this point after presently considering the other Jeremianic texts referencing the Valley of Hinnom.

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[227] See supra. fn. 219.

In Jeremiah 19, the LORD tells Jeremiah to purchase an earthenware jar, gather some of the elders and priests of Judah, and go to the Valley of Hinnom, through the Dung/Potsherd Gate, to perform a symbolic act of destruction before the leaders of the people while standing in the valley. While standing in the Valley of Hinnom, Jeremiah is instructed by the LORD to indict the people of Judah, in the hearing of their leaders, for their idolatry, and specifically "because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind" (Jer 19:4b–5 NRSV). The rest of the indictment (vv. 6–9) proceeds sounding much like what Jeremiah said in Jer 7:32–34, though with a horrific addition of a prediction that "I [the LORD] will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege, and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them" (v.9 NRSV).[228] The LORD instructs Jeremiah to, in the presence of Judah's leaders,[229] shatter the pot he takes out to the Valley of Hinnom once he has finished speaking this indictment, and while doing so to say to them:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת) they shall bury until there is no more room to bury. Thus will I do to this place, says the Lord, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת). And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth (הַתֹּפֶת)—all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods. (vv.11–13 NRSV)

After this oracle, Jeremiah comes back into the temple court and gives another oracle there: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am now bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks, refusing to hear my words" (v.15 NRSV).

There are several points of interest in this passage concerning our present study of the history of *Gehenna* and its relationship to Jesus' use of the term. The first concerns the identity of the gate that Jeremiah is told to walk through on his way to the Valley of Hinnom; it is the gate closest to the Temple Mount. It lies on the south-eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem,

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[228] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), says that this curse of eating one another "is another standard curse found in the Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon (448–50; 547–50; *ANET*³ 538–39) and in Deut 28:53–57 and Lev 26:29" (840).

[229] Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 840 says that "the men with Jeremiah act as witnesses to the prophecy (cf. 43:9)."

and it opens up to the eastern most edge of the *Wadi er-Rababeh*—the site most often recognized as the Valley of Hinnom. The gate is known as the Potsherd Gate (here in Jer 19 only) or Dung Gate (Neh 2:13; 3:13–14; 12:31), and it may have been known by these names because it was "probably the exit through which the city's refuse was removed,"[230] and was, moreover, "the gate [which led] out of the city into the Ben-Hinnom Valley where, perhaps, broken pottery was dumped."[231] This is the only time in the Hebrew Bible that this gate is reference by the name "Potsherd [Heb. חַרְסִית, presumably the collective feminine form of the noun חֶרֶשׂ] Gate." This of course raises again the question of whether or not the Valley of Hinnom was in fact a smoldering rubbish heap, or at least a rubbish heap, in the days of Jesus and even prior to him. It would make sense to see here the LORD instructing Jeremiah to take a pot through the "Broken Pottery Gate" in order to dash it to pieces in the place where broken pottery usually ends up—the garbage dump of Jerusalem—as a prediction concerning the soon-coming destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps the tradition about the Valley of Hinnom's being the garbage dump of Jerusalem is not as shaky as Bailey suggests.

Also of interest is the obvious connection here in Jer 19 between the Valley of Hinnom and the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. Remembering that the purpose of this discussion is to begin to evaluate N. T. Wright's statement that Jesus, in a way similar to Israel's prophets before him, used the term *Gehenna* in speaking of the imminent threat of "physical conflagration" posed to Jerusalem by the pagan superpower of the day, we can certainly see that this is a good description of how at least one of Israel's prophets, Jeremiah, used the term. Jeremiah, as instructed by the LORD, brings the elders and priests of Jerusalem from the gate closest to the temple and into the Valley of Hinnom to symbolically portray the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian army because of her apostasy. The parallels with Wright's portrait of Jesus start to become striking at this point: Wright portrays Jesus as a prophet who symbolically enacts the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in his temple action, and who uses the term *Gehenna* to speak of the destruction coming upon Jerusalem at the hands of the foreign armies of Rome because of her apostasy.[232] Jeremiah, a prophet known for his prophecies against the temple, uses the name and place of the Valley of

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[230] Bernard M. Levinson, "Dung," *HBD* 229–30.
[231] Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 838.
[232] Cf. Wright, *JVG*, chs.8–9.

Hinnom to speak of the destruction coming upon Jerusalem at the hands of the foreign armies of Babylon because of her apostasy.

There seems also to be a hint of a further parallel between Jesus and Jeremiah simply in the literary context of Jer 19. It is *very* interesting, in paralleling the story of Jesus, that this prophetic action by Jeremiah is preceded by the mention of a plot to bring charges against Jeremiah (18:18), and itself precedes Jeremiah's arrest and punishment by the priest in charge of the temple guard, Pashur (20:1–6). Of course Jesus' temple action is preceded in the Synoptic Gospels by mentions of plots against Jesus (i.e. Mt 20:17–19; Mk 10:32–34; Lk 18:31–34[233]) and seems to be the immediate cause of his arrest by the temple guard (cf. Mk 11:18; 12:12; Lk 19:47–48 for the stated intentions of Jesus' opponents to arrest him and have him put to death). Of course all of this could prove little more than that the Evangelists who structured their accounts of the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem may have modeled their accounts on the sufferings of Jeremiah; that is, it does not necessarily prove that the historical Jesus encountered opposition in this order and fashion. Nevertheless I think the parallels worth mentioning.

The last time the Valley of Hinnom is mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah occurs in the context of the story of Jeremiah's being commanded by the LORD to purchase a field in Anathoth as a sign of the restoration that will follow Jerusalem's destruction. Jeremiah 32:1–15 chronicles the purchase of the field in Anathoth at the command of the LORD, while vv.16–25 recount Jeremiah's prayer for understanding. In his prayer, Jeremiah praises the LORD but also questions the purpose of buying land even as the siege ramps of Babylon are built up against the walls of Jerusalem. The mention of the Valley of Hinnom occurs within the context of the LORD's response to Jeremiah in vv. 26–44. This response includes the LORD's indictments against the people of Judah for their sin (vv.26–35) and his promise of restoration and repopulation of the land following Jerusalem's destruction (vv.36–44). At the climax of the indictment portion of this response, the LORD says to Jeremiah: "They built the high places (בָּמוֹת) of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom (גֵּי בֶן־הִנֹּם), to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination, causing Judah to sin." (v.35 NRSV) Once again this passage specifically refers to the practice of child sacrifice and condemns it, citing these sacrifices in the Valley of Hinnom as one of the main

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[233] While plots by Jesus' opponents are mentioned throughout the Synoptics, interestingly the mention of these plots (and the predicted outcome of them) occurs on the mouth of *Jesus* just before the temple action.

reasons for the LORD's coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Unlike the other passages from Jeremiah examined here, however, this passage speaks explicitly about a restoration that will follow the destruction of the city.

Once again the parallels between Jeremiah and (at least Wright's portrait of) Jesus are instructive. Wright believes not only that Jesus prophesied Jerusalem's destruction as the punishment that would be brought upon Israel for their apostasy (climaxing in their rejection of him),[234] but also that Jesus looked forward to a restored Israel that would emerge from the ashes of the destruction.[235] The restored Israel would be the community that Jesus himself had already begun to form in his ministry—the community of his disciples. They are those whom Jesus instructs to flee the city when the destruction of Jerusalem takes place (Mk 13:14–19 & pars.).[236] They are the ones for whom the Sermon on the Mount was to be the charter of the renewed covenant people.[237] A rebirth of Israel would occur even through her punishment. Apostate Israel would be destroyed and true Israel and her Messiah vindicated. In this way the Exile, commenced during the days of Jeremiah, would finally come to an end.[238]

Now that we have examined the references to the Valley of Hinnom in the OT— especially those that occur in Jeremiah—we may ask what may be said about Wright's assertion that Jesus' use of *Gehenna* resembles how Israel's prophets used *Gehenna* to speak of a coming "physical conflagration" for the Holy City. To begin with, Israel's *prophets (plural)* do not speak of *Gehenna*; only Jeremiah does.[239] If we restrict the question to this one major prophet of Israel, however, Wright's claim is substantiated. Jeremiah does—quite vividly, in fact—use the name and place of the Valley of Hinnom to speak of the coming "physical conflagration" of Jerusalem. Moreover, the ministry of Jeremiah seems to parallel the ministry of the historical

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[234] Wright, *JVG*, 323: "The warnings already mentioned, and those about to be discussed, are manifestly and obviously, within their historical context, warnings about a coming national disaster, involving the destruction by Rome of the nation, the city and the Temple. The story of judgment and vindication which Jesus told is very much like the story told by the prophet Jeremiah, invoking the categories of cosmic disaster in order to invest the coming socio-political disaster with its full theological significance."

[235] Wright, *JVG*, ch. 8 passim. E.g. p.325: "Israel's story is retold so as to reach a devastating climax, in which the present Jerusalem regime will be judged, and the prophet and his followers vindicated. The covenant god will use the pagan forces to execute his judgment on his people, and a new people will be born, formed around the prophet himself.

[236] Wright, *JVG*, ch. 8 passim. E.g. p.348: "There will come a time when the appropriate reaction is flight. Jerusalem's doom has been announced, and Jesus' followers must not be caught in the city when it falls. Their vindication will come when the city that has opposed Jesus is destroyed."

[237] Wright, *JVG*, 287–92.

[238] Wright, *JVG*, 363.

[239] And though of course Joshua and Kings are considered to be a part of the Book of the Prophets in the Hebrew canon, it is obvious that Wright does not have these books in mind when he refers to "Israel's prophets."

Jesus as portrayed by Wright in a couple of other striking ways: (1) Each had a distinct message of judgment aimed at the temple; (2) Each seems to have been conspired against and arrested on the basis of these threatening words directed at the temple; (3) Each was a prophet whose message largely consisted of a warning concerning the imminent judgment the LORD was about to bring against Jerusalem by means of a foreign superpower's army. On the basis of an examination of Jeremiah's ministry and his use of the *Valley of Hinnom* alone, one might be led to conclude that the historical Jesus may have intentionally drawn upon his knowledge of the ministry and oracles of Jeremiah in forming his own denunciation of Jerusalem and its temple and his use of the term *Gehenna*.[240] If this hypothesis stands under an examination of the Synoptic Gospels themselves, it may be that much of what Wright suggests concerning the historical Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna* may be substantiated, further buttressing his overall portrait of the historical Jesus.

Wright's last comment related to Jesus' use of *Gehenna* is that Jesus' words "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:5) and parallel logia were directed at Jews whose fate was tied up with the threatened city of Jerusalem. The next step in the process of examining the historical Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna* must be then an analysis of Jesus' use of the term in the Synoptic Gospels themselves.

Gehenna in the Synoptic Gospels

Outside of an obscure reference in James 3:6, the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is the only person in the New Testament to use the term γέεννα. He does so 11 times: three times in Mark (9:43–48, where the term appears three times in the same logion); seven times in Matthew (5:22; 5:29–30, where the term appears twice; 10:28; 18:8–9; and 23:15 & 33, where the term appears in two of the seven woes directed at the Pharisees); and once in Luke (12:4–5). The fact that this term appears nowhere in the writings of Paul, Peter, or even the Johannine literature, but only (except Ja 3:6) in the Synoptics would lead one to conclude, in lieu of other observations,

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[240] This of course makes the assumption that these facets of the presentation of Jesus' ministry in the Synoptics are not simply the pure invention of the Evangelists themselves. That is to say, this question makes some assumptions about how historically reliable the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels are. I will address this concern more thoroughly at the beginning of my discussion of *Gehenna* in the Synoptic Gospels. For the time being let me simply say that I am in dialog with N. T. Wright concerning a specific point of his portrait of the historical Jesus, not concerning his interpretation of the historical authenticity of the Synoptics. Because of this, I am sharing his—and many Third Questers—assumption that the Synoptics are generally historically reliable. Again, I will say more on this shortly.

that we are on fairly stable ground in asserting that the term was used by the historical Jesus himself. Although the term appears 11 times, there are actually only 4 (or 5, if we consider the two woes to the Pharisees as originally separate) different logia.

Before proceeding to examine these Synoptic passages, however, a word concerning the problem of authenticity is in order. For well over a century now the problem of establishing the authenticity of any of the sayings of Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels has divided historical Jesus scholarship. In my survey of the history of the Quests I referred to the fact that current historical Jesus scholarship is more divided than ever on this issue. Those who participate in the so-called Renewed Quest often reject the vast majority of the Synoptic material as inauthentic, and they just as frequently elevate as authentic material from non-canonical sources like *Thomas*. Those who participate in the so-called Third Quest, though often remaining skeptical about the exact wording and order of collected material, are generally much more comfortable with a basic position of acceptance concerning the historical authenticity of the sayings of Jesus in the Synoptics. There is a fundamental philosophical and methodological difference of opinion at work here—one that I have no intention (nor, obviously, the space) to address in this study. I have indicated that I am more sympathetic to the philosophical and methodological stance of the Third Quest. Like G. B. Caird, "I have never been able to persuade myself that the interests of Jesus and those of the early church were so mutually exclusive that what may be ascribed to the one must be denied to the other."[241] Further, I agree with Dale Allison's specific comments on evaluating Jesus' use of *Gehenna*: "Little in our contentious field is clear to demonstration; and regarding Jesus and *Gehenna*, we do not come to the question free of judgments about Jesus in general. . . . We do not and cannot evaluate the details apart from the big picture with which we begin."[242] Consequently, I confess that I incline to believe—as do most Third Questers—that the Evangelists, while obviously shaping their source materials in ways that reflect their particular theological and literary interests, have presented us with basically historically authentic sayings of Jesus of Nazareth, and that it was in their interests to do so. Not only is this my philosophical stance; it is the philosophical stance of the scholar with whom I am in dialog, N. T. Wright. Since this is how Wright proceeds, and I am in dialog with his work, I will follow his lead and make little effort at independently establishing the

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[241] Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 4–5.
[242] Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 77–78.

authenticity of the sayings I am examining before exegeting them. I know that this will not be completely satisfactory to all who may wish to enter these debates, but the simple fact of the matter is that arguing about criteria of authenticity for each passage under investigation here would require many more pages than this study can afford.

Mark 9:43–4 // Matthew 5:29–30 // Matthew 18:8–9

The first logion, and the only time γέεννα appears in Mark's Gospel, appears in Mk 9:43–48, Mt 5:29–30, and Mt 18:8–9 (a saying very similar to Mt 5:29–30, repeated in Matthew's Gospel in a different context). My translations of the three passages are listed side by side here:

Mk 9:43–48	Mt 5:29–30	Mt 18:8–9
[43]And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off: It is better for you to enter life crippled than, having two hands, to go away (ἀπελθεῖν) into *Gehenna*, into the unquenchable fire. *[v.44, which is identical to v.48, is omitted in most early manuscripts]* [45]And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off: It is better for you to enter life lame than, having two feet, to be cast into (βληθῆναι) *Gehenna*. *[v.46, which is identical to v.48, is omitted in most early manuscripts]* [47]And if your eye causes you to sin, cast it out (ἔκβαλε): It is better to enter the Reign of God one-eyed than, having two eyes, to be cast into (βληθῆναι) *Gehenna*, [48]where their worm does not die and the fire is not extinguished.	[29]But if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck (ἔξελε) it out and cast (βάλε) it away from you: For it is better (συμφέρει) for you that one of your body parts be destroyed (ἀπόληται) than that the whole of your body be cast (βληθῇ) into *Gehenna*. [30]And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it away from you: For it is better for you that one of your body parts be destroyed than that the whole of your body go away (ἀπέλθῃ) into *Gehenna*.	[8]But if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you: It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast (βληθῆναι) into the eternal fire (τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον). [9]And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck (ἔξελε) it out and cast it away from you: It is better for you to enter life one-eyed than, having two eyes, to be cast (βληθῆναι) into the *Gehenna* of fire (τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός).

One of the things that is most striking about these passages is that, in both Mark and Matthew, Jesus associates *Gehenna* with *fire*, and in Mark he goes on to explicitly connect the idea of *Gehenna* with Isaiah's prophecy of a fiery and desolate graveyard reserved for God's enemies outside the walls of the new Jerusalem (Isa 66:24).[243] Third Isaiah's eschatological visions are still

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[243] The LXX of this portion of Isa 66:24 reads: "ὁ γὰρ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτήσει, καὶ τὸ πῦρ αὐτῶν οὐ σβεσθήσεται," while Mk 9:48 reads, "ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται." The future tense verbs of the LXX have changed into present tense verbs in Mark's Gospel. As mentioned in the translation of Mk

quite terrestrial, and the imagery in Isa 66, while speaking of "new heavens and the new earth," suggests that the new Jerusalem will be physically proximate to the place where the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against the LORD lie. In Mark 9, Jesus fills in the gaps and explicitly names this place as *Gehenna*, which is, of course, just south-southwest of Jerusalem—a place that would be easy to see from Jerusalem itself. It is very difficult on the basis of the observed correspondence to Isa 66 alone, however, to decide whether by *Gehenna* Jesus here means a physical place of destruction outside of the physical walls of Jerusalem or post-mortem destruction for the enemies of God. It is generous enough to leave open the possibility that Wright's assertion that Jesus' use of *Gehenna* is tied to his prophetic warning about the imminent conflagration coming upon Jerusalem *may* possibly find support in Jesus' association of *Gehenna* in Mk 9 with the place outside the walls of the new Jerusalem in Isa 66.

What are we to make of Jesus' use of *Gehenna* here in Mk 9 and its parallels, then? There are a couple of competing interpretations of these passages; some say these passages speak against sexual immorality, others say that they speak broadly against the temptation to sin. A striking parallel from the Babylonian Talmud is instructive here. *B. Nida* 13a says: "Every hand that makes frequent examination [of the genitalia] is in the case of women praiseworthy, but in the case of men it ought to be cut off." Following this is a discussion amongst the rabbis of the sin of masturbation. Then the tractate continues on p.13b:

> It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael, ' "You shall not commit adultery" [Exod 20:14] means there shall be in you no adultery, neither with the hand nor with the foot.' Our masters taught, 'The proselytes and those who play with children delay the messiah.' Granted, 'proselytes', as is the opinion of R. Helbo, for R. Helbo said: 'Proselyted are as hard for Israel as a sore'; but 'those who play with children', what does it mean? If we say homosexuality—they were punished by stoning [cf. Lev 20:13]; if we say sexual activity involving the limbs—they were punished by the Flood; thus we must say, those who marry young girls who have not yet reached the age of childbearing.[244]

Will Deming argues convincingly that this Talmudic passage, Mk 9:42–10:12, and Mt 5:27–32 all stem from the same tradition—a mid-1st century debate amongst both Christians and Jews concerning the full scope of male adultery.[245] Nevertheless, he argues that Mark and Matthew,

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9:43–48, this reference probably only occurred once in the original text, but was added twice more in later manuscript traditions.

[244] This translation is taken from Will Deming, "Mark 9.42–10.12, Matthew 5.27–32, and *B. Nid.* 13b: A First Century Discussion of Male Sexuality," *NTS* 36.1 (1990): 133.

[245] Deming, "Mark," 140–41.

unlike the Talmud, use this tradition to speak, not of sexual misconduct, but of temptation among Jesus' disciples.[246] The conclusion that these gospel passages are to be understood as addressing issues of perverted human sexuality is, however, supported by other scholars.[247] Adultery with the "hand" would refer to male masturbation; adultery with the "foot" to 'normal' adultery, since feet are a common Semitic euphemism for male genitalia;[248] and adultery with the "eye" would be understood as lustfully looking at a woman.[249]

Whether we understanding this warning as concerning sexual immorality or temptation broadly, it does not seem to be helpful to Wright's assertions about Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. Condemnations of sexual immorality and adultery using the term *Gehenna* to describe the offender's place of torment are not uncommon in contemporary Jewish sources.[250] In none of these cases could one effectively argue that the retribution the author has in mind is the physical conflagration of the city of Jerusalem. The punishment for adultery and sexual perversion in these sources is *Gehenna*, understood as post-mortem (either post-resurrection or in a disembodied intermediate state) suffering for sin. There seems to be no evidence to suggest that Jesus was using *Gehenna* in a way other than this common way in these passages. Here Jesus sounds much like his contemporaries, condemning specific immoralities—like sexual immorality—to post-mortem judgment in *Gehenna*.

Matthew 5:22

The second logion to examine is the first of the six antitheses uttered by Jesus in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. (5:21–22) My translation of the passage is laid out here:

> [21]"You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not murder'; and the one who murders is liable (ἔνοχος) to judgment (τῇ κρίσει). [22]But *I* say to you, whoever is angry with his brother is liable (ἔνοχος) to judgment (τῇ κρίσει). And whoever says to his brother, Airhead! (Ῥακά), is liable to the Sanhedrin (τῷ συνεδρίῳ); And whoever says, Rebel! (Μωρέ), is liable to the *Gehenna* of fire (τὴν γέεννav τοῦ πυρός).

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[246] Deming, "Mark," 138–9.

[247] Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (ed. Harold W. Attridge Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2007), 443f. Cf. Dale Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 178–82.

[248] Collins, *Mark*, 453–454.

[249] Collins, *Mark*, 454. Collins includes in this discussion sexual perversion with "the little ones" (Mk 9:42), which Collins understands as anyone sexually violating any child within the Christian community (Collins, *Mark*, 450).

[250] E.g. *B. Meṣiʿa 58b*; *Soṭah 4b*; *B. Nid. 13b*.

Before exegeting the passage at hand, it is helpful to highlight a bit of N.T. Wright's understanding of the function of this text and its immediate context. Wright understands the Sermon on the Mount, and especially the antitheses within which we find this use of *Gehenna*, "as a challenge to a new way of being Israel, a way which faced the present situation of national tension and tackled it in an astonishing and radically new way."[251] Wright sees in the last two antitheses (vv.38–42; vv.43–48) specifically a call for Jews to avoid and oppose the revolutionary resistance movements against Rome.[252] "The way forward for Israel is not the way of violent resistance . . ." says Jesus, according to Wright, "but the different, oblique way of creative non-violent resistance."[253] The context of the antitheses, then, according to Wright, is not devoid of discussion about Israel's rebellious tendencies and its fragile relationship with Rome—the conflict that will ultimately lead to the demise that Jesus predicts for the nation.

While I am aware that the authenticity of this antithesis is especially questioned, if we assume that Jesus said these things or something very like these things, then the crux of understanding Jesus' use of *Gehenna* in this passage lies with the interpretation of several obscure terms—τῇ κρίσει, ῥακά, and μωρέ are probably the most crucial—and of the overarching picture of punishments they create in vv. 21–22. Specifically, in the three warnings of v. 22, is Jesus describing increasingly heinous crimes and proportionately increasing punishments? Or is he perhaps speaking of crimes and punishments that are essentially on level with one another? Or are these questions simply our fruitless attempt at ordering what defies any simple sequence?

To address these concerns some have suggested that the term τῇ κρίσει does not, as it might be assumed, represent eschatological judgment, but rather simply indicates court proceedings. Robert Guelich, for instance, suggests that ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει in both v. 21 and v. 22 simply means, "is liable to trial."[254] Further, Guelich concludes, "In view of the use of ἔνοχος in 5:21b, 22abc and of κρίσει in 5:21b, 22a, ἔνοχος τῷ συνεδρίῳ connotes *liable to the Sanhedrin for a trial* (implying judgment)."[255] If this is the case, then one can perceive an increasingly threatening liability throughout v. 22—trial, trial before the Sanhedrin, and finally *Gehenna* itself. If that is the case, however, it seems difficult to understand how calling a brother μωρέ is proportionately more

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[251] Wright, *JVG*, 290.
[252] Wright, *JVG*, 290–91.
[253] Wright, *JVG*, 291.
[254] Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 183.
[255] Guelich, *Sermon*, 187.

offensive than calling a brother ʽρακά, which is in turn understood as proportionately more offensive than harboring anger against a brother in one's heart.

Guelich says that "The word *idiot* (ῥακά) occurs nowhere else in extant Greek literature. It is generally understood (Jeremias, *TDNT* 6:973–74; Guelich, 'Mt 5²²,' 39–40) as the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic invective *ryq'*/κενός ('emptyhead'). Its presence in the Greek text as a transliteration betrays the Aramaic background of the verse . . . ."[256] Davies and Allison concur: "*Raka* is derived from the Aramaic *rêqā'/rêqâ*, a word which was employed as a contemptuous insult: 'empty-head', 'good for nothing', 'fool' . . . ."[257] It seems, then, that the term ῥακά is best understood as a nasty insult. One can understand how a spoken insult ought to be understood as more offensive than anger harbored in private. What of the v.22c, though?

This is where the most consternation is caused among scholars. If insulting someone with the term ῥακά makes one liable to judgment before the Sanhedrin only, how then does it make sense that uttering the insult μωρέ makes one liable "to the *Gehenna* of fire"? Guelich expresses the sentiments of many commentators when he says, "Apart from the absurdity of prosecuting such charges in human society, one can hardly ignore the disproportionate relationship between the offense and the consequence."[258] Several attempts at resolving these seeming inconsistencies have been attempted. Guelich's response is to conclude that v. 22 is an *ad absurdum* argument, demonstrating the inadequacies of the Law's ability to judge the heart.[259] Like Guelich, Eugene Boring concludes that v. 22 is a parody on rabbinic casuistry.[260] In the late 19th century John Peters proposed a novel way around the confusion by arguing that v. 22b was, in fact, a continuation of what was said to the ancients—that is, it was a second antithesis *within* what we normally refer to as the first antithesis.[261] Of course these responses each assume that by *Gehenna* Jesus meant the place of final, post-mortem, eschatological judgment of the wicked.

Fresh light may be shed on this conundrum if we take another look at the term μωρέ. Most translators and commentators understand μωρέ as the vocative form of the Greek term μωρός, in

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[256] Guelich, *Sermon*, 186. This point could be perceived as further evidence of the antithesis's origin with the historical Jesus; although the argument is not persuasive in and of itself. It could also be perceived as evidence that Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Aramaic.

[257] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC 26; Edinburgh: T & T Clark Limited, 1988), 513.

[258] Guelich, *Sermon*, 188.

[259] Guelich, *Sermon*, 188.

[260] Eugene Boring, *Matthew*, (NIB 8; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 190. Boring cites Mt 23:16–21 as evidence for Matthew's rejection of this type of rabbinical nonsense.

[261] John P. Peters, "On Matthew V.21–22," *JBL* 11.1 (1892): 131–32.

which case they translate the word as "Fool!". This of course causes the dilemma of which many commentators have spoken: why does uttering μωρέ make one liable to "the *Gehenna* of fire" while uttering ῥακά only makes one liable to the Sanhedrin? The proposals by some that the term μωρός was that much more offensive than the term ῥακά are unconvincing.[262] An alternate translation of μωρέ has been proposed by a few commentators. Among them, Albright and Mann note that μωρέ could be understood as a transliteration of the Hebrew term מרה, from Num 20:10.[263] The Hebrew root מרה can mean "rebellious" (esp. against God).[264] If the term μωρέ is meant to connote rebellion against God, then the increase in punishments throughout v. 22 becomes more comprehensible. Calling someone an "idiot" may make one liable to the Sanhedrin, but calling someone a "rebel against God" makes one liable to *Gehenna* (however *Gehenna* is to be understood).

What if Wright's hypothesis—that by *Gehenna* Jesus was warning of the conflagration coming upon Jerusalem—is taken in tandem with this alternate translation of μωρέ? If Jesus' use of *Gehenna* is to be understood as a threat concerning the conflagration that will come upon Jerusalem if Israel does not accept her Messiah, and if the Sermon on the Mount in general is a compilation of Jesus' teachings concerning how those in Israel who heed the message of Jesus can be a part of the coming restored covenant community that will rise up through the ashes of the coming national disaster, then perhaps Jesus is here warning those who would call his Jewish followers "rebels against God" that they are in danger of being caught in that national disaster, in danger of making *Gehenna* a reality for Jerusalem, in danger of the fires of Rome's destruction of the Holy City. Thus, one could perhaps propose that Wright's understanding of Jesus' use of *Gehenna* makes sense here if a few things are assumed: (1) that μωρέ makes sense in this context as a transliteration of the Hebrew term מרה; (2) that Jesus has in view here Jews who would call his own Jewish followers "rebels," and that by using this term they mean to identify Jesus' followers as traitors to the national cause of resistance against Rome (and perhaps also traitors to God); (3) that, for Jesus, by rejecting Jesus and his "rebellious" followers they are placing themselves at greater risk for suffering the coming national disaster. This reading has the advantage of taking seriously the text's suggestion

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[262] E.g. Barclay, *Matthew*, 140.

[263] W. F. Albright & C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB 26; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 61; Cf. Donald Hagner, *Matthew*, 116–17; Against this proposal see G. Bertram, *TDNT*, "μωρός," *TDNT* 4:832–47; Guelich, *Sermon*, 188.

[264] "מָרָה," *BDB* 598.

that the insult μωρέ was more serious than the insult ῥακά. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that an interpretation which combines the alternate translation of μωρέ with Wright's suggestions concerning Gehenna stretches the evidence quite a bit.[265] The only reason for suggesting such an interpretation is that the common interpretations of this passage have an awful time appropriately fitting the crimes to their punishments.

To summarize, then, there is a possible translation of μωρέ that may possibly support Wright's conclusions concerning Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. While it is *quite* a stretch to apply both this translation of μωρέ and Wright's hypothesis concerning *Gehenna*, it is also a stretch to accept many of the common interpretations that propose that somehow Jesus (or Matthew) suggests that calling someone "fool" is a significantly more damnable offense that calling someone "idiot."

Matthew 10:28 // Luke 12:4–5

The only *Gehenna* passage that Wright explicitly comments on in *JVG* is Mt 10:28 // Lk 12:4–5. My translations of the passages are side by side here:

Mt 10:28	Lk 12:4–5
"And do not fear those who kill the body (τὸ σῶμα), but who have no power to kill the soul (τὴν . . . ψυχὴν); rather fear the one who has power to destroy (ἀπολέσαι) both soul (ψυχὴν) and body (σῶμα) in *Gehenna*."	[4]"But I say to you my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after this cannot do anything more (μὴ ἐχόντων περισσότερόν τι ποιῆσαι). [5]But I will show you whom you should fear; fear the one who, after killing, has authority to cast (ἐμβαλεῖν) into *Gehenna*. Yes I say to you, fear this one.

Most commentators have understood the one who casts into *Gehenna* as God.[266] Wright, however, objects to this common interpretation:

> Some have seen 'the one who can cast into *Gehenna*' as YHWH; but this is unrealistic. Jesus did not, to be sure, perceive Israel's god as a kindly liberal grandfather who would never hurt a fly, let alone send anyone to *Gehenna*. But again and again—not least in the very next verse of this paragraph—Israel's god is portrayed as the creator and sustainer, one who can be lovingly trusted in all circumstance, not the one who waits with a large stick to beat anyone who steps out of line. Rather, here we have a redefinition of the battle in terms of the identification of the real enemy. The one who can kill the body is the imagined

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[265] Note also that this is not a specific interpretation that Wright himself offers, but one that could perhaps make sense of his suggestions concerning *Gehenna*.

[266] Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 286; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* (AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 957; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 206–7.

enemy, Rome. Who then is the real enemy? Surely not Israel's own god. The real enemy is the accuser, the satan.[267]

According to Wright, then, in saying these things Jesus is attempting to turn the enmity of the Jews away from Rome—the perceived enemy, the one who can kill only the body—and toward the satan—the true enemy, the one who casts both body and soul into *Gehenna*. To be sure, Wright is not the only one who understands the one who casts both body and soul into *Gehenna* to be Satan.[268] This interpretation, however, seems to work against his broader contentions concerning *Gehenna*. If this passage is to be understood as referring to Satan who casts both body and soul into *Gehenna*, it would seem that the notion of the physical conflagration of Jerusalem is not in view. It is precisely *physical* destruction (killing the body *only*) that is being contrasted in these two texts with the destruction that occurs in *Gehenna*—whether that be at the hands of God or of the satan. Almost certainly, then—regardless of who we understand to be the one who casts into *Gehenna*—we have here the metaphorical use of *Gehenna*, designating a post-mortem place of punishment.

Chaim Milikowsky argues convincingly, on the basis of the treatments of eschatological topics in each Gospel, that Matt 10:28 points toward Matthew's understanding of *Gehenna* as a place of corporeal punishment for the reconstituted body and soul following the resurrection, and that Lk 12:4–5 gives credence to the belief that Luke understood *Gehenna* as a place of retribution for the *soul only* in an immediately post-mortem state.[269] "In Matthew," says Milikowsky, "*Gehenna* is the place of retribution for the reunited body and soul; the soul by itself has no real existence and does not receive retribution. Luke, on the other hand, knows of an immediately post-mortem hell; in his much more dualistic anthropology the soul is the proper recipient of punishment."[270] Matthew, claims Milikowsky, expected the general resurrection of the righteous for life and the wicked for punishment; Luke, on the other hand, expected only a resurrection of the righteous.[271] Milikowsky's explanation makes good sense of the variations between these two versions of the same logion. His interpretation of the material confirms that we are here dealing with a wholly metaphorical usage of *Gehenna* by Jesus. Whatever is meant

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[267] Wright, *JVG*, 454–455.

[268] See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 207, fn. 31 for a list of several commentators who take this view.

[269] Chaim Milikowsky, "Which Gehenna? Retribution and Eschatology in the Synoptic Gospels and in Early Jewish Texts," *NTS* 34.9 (1988): 238–49.

[270] Millikowsky, "Which Gehenna?," 242.

[271] Milikowsky, "Which Gehenna?," 242–43.

by either of these two versions of the logion, one thing is for certain—Wright's notion of *Gehenna* as a threat concerning Jerusalem's physical conflagration seems to be outside the scope of possibilities.

Matthew 23:15, 33

The last two times we find the word γέεννα on the mouth of Jesus come within the context of the seven woes he directs against the scribes and Pharisees in Mt 23:13–39. While the term *Gehenna* occurs only in v.15 and v.33, I have given the translation of the verses forming the immediate context of v.33 for the sake of the present discussion.

Mt 23:15

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and when this occurs you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna (υἱὸν γεέννης) as you." (author's translation)

Mt 23:29–36

[29]Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, [30]and you say, "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." [31]Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. [32]Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. 33You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell (πῶς φύγητε ἀπὸ τῆς κρίσεως τῆς γεέννης)? [34]Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, [35]so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. [36]Truly I tell you, all this (ταῦτα πάντα) will come upon this generation (τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην). (NRSV)

The phrase "child of *Gehenna*" in v.15 is unique, and calls to mind the one other use of *Gehenna* in the New Testament outside the Synoptics—James 3:6. In Ja 3:6, though the syntax is a bit tricky, the idea conveyed is that the destruction conveyed by the human tongue has as its source *Gehenna* itself. It is very clear that in Ja 3:6 the term *Gehenna* is being used metaphorically, not to describe the physical conflagration of Jerusalem. It is used more like a shorthand for "the source or abode of evil." The phrase "child of *Gehenna*" in Mt 23:15 works in a very similar way, metaphorically describing just how wicked the Pharisees and scribes are in Jesus' eyes because of their hypocrisy. I see no reason to further pursue the possibility that by

Gehenna Jesus is here in Mt 23:15 warning about the coming physical conflagration of Jerusalem.

The use of *Gehenna* in v.33, however, when considered along with the rest of Jesus' monologue in chapter 23 and continuing into chapter 24, may be the most explicit connection of *Gehenna* to the destruction of Jerusalem in all of Jesus' uses of the term. The seventh and final woe in this chapter begins with v.29. In vv.29–32 Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of following in their ancestors' murderous steps. Though they say they denounce the murders of the prophets (τῶν προφητῶν) and righteous ones (τῶν δικαίων), Jesus says that their words and deeds testify otherwise. He sardonically exhorts them to "fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors." (v.32) Whom does Jesus expect further atrocities to be committed against?— presumably his own disciples, whom he describes as "prophets, sages, and scribes . . . ." (v.34a)[272] Jesus predicts that they will be killed, crucified, flogged, and pursued by the scribes and Pharisees. (v.34b) All of this will be accomplished, according to Jesus, "so that (ὅπως) upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar." (v.35)

While identifying Zechariah son of Berechiah[273] sometimes causes problems, it is likely that the original referent was Zechariah the priest, who was stoned in the courtyard of the Temple by the people of Judah at the command of King Joash. (2 Chr 24:20f.) As Sheldon Blank concludes in an article intended to decipher the identity of this Zechariah son of Berechiah, "Abel is mentioned at the beginning of Genesis, Zechariah the priest at the end of Second Chronicles, and, according to the order of the Hebrew Bible, the one is at the beginning, the other at the end of the Old Testament."[274] That is, the whole of the tainted history of Israel is in view here—and Jesus would have "this generation" held accountable for it all. In a statement strikingly like Mt 24:34 Jesus concludes, "Truly I tell you, all this (ταῦτα πάντα) will come upon

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[272] See Hagner, *Matthew*, 675–6 for information on Matthew's referring to Christian disciples by these names. In the Lukan account (Lk 11:47–51), Jesus refers to them as "prophets and apostles" (v.49).

[273] The Lukan account mentions only the name "Zechariah" (Lk 11:51).

[274] Sheldon H. Blank, "The Death of Zechariah in Rabbinic Literature," *HUCA* 12–13 (1937–38): 331. Cf. Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 282; Hagner, *Matthew*, *14–28*, who notes as one other possible alternative the Zechariah son of Bareis/Bariscaeus/Baruch murdered by the Zealots "in the midst of the temple" c. 69 C.E. On problem with this possibility is, obviously, that it originate with the Evangelist and not with Jesus. For this and other reasons Hagner concurs with the above-mentioned opinion of Blank (676–7).

this generation (τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην)." (v.36) From here Matthew's account enters straight into Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39) and his prediction of the Temple's destruction (24:1f.).

It is within this context that Jesus' use of *Gehenna* occurs as an implicit condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees: "You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to *Gehenna*?" (v.33) It seems likely, given the context of the pericope, that Wright's proposal that *Gehenna* was used as a warning concerning the physical conflagration soon to come upon Jerusalem could make sense of the content here. While the literary context of this condemnation is, of course, the product of the Evangelist's hand, there seems to be no reason to suspect that Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees to *Gehenna* was detached from the prophetic utterances and woes found in chapters 23 and 24. It seems as likely that they were originally attached in the historical Jesus' ministry as that they were brought together here by Matthew's hand. There are certainly redactions—most likely the designation "son of Berechiah" for Zechariah came from Matthew's hand and was not original[275]—but the overarching connection between Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees using the term '*Gehenna*' and Jesus' prophetic prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple seem original.

In this last logion, then, we find our strongest (and perhaps only) support for Wright's proposed reading of Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. Jesus uses the term *Gehenna* as a part of a warning directed at those who would presumably—as Jesus' and his disciples' enemies—suffer the wrath that was about to come upon the nation at the hands of the Romans. From this warning Jesus proceeds to weep over Jerusalem and predict it and its temple's destruction. If this were the only logion in which Jesus used the term *Gehenna*, Wright's contention would look fairly sound. The fact of the matter is, however, that this is *not* the only time Jesus uses the term *Gehenna*, nor is it the most like his usual usage of the term.

Conclusions

It is time to bring all of the evidence to bear upon Wright's portrayal of Jesus' use of *Gehenna*. Once again, Wright basically makes three claims about *Gehenna*: (1) It was in ancient times the "smouldering rubbish heap" of Jerusalem; (2) As such, it became a place metaphorically tied to post-mortem judgment, but Jesus primarily did not use the term in this way; (3) Jesus, in a way similar to Israel's prophets before him, used the term *Gehenna* in

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[275] Cf. the argument to this effect in Blank, "Death of Zechariah," 328–9.

speaking of the imminent threat of "physical conflagration" posed to Jerusalem by the pagan armies of Rome.

On the first point, we must confess that the information we have about the use of the Valley of Hinnom/*Gehenna* in time of ancient Israel is not as replete as most scholars, including Wright, seem to assume. While most scholarship depends upon a 13th c. rabbinic commentary on the use of the site, others have made significant challenges to this traditional identification of *Gehenna*'s function. The challenges are not unanswerable, however, and archaeological evidence and literary evidence from the Book of Jeremiah suggest that an identification of the Valley of Hinnom as a site for Jerusalem's garbage dump and as a place where fires were burnt for various purposes is not implausible. Whatever the case may be, by the time of the divided monarchy *Gehenna* was recognized as a nasty place. That much is certain. To go beyond this and confidently assert—as many scholars do—that Jerusalem threw its garbage away here and kept fires regularly burning to consume the refuse is simply to go beyond the evidence.

Since this is the case, we cannot confidently assert that *Gehenna* became a metaphorical way of referring to fiery post-mortem judgment *because* it was a smoldering rubbish heap. All we can say for certain is that the place had a nasty enough reputation—most notably being known as a place where pagan child sacrifices were conducted during the divided monarchy—to make its name synonymous with post-mortem punishment.[276] Wright assumes that this was not what Jesus usually meant when he used the term, though, and that point takes us to the third claim.

The unique and important claim Wright makes about Jesus' use of *Gehenna* is that he used this term to warn—not primarily about post-mortem judgment—but about the eschatological (as Wright defines eschatology) punishment about to befall the Jewish nation, her city, and her temple because of her apostasy. This is the point that I wish to bring my central critique against.

While the similarities between Jeremiah—who apparently does use the Valley of Hinnom in the way Wright describes Jesus and Israel's prophets using it—and Jesus are very striking, and while Jesus' overarching warning to Israel seems to mirror closely Jeremiah's warnings over half a millennium prior, the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels, which Wright depends upon for his

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[276] Again the fact that it *was* synonymous with post-mortem judgment is not in question (cf. supra. fn. 211 for intertestamental use of the term). The question that has been raised in this study is *how* the term came to be equated with post-mortem judgment. It is this question that seems to be without a solid answer at this juncture.

reconstruction of Jesus' aims and intentions, does not support the claim that Wright has made concerning Jesus' use of the term *Gehenna*. Possible exceptions to this include: (1) The last logion considered in this paper, Mt 23:33, and its context may support Wright's reading; (2) Much more tentatively we may suggest that an interpretation of μωρέ as "rebel" in Mt 5:22 may also support Wright's claims. The overwhelming picture of the situation, however, is that *when Jesus used the term* Gehenna *he used it in a way that mirrored his contemporaries use of the term—namely, by this term he meant to threaten not the physical conflagration of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans as punishment for national sin, but post-mortem (whether post-resurrection or otherwise) suffering by individuals for personal sins they had committed.*

This is not to say that Wright's portrayals of Jesus' prophetic ministry and his warnings about coming judgment upon the nation of Israel are invalid; far from it! I still find these portrayals very compelling. The only conclusion being drawn here is that *Jesus' use of the term* Gehenna *was not primarily in reference to these national warnings, but more likely in reference to personal warnings he made to individuals because of their immorality and sinfulness (e.g. various forms of adultery).*

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In one of the most recent publications that includes Wright's work on the historical Jesus,[277] Wright receives a critique by friend and fellow scholar Nicholas Perrin[278] that is similar to the one that I would want to raise concerning Wright's monumental research. As the title of his article suggests, Perrin's critique is that Wright's portrayal of Jesus' eschatological vision and his portrayal of Jesus' ethics do not quite do justice to the portrait of Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels. To paraphrase Perrin, his critique comes down to saying that Wright's emphasis on Jesus' eschatological call to the *nation* of Israel leads to Wright's downplaying of Jesus' call to *individuals* to live out the kind of ethic he lived and preached.[279] Perrin perceives that Wright has, at least to a degree, bought into a false dichotomy between Jesus' ministry to the *corporate* nation of Israel and his ministry to *individual persons*. Like Wright's mentor, G. B. Caird, Wright has, according to Perrin, taken the collectivistic theme of Jesus' eschatological worldview too far and the individualistic theme not far enough.[280]

In Wright's defense, this is a snare that he acknowledges even in *JVG* and claims to attempt to avoid. Relatively early in his portrayal of Jesus' prophetic vocation Wright addresses just this dichotomy between the *corporate* and *individual* elements of Jesus' ministry in the course of a discussion about the "social and corporate effects of his kingdom-announcement."[281] Wright explains: "In case this paragraph should itself be misunderstood, let me say as clearly as possible that the *corporate* meaning of the stories does not undermine, but actually enhances, the *personal* meaning for every single one of Jesus' hearers. It is *individualism* and *collectivism* that cancel each other out; properly understood, the *corporate* and the *personal* reinforce one another."[282] Even without the entire context of this passage, one can see that Wright is aware of the potential for falling into a tendency to dichotomize the *corporate* and *individual* elements of Jesus' ministry.

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[277] Nicholas Perrin and Richard Hays , eds., *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). This work, as mentioned previously in this paper, was the product of a conference held in Wright's honor at Wheaton College in April 2010.

[278] Nicholas Perrin, "Jesus' Eschatology and Kingdom Ethics: Ever the Twain Shall Meet," in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 92–114.

[279] Perrin, "Jesus' Eschatology," 112.

[280] Perrin, "Jesus' Eschatology," 112.

[281] Wright, *JVG*, 246.

[282] Wright, *JVG*, 246.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that recognizing a problem and steering clear of it are two separate matters. Wright recognizes both the corporate and individual elements in Jesus ministry, but the full portrait of the historical Jesus that he paints is clearly dominated by the former. Wright's Jesus is a Jesus who had a prophetic message and warning for the *nation* of Israel: The message was that YHWH's kingdom had arrived, the true enemies of Israel were to be destroyed, and the exile of the nation was coming to an end: The warning was that anyone who rejected Jesus—through whom these mighty deeds were being accomplished—would be rejecting participating in the *national* restoration and embracing their place in the *national* destruction. This is the portrait that leads Wright to suggest—with little evidence—that Jesus used the term *Gehenna* as a part of his warning concerning the national catastrophe that, at the hands of the Roman military, would enfold Jerusalem within a generation's time.

Jesus did not, however, primarily use the term *Gehenna* in this way. He primarily used it, according to the Synoptic tradition, the way his contemporaries did—to warn his hearers about the post-mortem punishment that awaited the wicked. It is my contention that Wright fails to recognize this point because of his broader commitments to emphasizing the ministry of Jesus to the *nation* of Israel—a common Third Quest theme. Once again, Wright is hardly unaware of the fact that Jesus also ministered to individuals, but this is the spare tire to the engine of Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel in Wright's description. What drives Wright's portrait of the historical Jesus is not his ministry to individuals, but rather his eschatological appeal and proclamation to the nation of Israel.

As I recall Perrin's critique, it is encouraging to me to note that Wright accepts this critique well and acknowledges the shortcomings of his own work, while also giving an explanation for his particular emphases. Wright's response to Perrin is this:

> That said, I fully accept Nick's point in relation to *Jesus and the Victory of God*. What he says chimes in with the questions raised by Brian and Sylvia [in a previous article]. Both Jesus' critique of his contemporaries and his challenge to every single person needed to be drawn out more. I have been so used to seeing Jesus' commands and warnings being *reduced* to the rather trivial moral challenges faced by young people in comfortable Western homes that I was determined, if I could, to draw out the much larger picture. Start with the big picture and you'll get the details eventually. Start with the details and you may never know where you are on the map. I still think that the nationalist dream (of Israel becoming top nation by military conquest, restoring the ancient kingdom of David and Solomon) did function as a kind of meta-sin, but there was clearly plenty of ordinary, boring old sin going on too, and Jesus named and shamed it. I

think of the warnings of the Sermon on the Mount, or of Mark 7, to look no further. The challenge to the rich young ruler, as Nick points out, is deeply personal, and not to be swallowed up within the larger national problem.[283]

Having immersed myself in the work of this erudite yet unpretentious scholar for the past year or so, I expect nothing less than to hear this kind of reflective and grateful response from him. Wright's work is not perfect; no one's is. I do believe, however, that his work is still some of the most compelling research to yet be conducted on the historical Jesus, and that it will endure in the long and growing history of the Quests as a distinct achievement of this current phase of research. I hope that the critique I have offered here can be added to those like Nicholas Perrin's and received by any who encounter this study as an attempt by a novice researcher to walk among the feet of a giant.

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[283] Wright, quoted in Perrin, "Jesus' Eschatology," 113.

ILLUSTRATIONS

This picture was obtained via a Google Images search on 7/25/11 from the website www.palestineremembered.com.

25 July 2011. Online: http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Jerusalem_

528/Picture_11942.html.

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