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JESUS’ ESCHATOLOGY IN JEWISH CONTEXT

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Abstract

I intend to: 1] give a brief synopsis of Historical Jesus Scholarship as it pertains to apocalypticism. 2] Give a brief explanation of Jesus’ eschatology in light of him being understood as a first-century Jewish Apocalypticist. 3] To answer the question: What was Jesus Eschatology? 4] To show that Jesus Eschatology was intrinsically tied to the Jewish Hope for the End of the Exile and return of all twelve tribes, "all Israel." 5] To show the implications for Christian Eschatology by proposing that Jesus was indeed apocalyptic, but He did not really expect the end to history in His time or shortly after, but instead used both Hebraic and apocalyptic language to describe the end of an old order, which would include the restoration of all Israel and the end of her exile, 6] To show the implications for Christian Theology; particularly modern Evangelical Orthodoxy. 7] And finally, we discuss why the efforts of Third Quest Historical Jesus scholars, to see how the historical Jesus can fit into New Testament theology, must not be abandoned.
Introduction

The task for this course term paper was to write about a particular time, event, or teaching in the life of Christ. I initially chose a broad subject, *The Jewish World in the Days of Jesus*, fitting for a class discussing the first-century *Life and Teachings of Christ*. However, Alfred Edersheim has already done a fine job of giving us many details of Jesus and His Jewish culture in his magnum opus of New Testament background, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*; any attempt on my part to expound on Edersheim's work would most likely fall far short. Therefore, I have decided to narrow my research paper and it's subject to a particular teaching of Christ in the first-century, his *eschatology*.

Sources

Before we begin our journey, a brief word about my sources is in order. There are many second-temple Judaic sources, which could be examined that come to us from 500 B.C. through A.D. 70, which will attest to the expectation of exile and the restoration of all twelve tribes of Israel in the first-century.\(^1\) This is significant, because the typical test for doing professional history is to employ criterion of multiple attestation. If this paper were a doctrinal dissertation it would no doubt be necessary to fully exhaust this subject in order to keep with proper historical authenticity. However, for the sake of keeping this paper small and manageable; and because we are a Christian University, I will stick mainly with canonical sources, particularly, the Old Testament background to second-temple Judaism and Jesus' eschatology. The reasons are simple: 1] many of the sayings of

Jesus and His disciples are either allusions or direct quotes from the Old Testament. It should be noted that this approach to the Old Testament is nothing new. Such methodology is typified in the approaches of such scholars as N.T. Wright and Richard B. Hays. The writings from the followers of Jesus are the best sources available about what they actually believed, and the Historical Jesus scholars I shall mention have already done a fine job of employing criterion of historical authenticity in their massive tomes, so I refer the reader to my bibliography. However, I should mention that I might exercise the freedom to diverge from time to time.

On a final note, when it comes to Jesus and His people’s (i.e., Israel), social and political history, I will use known facts as my sources that are available to all and agreed on by virtually every credible historical and theological scholar. This should help to minimize any unwarranted bias.

A Synopsis of Historical Jesus Scholarship and Apocalypticism

A lot has been said about Jesus’ first-century teaching not only by the speculative writing of Christian theologians, but also by Historical Jesus Scholars. Their task has been to reconstruct Jesus’ life and sometimes theology, by using both canonical and non-canonical sources. As a result, some Historical Jesus scholars have concluded that Jesus was nothing more than an “Egalitarian Jewish Peasant,” but others have embraced the view that Jesus was an apocalyptic or eschatological Prophet.

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3 See Footnote 11.
Before we begin our synopsis it is important to note that Albert Schweitzer spoke of his search for the historical Jesus in terms of a *quest*. Subsequently, future scholarship would build upon this idea by speaking of periods of Historical Jesus scholarship as first, second and third quest.

Albert Schweitzer in his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, shows that the first Quest of Historical Jesus scholarship began with Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). Schweitzer says, "Before Reimarus, no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus….he was the first to grasp, that the world of thought in which Jesus moved historically was essentially eschatological."⁵

Albert Schweitzer himself was one of the greatest and final contributors to this first quest, he first popularized the view that Jesus is best understood as a first-century Jewish Apocalypticist. Schweitzer's central claim was that Jesus expected the end of the world was near to his own time and that His *parousia*, the Greek word for “Presence,” often referred to as “Jesus Second Coming,” was to happen in the first-century, during the lives of His disciples.

For Schweitzer, the failure or nonoccurrence of these events proved Jesus to be a failed doomsday or apocalyptic prophet. As a result of this conclusion, in 1913, Schweitzer abandoned a career in theology. Believing it was no longer relevant; he turned to medicine and humanitarian endeavors by founding a hospital and working as a physician in Africa. But Schweitzer's work caused quite a stir within the world of

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scholarship. So much so, that Christianity has been trying to provide answers for Jesus apocalyptic predictions since that time.

The Second Quest of Historical Jesus scholarship was a brief movement in the 1950s. Its effort was to revive the quest for historical Jesus. The movement mainly consisted of German scholars who were some of Rudolph Bultmann's students. Through the course of their studies, they had begun to question the idea stemming from their teacher, that the historical Jesus was irrelevant for Christian faith. As a result, this second quest was a challenge to that idea.

A trinity whom I like to call the Oxford Trio birthed the Third Quest of Historical Jesus Scholarship. It began in the 1970’s and lasted through the mid 1990’s, though arguably later. These scholars are named the Oxford Trio, because they all come from Oxford University in England. They consist of: Geza Vermes, E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright.

In 1973, Dr. Geza Vermes wrote a book entitled, *Jesus the Jew: A Historians Reading of the Gospels*. In it he stressed Jesus in His “Galilean” context. In addition, Dr. Vermes spent much of his time explaining the titles of Jesus as Prophet, Lord, Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God. He asserts that these titles are only properly understood in their first-century historical contexts, which are very eschatological and apocalyptic in nature.⁶


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Wright says, “one of the reasons I wrote ‘The New Testament and the People of God’ in the early nineties, is because I was fed up having to spend hour after hour with individual pupils explaining basic things about first-century Judaism.”

More notably, N.T. Wright is known for coining the term Third Quest. Wright felt that previous Historical Jesus scholars had failed to deal with Schweitzer’s claims adequately, by looking at Jesus through their particular nineteenth or twentieth century lenses, rather than first-century. For Wright, the term Third Quest was a way of saying; a third quest is needed to stress Jesus in His first-century Judean or Jewish Context.

Dr. E.P. Sander’s (Ed Parish Sanders) contribution to Historical Jesus scholarship has been to put Jesus in His Jewish context and portray Him as an Eschatological Restoration Prophet. In 1985, he wrote, Jesus and Judaism. In it Sander’s argued, that when you look at contemporary literature of the period, you will find recurring themes that were first built on the writings of Old Testament Prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Hosea. Sanders insist that first-century Jews and followers of Jesus all looked forward to a time when God would reunite the twelve tribes of Israel and end the exile. He opines,

"There is one vital point, however, at which the results of this study correspond to my own expectations. We went in search of a thread, which connects Jesus’ own intention, his death and the rise of the movement. We found first a general context, which embraces both Jesus and the movement, which succeeded him: hope for the restoration of Israel. Second, we found a specific chain of conceptions and events, which allows us to understand historically how things came about. Jesus claimed that the end was at hand, that God was about to establish his kingdom, that

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those who responded to him would be included, and (at least by implication) that he would reign. In pointing to the change of eras, he made a symbolic gesture by overturning tables in the temple area. This is the crucial act, which led to his execution, though there were contributing causes. His disciples, after the death and resurrection, continued to expect the restoration of Israel and the inauguration of the new age, and they continued to see Jesus as occupying first place in the kingdom. Also, as we saw in chapter 8, they continued to look for an otherworldly kingdom, which would be established by an eschatological miracle, although its locale may have shifted from this world to the heavenly one. The person of Jesus himself was also progressively interpreted: he was no longer seen just as 'Messiah' or 'Viceroy', but as Lord. Some who were attracted to the movement began to win Gentiles to it. The work of the early apostles, which is so well reflected in Paul's letters, fits entirely into known expectations about the restoration of Israel.”

Dr. Sander’s restoration idea will become central in our study.

In 1999, Dr. Bart D. Ehrman wrote, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. Ehrman followed in Schweitzer’s footsteps with a similar reconstruction of Jesus. Dr. Ehrman writes,

"This is the view embraced in this book…it claims that Jesus is best understood as a first century Jewish Apocalypticist. This is a shorthand way of saying that Jesus fully expected that the history of the world as we know it (well, as he knew it) was going to come to a screeching halt, that God was soon going to intervene in the affairs of this world, overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment, destroy huge masses of humanity, and abolish existing human political and religious institutions. All this would be a prelude to the arrival of a new world order on earth, 

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the Kingdom of God. Moreover, Jesus expected that this cataclysmic end of history would come in his own generation, at least during the lifetime of his disciples…. Jesus thought that the history of the world would come to a screeching halt, that God would intervene in the affairs of this planet, overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment, and establish his utopian Kingdom here on earth. And this was to happen within Jesus' own generation.”

Dr. John P. Meier is the author of the four volume series, written from 1991 to 2009, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Meier presents Jesus as an “eschatological prophet of the coming kingdom of God, [Jesus] not only presented himself as the Elijah-like miracle-worker who made the future kingdom already effective and palpable to his followers, but at the same time presented himself as a teacher who could tell Israelites how to observe the Law of Moses - indeed, who could even tell Israelites what they should or should not observe in the Law.”

Finally, in 1991, Dr. John Dominic Crossan wrote, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant*. Crossan however, did not conclude that Jesus was an Apocalyptic Prophet. Instead for him, Jesus was nothing more than an "Egalitarian Jewish Peasant." Egalitarian is the idea that all people are or should be equal. Therefore, in short, Crossan believes Jesus mission was to create a peasant society that was on equal footing. Additionally, Like Crossan, the claim of other Historical Jesus

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scholars, such as, Robert Funk and Marcus Borg is that the historical Jesus was not at all apocalyptic.¹²

There are many more scholars that could be mentioned, that have made credible contributions to the historical Jesus. Those who come to mind are: David Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Rudolph Bultmann, C.H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, Bruce Chilton, L. Michael White, Paula Fredrickson, James Tabor and Dale Allison. However, because I am attempting to keep this paper small and manageable, I will not be able to detail the ideas of them all.

The point of this synopsis was to show that the idea of an apocalyptic Jesus is nothing new. Though Crossan, Funk and Borg did not see Jesus as apocalyptic; Reimarus, Schweitzer, Vermes, Wright, Sanders, Ehrman, and Meier did. Perhaps they did, because they all emphasized Jesus in His Jewish context. It is important to note that the focus of scholars, who do not see Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, has always been on the New Testament only. However the focus of scholars such as Sanders, Meier, Vermes, Ehrman and Wright, has almost always been on second-temple Judaism and its contributions to the birth of Christianity. Therefore, they have unanimously felt the need to stress placing Jesus with in the Judean culture of the first-century and second-temple Judaism. I mention this, because I believe it influences the conclusions of these scholars. It influences mine; in fact, it is one of my most parsimonious presuppositions.

Personal Methodology

As a green-naïve undergraduate theology student, I thought, “Why has nobody thought of this before me? Maybe there is something new under the sun after all.” Turns out, as my professors quickly pointed out, many scholars before me had already had the same ideas. I hope the reader can see my humor.

Therefore, I have endeavored to mention the many scholars to whom my professors were referring, because I share their presupposition; that is, the life and teachings of Christ must first be understood in light of His own time. I believe this is true whether one is doing theology or history.

The study of the Historical Jesus is the critical historians reconstruction of Jesus' life. Therefore, it follows that this involves a critical study of Jesus’ ancient context. Likewise, in the world of theology we call this the historical-grammatical hermeneutical principle. That is, the scripture cannot correctly be understood apart from their historical context.

The Jewishness of Jesus must be first and foremost in the reconstruction of His life, theology and eschatology. Anytime one takes something out of context, lack of understanding often follows. Therefore, our search for the meaning of Jesus first-century eschatology must always begin in Jesus own world, that is, in His Jewish context.

Jesus roots were no doubt first-century Judaism and His religion was first-century Judaism. He was not a Christian; He was a Jew! Furthermore, Jesus and His Apostles writings were deeply rooted in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Therefore, their words must be taken in that context.
At the end of the day, it is my opinion that we should not consider the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation to be a more appropriate cultural context for interpreting the New Testament and the life of Jesus. Neither should we view Jesus through the lenses of Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine, Jerome, Calvin, Beza, Arminius, Luther, or Aquinas. Likewise, Jesus read through only New Testament eyes, absent of their Old Testament background, will yield an incomplete picture. Therefore, my cry is the same as the Third Quest Scholars. That is, the most appropriate cultural context for interpreting the New Testament and the life of Jesus is through the lens of second-temple Judaism. Again, this is my most parsimonious presupposition in this paper.

**Jesus in His Context**

In order for us to examine Jesus context, we must first consider the social and political history of Palestine during the first century. Again, these are facts agreed on by all serious scholars.

The ancient history of Israel is one of foreign domination. For one hundred years all twelve tribes of Israel were united under a common monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon. The latter two were successful in driving the Philistines from the land, thus, centralizing the capital city Jerusalem and building the temple.

Upon the death of Solomon, civil war broke out. As a result, the United Kingdom was divided into two smaller kingdoms: Israel, that is, the northern kingdom, consisting of the ten northern tribes and Judah, that is, the southern kingdom, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.
Throughout the course of their history the two kingdoms were often subjected to foreign occupation as well as forced exile. In 722-721 B.C., the Assyrian empire overthrew the northern kingdom; and thus, the ten northern tribes of Israel were scattered among the Gentiles (2 Kings 15-17, Hosea 8:8).

In 586 B.C., the southern kingdom was conquered by Babylon. The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, took the leaders of Judah into exile and lay waste to Jerusalem and its temple (2 Kings 24-25). While in Babylon, they became known as those from Judah or Jews. The name, Jew, was given to them as a disparaging title by their conquerors. It is a common mistake to identify Jews as all Israel; they are not synonymous.

Some fifty years later, the Persians overtook the Babylonians and brought an end to the exile of Judah. King Cyrus the Great issued an Edict of Restoration, which allowed for the people of the Southern Kingdom to return and for their temple to be rebuilt. The High Priest was then given jurisdiction as a local ruler in charge of local affairs. The Temple and its priesthood became not only a religious institution, but also a social and political institution. This is because the priesthood became the aristocratic political leaders. This point in history is known as the birth of second-temple Judaism.

Some two hundred years later, in 333 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the Jewish-Persian state as part of his effort to take over Persia. The Jews surrendered to Alexander, who let them stay in Judah with hopes of Hellenization. Upon Alexander’s death, Hellenistic kings took control. Through the course of time, the Maccabean revolt was birthed, as a reaction against this Hellenization. It is significant, because for Jews, religion and politics were bound up together.
In 63 B.C., the Romans came to occupy the Jewish state, renaming it Palestine. General Pompey conquered Jerusalem after a three-month siege, slaughtering twelve thousand Jews.¹³ He attacked on the Sabbath, because he knew that Jews would be less ready to defend themselves. Pompey desecrated the temple by entering the Holy of Holies; this had not been the first time the temple had been debased.

Over the course of repeated oppression and domination, the concept of a messiah, meaning, “anointed one” became prevalent. In brevity, this term was a reference to a king who from the line of David, would restore the kingdom and end the exile of all twelve tribes. Vermes says, “He was expected to be a king of David’s lineage, victor over the Gentiles, savior and restorer of Israel.”¹⁴

Another prevalent idea ascribed to by first-century Jews was the idea of covenant. They believed that they were the elect and chosen people of God who would eventually be the light of the whole world. After all, it was the Old Testament Prophets who had predicted that in the last days all nations would go up to Jerusalem to learn of the one true God (Isaiah 2:2; Zechariah 14:16).

The idea of covenant was central to all Jews during this time. At the center of their worship was the idea that God and all Israel had entered into a special relationship. According to the covenant, Israel was to follow all the rules stated in the Torah. In return, God would be the God of Israel, promising to protect them, prosper them, and set them above all other nations. “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord the God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I

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command thee this day, that the Lord the God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1).

N.T. Wright has said concerning the idea of covenant within second-temple Judaism,

“We have now found that the set of basic beliefs, which explicate the entire worldview theologically, may be summarized quite simply as monotheism, election and eschatology. There is one creator god, who has chosen Israel to be his people, giving her his Torah and establishing her in his holy land. He will act for her and through her to re-establish his judgment and justice, his wisdom and his shalom, throughout the world.”

E.P. Sanders has also agreed that the covenantal idea was prevalent during second-temple Judaism. He opines,

“We can likewise see that Jesus accepted ‘covenantal nomism.’ His mission was to Israel in the name of the God of Israel, He thus evidently accepted His people’s special status, that is, the election and the covenant.”

However, the Jewish idea of covenant and the expectation of a Messiah, which would come to rule all Israel and the nations, thus, ending the exile and restoring Israel, had to at times seem hopeless, in light of their first-century situation. This is because; the world of Jesus in the first-century was not only one of domination by Rome, but also one of continual exile. At the center of second-temple Jewish thought was the idea that all twelve tribes of Israel would one day be restored. Though, by the first-century, Judah’s

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exile had long come to an end, the northern ten tribes had not yet returned from exile. Josephus makes it clear that the northern ten tribes were still scattered well into the first-century, “Wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans, while the ten tribes are beyond Euphrates until now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers.” ¹⁷

Josephus was not the only Jew who saw it this way; many Jews during the first-century still had the expectation of the northern ten tribes return. This was a teaching that had its roots in the prophets,

“Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great [shall be] the day of Jezreel” (Hosea 1:11).

“And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12).

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land” (Jeremiah 23:5-8).

“The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all” (Ezekiel 37:15-22).

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33).
Recently more and more scholars have made note of the fact that all twelve tribes of Israel were expected to return from exile. Dr. Brant Pitre, *Donum Dei* Professor of Word and Sacrament at Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans, Louisiana and a former student of Dr. John Meier, writes,

“Many writers often use the terms *Jew* and *Israelite* as if they were simple synonyms. However, in the matter of exilic history, such inexactitude overlooks an absolutely critical fact: there was not only one exile in Israel’s history, but two….Every first-century Jew would have known that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom were still in exile….The glorious message of the prophets consistently envisioned the restoration of all twelve tribes of Israel in a final Return from Exile.”  

Therefore, with this discussed data in mind, we find that the first-century time of Christ was a time of continual domination and exile. However, it was also a time of expectation in which Israel expected their restoration and the fulfillment of the covenant promises made by God through his Prophets. Though much more detail could be given, in brevity, this is equated to an end of all Israel’s exile.

The prevalent idea was that one day God would act through a Davidic Messiah, to restore all Israel to its rightful destiny. This expectation was for the liberation of all twelve tribes from not only subjugation, but also literal geographical exile. This is the proper historical portrait, which was the basic worldview of Jews during the period of the first-century. As we shall see, it was also the view and heartbeat behind Jesus’ words and mission, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

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Israel’s Exile and Restoration: The Heart of Jesus Eschatology

Due to a non-historical approach to theology, most theologians throughout church history have missed the significance of this historical conundrum. It is evident in the fact that their interpretations have been largely individualistic without any Judaic context. For example, Augustine, Calvin, Beza and Luther all interpreted redemption individualistically, thus, rejecting the significance of Israel’s restoration. In fact, I would dare say that other major doctrines such as: Resurrection, as it pertains to eschatology, have also been constructed without any first-century historical consideration. As a result, what has become the orthodox doctrine is an interpretation of Jesus mission with no historical significance.

However, many scholars have pointed out that Jesus mission was toward Israel’s restoration. E.P. Sanders writes, “some [Jews] fixed on God’s promises and wrote and talked about how they would be kept - that is, they looked for the redemption of Israel. Jesus fits here.”19 N.T. Wright declares, “He [Jesus] regarded himself as the one who summed up Israel’s vocation and destiny in himself. He was the one in and through whom the real ‘return from exile’ would come about, indeed, was already coming about. He was the Messiah.”20 Additionally, Wright continues, “This whole scene, summed up here from the previous Part of the book, has encouraged us to ask the question, who did Jesus think he was? The first answer must be: Israel-in-person, Israel’s representative, the one in whom Israel’s destiny was reaching its climax. He thought he was the Messiah.”21

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21 Ibid., p. 538.
Though one could possibly argue that these scholars are wrong, they could not say the same of the apostle Paul who would say of Jesus’ mission, "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Romans 15:8). In Paul’s eyes, the heart of Jesus’ mission was the intent of making good on the promises that God made to the fathers of Israel. In addition, Jesus own words concerning his mission were, “that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). In these were promises of Israel’s restoration.

One must then ask, what were God’s promises and how would they be kept? This is a very important question in light of the apostle Paul’s words. There are many aspects to God’s promises made to Israel, but I intend to only highlight one: Restoration. It is significant, because this was also a term used to speak of Israel’s redemption, salvation and resurrection; they are constituent elements.

**Eschatological Promises**

As noted earlier, N.T. Wright pointed out, “We have now found that the set of *basic beliefs*, which explicate the entire worldview theologically, may be summarized quite simply as monotheism, election and eschatology.”\(^{22}\) E.P. Sanders calls this idea “Jewish Restoration Eschatology.”\(^{23}\) This is because, the idea that God's promises were not yet fulfilled, lead to eschatology. That is, Israel’s expectation that God himself would act on her behalf and ultimately restore her to her rightful state.


Unfortunately, in our time, much orthodoxy revolves around the idea that eschatology has to do with the end of human history. Additionally, as we have seen from our earlier synopsis, for many historical Jesus scholars who rightfully see Jesus as an Apocalyptic Prophet, it is nothing more than historical eschatology. That is, the idea, that since the world did not end and Jesus did not return in the first-century as he said, it became a “historical phenomenon,”\textsuperscript{24} and therefore, the Christian religion was forced to take on a new shape.

However, I maintain that New Testament Eschatology is not Historic Eschatology. It is Jewish Eschatology, that is, New Testament Eschatology is nothing more than the explanation and fulfillment of Jewish Eschatology. What I am proposing can be summed up as follows: Jesus eschatology was Jewish. He was concerned with fulfilling God’s promises made to the fathers of Israel. Jesus eschatology was rooted in the Old Testament Prophets.

**Israel’s Restoration as Resurrection**

As alluded to earlier, the act of Restoration was seen as a Resurrection. When New Testament writers spoke of the resurrection, they were actually speaking of the long anticipated promise of the restoration of all Israel. Paul before Felix said his doctrine of Resurrection was that spoken by "Moses and the Prophets."

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:14-15).

Again, Paul on trial for his doctrine of Resurrection, before Agrippa, said, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6-7).

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22).

Several things become axiomatic 1] Paul said, his doctrine was written in the Law and Prophets, 2] It was the hope of the twelve tribes of Israel, and 3] He was saying nothing about resurrection than what was already said of the Prophets and Moses. However, despite these three facts, today’s theologians primarily consult only the New Testament to develop their doctrine of resurrection. In fact, the basic orthodox view of resurrection has been developed primarily on only New Testament passages.

As we have noted, some historical scholars have pointed out the importance of seeing Jesus mission as centering on Israel's restoration, but none have attempted to tie it to orthodox theology. Likewise, within evangelical Christianity, I know of no seminary theologians that have been willing to fully take this step.

N.T. Wright has come close, as he has correctly pointed out the relationship between Israel's restoration and resurrection. He writes,

"Hope for resurrection began in Judaism not as dogma but as a story—the story of Israel’s exile and restoration. The first obvious passage in which we find it is Ezekiel 37:1-14, the vision of the valley of the dry bones. There the hope for Israel’s restoration is expressed in terms of the vivid, almost surreal, metaphor of dry bones coming back to life, acquiring flesh,
sinews, and ultimately breath. The context makes clear that this image denotes return from exile; it also, by means of the previous chapters, sets up a series of connections, such as rescue, cleansing, and (particularly) covenant renewal. The same is true, arguably of that difficult passage Isaiah 26:16-21. Resurrection begins life, in other words, as a metaphor for return from exile and all that went with Israel’s hope for that.”

However, at the end of the day, Wright also claims these Old Testament passages predicted the raising of biological bodies. This well illustrates the task of our time. What do we do with this historical information? Do we ignore it? No doubt the attitude of most theologians has been to sever Israel’s connection to Christianity. Likewise, the attitude of most historical Jesus scholars has been to say it was a “historical phenomenon,” therefore, Christianity was birthed as a new shape of the Judaic religion. This conflict between orthodoxy and history continues to be the greatest challenge to Christianity in our time.

N.T. Wright, correctly pointed out the relationship of Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 26 to Israel’s restoration, but he did not point out Hosea 13 and Isaiah 25. These are important, because they are at the heart of Paul’s 1 Corinthians 15 discourse.

In order to illustrate the concept of resurrection it is necessary to begin in the Old Testament, since this is where Paul said he got his doctrine. As shown earlier, Israel anticipated a time of restoration. We have shown how the prophets spoke of this restoration as return from exile of all Israel. However, before the Old Testament

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27 See Footnote 24.
prophet’s depiction of restoration, was the pronounced death sentence to both Israel and Judah for violating the covenant.

The Prophet Hosea pronounced a death sentence over the northern ten tribes of Israel. Throughout Hosea it is depicted as a divorce from the covenant. In which they would become “not my people, and I will not be your [God]” (Hosea 1:9). They would be scattered among the Gentiles, by Assyria (2 Kings 15-17, Hosea 8:8).

However, with death came eventual resurrection. Hosea continues by foretelling of Israel’s restoration that would come after her death. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (Hosea 13:14).

Likewise, Isaiah depicted all Israel’s restoration as a resurrection in Isaiah 25. In fact, it was synonymous with their salvation.

"And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:6-9).

Paul in his defense of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 quotes from both Hosea 13:14 and Isaiah 25:8. For Paul resurrection is the future deliverance of Israel from her dead state (i.e., separation from God). A time when death would be swallowed up in
victory and the redemptive purposes of God for his people (i.e. Israel) would be fulfilled. This is evident, because Paul specifically draws from, Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13. Why? Because Paul was looking for the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament resurrection promises, made to the fathers of Israel. Clearly, from the text of 1 Corinthians 15, for Paul, the resurrection would be when Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13 would be fulfilled. This is because it was about Israel’s restoration. This was synonymous with their salvation from sin death, that is, alienation or separation from God caused by their sin. In my opinion, the most appalling error within the history of orthodoxy has been the distortion of Isaiah 25, Hosea 13 and 1 Corinthians 15, making these verses refer to physical bodies rising up out of the ground. Unfortunately, this doctrine, which has become orthodoxy, has taken on a form quite different then seen in history.

Finally, Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). By Jesus words “now is” it is clear the resurrection was underway. Did Jesus mean the raising of physical bodies was underway? No, he meant Israel’s regathering, resurrection, salvation, and most of all, restoration; was coming to fulfillment in himself. He was their Messiah. The one who would bring about an end to their exile and set in order their rightful destiny.

**Implications for Evangelical-Orthodoxy**

What do I mean by Evangelical-Orthodoxy? I am using the term loosely I suppose. I do not wish to limit my definition to one particular branch, but to include all,
which has stemmed from the sixteenth-century Protestant reformation, which has become a wide-reaching definitional chuppah, thus covering a variety of Protestant groups.

As one can imagine, the implications for the theology of Evangelical orthodoxy are prodigious. Soteriologically, we have seen a Jesus that was concerned for the restoration of Israel; this was equated with their salvation and resurrection. Additionally, we have seen that Israel’s restoration was at the heart of Paul’s 1 Corinthians 15 discourse. Thus, to name only a few, orthodox theologies of Soteriology and a future Bodily Resurrection are immediately in Jeopardy.

The implications for Evangelical-orthodoxy are enormous. The historical problem has never been faced head on. Instead, Evangelical Christianity has invented systems to get around dealing with the problem. For example, reformed theologians have invented whole apologetical or epistemological systems, which fail to consider empirical evidence, rationalism, and existentialism as aids in the quest for truth. By ascribing to these methods, they have by default, bypassed dealing with history and said "We believe the bible so there is nothing more to be learned."

Likewise, historical scholars have long recognized the problem between History and Theology, but have been unwilling to attack the problem. E.P. Sanders in his book, Jesus and Judaism said, "Some readers will justly wonder how the Jesus who has been described here [in Jesus & Judaism] is relevant to Christian Faith and Practice. That is a theological problem into which I am not going to venture, at least not here."28

Sanders like many scholars understand the web of frustration involved in taking this path. Why? For Christians, it is often perceived that any attempt to paint a new portrait of Jesus is an attempt to discredit Christianity and its Bible. Maybe it is for some,

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who can know one's individual motivation. It certainly is not my motivation. I believe we must engaged in historical research as a display of homage for the Bible. In my opinion, Historical Jesus research is necessary. As both an academic and Christian, the historical task is part of the activities of learning and knowledge, to ignore them, is intellectually dishonest.

**Conclusion: Mending Bridges**

Research into the historical Jesus has long been very controversial. In fact, many evangelical seminaries refuse to offer the course to their students. They are fine with their version of Jesus, that is, the one they pray to every morning and the one defined by two thousand years of Christian history and the development of its theology. No doubt, they would rather historical Jesus scholars stop asking such unpleasant questions.

Likewise, many academics who have studied the history of Historical Jesus Research think nothing new can be said that has not already been said by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, Albert Schweitzer, David Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Rudolph Bultmann, C.H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, Bruce Chilton, Geza Vermes, L. Michael White, E.P. Sanders, Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, Marcus Borg, Paula Fredrickson, John Meier, Dale Allison or Tom Wright.

However, though not entirely missed by Wright, I think they are missing an important point. That is, for the most part, scholars have acted as if history and faith are antithetical. Some historical scholars have thrown the baby out with the bath water saying, "we do not need scripture." Likewise, some theologians have said, "we do not
need history." As a result, both the historian's and the theologian's reconstructions of Jesus have been foreign to the real Jesus of the past.

However, I am speaking now to my fellow Christians. History and Faith are not antithetical. To appeal to the one is not a denial of the other. Though, history may challenge orthodox versions of Christianity, I believe it will also help to recapture the original intended message. Thus, giving new life to the modern evangelical mission. These two are compose a bridge that needs to be mended.

Quite honestly, I think many Christians have been careless in their thinking. We have for too long created an image of Jesus based off of the interpretations of the Early Church Fathers or the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. As a result, I believe Evangelical-Orthodox Christianity has misunderstood and misinterpreted the portrait of Jesus that is actually in the Bible. However, the real Jesus is not the one invented in the mind of those theologians that throughout history have refused to place Jesus in his historical context. It is only by the historical approach that we can find what the New Testament writers were really trying to say about Him. Just because orthodoxy dictates your version of God it should not excuse you from studying in light of the materials we have that inform us of Jesus' world and context. Doing so is the only answer for the divide between Christianity’s five hundred thousand different denominations.

There is a bridge to be mended and not many have taken up this task. In my opinion, the gap that exists between the Christ of faith and the Christ of history does not need to be that wide. There is a need to find synergy between the two.

Unfortunately, this is a hurdle that I am not sure Christianity can jump. This is also a hurdle that I am not sure historical scholarship can jump. Regardless, there are
many challenges which lie ahead that face both theologians and historians, I for one, want to be right in the center of it.
Bibliography


