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The Gospel of John's Christology as Evidence for Early Jewish Messianic Expectations: Challenges and Possibilities

Benjamin E. Reynolds

Abstract

This essay begins by noting the challenges to reading the Gospel of John in the context of early Jewish messianism, such as questions about John's authenticity, the relationship of the Gospel with the Johannine community, and the Gospel's high Christology. The focus of the essay, however, is on the lack of references to John in the scholarship of early Jewish messianism. I focus on five scholars who address the Fourth Gospel in the context of first-century messianic expectations and draw attention to how rarely the Gospel is read as a Jewish text. The messiah passages of John are listed, along with possible questions and issues related to them. The essay concludes by suggesting possible ways to reading John as a Jewish messiah text.

Introduction

Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism poses many challenges yet it also brings with it numerous possibilities for rethinking Johannine Christology and its place within the messianisms of early Judaism. Although the challenges may come more quickly to mind, there are obvious reasons why it would be worthwhile to consider John's Gospel as an early Jewish text. For example, the Gospel narrates the life of Jesus, a Jew, who came to his own people (1:10; cf. 11:50). There are multiple references to Jewish feasts, citations and allusion to the Jewish Scriptures, reference to Jewish symbols and ideas, and a central focus on Jesus's identity as the Jewish Messiah (11:27; 20:31). Additionally, in the light of the entire New

Testament, it is only in the Fourth Gospel that we find the Aramaic transliteration *μεσσίας* to speak of Jesus as the Messiah (1:41; 4:25). Thus, we might consider it at least possible that the Fourth Gospel may have something to contribute to our understanding of Second Temple Jewish messianic expectation. While this may be the case, scholars of early Judaism rarely, if ever, mention the Fourth Gospel when examining early Jewish messianism.

In this essay, I will begin by addressing challenges to reading the Gospel of John as evidence for early Jewish messianic expectation, with regard to current Johannine and New Testament scholarship. Then, I will draw attention to the way the Gospel's relationship with early Judaism has been discussed, before extensively highlighting the paucity of the Fourth Gospel's use in Second Temple studies on messianism. I focus briefly on a few studies which do include John and note how these examples return to the initial challenges. I conclude with some suggested possibilities for viewing John's Messiah as a Jewish messiah.

Challenges to Viewing John as Evidence for Jewish Messianic Expectation

Finding evidence of Jewish messianic expectation in the Fourth Gospel has numerous challenges, which are immediately obvious to anyone familiar with Johannine scholarship.¹ First, since the rise of critical scholarship, John's Gospel is rarely used to establish actions and words

¹ Cf. Dietmar Neufeld, "'And When That One Comes': Aspects of Johannine Messianism," in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, SDSSRL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 120–40; and Tom Thatcher, "Remembering Jesus: John's Negative Christology," in *Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 165–89.

of the historical Jesus.² The authenticity of the Gospel of John's has been questioned since the rise of critical scholarship.³ For example, John Ashton states, "John has no interest in the historical Jesus as such."⁴ As a result, in historical Jesus studies, scholars rarely refer to John's Gospel apart from appealing to other examples of the broader Jesus tradition. James Dunn states: "John's Gospel cannot be regarded as a source for the life and teaching of Jesus of the same order as the Synoptics. . . . one can recognize *both* that the tradition has been heavily worked upon *and* that it is well rooted within earlier Jesus tradition." Dunn goes on to state that in the search for the historical Jesus John's Gospel can merely function as a secondary support to the Synoptic Gospels.⁵ Compared to other perspectives on the Fourth Gospel's historicity, like that of Maurice Casey who contends that John's "presentation of Jesus is seriously false,"⁶ Dunn's view is actually quite promising. Yet any Jesus scholar, in order to remain credible, tends not use

² For a recent examination of John's Jesus in relationship to history, see William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 393–418.

³ See the discussion in Peter W. Ensor, "The Johannine Sayings of Jesus and the Question of Authenticity," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman, WUNT II/219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 14–33.

⁴ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 526; See also, Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on the New Testament*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), 15–47.

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 166–67 (emphasis original); see also Dale C. Jr. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 29, who implies that the Fourth Gospel is a new performance of the Jesus tradition.

⁶ Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 61.

John as a lead source let alone a source at all. N. T. Wright admits in the preface to *Jesus and the Victory of God* that he purposely did not use John because “the debate which I wish to contribute in this book has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition.”⁷

Push back against this negative perspective on John’s historicity has come from scholars who have argued for at least some consideration of Johannine material in historical Jesus studies.⁸ Most recently, the major impetus for this has come from the John, Jesus, and History project.⁹ While the project’s work has sparked significant discussion and highlighted the value of considering the Fourth Gospel in historical study of Jesus, the priority of John has not won the day. In his essay in *John, Jesus and History, Volume 3*, Jörg Frey states: “The Johannine image

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), xvi.

⁸ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Martin Hengel, “Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Judentums,” in *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana*, WUNT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 293–334; Francis J. Moloney, “The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History,” *NTS* 46, no. 1 (2000): 42–58; Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁹ Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, SymS 44 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007); Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of History in the Fourth Gospel*, ECL 2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009); Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, ECL 18 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

of Christ, his message, ministry, and true meaning is thus a creation of post-Easter reflection under the guidance of the Spirit.”¹⁰ The Gospel of John may be seen as evidence reflecting Jesus traditions alongside the Synoptic Gospels (and Q), but John continues to be understood by many as reflecting a developed early Christian tradition.¹¹

Second, and directly related to the challenge of historicity, the Fourth Gospel is generally understood to reflect the experience of the Johannine community in the late first century (or early second century) rather than the historical events of Jesus’s life. J. Louis Martyn’s book *History and Theology of the Fourth Gospel*, which was originally published in 1968, has had a significant and lasting influence on Johannine studies.¹² Since its publication fifty years ago, the vast majority of Johannine scholars has assumed Martyn’s thesis and read John as a two-level drama, in other words they have read the narrative of Jesus’s life as reflecting the situation of the Johannine community and its tensions with the synagogue (or non-Jesus believing Jews). In addition, the Gospel of John is understood to have been revised or redacted two to five times by

¹⁰ Jörg Frey, “From the ‘Kingdom of God’ to ‘Eternal Life’: The Transformation of Theological Language in the Fourth Gospel,” in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, ECL 18 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 439–58 (458).

¹¹ See James D. G. Dunn, “John and the Historical Jesus: A Response,” in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, ECL 18 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 493–505.

¹² J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed., NTL (Westminster John Knox, 2003); see also Ashton, *Understanding*; and more recently John Ashton, *The Gospel of John and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

various editors. The revisions and editing of the Gospel is thought to reflect the expansion and refining of christological debate within the community and with the community's various neighbors and opponents, be they non-Jesus believing Jews, Samaritans, or followers of John the Baptist.¹³ These perspectives on John only highlight the challenge (or impossibility?) of attempting to discover early Jewish messianic understandings in the Fourth Gospel.

Third, the so-called "high Christology" of John has long been understood to reveal the development of early Christian beliefs concerning Jesus as the Christ. Within the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus may be seen as a human prophet who may or may not have been thought to be a messiah, yet in the Gospel of John, Jesus has descended from heaven, has been sent by the Father, is one with the Father, and is the only begotten of the Father. This Johannine portrayal of Jesus as the divine Son of God is thought to have been possible only in later Christian thought. This understanding of Johannine Christology is clearly evident in Maurice Casey's *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*,¹⁴ but also in James Dunn's *Christology in the Making* and Martin

¹³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971); Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979); Martyn, *History and Theology*; Ashton, *Understanding*; and most recently, Urban C. Von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John: Introduction, Analysis, and Reference*, vol. 1, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of Johannine Literature and Why It Matters*, LNTS 517 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

¹⁴ Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

Hengel's "Christological Titles in Early Christianity,"¹⁵ although this view is nothing new.¹⁶ Within New Testament studies, it is generally assumed that John's Gospel is the final stage in the development of Christology and is therefore dependent on early Christian traditions and memories.¹⁷ For example, John Painter states: "it is likely that the Synoptic use of tradition is closer to the language of Jesus than John so that the form of John's explicit Christology represents a *reflective development* of that tradition...."¹⁸ Based on these assumptions, scholars do not deem John's Christology to reflect Jewish messianic expectation, at least directly. Rather, John's Christology is understood to reflect a Johannine version of the Synoptic Jesus set in the

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Martin Hengel, "Christological Titles in Early Christianity," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 425–48, (430–35); note also the title of the festschrift for Marinus de Jonge, Martinus C. de Boer, *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*, JSNTSup 84 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 244: "John is basically somewhat further removed from the preaching of Jesus than is Paul."

¹⁷ Thatcher, "Remembering Jesus," 174, states: "The interplay of memory, faith, and Scripture may therefore be viewed as John's Christological formula, the generative matrix through which he developed statements about Jesus' messianic identity."

¹⁸ John Painter, "The Point of John's Christology: Christology, Conflict, and Community in John," in *Christology, Controversy, and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, ed. David G. Horrell and C. M. Tuckett, NovTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 231–52 (240, emphasis mine).

context of late first-century intra-Jewish diaspora dialogue and conflict or less specifically a Christianized or theologized development of Jewish messianic expectation.

These three challenges—the historicity of John, the context of the Johannine community, and the development of a divine Son Christology—are intertwined. For many, John’s high Christology indicates its derivation from the community, which in turn negates its historicity.¹⁹ How much more problematic then is it to read the Gospel of John’s Christology as a form of Jewish Messianism? If it is questionable to find the historical Jesus in John, or actual information about Jesus’s debate with his interlocutors, or a description of Jesus untainted by early Christian theological reflection, what hope do we have to find authentic early Jewish expectations concerning the Messiah evident in the Gospel of John?

The Gospel of John and Second Temple Judaism

In light of these challenges, it should be noted that Johannine scholars have recognized the connection of the Gospel with Palestinian Judaism. Ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the pendulum began to swing away from viewing Gnostic, Mandaean, and Hermetic traditions in the background of the Fourth Gospel.²⁰ C. K. Barrett cites Wilhelm Michaelis as stating in 1961: “It may now be said that the Palestinian character of the Gospel of John has

¹⁹ Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, 25; *idem*, *Is John’s Gospel True?*, 31–62.

²⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism: The Franz Delitzsch Lectures, University of Münster, 1967*, trans. D. Moody Smith (London: SPCK, 1975), 12.

become so clear that attempts to promote another provenance really should cease.”²¹ The Dead Sea Scrolls clarified that the Gospel of John shared similarities with early Judaism. Raymond Brown made some of the earliest connections between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Fourth Gospel,²² and further studies have since explored the Gospel’s similarities with the Scrolls.²³

The Dead Sea Scrolls are not the only indications of the Fourth Gospel’s relationship with Second Temple Judaism. Many recent studies have noted ties to early Judaism in John (the law, Moses, Son of Man, feasts, geography, archaeology, symbols, language, etc.²⁴). The challenge for Johannine scholarship has been where to go and what to do after noting John’s relationship with early Judaism. The discussion often ends with stating that a relationship exists or explicating the Gospel on the basis of early Jewish sources. Could the reason for this apparent dead end be that moving forward means traveling into uncharted waters, into places that

²¹ Barrett, *John and Judaism* 8; citing Wilhelm Michaelis, *Einleitung in Das Neue Testament: die Entstehung, Sammlung und Überlieferung der Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Bern: Berchtold Haller, 1961), 125.

²² Raymond E. Brown, “Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles,” *CBQ* 17, no. 3 (1955): 403–19; *idem*, “Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles: Other Similarities,” *CBQ* 17, no. 4 (1955): 559–74.

²³ For example, James H. Charlesworth and Raymond E. Brown, *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*, *EJL* 32 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011).

²⁴ For some aspects of geography, messianism, people, and feasts, see Hengel, “Johannesevangelium als Quelle.”

Johannine scholarship does not go with regard to reevaluating John's historicity, the context in which the Gospel was written, and the height of its Christology?

There are still pressures that keep the pendulum from swinging all the way toward a Palestinian Jewish understanding of the Gospel of John. These pressures are similar to the challenges already mentioned: historicity, the Johannine community, and John's "high Christology."

Specifically regarding the Gospel's messianism, C. H. Dodd claims that the Gospel of John's Christology is the most Jewish Christology of the four Gospels, and yet he states: "The positive and significant elements in the Johannine Christology find little or no point of attachment to Jewish messianic ideas."²⁵ For Dodd, the Fourth Gospel is aware of Jewish messianic expectation, but he argues that the Gospel contradicts that expectation.²⁶

Also, in the published version of his Franz Delitzsch lectures given in 1967, C. K. Barrett argues for a relationship between Judaism and the Gospel, but like Dodd, Barrett views the writing and editing of the Gospel as having been influenced by tensions between Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah and those who do not. He concludes that "it is hardly satisfactory" to conclude that the Gospel is Jewish, and he warns that "we must ask with what Judaism the gospel was in contact and in what relation to this Judaism it stood."²⁷ He notes that John "contains Judaism,

²⁵ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 92.

²⁶ Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 228–29; cf. Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?*, 62, who considers the Johannine Jesus "un-Jewish."

²⁷ Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 42.

non-Judaism, and anti-Judaism,”²⁸ and in essence argues that the Gospel of John is somewhat distant from the life and context of Jesus.

With these considerations, the Gospel of John’s relationship to early Judaism exists and yet it does not. The Fourth Gospel indicates similarities with early Judaism and specifically aspects of Jewish messianic expectation, but where differences exist, Johannine scholarship tends to view those differences as adaptations of the tradition or the Johannine community’s critique or correction of Jewish belief or other Jesus followers’ beliefs. The tendency within New Testament studies is not to consider that the Johannine perspective might possibly reflect a Jewish sectarian perspective, but to see John and the Johannine Jesus, who is Messiah, as anti-Jewish. Before returning to this idea, it is worth considering how Second Temple scholarship on Jewish messianism uses or does not use the Gospel of John.

The Use of John in Scholarship on Second Temple Messianism

In the vast majority of books and essays on the Jewish Messiah, there are, predictably, no citations of John in studies on early Jewish messianism: Michael Stone’s essay “The Questions of the Messiah in 4 Ezra,” Michael Knibb’s essay “Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha in the Light of the Scrolls,”²⁹ James Charlesworth’s essay, “From Jewish Messianology to Christian Christology: Some Caveats and Perspectives,”³⁰ Al Wolters and Loren Stuckenbruck’s essays in

²⁸ Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 71.

²⁹ Michael A. Knibb, “Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha in the Light of the Scrolls,” *DSD* 2, no. 2 (1995): 165–84.

³⁰ James H. Charlesworth, “From Jewish Messianology to Christian Christology: Some Caveats and Perspectives,” in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. Jacob Neusner,

The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments,³¹ and many other essays in the edited volumes *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, *Qumran-Messianism*, *King and Messiah*, *The Messiah*.³² And intriguingly, Kenneth Pomykala, in his study on the Davidic dynasty, does not even consider New Testament evidence, stating: “of course ideas from early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism cannot serve as a barometer for Jewish expectations in the Second Temple period.”³³ This finding, that studies of messianism in early Judaism rarely refer to New Testament texts, let

William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 225–64; *idem*, “From Messianology to Christology: Problems and Prospects,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 21–52.

³¹ Al Wolters, “The Messiah in the Qumran Documents,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 75–89; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Messianic Ideas in the Apocalyptic and Related Literature of Early Judaism,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 90–113.

³² Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema, eds., *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); John Day, ed., *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

³³ Kenneth Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism*, EJL 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). He states in the introduction: “of course ideas from early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism cannot serve as a barometer for Jewish expectations in the Second Temple period” (4–5).

alone the Gospel of John, should not be astonishing. Perspectives on messianism in early Judaism are established initially through meticulous examination of later Hebrew Bible prophetic texts that depict references to royal, prophetic, or priestly anointed figures: Isaiah 7–11; Micah 5; Amos 9; Malachi 3–4; Jeremiah 23; Zechariah 4; and Daniel 7 and 9 come readily to mind. These texts are often themselves interpreting or alluding to texts such as Genesis 49; Numbers 24; Deuteronomy 18, 33; 2 Samuel 14; and numerous Psalms (e.g., 2, 45, 89, 110, 132).

Then depending on methodology, a scholar may examine all uses of משיח (“anointed”) in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Apocrypha, and/or the Pseudepigrapha, or the net may be cast more widely than terminology, which yields further texts and examples.³⁴ The usual texts included in these studies are: 1QS IX, 9–11; 1QSa; 4Q174; 4Q246; 4Q521; 11QMelchizedek; CD 7:18–21; Sirach 48–49; Psalms of Solomon 17–18, 1 Enoch 46–48; 62; 69; 4 Ezra 7; 11–13; 2 Baruch 29–30; 39–40; 70–74; and sometimes 1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41; the Sibylline Oracles, and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (esp. Testament of Judah 24 and Testament of Levi 18).³⁵ Of course any study

³⁴ James H. Charlesworth, “Messianology in the Biblical Pseudepigrapha,” in *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 21–52; see Gerbern S. Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectations from Maccabees to Bar Kochba*, JSPSup 27 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 21–27, for a nuanced methodological discussion; also, Matthew V. Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 34–63; *idem*, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁵ William Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Gerbern S. Oegema, “Messianic Expectations in the Qumran Writings:

of Second Temple Jewish messianism is remiss without highlighting Josephus's company of messianic pretenders—Judah the Galilean, Simon, the Egyptian, and Menahem, also including Simon bar Kosiba. A study of Josephus's characters turns up glimpses of popular messianic expectation or popular responses to messianic uprisings in contrast to or in supplement to what may be perceived as “scribal” and thus “elite” messianic expectation in the sources mentioned above. Some studies may also examine messianic interpretational tendencies in the Septuagint as part of early Jewish messianic understandings.³⁶

In the majority of studies of Jewish messianism that I have surveyed, scholars rarely mention the New Testament. When they do, they do so toward the end of their studies in sections or chapters dedicated explicitly to New Testament Christology.³⁷ It is in these sections where references to

Theses on Their Development,” in *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 53–82; Andrew Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology*, WUNT 207 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

³⁶ Michael A. Knibb, ed., *The Septuagint and Messianism*, BETL 195 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Johan Lust, *Messianism and the Septuagint: Collected Essays*, ed. K. Hauspie, BETL 178 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004).

³⁷ For example, John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 229–37, in the section entitled “Jesus and the Davidic Messiah” in the chapter “Messianic Dreams in Action”; and Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations*, USFSFCJ 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 317–54, in the chapter “The Messiah in the New Testament.”; also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Shirley

the Gospel of John are usually found, yet even if the New Testament is cited, the Fourth Gospel may be left out.³⁸ But regardless of where in a Jewish messianism study the Fourth Gospel is cited, scholars almost without exception refer to John as an example of New Testament or early Christian (and thus not Jewish) belief in the Messiah. For example, Andrew Chester cites the variant ὁ ἐκλεκτός (“the Elect one”) in John 1:34 as part of his case that “elect one” in 4Q534 and the Parables of Enoch may be a messianic reference.³⁹ Chester tentatively puts forward John 1:34 as a New Testament example of “elect” being used messianically,⁴⁰ and he also mentions John 12:15 as an example of Davidic messianism, but the Markan and Matthean accounts are still given precedence.⁴¹ Likewise, John Collins cites Mark 6:4 and John 6:14 as evidence that the roles of prophet and king were separate in the New Testament.⁴² On neither instance is the Johannine or New Testament evidence understood to reflect Jewish messianic expectation.

Lucass, *The Concept of the Messiah in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity*, LSTS 78 (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

³⁸ Oegema, *The Anointed and His People*, chs. 4 and 5, discusses Paul, early Christology, the Catholic Epistles, Revelation, and church fathers, but not John.

³⁹ See Johannes Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte Aus Qumran: Königliche, Priesterliche Und Prophetische Messiasvorstellungen in Den Schriftfunden von Qumran*, WUNT II/104 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 170–204, for an in-depth discussion of 4Q534 without mention of John 1:34.

⁴⁰ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 256.

⁴¹ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 313.

⁴² John J. Collins, “Jesus, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 100–19 (116–17).

As in historical Jesus studies, early Judaism scholars usually view the Gospel of John's Christology as a development of early Christology, which is in turn viewed as a development of Jewish messianic expectation. James Charlesworth expresses the latter idea with the following statement: "Jewish messianology does not flow majestically into Christian christology."⁴³ In a similar way John Collins concludes his New Testament section in *The Scepter and the Star* with this statement: "Christian claims for the divinity of Jesus eventually went beyond anything we find in the Jewish texts."⁴⁴ And again, Antti Laato states, "The Gospel of John represents the final stage of development of New Testament Christology."⁴⁵

This view that Christian Christology is a development from Jewish messianism is recognizable in the mid-twentieth-century work of Jacob Klausner: "The Christian Messiah is in essence only a further development of the Jewish Messiah. . . ."⁴⁶ And again Klausner says, "Jesus' Messiahship was gradually obscured: Jesus the Messiah gave way to 'Jesus the God-man,' or 'the God Jesus'; and matters finally reached such a pass that the name 'Christ' became the essential cognomen of Jesus ('Jesus Christ' and not 'Jesus the Messiah'). The Messiahship of Jesus became secondary to his deity."⁴⁷ Without needing to offer further examples, of which

⁴³ Charlesworth, "From Jewish Messianology," 255.

⁴⁴ Collins, *Scepter and the Star*, 236.

⁴⁵ Laato, *A Star Is Rising*, 349. Laato does claim that characteristic Johannine descriptions of Jesus—preexistent Son of God, the Son sent by the Father to save the world from sin, and his glorious return to the Father—were all present in earlier Christian tradition.

⁴⁶ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 529.

⁴⁷ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea*, 528.

there are plenty, it is quite obvious that the challenges to viewing John as a source of Jewish messianism, particularly the understanding of John as the end of a trajectory of christological development, influence scholarly use of John in Second Temple scholarship.

The Gospel of John's Christology is understood to be removed not merely from Jewish messianic beliefs but from messianic belief in early Christianity. Thus, when John's Gospel is mentioned in the studies of Second Temple Judaism, it is primarily as evidence of Christian belief or to indicate the development of Christological perspective(s) on Jesus as the Christ (and not necessarily as Messiah).

Attempts at Using John as Evidence for Jewish Messianism

There are a few scholars I have found who have used John as evidence for Jewish Messianism. In these examples, the challenges and possibilities of using the Gospel of John as a Jewish messianic source are starkly recognizable.

Sigmund Mowinckel

Sigmund Mowinckel is quite willing to cite John's Gospel as an example of Jewish messianic expectation, especially in the chapter "The National Messiah." He seems to assume without question that the Gospel of John reflects early Jewish traditions concerning the Messiah.

Mowinckel cites John 4:25 along with Ps. Sol. 18:8–10 and 1 En. 49:3 to indicate Jewish and Samaritan belief that the Messiah would teach people "a right understanding of the law."⁴⁸ He

⁴⁸ Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G.W. Anderson, BibRS (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 311, see also 322 and 376.

also cites John 4:25 and 6:14 as evidence that the Messiah is the Prophet: “This passage [6:14] seems to imply that ‘the Prophet’, simpliciter, was a title of the Messiah.”⁴⁹ Mowinckel mentions John 1:21, 25 as one of a number of examples that indicate that it was “presupposed in the Gospels as a common Jewish belief” that Elijah would precede the Messiah.⁵⁰ John 7:41–42 is cited with other texts as an example of Mic. 5:1 giving rise to the idea that the Messiah would originate from Bethlehem.⁵¹ Meanwhile it is worth pointing out that Mowinckel understood the Messiah as a human, national figure and the Son of Man as a heavenly figure.

Marinus de Jonge

In contrast to Mowinckel, Marinus de Jonge offers an explicit attempt to address John as a source of Jewish messianism in his essay “Jewish Expectations about the ‘Messiah’ according to the Fourth Gospel.”⁵² He begins with many questions relevant to considering the Fourth Gospel as a source for Jewish messianism: Which sources does the Evangelist use? Do we find this information in other Jewish sources? Can we put together a portrait of Jewish messianic expectation from John?

⁴⁹ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 322.

⁵⁰ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 299.

⁵¹ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 286.

⁵² M. de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God: Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective*, trans. John E. Steely, SBL/SBS (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 77–116; originally published as Marinus de Jonge, “Jewish Expectations about the Messiah According to the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 19, no. 3 (1973): 246–70.

De Jonge seems to argue that John may serve as a source on its own, but in the end de Jonge will not allow it to do so. He states:

If statements made by Jewish opponents or sympathizers in the Fourth Gospel do not agree with expressions or conceptions found in the Jewish sources, or show only partial agreements, we may not exclude the possibility that the Gospel, as only source, has preserved truly Jewish notions and beliefs. After all, the Jewish material is variegated, and very scanty and haphazard. Yet the Johannine material can only be used to fill in the gaps or to correct the picture after due allowance has been made within the Fourth Gospel.⁵³

Since the majority of statements, particularly in John 7, come from the Jewish crowd, de Jonge argues that these statements are “a complete misunderstanding” or “they represent an inadequate formulation of belief.” The Gospel, thus, attempts to ignore, reinterpret, or correct such insufficient Jewish messianic understandings.⁵⁴ Ultimately, de Jonge argues that the Gospel of John does not offer authentic examples of Jewish messianism because the statements of messianic expectation in John are spoken by the “Johannine Jews.” The Gospel considers these statements as an inadequate description of Christology and critiques these Jewish beliefs and the early Christian responses to them.⁵⁵ For de Jonge, the presentation of Jewish messianic belief in

⁵³ de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 79.

⁵⁴ de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 85.

⁵⁵ de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 96–97.

the Gospel of John adds “little or nothing to our knowledge of Jewish expectations,” not least because the Gospel has reshaped and corrected those expectations.⁵⁶

Dietmar Neufeld

Dietmar Neufeld notes that although the Christological titles in the Gospel of John reflect specific Johannine understanding they are related to Jewish messianic expectation. Some of his conclusions are similar to de Jonge in that the Fourth Gospel’s context determines the use of the messianic expectations and their meaning. Neufeld also references the multiple expectations of a messiah in Second Temple Judaism, yet he contends that the “recontextualized” Johannine Messiah has grown out of “reflection that had its roots in Judaism.”⁵⁷ Again, we see distance placed between Jewish messianic expectation and the Johannine Jesus. The Jesus of John is not an example of a purely Jewish messiah.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ De Jonge is followed by Judith Lieu who also asks the question about whether John’s Gospel may reflect actual Jewish messianic expectation, but she like de Jonge sees the messianic expectation reflected in John as inadequate. Judith M. Lieu, “Messiah and Resistance in the Gospel and Epistles of John,” in *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and James Carleton Paget (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 97–108.

⁵⁷ Neufeld, “Aspects of Johannine Messianism,” 140.

⁵⁸ Note in a similar vein, Matthew V. Novenson, “Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of John, or The Unlikely Trove of Messiah Traditions in the Gospel of John,” in *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, ed. Craig R. Koester, LNTS (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming).

Richard Bauckham

Richard Bauckham offers one of the most stimulating essays when considering John's Messiah as a Jewish messiah. He contends that de Jonge "prejudices [his] investigation" by considering the function of the Gospel's messianic expectations before assessing their reliability.⁵⁹ By contrast, and against the grain of Johannine scholarship, Bauckham argues that correspondence between the Gospel of John and Jewish Palestine of Jesus's day should cause us to "take seriously that the evangelist's intention was to write a story set in the past – a past represented with historical realism rather than imagined with allegorical reference to the present."⁶⁰ In the rest of his study, Bauckham addresses the three eschatological figures of John 1:19-21 (the Messiah, Elijah, and the prophet), the references to "the prophet" (1:45; 6:14-15; 7:40-41), and the uses of "Messiah" in John (including, "Son of God," "King of Israel," origins of the Messiah, signs of the Messiah, and "Son of Man"). In these discussions, Bauckham engages extensively with the usual early Jewish messianic texts addressed by scholars of Second Temple messianism. He does not always argue for the interpretation of John that would most serve his case, but he contends that the messianism of the Fourth Gospel corresponds to the myriad of messianic beliefs in the first century.

⁵⁹ Richard Bauckham, "Messianism According to the Gospel of John," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman, WUNT II/219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 34–68 (35); citing de Jonge, "Jewish Expectations," 247.

⁶⁰ Bauckham, "Messianism According to the Gospel of John," 34.

William Horbury

In a brief two paragraphs of his revised 1985 *JTS* article “Messianic Associations of ‘The Son of Man,’” William Horbury presents one of the most promising attempts to read John’s Gospel as a source for Jewish messianism, especially considering that he is an early Judaism scholar. He begins, “Two Johannine passages have claim to reflect, like Josephus, the broad biblical basis found for the messianic hope by first-century Jews....”⁶¹ The passages he discusses are John 1:45 (“we have found the one of whom Moses wrote in the law and also the prophets”) and 12:34 (“We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; how do you say that it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”). Regarding 1:45, Horbury notes the expectation that the Messiah was prophesied in the law, and regarding 12:34, he points out the association of the Messiah with the Son of Man, claiming that the crowd’s question indicates an association between the Messiah and the Son of Man.⁶² Horbury views these Johannine passages as a corrective Christology, but significantly for this project, he is an example of an early Judaism scholar who understands John as evidence of early Jewish messianic expectation.⁶³

In summary, these scholars who have used the Gospel of John as a source of Jewish messianism highlight the challenges and issues involved in doing so. Both de Jonge and Neufeld view John

⁶¹ Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians*, 129.

⁶² Lieu, “Messiah and Resistance,” 102n20, in line with much Johannine scholarship, is dismissive of Horbury on this point.

⁶³ Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians*, 129–30; see also, *idem*, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998), 8–10, 32.

as reflecting Johannized (or Christianized) adaptations of Jewish messianic expectations, not unlike Dodd. Mowinckel comes to us from another age. He readily accepts Jewish messianic belief in John, but he does so unquestioningly and in a pre-Dead Sea Scrolls context. Bauckham presents a serious exploration of John as evidence for Jewish messianism, but he concludes by suggesting that the author of John knew pre-70 CE Palestine.⁶⁴ There is need to explore further the implications of his conclusions. Horbury, more akin to Mowinckel yet more cautious, contends that John 1:45 and 12:34 are representative of broader expectations concerning the Messiah in the first century. Of the few scholars who actually address John in regard to early Jewish messianism, fewer view John as relevant for first-century Jewish messianic expectations.

Reading John's Christ as Jewish Messiah: Possibilities and Prospects

Thus, on the question of Jesus as the Messiah, Johannine scholarship finds itself in an interesting place not unlike that of Pauline scholarship.⁶⁵ Johannine scholars, since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, have recognized the Palestinian Jewish nature of the Gospel of John, but by and large, they have understood John's Christology as a corrected, theologized, or Christianized version of Jewish messianology. Meanwhile, scholarship on Jewish messianism has acknowledged the diversity of early Jewish messianic expectation, but at the same time, the

⁶⁴ See also, Hengel, "Johannesevangelium als Quelle," 316, 334.

⁶⁵ See Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs*, 12–33, for his insightful chapter, "The Modern Problem of Christ and Messiahs."

Fourth Gospel is almost never referenced as an example of this expectation. This situation appears counterintuitive, but there may be ways to move beyond the apparent impasse.

Daniel Boyarin's work presents one such way of approaching the Gospel of John's Christology as a form of Jewish Messianism.⁶⁶ Boyarin has argued that "high Christology" may be found in early Jewish writings, particularly the Parables of Enoch and 4 Ezra.⁶⁷ These two texts, as well as 2 Baruch, reveal a Jewish messianic figure who is preexistent, involved in the judgment of the wicked, the Servant of the Lord, and an individual figure.⁶⁸ One striking aspect of the Enochic Son of Man is that he is seated on the Lord of Spirits's throne, indicating a high Christology indeed.⁶⁹ To quote Boyarin in his published Sixth Enoch Seminar essay:

⁶⁶ Daniel Boyarin, "Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism," *JSJ* 41, no. 3 (2010): 323–65; *idem*, "How Enoch Can Teach Us about Jesus," *EC* 2, no. 1 (2011): 51–76; *idem*, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012); *idem*, "Enoch, Ezra, and the Jewishness of 'High Christology,'" in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini, *JSJSup* 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 337–61.

⁶⁷ Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 71–101.

⁶⁸ John J. Collins, "The Son of Man in First-Century Judaism," *NTS* 38, no. 3 (1992): 448–66; Lester L. Grabbe, "'Son of Man': Its Origin and Meaning in Second Temple Judaism," in *Enoch and the Synoptic Gospels: Reminisces, Allusions, and Intertextuality*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Gabriele Boccaccini, *EJL* 44 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 169–97.

⁶⁹ See Darrell D. Hannah, "The Throne of His Glory: The Divine Throne and Heavenly Mediators in Revelation and the Similitudes of Enoch," *ZNW* 94, no. 1–2 (2003): 68–96; Helge S. Kvanvig, "The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch," in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 179–215 (189–93).

a historical description of the disputatious religious practices (including textual practices of the Israelites of the first century) can accommodate the Gospels (and even Paul) and the very highest of the New Testament Christologies within the borders of what can be historically, phenomenologically described as Jewry. I thus disagree with views that see “early Christianity” as something other than “Judaism” or, alternatively, in order to save the phenomena, deny the originary natures of high Christologies altogether, seeing them as later and externally motivated mutations.⁷⁰

Boyarin continues by saying that together the Parables of Enoch and the Gospels “provide strong evidence for the confluence of ideas about the human Messiah Son of David and the divine Messiah Son of Man in Judaism by, at least, the first century CE and probably earlier too.”⁷¹ And more provocatively: “The road to Nicaea had been well cleared and paved and neither Trinity nor Incarnation can be said to represent a departure from Israelite religion but rather an unfolding of it. Jews came to believe Jesus was God, because they already believed that the Messiah would be a divine redeemer incarnated in a human body; they just argued about who that human being was.”⁷²

For most scholars, Boyarin’s thinking is a complete paradigm shift and in many ways something that “just isn’t done.”⁷³ Yet as is noted by many scholars of Jewish messianism, there are

⁷⁰ Boyarin, “Jewishness of ‘High Christology,’” 338.

⁷¹ Boyarin, “Jewishness of ‘High Christology,’” 349.

⁷² Boyarin, “Jewishness of ‘High Christology,’” 352.

⁷³ Horbury, *Jewish Messianism*, argued similarly to Boyarin yet not as forcefully.

multiple understandings of Jewish expectation, such that we can discuss Jewish messiahs and messianisms⁷⁴ Speaking of the Dead Sea Scrolls role in this, George Brooke states: “the Scrolls have put the ‘mess’ into ‘messianism’, making it difficult to be clear what constituted Jewish eschatological expectation at the time of Hillel and Jesus.”⁷⁵ A comparison of the messiah figures in the Parables of Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the Psalms of Solomon adds to this “mess,” even though there are notably similar features between them. Throw in Josephus’s cast of characters for good measure and we have an astounding spectrum of messianic belief within early Judaism.⁷⁶ If such is the case, and if there are examples of a “high” or divine messianism in the Second Temple period,⁷⁷ the possibility of considering John’s Christology as a form of Jewish messianism need not be hindered by a developmental view of New Testament Christology, especially if the New Testament documents, *including* the Fourth Gospel, are recognized as texts belonging to early Judaism.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ For example, Neusner, Green, and Frerichs, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*.

⁷⁵ George J. Brooke, “Kingship and Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 434–55 (455).

⁷⁶ Charlesworth, “From Messianology to Christology,” 28: “The complexity of messianic ideas, the lack of a coherent messianology among the documents in the Pseudepigrapha and among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the frequently contradictory messianic predictions prohibit anything approximating coherency in early Jewish messianology”; also, Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 270.

⁷⁷ Similarly Kvanvig, “The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” 192.

⁷⁸ An earlier argument in this direction was made by Horbury, *Jewish Messianism*. See also Gabriele Boccaccini's essay in this volume.

Messianic Texts and Themes in the Gospel of John

Regardless of which perspective is taken, any reading of the Fourth Gospel's Christology must address the numerous texts, contexts, and themes that relate to John's presentation of Jesus as the Messiah. The primary texts that serve as important links to Jewish messianic expectation in the Gospel of John include:

- ❖ John the Baptist's dismissal of being the Christ, Elijah, or "the prophet" (John 1:19-21; cf. 3:28)
- ❖ Andrew's declaration to Peter: "We have found the μεσσίαν" (1:41)
- ❖ Philip's declaration to Nathanael: "We have found the one of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote" (1:45)
- ❖ Nathanael's exclamation "You are the Son of God, the King of Israel" (1:49)
- ❖ Jesus's statement to the Samaritan woman that the one speaking with her is the μεσσίας (4:25)
- ❖ the crowd's claim that Jesus was the prophet who was to come into the world and their subsequent attempt to make him king (6:14-15)
- ❖ the crowd's claim that when the Christ comes no one will know where he is from (7:27)
- ❖ the expectation by the crowd that the Christ will do signs (7:31; cf. 10:41)
- ❖ the crowd's question about whether Jesus was the prophet or the Christ
- ❖ and whether the Christ was David's descendant and would come from Bethlehem (7:40-44; cf. 7:52; 9:17)
- ❖ that those who believe Jesus to be the Christ will be thrown out from the synagogue (9:22; cf. 12:42; 16:2)

- ❖ Martha’s exclamation: “I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who comes into the world” (11:27)
- ❖ the crowd’s expectation that the Christ will remain forever (12:34)
- ❖ the Gospel as witness to Jesus’s signs so that readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:30-31)
- ❖ and additionally, the two references to Jesus as “Jesus Christ” (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:17; Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, 17:3)

These texts and their contexts serve as the primary material for discussion of whether or not John’s Gospel reflects an early Jewish understanding of the Messiah.

From these messianic texts, many questions arise concerning messianic themes and ideas in the Fourth Gospel. Of the four Gospels, only John’s Gospel refers to Jesus with the transliterated *μεσσίας*, which on both occasions is interpreted as *χριστός* (1:43; 4:25). Is this evidence of nearness to Jewish messianic expectations? The questions put to John the Baptist may be considered as evidence for three messianic expectations (Christ, Elijah, and the Prophet) similar to what we find at Qumran (John 1:19–21; cf. 1QS IX, 10–11), but should we understand the questions to reflect one, two, or three figures (cf. 6:14–15)? What if anything does the Elijah expectation have to do with the Prophet, the text of Malachi 3–4, the Elijah references in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, and/or the Elijah references in rabbinic literature? Is “the Prophet” equivalent to Elijah, the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18, the Samaritan Taheb, or some or all the above? Additionally, we must take into account the relationship between the crowd’s declaration of Jesus as the prophet and then their desire to make him king (6:14–15). Has the crowd mistaken or conflated two roles, or does their statement and reaction indicate multiple

first-century understandings of the Messiah? Is there any relation to the prophet like Moses and the traditions that viewed Moses as king (cf. Philo)?⁷⁹

In Nathanael's declaration that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel, we are confronted with questions about whether these two descriptors are equivalent in meaning. Is "Son of God" a Davidic, messianic referent as in the Psalms and other Jewish tradition⁸⁰ or do we read a Johannine, divine Son-Father relationship?⁸¹ And on the Gospel of John's presentation of Davidic messiahship, we must also include the triumphal entry (12:12–15) and the crowd's understanding that the Messiah would be a descendant of David and come from Bethlehem, the city of David (7:41–42). Also, the Bethlehem expectation has its own tensions, such as whether this expectation comes from Micah 5 or traditional understandings of Micah 5. Is there an underlying knowledge and acceptance in John of the infancy narratives in Matthew 2 and Luke 2 or an oral tradition regarding Jesus's birthplace? In other words, is the evangelist making an ironic comment at the crowd's expense and the readers' benefit, i.e., Jesus fulfilled this expectation but not everyone knew he spent his early years in Bethlehem?⁸² Or does the earthly

⁷⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, NovTSup 14 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

⁸⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 180–81.

⁸¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1967), 1:511.

⁸² Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 730–31.

Bethlehem origin of the Messiah not matter for the Gospel of John's heavenly presentation of Jesus?⁸³ Or is the Gospel merely disinterested in messianic origins?

Also, in John 7, there is evidence that the Messiah's origin was expected to be unknown (7:27; cf. 9:29). Is this the same expectation of the hidden messiah(s) of the Parables of Enoch (1 En. 48:6; 62:7) and 4 Ezra 13:26, 52? Yet, how does this unknown origin relate to the expectation that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem? Since all of these comments come as questions from the crowd, how do we know what the evangelist intends—irony, indifference, correction, or something else? Or are they evidence of variegated messianic expectations in the first century?

The Fourth Gospel's stated purpose (20:31; cf. 11:27) highlights its emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah. Belief is intended to result from the Gospel's written witness to Jesus's signs. The Gospel, thus, gives some credence to the view that the Messiah was expected to do signs, which is the expectation of the Jerusalem crowd (7:31). The Galilean crowd declares Jesus to be the prophet after they saw the feeding sign (6:2, 14), and they request a further sign (6:31–32; cf. 6:26), implying some relationship between completing signs and a messianic or prophetic figure (cf. 10:41). And again in 10:24–25, in response to the question of whether or not he is the Christ, Jesus says that his works bear witness to him. Is Jesus avoiding the question or answering it by saying he is a signs Messiah?⁸⁴

The designations Messiah and Son of Man are intertwined in John 12:34 (cf. 1:41, 45, 51), where the crowd's expectation that the Messiah will remain forever (cf. Ps. 88:37 LXX) apparently contradicts their understanding of Jesus's statement that the Son of Man will be lifted up and

⁸³ de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 55.

⁸⁴ See Meredith Warren and Andrea Taschl-Erber's essays in this volume.

draw all to himself (12:32, 34). Does John’s Son of Man Christology function as a corrective here and possibly in 1:49–51?⁸⁵ Or does the Gospel of John provide further evidence within early Judaism that the Messiah and the Son of Man were understood to be the same individual?⁸⁶ If so, may we interpret the rest of the Son of Man sayings as messianic references?

On a number of occasions in the Gospel of John, we find evidence that the Messiah was expected to teach. The Samaritan woman expects the Messiah to announce all things when he comes (4:25). Following the questioning of Jesus’s messianic credentials in John 7, the officers do not seize Jesus because no one has ever spoken like Jesus speaks (7:46). Does this reflect broader messianic expectations or confluences with prophet like Moses traditions?

John’s Gospel also indicates an expectation that the Messiah “comes.” To return again to the Samaritan woman’s comment, she declares that the Messiah is coming and will declare all things when he comes (4:25). In 7:27, the crowd seems to assume that it will not be known from where Messiah will come (cf. 7:41–44). Also, the signs that will reveal the Messiah will be seen when the Messiah comes (7:31). Similarly, Jesus says that he has come into the world for judgment (9:39). This last reference begs the question of whether or not Jesus’s coming into the world and descent from heaven is a Johannine theme or part of the expectation of a coming, hidden Messiah.

The variant designation ὁ ἐκλεκτός (“the Elect one”) in John 1:34 may relate to a broader Jewish messianic designation found in Ps. 89:3 where “David, my servant” is associated with τοῖς

⁸⁵ Martyn, *History and Theology*, 128–30.

⁸⁶ Benjamin E. Reynolds, *The Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, WUNT II/249 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 223–25; note most recently Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 439–40.

ἐκλετοῖς μου (“my elect ones,” 88:4 LXX). Later in the psalm, the Davidic king is also referred to as “the Holy one of Israel, our king” (τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰσραηλ βασιλέως ἡμῶν, Ps. 88:19 LXX), a description similar to the one Peter gives to Jesus in John 6:69 (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ), and Ps. 88:37 LXX (τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸς αἰῶνα μενεῖ) was noted above in connection with John 12:34. “Elect” or “chosen” is a typical designation for the Isaianic Servant (Isa. 42:1; 43:10; 44:1; 49:7). We also find the phrase “the chosen one of God” (בְּחִירַת אֱלֹהִים) used in 4Q534 (4QBirth of Noah^a ar), and “elect” is the most common description of the Messiah Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch.⁸⁷ Considering “the elect one” is the original Sinaiticus reading in John 1:34, what does this reading mean for Jewish messianic expectation in John?

And we still have not mentioned the Johannine designations λόγος with its connections to creation and wisdom traditions or lamb of God, which may be drawn from levitical sacrifice, the Passover lamb, or lambs of the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 90). The reference to Jesus as Good Shepherd may indicate Davidic kingship expectations in relation to the shepherding imagery in Ezekiel 34, and the bridegroom imagery may also reflect Jewish understandings of the Messiah rather than an expectation developed by the Gospel or early Christianity.

Conclusion

When we consider the Fourth Gospel’s messianic texts and themes in relation to Jewish messianic expectation, there are a number of possibilities for how we might read the Gospel of John’s Christology as Jewish messianism. The typical route within Johannine studies, and New

⁸⁷ James C. VanderKam, “Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37–71,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 169–91.

Testament studies more generally, has been to note the Gospel's parallels and similarities with early Jewish sources. Often this material is mined for the "background" of John in order to illuminate the meaning of the Gospel, but there is little attempt by Johannine scholars to understand or respect these Second Temple sources as worthy of study in their own right.⁸⁸ After deducing parallels and similarities, scholars either emphasize John's differences from these sources, which are often explained as resulting from a corrective Christology, a Johannized or Christianized theology, a reflection of the Johannine community's interaction with the synagogue, a development toward a divinized Messiah (i.e., "high Christology"), or some other related option. These explanations primarily address differences with Jewish sources, and there is little effort given to explaining or understanding why the Fourth Gospel shares similarities with early Jewish sources about the Messiah.

Much work that can still be done to note John's similarities, parallels, etc. with Second Temple literature. These are and can be valuable exercises, but if these early Jewish sources continue to be merely viewed as "background" and the Fourth Gospel as somehow separate from early Judaism, reading John as an early Jewish text will not happen. If we do not attempt to answer the question "so what?" concerning the similarities between John's Christology and early Jewish messianology and to consider what those similarities might mean for the Fourth Gospel's place early Judaism (and early Christianity), we will not come to terms with what it means to read John's Christology as Jewish messianism.

⁸⁸ See Matthias Henze, "On the Anthropology of Early Judaism: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Anthropology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jason Maston and Benjamin E. Reynolds, LNTS 529 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming).

It is worth considering why the Gospel of John might reflect shared messianic expectations with other early Jewish texts. What meaning and relevance do John's messianic references have for the variegated expectations of early Jewish messianism? What does it mean that John shares ideas, interpretive methods, scriptural texts, language, descriptions, festivals, names, places, and messianic expectations with other Jewish texts from the period? What does it mean for the Fourth Gospel and New Testament Christology that John has so many Jewish expectations connected to the identity of Jesus? Can we accept Boyarin's statement as a point of departure: "Jews came to believe Jesus was God, because they already believed that the Messiah would be a divine redeemer incarnated in a human body; they just argued about who that human being was"⁸⁹?

One of the many challenges for Johannine scholarship is that reading the Gospel as a form of Jewish messianism and asking "so what?" means confronting assumptions of the field: the Johannine community, its context(s), and John's "high Christology" as a later development within Christianity. To see John's Christology as similar to an early Jewish high messianism raises significant questions about developmental ideas concerning early Christian Christology and also about the historical contexts of Jesus and the Fourth Gospel. What would it mean to step outside the well-worn ruts of Johannine scholarship and see in the Gospel of John evidence of Jewish beliefs about the Messiah or expected anointed figure(s)? Merely reading outside Johannine studies and reading more early Jewish literature and scholarship may begin to help our understanding the Gospel of John as another text arising in an early Jewish context.

⁸⁹ Boyarin, "Jewishness of 'High Christology,'" 352.

However, the challenge for scholars of early Judaism is not to bracket the Gospel of John's messianic expectation as "Christian" and therefore "un-Jewish." Ironically, the naming of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah has separated Jesus-believing from Judaism.⁹⁰ If we say that the New Testament is part of early Judaism, what do we think that means? Can we understand the New Testament as another form of sectarian, messianic Judaism, just one that attached a name to the multiplicity of expectations concerning who and what the Messiah might be?

This volume is not intended to be an exercise in "the messianic 'backgrounds' of John's Christology." It is not intended to be a search for comparisons or parallels. These comparisons are necessary for studying the texts and ideas associated with early Jewish beliefs in a Messiah, and they will be appealed to throughout the volume. But, I would hope that readers recognize that some Jewish texts present a high Messianism that is remarkably similar to the Christology of John. In some streams of early Judaism, there were some who expected a Messiah not unlike the Jesus of the Gospel of John. What would happen if we read John's Christology as if it was part and parcel of the Jewish Messianism of its day? But to push us even further, if some of us were not uncomfortable already, what then do we do with such a perspective?

⁹⁰ Charlesworth, "From Messianology to Christology," 11, states: "Yet even after refining our nomenclature, it is frustrating to see that 'Jewish' is separated from 'Christian' as if Jesus and his earliest followers were not Jews and did not fit solidly and firmly in pre-70 Palestinian Judaism (or better, Judaisms)."

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