

FORT BEND CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

JESUS' REDEFINITION OF SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

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## INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have made the argument that Jesus did not see himself as Israel's messiah, but rather a truth-sayer or sage. The purpose of this thesis is to assert the idea that Jesus did not see himself as sage, but rather that he saw himself as Israel's messiah, inaugurating YHWH's kingdom through his work, while still fitting into a purely Jewish context.

This is done by first answering three major questions about the worldview held by most first century Jews during the time: (1) Who/What was Israel? (2) Who/ What was the Kingdom of God? (3) Who/What was the messiah figure? Then tracing Jesus' redefinition of each of the three previously mentioned praxes while still keeping the basic Jewish hope for each: Israel's return from exile, her vindication over her enemies, and YHWH ultimately becoming king.

The hope for this thesis is that, upon completion, the reader will have a profound knowledge of both the Jewish view and Jesus' view of the three praxes. Second, that the reader will have gained valuable insight into the true person of Jesus. Finally, that through this thesis, the reader will be able to concede to the conclusion made in the writing of this thesis.

## SECTION ONE: THE JEWISH VIEW

### The Jewish View of Israel

To the first century Jew, the nation of Israel could be traced back to the covenant YHWH had made with Abraham.

“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”<sup>1</sup>

This verse marks the start of Israel’s development. YHWH has made a covenant with Abraham to be his god and the god of his offspring. Through a long and tedious process that will have to be overlooked for the sake of brevity in this thesis, these offspring would become the nation of Israel that was settled in Judea.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish people that this thesis is concerned with are living in the era of what is now called Second-Temple Judaism. After the fall of the first temple and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE the Jews spent 70 years in exile.<sup>3</sup> However, at the end of the 70

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:1-7 (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright’s *New Testament and the People of God*, camps out on this subject on pages 152-166, however as this thesis is more focused on determining the praxis of the first century Jew and not their history, it will more closely align with Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

<sup>3</sup> Michael David Coogan, *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, (1999), 350.

years, the Jews returned in a mass of 40,000<sup>4</sup> and built the second temple circa 515 BCE. This marked the start of the Second-Temple Judaism era. Yet something was amiss. The presence of their god, YHWH, was no longer in the temple. Although the Jewish people had returned from exile physically, they had not yet returned from exile from YHWH, “The people had returned in a geographical sense, but the great prophecies of restoration had not yet come true.”<sup>5</sup>

As a nation, the Jews separated themselves from other pagan nations in an attempt to restore YHWH’s covenant by their strict observance to the Law. “Obedience to the law, therefore, is the chief token of its acknowledgement of Divine Grace.”<sup>6</sup> Through their observance of the Torah, the Jews identified themselves as an entirely different entity from their neighbors. In particular, the Jews were characterized by their observance to the vast number of laws in the Torah. These laws included laws regarding circumstantial evidence, the conviction of criminals, and the bearing of false charges<sup>7</sup>; murder<sup>8</sup>; and stealing<sup>9</sup>; and what to wear<sup>10</sup>. Yet, the Jewish people were especially characterized by three major laws.

*Sabbath*: The Sabbath was intended to be a day of rest as YHWH rested on the seventh day of creation in Genesis 2:2. As YHWH’s covenant people, the Jews were called to “observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.”<sup>11</sup> To work on the day of the

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<sup>4</sup> Nehemiah 7:6-66 (ESV).

<sup>5</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 128.

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 419.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 23:2-7 (ESV).

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 35: 16-26, Exodus 21:23, Leviticus 24:21 (ESV).

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 22:1 (ESV).

<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 22:11-12 (ESV).

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 5:12 (ESV).

Sabbath was considered a serious offense, punishable by death if not correctly observed<sup>12</sup>. The Jewish people had Sabbath observance down to a science, monitoring and prohibiting certain activities that could be done throughout the day.<sup>13</sup>

*Food Laws:* The entire chapter of Leviticus 11 deals extensively with this subject. Of the land dwelling animals, the Jewish people were only allowed to eat “whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, not including: camels, rock badgers, hares, and pigs. As well as animals with paws. Both eating the flesh and touching the dead carcass would result in uncleanness. Of the animals that dwell in the water, the Jews could eat, “Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers,” anything that did not have fins and scales was considered detestable. Eating or touching the carcass would result in uncleanness. Of the birds: eagles, vultures, kites, falcons, ostriches, ravens, nighthawks, gulls, owls, and herons were all considered detestable to eat. Of the all the winged insects that have four feet, only the locust, cricket, and grasshopper were clean.<sup>14</sup> The Jews in 1st Maccabees took these laws to the extreme, choosing to die rather than to profane their laws.<sup>15</sup>

*Circumcision:* The importance of circumcision in the Torah is uncontested as it is mentioned 13 times.<sup>16</sup> To the First Century Jew, circumcision was a mark of the covenant. “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has

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<sup>12</sup> Exodus 31:14 (ESV).

<sup>13</sup> There are 39 prohibited activities located the *Mishnah Tractate Shabbat 7:2*

<sup>14</sup> Leviticus 11:1-47 (ESV).

<sup>15</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:41-63 2 Maccabees 7:1-18 (Apocrypha)

<sup>16</sup> Reuven Hammer, *The Classic Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 134.

broken my covenant<sup>17</sup>.” All other pagan nations were considered to be uncircumcised and therefore not a part of YHWH’s covenant people<sup>18</sup>. This action was so important, that not even Moses, the man who was called to lead Israel out of Egypt, could be excused from it, “but because he neglected circumcision for a moment the angel sought to kill him<sup>19</sup>.”

The Israelites kept these laws as an attempt to initiate the return of YHWH and restore the covenant from which they were in exile. This begs the question, what does this return of YHWH signify?

### **The Jewish View of the Kingdom of God**

The Jewish hope in the restoration of the covenant between Israel and YHWH rests in the Old Testament prophecies.<sup>20</sup> This is a covenant that “is ultimately assured to every Israelite on the ground of original election of the people by the free grace of God.<sup>21</sup>” Only if the Israelite were to renounce YHWH and his covenant would they no longer be a part of the vindication that was to come.<sup>22</sup> “Only very high-handed criminals, and very outrageous and unrepentant heretics and apostolates, would incur such a doom.<sup>23</sup>” However, those who did not fit into such categories could summarize their basic hope in the passages of Ezekiel.

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 17:14 (ESV).

<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 9:25 (ESV).

<sup>19</sup> Reuven Hammer, *The Classic Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 134; Exodus 4:24

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 49:8; Ezekiel 36:7-15; Zeph 3:14-20; Jericho 31:31 (ESV).

<sup>21</sup> Moore, *Judaism II* p. 95 - Paul and Palestinian Judaism pg 147

<sup>22</sup> E. P. Sanders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 147.

<sup>23</sup> C.G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, (London, 1914), 584.

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach. “But you, O mountains of Israel, as shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt.”<sup>24</sup>

The reader of these prophecies can easily conclude that, “God loves Israel and has made known his love, that God protects Israel from evil, that God abides with Israel,” and YHWH was one day going to restore Israel to her former glory.<sup>25</sup> Yet, for some reason “YHWH, committed to Israel by an unbreakable covenant, was delaying his decisive act, for reasons best known to himself, though earnestly inquired after by the pious. He was holding back from putting into practice the plan Israel knew he really had. Since he was the god of all the earth, it was clearly in his will to keep his promises to Israel by vindicating her at last over her enemies, and by thus reordering the whole world.”<sup>26</sup> As an attempt to force YHWH’s hand, the Jews strove forward with such a strict adherence to the Torah, placing their hopes in revolutionary leaders in, hoping for the ultimate goal of vindication and the end of exile.

The true vindication of Israel and inauguration of the Kingdom of God, in the first century Jewish mind, could only be characterized by, “liberation from Rome, the restoration of the temple, and the free enjoyment of their own land.”<sup>27</sup> The true enemy is now established:

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<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel 36:7-10 (ESV).

<sup>25</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 104.

<sup>26</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 203.

<sup>27</sup> N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 300.



Rome<sup>28</sup> was the ultimate force in opposition to Israel, “the power of darkness ranged against the children of the light.”<sup>29</sup> Until Israel freed herself from the grasps of this oppressive ruler, her covenant would not be restored and she would not return from exile. A large emphasis is also placed on the temple. The temple, “constituted primarily the divine dwelling place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations.”<sup>30</sup> The temple was not just a religious center. It was, “the centre of every aspect of national existence”<sup>31</sup> and the god that once inhabited it no longer dwelled inside. The temple was now just an empty shell of its former glory and this glory would not return to such until Israel was finally vindicated.

The end of exile would only be signified once Israel was vindicated over her enemies. Once Rome was vanquished and Israel again had political dominion over her own land. YHWH’s presence would finally be restored in the temple and then Israel would once again be able to freely enjoy her land as the true covenant people of YHWH.

### **The Jewish View of the Messiah Figure**

The idea of an eschatological redeemer was not something unknown to the first century Jewish mindset. In fact the “Jewish anticipation of the messiah’s arrival was unusually keen in first century Palestine<sup>32</sup>” and was prophesied in Old Testament verses<sup>33</sup> appearing consistently in

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<sup>28</sup> Rome was known as the Kittim, or pagan enemy.

<sup>29</sup> N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 159.

<sup>30</sup> S. Safrai, *Compendia: The Temple*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 904.

<sup>31</sup> N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 225.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, Ernest S. Frerichs, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 9 Micah 5, Psalm 22 (ESV)., Psalms of Solomon 17 (Pseudepigrapha)

the Hebrew Bible as well.<sup>34</sup> The anointed one was the “central figure in the Jewish myth of the future<sup>35</sup>” as he would be the one to finally return the Israelites from their exile and, in turn, initiate the long awaited liberation from their Roman oppressors. “He would be the culmination and completion of an ancient Israelite tradition.<sup>36</sup>”

The basic hope for the Jewish messiah figure is observed in Psalms of Solomon 17.

“Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time known to you, O God, in order that he may reign over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample (her) down to destruction.<sup>37</sup>”

From this passage it can be concluded that the messiah will also be from the line of David. The Israelites would also interpret “unrighteous rulers” as the Roman presence in Jerusalem. A consistent theme in their worldview, Rome was seen as the central enemy to the average Second Temple Jewish man. Since Rome was the central enemy, every messianic attempt would be an attempt to “Deliver [Israel] from the uncleanness of unholy enemies<sup>38</sup>” or, in other words, liberate her from Roman rule.

However, this messianic figure is an entirely different creature than what is seen in the

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<sup>34</sup> Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, Ernest S. Frerichs, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1979), p xxvii

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, Ernest S. Frerichs, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Psalm of Solomon 17:21-22 (Pseudepigrapha). The entirety of this messianic hope is fleshed out throughout the rest of the verse.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 17: 45

Christian view of messiahship. The messianic attempts can best be classified as violent revolutions against the Roman presence in Israel. “No one dared to suggest that the expectation of a warlike Messiah who would liberate Israel from Rome ran counter to received wisdom.”<sup>39</sup> To further this generalization, one can trace through some of the major messianic revolutionaries in early Jewish history.

*Judas Maccabeus (1st Century)*: In the second century B.C.E., Judea was under the rule of the Seleucid leader, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Upon the initiation of his reign in 175 B.C.E. Antiochus began a radical policy of Hellenization, outlawing Jewish religious practices (sacrifice, circumcision, sabbath observance), burning the Torah, and setting up idols in the temple. Mattathias, Judas’ father, called those who were still faithful to YHWH to follow him and fled to the wilderness where they then waged bloody guerrilla warfare “attacking renegade Jews,” “tearing down pagan alters,” and “circumcising by force every uncircumcised boy they found within the borders of Israel.”<sup>40</sup> Upon Mattathias’ death, he appointed his son, Judas Maccabeus, to head the continuation of his revolutionary movement. Judas won a string of victories over Seleucid forces and returned to Jerusalem where he “purified” the temple.<sup>41</sup> Judah continued fighting with the Seleucid forces, now under the rule of Demetrius I Soter, until his death in 160 B.C.E. at the battle of Elasa.<sup>42</sup> Judas was succeeded by his brothers, who continued fighting until ultimate liberation from the Seleucid grasp.

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<sup>39</sup> N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 198.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:44-7. (Apocrypha)

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:1-22.

*Judas The Galilean(Second Century)*: In the year 6 C.E., Cyrenius, a Roman senator, was sent to Syria by Caesar Augustus to impose the Census of Quirinius to “take account of their substance”<sup>43</sup> or for tax purposes. The Jews considered this heinous, but took no further action against it, “yet was there one Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty.”<sup>44</sup> Judas led the Jewish people into an armed revolt against this census that was crushed brutally by Roman forces and ultimately lead to Judas’ own execution. However, this is not where Judas’ movements stopped. It was not uncommon for Jewish messianic figures to be succeeded by sons or other militant leaders once they had failed or passed away. Judas’ sons carried on his movement and were executed by Tiberius Alexander, a Roman procurator <sup>45</sup> and Judas’ grandson, Menahem, was also a leader in the Jewish Wars, breaking open Herod’s armory and fueling a revolt of his own until he was also tortured and executed.<sup>46</sup>

A similar trend can be deduced from both messianic attempts. First, the revolt was violent. Second, it was in opposition to some form of pagan enemy that was limiting Jewish practice. Third, the movement was not confined to one person. Other potential messiah figures that exhibit this trend includes *Theudas*, *Hekeziah* the Bandit Chief, and *Bar-Kochba*. With this third and final point defined, it is now possible to move into the section concerning Jesus’ redefinition of the previously mentioned topics.

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<sup>43</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter 1,1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., XX. 5,2.

<sup>46</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, Book II, 433-448.

## SECTION 2: JESUS' REDEFINITION

### Jesus' Redefinition of Israel

Before any headway into Jesus' redefinition of Israel can be made, his view of Israel must be established. Jesus' view of Israel is best characterized by his telling of the story of the prodigal son. Through this parable Jesus tells the story of Israel's exile and ultimate restoration. In this story, the younger of two sons (Israel) asks his father for his inheritance and travels to a distant country where he "squandered his property on dissolute living." With nothing, the son resorts to hiring himself out to try to secure a meager living, in which he would have gladly eaten the slop of the pigs he was being paid to feed. Consequently, the son realizes how much better his father's servants were treated and decides to return to him. Upon the son's humble return, his father rejoices and calls for a feast to celebrate the coming home of his son, a response not typical for the return of a son who had previously wished his father dead in his asking for and squandering of his father's inheritance.<sup>47</sup> Through this story, Jesus states that even though Israel has forsaken her god to follow sin and pagan idolatry, her god would not respond in the same manner. She could wish death upon her god and still not break away from his covenant and when she finally decided to return to her god, she would receive quite the welcome.<sup>48</sup> Yet, Israel was still in the exile portion of the story and YHWH was still waiting for her to return to him with her entire heart. However, "with Jesus' work the way is open, for any Jews who will dare, to find out

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<sup>47</sup> Luke 15:11-24 (ESV).

<sup>48</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 129.

what being the Israel is all about. By following him, by putting his agenda into practice they can at last be true Israel.”<sup>49</sup>

Jesus was not intending to create Israel anew. His focus was on its reform. Jesus’ redefinition of Israel constituted something entirely different from what the first century Jew would have been looking for. YHWH’s kingdom would still come and Israel would still receive her vindication, just in a more subversive way than previously expected. Jesus was announcing that those who chose to follow him would be redefined as part of the true Israel.<sup>50</sup> Those who chose to follow Jesus would in turn be doing the will of YHWH<sup>51</sup> and in turn share in his covenant. This call to follow meant giving up everything, including family and live as part of a new surrogate family.<sup>52</sup> “Jesus intended his followers to inherit all the closeness and mutual obligations that belonged with a family membership”<sup>53</sup> and in sharing in this, his followers would also share in the coming vindication. Conversely, to be outside this family at the time of vindication would result in total ruin.<sup>54</sup>

To follow Jesus and live as a part of this new Israel looked radically different than the previous interpretation of what it meant to live as the covenant people. He was not discrediting the Torah, his work is merely a continuation. He is claiming that the scribes and pharisees had gotten it all wrong. There is a deeper meaning in what it means to be the covenant people than

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<sup>49</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 289.

<sup>50</sup>David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 348-351.

<sup>51</sup>N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 278.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 10:37-8; Luke 14. 26-7; Mark 3:31-5 (ESV).

<sup>53</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 278.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 327/ Luke 17:1 (ESV).

just a strict adherence to legal codes. Jesus is claiming that there is a much “deeper meaning in the sacred writings than first-century Israel had grasped; it is this deeper meaning that Jesus is commending.”<sup>55</sup> This deeper meaning can be seen in his confrontations with the pharisees over the sabbath and food laws.

*Sabbath:* Jesus’ first confrontation arises when he and his disciples are plucking heads of grain and eating them on the sabbath. In response to the pharisees calling this unlawful work, Jesus replies that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus’ next confrontation arises when he heals on the sabbath. The pharisees once again look to accuse Jesus for working on the sabbath, yet he responds in turn by asking the pharisees “is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or destroy it?”<sup>57</sup> Jesus is declaring what the true meaning of the sabbath is. He is claiming that the highly critical sabbath observance that the pharisees so ravenously clung to was not in accordance with the will of YHWH. The focus was not to be on what ought not be done that day, but rather that humanity’s curse for the fault of Adam<sup>58</sup> was being concluded and through Jesus’ work the true Israel could now find rest in YHWH.

*Food Laws:* Jesus declares all foods clean: “there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”<sup>59</sup> Once again Jesus’ nullifying the previous will of YHWH. He is stating that the pharisees over

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>56</sup> Mark 2:23-8 (ESV).

<sup>57</sup> Luke 6:6-11 (ESV).

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 3:1-19 (ESV).

<sup>59</sup> Mark 7:15 (ESV).

emphasis on food laws and cleanliness is not in accordance with YHWH's will. Israel was not going to further YHWH's kingdom through separation from all other people, but rather by following Jesus' agenda and making clean that which was previously seen as unclean.

Jesus also furthers his agenda of what being the true Israel encapsulated through his furthering of many other basic Jewish laws.

*Murder:* Jesus furthers the statement "you shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment" to "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment."<sup>60</sup>

*Adultery:* Jesus furthers the statement "you shall not commit adultery" to "everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>61</sup> He also outlaws divorce, except on the grounds of sexual immorality.<sup>62</sup>

*Oaths:* Jesus furthers the statement "you shall not swear falsely" to "do not take an oath at all."<sup>63</sup>

*Judicial Revenge:* Jesus calls for a new form of behavior towards other. Instead of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" Jesus calls for his followers to turn the other cheek, offer their cloaks as well, and to walk the extra mile.<sup>64</sup>

*Hatred of Enemies:* Finally, Jesus calls for his followers to no longer hate their enemies, but to "love your enemies and Pray for those who persecute you."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew 5:21-2 (ESV).

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 5:27-8 (ESV).

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 5:32 (ESV).

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 5:33-4 (ESV).

<sup>64</sup> Matthew 5:38-42 (ESV).

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 5:43-8 (ESV).



Through Jesus' redefinition of these former laws what it meant to be Israel took on an entirely different meaning. Israel was no longer ethnic Israel<sup>66</sup>, but those who chose to follow Jesus and adhere to his law and through this adherence this new Israel would take part in YHWH's coming kingdom.

### **Jesus' Redefinition of the Kingdom of God**

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”<sup>67</sup> The long awaited moment had finally come. YHWH was finally going to vindicate his covenant people. Except, Jesus' redefinition of what YHWH's kingdom looked like was equally subversive as his redefinition of Israel. The focal point of Jesus' redefinition is centered on two major points; *the temple* and *the true enemy*.

*The Temple:* Jesus' attitude towards the temple is aptly reflected in his parable cursing the fig tree.

“On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 also offer vast insight into who the true Israel encapsulates.

<sup>67</sup> Mark 1:14-15 (ESV).

<sup>68</sup> Mark 11: 12-14 (ESV).

This verse, followed by Jesus' cleansing of the temple and the withering of the fig tree in the following verses reflect what Jesus was truly claiming about the temple.<sup>69</sup> Jesus was not denouncing the idea of the temple, but rather the way it was being used at the time. The temple was not bearing fruit and, in turn, it was going to receive judgment. Consequently, Jesus was the one announcing this coming doom.<sup>70</sup> However, through his actions in the temple, Jesus was also asserting "that the time had come for the institution to be transcended."<sup>71</sup> This idea of the temple being transcended can be seen in Jesus' forgiveness of sins.<sup>72</sup> Jesus was offering exactly what the temple was offering; the forgiveness of sins. Through this he was undermining the basis for control the pharisees had placed on the temple<sup>73</sup> and, in turn, "it indicates that, for Jesus, part of the point of the kingdom he was claiming to inaugurate would be that it would bring with it all that the temple offered, thereby replacing, and making redundant, Israel's greatest symbol."<sup>74</sup>

*The True Enemy:* "Jesus' overall perspective was that God was bringing an end to the demonic and political powers dominating his society so that a renewal of individual and social life would be possible."<sup>75</sup> However, Jesus regarded demonic and political powers as something entirely different than the average Second-Temple Jew. "From Jesus' point of view, Israel could

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<sup>69</sup> Mark 11: 15-25 (ESV).

<sup>70</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 421,423; Telford, W. R. *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*. JSNTSS vol.1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

<sup>71</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 432.

<sup>72</sup> Mark 2:1-12 (ESV).

<sup>73</sup> Sean Freyne, *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 47.

<sup>74</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 435.

<sup>75</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, (San Francisco: Harper & Rowe, 1987), 157.

not identify Rome as the satan-figure and leave it at that.”<sup>76</sup> Israel’s *true* battle was with a much more powerful entity than pagan hordes that were the previously supposed cause of Israel’s exile. This true enemy was the dark forces known to the Old Testament, constituted by sin and death and the demonic forces that propagated it. This enemy was headed by the prince of demons, or the devil<sup>77</sup> and a battle was already underway.<sup>78</sup> A battle in which Jesus had already had a decisive victory, “I saw the satan fall like lighting from heaven,”<sup>79</sup> and through this victory, his disciples were able to cast out demons.<sup>80</sup> Through this work YHWH was becoming king, not through opposition to Rome.

Jesus’ redefinition of these two symbols marks an entirely different ideology for the YHWH’s coming kingdom. Jesus was the temple through which sins could be forgiven, and the battle was not with Rome but with the evil forces in this world. Through the adherence of this praxis would allow one to share in the true Israel’s vindication by YHWH. However, a messiah figure was still needed in order to inaugurate this coming kingdom.

### **Jesus’ Redefinition of the Messiah Figure**

As seen in the previous two sections, one can expect Jesus’ redefinition of this so called messiah figure to be as equally subversive. The messiah figure would still be the one to inaugurate YHWH’s kingdom and return Israel from exile. Nonetheless, Jesus redefined the

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<sup>76</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 451.

<sup>77</sup> Presented as the *Evil One* in Matthew 6:13.

<sup>78</sup> Luke 10:1-12 (ESV).

<sup>79</sup> Luke 10:18 (ESV).

<sup>80</sup> Luke 10: 17-20 (ESV). This victory would most likely his victory over the temptation of the devil in the desert in Matthew 4:1-11.

manner in which this was to be done. Jesus refuted the current revolutionary activity of the time through his acting out judgment on the temple.

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.’”<sup>81</sup>

The phrase *den of robbers* is an allusion to Jeremiah’s judgment of the temple in his own time. The word *robbers* as used in both instances is translated to more of a brigand or outlaw, not petty theft.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Jesus is stating that he is having the same problem as Jeremiah. The temple had become “the talisman of nationalist violence”<sup>83</sup> and seemed to be syphoning off the money earned from selling sacrifices to fund a revolutionary movement against Israel’s Roman oppressors.<sup>84</sup> However, this is not on par with what Jesus desires in a revolutionary movement and, as seen in the previous section, Jesus announces the coming destruction of the temple.

His definition of what Israel’s revolution should look like is rooted in non-violent actions. Jesus was not going to storm into Jerusalem in military conquest. He was not going to sit at the throne of Israel as his disciples had wished.<sup>85</sup> Jesus had come to deliver Israel from the real satanic bondage in which she was so deeply rooted. This satan was dwelling in Israel’s nationalistic hopes of vindication, and Jesus was “fighting Israel’s real battle by challenging

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<sup>81</sup> Matthew 21:12-13 (ESV).

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History: The Bampton Lectures*, (London: Duckworth, 1982), 132.

<sup>83</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 420.

<sup>84</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, (New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 176.

<sup>85</sup> Mark 10:35-7 (ESV).

Israel's idolatrous nationalism, which was passing off its satan-induced worldview as true allegiance to the reign of YHWH."<sup>86</sup> Jesus is taking on this role as messiah figure, inaugurating Israel's coming vindication through his own revolutionary movement against the satanic forces in Israel. The victory would come not by violent revolution, but by adherence of what it meant to be the true Israel, "turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, the deeply subversive wisdom of taking up the cross"<sup>87</sup> and the ultimate taking up of Jesus' own cross. This would be the climax and inevitable result of Jesus' messianic work. There would be no family member continuing Jesus' movement. Yet, the death, as seen by Jesus, would be the true victory for YHWH's kingdom. The true victory in which sin and death would be defeated and through the Son of Man, the true Israel would be vindicated.<sup>88</sup>

### SECTION 3: COMPILATION OF VIEWS

To determine if Jesus truly did believe his was Israel's messiah figure the reader must once again look at a brief overview of what his redefinition meant to Israel.

*Israel:* The first-century Jew characterized Israel as an ethnic nation comprised of strictly Jewish members who could trace their family lineage back to Abraham. They differentiated themselves through their observance to the laws stated in the Torah. Anyone outside this sphere was considered a pagan and did not have a share in YHWH's covenant. However, Jesus redefined what truly comprised Israel. Israel was no longer a nation composed of Torah observing Jews, but rather those who chose to follow him and adhere to his agenda. Jesus' work

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<sup>86</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 461-2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 465

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 467

was a continuation of the Torah. He claimed, through his redefinition and furthering of the major Jewish laws, that there was a much deeper meaning to what YHWH was calling them to do through it than they were grasping. Those who would share in the covenant would be those who followed Jesus and his movement, not those who confined themselves to the strict legal agenda.

*The Kingdom of God:* The Jews had a very self-centered approach to YHWH's coming kingdom. When Israel's god came, he would free them from the Roman rule and give them dominance over the surrounding pagan nations. His presence would be restored in the temple once again giving light to Israel's source of nationalism. However, Jesus' movement was against this sense of nationalism. YHWH's vindication was not going to destroy Rome and give Israel political dominance. Israel was going to be vindicated over sin and death and their propagators, an enemy which far surpassed the evil of Rome. The battle was already underway and Jesus and his followers were rapidly moving towards its conclusion. Neither was YHWH going to restore his presence in the temple. Israel would have a new temple. Jesus took on the role of the temple through his healing and forgiveness of sins. He offered exactly what the temple offered and negated the need for Israel's old source of nationalism.

*Messiah figure:* Israel had already had previous messianic attempts. Time and time again these messiah figures headed violent revolutions against whatever pagan enemy oppressed them at the time. Each was an attempt to bring about YHWH's vindication and Israel's return from exile. However, since neither of those goals were ultimately accomplished, something obviously wasn't working. Jesus' redefinition of YHWH's kingdom required a redefined messiah as well. This messiah figure was not going to head a violent revolution, but rather a nonviolent one. He was not going to free Israel from a pagan oppressor; he was going to free them from the true

enemy through his ultimate death. YHWH's real vindication was coming through Jesus' movement and through it, Israel would return from exile in a far greater way than previously expected.

Through Jesus' redefinition of the three afore mention topics he places himself as Israel's true messiah figure. His own following would be the true Israel. He would be the one to battle the true enemy and through his work he would emerge victorious. The true Israel would finally return from exile and receive the ultimate vindication through Jesus' death. His movement was unlike that of any other prophet, teacher, or other Jewish Messiah figure. It is not possible to place him anywhere other than a Jewish messiah figure. Though his movement was unlike that of any other prophet, teacher, or other Jewish Messiah figure, he redefined what it truly meant to be Israel and who was to bring about YHWH's vindication and Israel's return from exile.

## **CONCLUSION**

The first century Jew had many preconceived ideas about what it meant to be Israel, what YHWH's kingdom comprised, and who was to inaugurate the kingdom. However, Jesus believed they were not in accordance with the true will of YHWH. He redefined the Jewish worldview in such a way that could only be done by someone who was claiming to be the true messiah figure of Israel. He was not a timeless truth-sayer or sage, but rather the one who was inaugurating YHWH's kingdom through his work.



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