

JESUS AND ISRAEL'S TRADITIONS OF JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION¹

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If Jesus held a partially realised eschatology, it is unlikely that he would have done so in isolation from the concrete, this-worldly expectations of the eschaton which characterised Jewish eschatology in this period. In attempting to specify the degree to which Jesus' eschatology was realised, much scholarship in this century has assumed that if eschatological reality was present for Jesus it must have been abstract or spiritual. This study represents an advance over such approaches by considering Jesus' intentions in relation to key constitutional features of the eschaton within Jewish restorationism and shows that Jesus' eschatology was substantially though not completely realised.

The use of Jewish expectations for the eschaton as a measure of the degree to which Jesus' eschatology was realised is complicated enormously if Jesus also announced a coming national judgment. How can the announcement of national judgment be reconciled with the belief that Israel's restoration had already begun? Yet, I argue, Jesus did proclaim coming national judgment. The point emerges from a consideration of Jesus' use of Israel's sacred traditions, for it appears that Jesus not only drew on sacred traditions which had previously served a message of national judgment but also appropriated sacred traditions in a way that subverted widespread conceptions of national restoration.

Perhaps most indicative of a national dimension in Jesus' pronouncements of judgment are his use of two motifs—the vineyard and the eschatological banquet—which appear in two distinct streams of tradition. These motifs could serve Israel's hope of restoration. But they were also used negatively in contexts of national condemnation. This latter stream of tradition is taken up in Jesus' vineyard parables and parable of the great banquet which may be read as part of his

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assessment of the nation. This is not to say that judgment is an express part of all of these parables, but they address the meaning of Israel's election, an issue which traditions of national judgment had always raised.

In the wider context of Jesus' ministry the question of election was implicit to the controversy over his association with 'sinners' and these parables are related with reasonable clarity to Jesus' acceptance of 'sinners'. Though these labels seem not to have been used simply as designations for anyone outside one's own group, they gained their significance in the context of convictions about who did and did not belong to Israel and on the nature of the repentance that would precede Israel's restoration.

To understand this repentance, it is necessary to observe the tension between national and individual repentance; a number of Jewish texts indicate that repentance was possible for the apostate nation but not for apostate individuals, 'sinners'. If the quite different ways that national and individual apostasy were treated is observed, the reason for objections to Jesus' acceptance of 'sinners' becomes clear: 'sinners' were those who had overtly rejected the covenant, cutting themselves off from all possibility of participating in Israel's eschatological repentance; Jesus' association with them rankled because it was seen as compromising the integrity of Israel's penitent preparation for eschatological restoration. For Jesus, national judgment brings Israel's election to an end. But because the announcement of judgment carries with it the proclamation of a new act of election—an election in which God was free to include apostates—the continuity of God's commitment to Israel is firm.

If Jesus drew on sacred traditions which subverted accepted conceptions of Israel's restoration, this is not to say that he made no positive use of restoration traditions. But neither did he re-present these traditions in wholly conventional ways. There was, for example, a common expectation that the constitutional shape of Israel in the eschaton would be determined by the re-establishment of the tribal league in the Land. Some Jews associated this restoration with the return of Elijah before the Day of the Lord. Jesus agrees that Israel's eschatological reconstitution was associated with the return of Elijah but asserts that Elijah's restoration had already taken place through the ministry of John. In doing so Jesus rejects that strand of the tradition which anticipated a re-establishment of the twelve tribes by the returning Elijah.

If Jesus believed John to have restored ‘all things’, we are led inexorably to conclude that Jesus believed John to have called forth a faithful and penitent remnant. Such a conclusion allows us to construct a model for understanding not only the relationship between Jesus and John but also for understanding why Jesus’ message is suffused with personal and transcendent elements: as the Qumran community looked back to its constitution as the remnant of Israel while remaining open to the admission of new individual members, Jesus called individuals to join in the remnant called out by John.

Another important Second Temple expectation was that restored Israel would be a pure people dwelling in a pure Land. The motivation for the adoption by many of purity practices not explicitly mandated in Scripture has been obscured in the work of Neusner and Sanders. I have argued that conceptions of the holiness of Israel, Temple and Land, in the eschaton fuelled the first century pursuit of purity. But if this pursuit was supported by sacred traditions, there was also a minority tradition in which the holiness of the eschaton is so absolute that the need to mark out the distinction between holy and common with a purity gradation is lost.

I have shown that various sayings of Jesus indicate his belief that fundamental postulates of the purity code were irrelevant to the present eschatological situation. For Jesus, there was little point to the redoubled effort to keep uncleanness out, since uncleanness had already penetrated ‘this generation’ to such an extent that destruction was now required. The pursuit of extra purity meant that, for many, Israel’s holiness was expressed not simply through the rectification of impurity but through the preservation of purity. By contrast, Jesus asserts that it is the evil within and not contraction of bodily impurity which takes one’s holiness away. Perhaps most jarring to first-century Jews who valued preservation of purity as preparation for restoration would have been Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan. The parable is a subtly mocking caricature of a priest and a Levite who, when faced with halakhic ambiguity, chose not to show neighbourly love when doing so entailed even a chance of defilement. Instead neighbourly love is shown by a Samaritan who would have been regarded as irremediably unclean. Samaritan presence in the Land was a fissure in the territorial integrity of Israel, and their defilement of the Land an obstacle to Israel’s restoration. Jesus, however, declares that the Samaritan and not those who rigorously preserve purity stands approved by God. Such a stance hardly comports with a belief in the

restoration of the twelve tribes to a pure Land. But it is entirely sensible if, according to a minority stream of Israel's sacred traditions, Jesus conceived of the holiness of the eschaton in a way that emptied bodily impurity of its significance.

Sacred traditions concerning the eschatological Temple were likewise far from uniform. Against the common assumption that this Temple would be a structure similar to or even continuous with the Herodian Temple, a substantial body of evidence describes the Temple in non-material terms, a notion easily supported by the belief that God himself would build the Temple. Such a belief did not exclude the conviction that a messianic figure would be involved—an idea which is earlier and more common than many have allowed. Many texts anticipate Gentile participation in the worship of the eschatological Temple. However, part of the tradition strongly asserted that foreigners would be excluded from the eschatological sanctuary. The low wall in the midst of the outer court may have been an attempt to accommodate both parts of the tradition.

Against a diversity of proposed explanations, Jesus' action in the Temple is best understood not as an attack on one aspect of the Temple's function (e.g. expiation of sin) or on a specific aspect of Temple praxis (whether its corruption or halakhic shortcomings); rather, the action was directed against the operation of the Temple as a whole. In citing Jeremiah 7:11, Jesus explicates his action as a denial of the Temple's capacity to be a guarantee of national protection and election. The nation was headed for judgment, a fact obscured by the uninterrupted operation of the Temple. With Isaiah 56:7, Jesus indicts the Temple for failing already to be the eschatological Temple. The Temple was not what it should already have been: a focal point for the ingathering of the nations. Jesus' action is thus an enactment of the expectation in Zechariah 14:21 that no traders would be present in the eschatological Temple. If the Second Temple had failed to become the eschatological Temple, Jesus in no way allows that the appearance of this central feature of the eschaton be delayed any longer. He predicts that he will himself be the agent for the construction of a Temple 'not made with hands'. If it remains unclear what specifically Jesus thought this Temple would be, there was ample support in Israel's sacred traditions for the expectation of a non-material Temple built by Israel's messiah.