

## CHAPTER 20

### THE STAGES OF REDEMPTION HISTORY ACCORDING TO JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS<sup>1</sup>

To Shaul Baumann in friendship

Before the discoveries from Qumran one was not even certain that there existed any tension between the Baptist and Jesus. Now the nature of this tension has become unmistakable. With the help of the writings of the Dead Sea Sect—the Essenes—and pertinent Jewish apocalyptic literature, it has become clear that John the Baptist belonged to that fascinating spiritual world of thought. Jesus' ideas, on the other hand, were mainly shaped by rabbinism. Regarding the messianic time-table of Jesus, there is evidently no room for his often assumed "acute eschatology"; for him, the day of the Son of Man is still in the future (Luke 17:22–24). Their ideological polarity finally led to the separation of these two spiritual giants.<sup>2</sup> Since the

- 1 Flusser, *Das Christentum—eine jüdische Religion*, pp. 37–52; Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, pp. 49–74; J. Jeremias, *Die Verkündigung Jesu* (Gütersloh, 1971), pp. 99–110. See pp. 46–53.
- 2 We have indicated above on pp. 43–44 that Jesus was baptized in the vicinity of Bethsaida, the home of the brothers Andrew and Peter, whom he met after his baptism (John 1:40–44). This probability is now strengthened by further research. According to Luke 9:10, 12 the fishing place of Bethsaida was encircled by "desert" (see Mark 6:31, 35; Matt. 14:13, 15) and John baptized in the "desert". See now M. Nun, *Jerusalem Perspective* 53 (Oct.–Dec. 1997), pp. 16–17 and 37. On the preceding page one sees an ancient aqueduct which channelled water from the river Jordan to irrigate the plain of Bethsaida. About Bethsaida see *Tabula Imperii Romani/Judaea-Palestina*, eds. Y Tsafrir, L. DiSegni, J. Green (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Jerusalem, 1994), p. 85

basic facts for the schism are not commonly known, I want to present them to the reader.

When the Baptist heard about the activity of Jesus, he sent two of his disciples to ask: "Are you the one who has to come—or should we expect another?" (Matt. 11:2–4; Luke 7:18–21). John expected "the one who was to come." Previously, he had alluded by this term in his "messianic preaching" (Matt. 3:4–6; Mark 1:7 and Luke 3:16) to Daniel 7:13, which speaks about the "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven." Apparently, John the Baptist expected the coming of the well-known eschatological Son of Man.<sup>3</sup>

While the figure of the Son of Man is known from Daniel 7, it does not belong to rabbinical eschatology. On the other hand, the eschatological Son of Man is an important person in trends associated with Jewish apocalypticism and Jesus. In fact, for Jesus this notion was central. Similar to the apocalyptic writings, he describes the Son of Man as the almighty superhuman judge of the Last Judgment.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate men into two groups as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' . . . Then he will also say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed,<sup>4</sup> into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' . . . There they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Matt. 25:31–46).

The designation Son of Man does not appear in the writings of the Dead Sea Sect. In a fragment from Qumran<sup>5</sup> the function of the judge of the Last Days is filled by Melchizedek. During the Last Judgment

3 See chapter 9.

4 See also Matt. 7:23 and Luke 13:27 (i.e., Psalm 6:9).

5 See Flusser, "Melchizedek and the Son of Man," in *Judaism*, pp. 186–191. See also the edition of 11QMelch with comments by E. Puech, "Notes sur le manuscrit de 11Q Melchisedeq," *Revue de Qumran* 48/12 (1987), pp. 483–513.

he will separate the righteous from the wicked. He will not only pass judgment, but he will also execute it. According to the writings of the Essene Dead Sea Sect and related apocalyptic writings (as well as earlier biblical eschatology), the Last Judgment will close the current history of humanity. According to some writings, it will even mean an end to the existence of our earth. Wherever the figure of the Son of Man appears in apocalyptic texts, he is always the sublime judge in the Last Judgment. John the Baptist was sure that the Last Judgment was imminent (Matt. 3:10 and Luke 3:9). In John's eschatology there is no place for any intermediary period between this wicked age and the end of this world—when the Son of Man will be revealed. Consequently, within such an eschatological timetable, which was also adopted by the Dead Sea Sect, there is no place for the rabbinical concept of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus sent to the Baptist a partially affirmative answer. A new era had been opened by John. Jesus said to the Baptist's messengers, "Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who is not wrong about me" (Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23).

A very close parallel from Qumran exists, which confirms the authenticity of Jesus' message to the Baptist.<sup>7</sup> In the fragment it is God himself who will perform all these marvelous deeds; as in the words of Jesus, he will revive the dead and bring good news to the poor. Jesus concluded his message to John with a warning, "Blessed is he who is not wrong about me." Jesus' doubts about the Baptist were justified. John never accepted Jesus' claim because of their different eschatological time-tables.

6 Only in Matthew does John the Baptist speak about the kingdom of heaven. "But Matthew cannot be trusted to distinguish between the words of John and the words of Jesus." Dodd, *Parables*, p. 39.

7 This text is 4Q521, fragments 2ii and 4, lines 6-13, especially line 12. See E. Puech, "Une apocalypse messianique" (4Q521), pp. 477-522. See Isaiah 26:19; 29:18; 35:5; 61:1. Only the cleansing of the lepers is lacking in the parallel. See above p. 49 n. 22. The last in Jesus' list (Matt. 11:5 and Luke 7:22), namely that "the poor have the good news preached to them," is the Greek equivalent from Isaiah 61:1 and also appears in the fragment from Qumran (line 12).

What is important is that Jesus affirmed in principle the Baptist's question about the eschatological meaning of his activity without explicitly declaring that he was the Messiah. He established his claim to the eschatological office by pointing to his supernatural works of healing. Jesus saw this as an unmistakable sign that the new era had already begun. "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). In the first redemption, one from the Egyptian yoke, the magicians recognized in the mighty works of Moses "the finger of God," i.e., God's direct redemption (Ex. 8:15[19]). According to Jesus, this was also the meaning of his healings.

In order to fully understand the contrast between the messianic view of John and the position of Jesus, one has to hear the second half of his words to the Baptist messengers.

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater<sup>8</sup> than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is breaking through, and those who break through, take it in possession. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah to come. He who has ears, let him hear (Matt. 11:11-15).

With John's coming, the kingdom of heaven broke forth. Yet, although John was the greatest among "those born among women" (cf. Deut. 34:10), "the least in the kingdom of heaven would be greater than he." John the Baptist made the breach through which the kingdom of God could break, but he himself was never a member of that kingdom. He was, so to speak, a member of the previous

8 The word "greater" in Matt. 11:11 seems to be an interpretative addition by the Evangelist which was caused by the second "greater" in the same verse. Jesus evidently said that "among those born of women" there has not risen anyone *like* John the Baptist." Jesus alluded here to Moses, about whom is written in Deut. 34:10 that "no prophet has risen in Israel *like* Moses." Also, in Judaism, the phrase, "those born of women," was connected with Moses. When Moses ascended to heaven in order to receive the Law from God, "as soon as the angels became aware of Moses in heaven they said to God: 'Why is he who is born of women here?'" Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 3, p. 113. Apparently, Jesus considered John to be a type of second Moses.

generation. The prophets and the law prophesied until John—he marks the end of the Old Testament era.<sup>9</sup>

According to Jesus the biblical period ended because “all the prophets prophesied until John” (Matt. 11:23), and the present time is the era of the kingdom of heaven. Although John opened the way for the kingdom of heaven, he himself did not belong to the new period. He rather fulfilled the role of Elijah as the precursor of the messianic age.

Thus, Jesus made a tripartite division of the history of salvation. The first was the “biblical” period, which climaxed with the career of John the Baptist. The second period began with his own ministry in which the kingdom of heaven was breaking through. The third period will be inaugurated with the coming of the Son of Man and the Last Judgment at a future time which is unknown to anyone. According to this scheme, we still live in the Middle Ages.

The root of the contrast between the “precursor,” John, and Jesus was the fact that although John was right that a new era was beginning, he believed that it would be the time of the Last Judgment and the end of human history. In the eschatological system of the Baptist—and in the whole apocalyptic trend to which both John and the Dead Sea Sect belonged—an additional period *before* the judgment was unthinkable. Jesus, however, was sure that through him the age of the kingdom of heaven was inaugurated *before* the end of days. He recognized a period *after* the kingdom of heaven—the unknown day of the coming of the Son of Man and the Last Judgment (see e.g., Luke 17:22–24; Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36 and Acts 1:7).<sup>10</sup>

9 About Jesus' concept of the kingdom of heaven see above pp. 49–53, 105–112, and my German book about parables *Gleichnisse*, pp. 270–273, 280–281]. According to rabbinical sources the messianic age was indeed revealed to the biblical prophets, while “the age to come” was hidden. This is the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan (*B. Sanh.* 98a).

10 It is true that the bipartite division between this world and the eschatological world to come is older than the tripartite framework of Jesus. Nevertheless, among his contemporaries he was certainly not the only Jewish thinker who believed that subsequent to present history and before the purely eschatological age, there would be a type of transitional age.

John believed that the last judgment was imminent; the ax is already at the root of the tree, and the Mighty One will come with "his winnowing fork in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). Jesus rejected such a perspective and expressed his view in the Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24–30).<sup>11</sup> "While you are pulling up the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:29). Judgment must wait until the harvest. "Then one shall collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned and gather the wheat and bring it into the barn" (Matt. 13:30). It even seems that Jesus' parable was a fitting answer to John's harvest metaphor. Today, in the intermediary period, it is inevitable that sinners live in same world with the righteous. Only at the end, in the Last Judgment, will the Son of Man "separate them into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."<sup>12</sup> The sinners "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25:31–46).

Jesus adopted the idea of the intermediary period between the historical past and the end of history. Yet he is the only known *thinker who drew from this scheme the logical conclusion that until the final destruction of the wicked, the righteous and the sinners would necessarily coexist*. This insight was necessary for him, because he identified the intermediary period with the rabbinical concept of the kingdom of heaven—according to which the coexistence of the wicked and the righteous is indisputable.

The only one who inserted the kingdom of heaven as the second stage of the tripartite eschatology was Jesus. We will see shortly that in the contemporary Jewish parallels the second stage, is the messianic

11 See also the Parable of the Dragnet (Matt. 13:47–50) and the Parable of the Fig Tree (Luke 13:6–9).

12 See Ezek. 37:16–17. There is an old Hebrew poem which the Jews pray on the Jewish New Year in which it is said: "Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the souls of all the living; and You shall apportion the final needs of all Your creations and inscribe their verdict." *The Complete Artscroll Machzor. Rosh Hashanah*, trans. by Rabbi Nossan Scherman (New York, 1984), p. 483.

age. There were two primary causes for this variation in terminology. The first was that the foundation for Jesus' views and teaching was rabbinical Judaism. Indeed, the concept which held central importance for Jesus was the kingdom of heaven, and it was exclusively rabbinic. The second reason for his identification of the intermediary stage as the kingdom of heaven was Jesus' belief that he was sent to lead a movement whose task was to announce that the kingdom of heaven was already at hand. I would even venture that the message of the kingdom of heaven and his role in it was of such importance for Jesus that any other components in his eschatological system were insignificant by comparison.

Not only was Jesus the only Jew who introduced the concept of the kingdom of heaven into the tripartite messianic scheme, he is also unique in his identification of the kingdom of heaven with the rabbinical "Days of the Messiah." He was sure that the messianic age was already present. It has already been recognized<sup>13</sup> that the coming of the Redeemer and the concept of the kingdom of heaven are two independent eschatological structures. Both in rabbinic thought and in Jesus' view, the concept of the kingdom of heaven is not purely futuristic. One scholar has called this notion "realized eschatology."<sup>14</sup>

The dangers inherent in a purely futuristic idea of God's kingship were understood by the Greek translators of the Book of Exodus. The closing words of the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:18), "The Lord *will* reign for ever and ever" are translated into Greek, "the Lord *is* reigning for ever and ever."<sup>15</sup> Later on, Rabbi Yose from Galilee (beginning of the second century A.D.) recognized the same dangers:<sup>16</sup> "If Israel at the Red Sea had said, 'He *is* king for all eternity,' no nation or language would have ruled over them, but they said (Ex. 15:18), 'the Lord *will* reign forever and ever.'"

According to rabbinic Judaism the kingdom of heaven means that the one and only God presently rules *de jure*, but in the eschatological

13 See Vielhauer, *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament*, pp. 80-94; Young, *Parables*, pp. 51-83.

14 See Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

15 Similar translations are preserved in the Aramaic Targums.

16 Horowitz and Rabin, eds. *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, pp. 150-151.

future "the kingdom of God will be revealed to all the inhabitants of the world"<sup>17</sup> *de facto*. There should be no doubt that both for rabbinic Judaism and for Jesus the kingdom of heaven is a present reality, "The kingdom of heaven is in your midst" (Luke 11:20–21; cf. Ex. 25:8 and see the Aramaic Targumim there). Israel's sages taught that there may even be individuals who are already living, so to speak, in the kingdom of heaven, if they take upon themselves "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, we hear that Jesus believed there were already men who had taken the kingdom of heaven into possession (Matt. 11:12). He evidently saw in them pioneers of the expansion of the kingdom of God among men. At this point, Jesus accords with the sages in his view of the kingdom of heaven.

In the pre-Christian Assumption of Moses (10:1) one reads about the Last Days. "And then shall His (God's) kingdom appear throughout all His creation; and then shall the Devil meet his end, and sorrow shall depart with him." In this apocalyptic writing, the kingdom of heaven is purely eschatological and not, as in the rabbinic tradition, both future and present. Even so, there is one point of contact between the apocalyptic view and Jesus' idea of the kingdom of heaven, which does not appear in rabbinism; namely, Jesus' concept of the victory over Satan. When Jesus' envoys returned and announced to him, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name," he replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:17–20). We have seen in Jesus' answer to the Baptist (Matt. 11:4–6; Luke 7:22–23) that he understood his healings to be proof that a new era had already begun.

On another occasion (Luke 11:20–22; Matt. 12:28–30), Jesus expressed his opinion about the nature of the kingdom of heaven and his task in promoting it. "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). At present the devil is not completely defeated, as we read in the Assumption of Moses. Instead, he is weakened. Jesus has overpowered him and has taken the armor in which Satan trusted and divided up his spoils

17 Targum on Zechariah 14:9.

18 See, e.g., *M. Avot* 3:6.

(Luke 11:21–22). Jesus explained in the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:26–30; cp. the Parable of the Dragnet, Matt. 13:47–50) that in the period of the kingdom of heaven the righteous and the wicked will coexist until the coming of the Son of Man. Although the Jewish sages did not say explicitly that at present persons who take upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, live among sinners, they would certainly not have opposed the content of Jesus' parables on the theme.

At the end of the parable Jesus adds: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23).<sup>19</sup> A movement had begun in Israel, the realization of the kingdom of heaven on earth (Matt. 6:10). The movement necessarily centered around the person of Jesus; separate initiatives, independent of Jesus, would not gather but scatter. One can recognize again how important the concept of the kingdom of heaven was for Jesus. His main task was to be the center of the movement which realized the kingdom of God among mankind—with the aid of collaborators. "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is breaking through and those who break through, take it in possession" (Matt. 11:12). He urged his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the owner of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37–38; Luke 16:2). With John the Baptist the biblical period came to an end and a new era—that of the kingdom of God—began. Or as Jesus declared at the conclusion of his testimony about the Baptist, "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11:13).<sup>20</sup>

It was (and is) a common Jewish opinion that the kingship of God is both present and future, and that it has existed from the creation of the world, or at least from Abraham's time. This was not the position of Jesus. According to him the concept of the kingdom of heaven was not static but dynamic. It was a movement which began with John the Baptist. There are a number of reasons why Jesus

19 About this saying see also my studies, "Hillel's Self-Awareness and Jesus," *Judaism*, pp. 510–511; "Hillel and Jesus, Two Ways of Self-Awareness," *Hillel and Jesus*, eds. J. H. Charlesworth and L. L. Johns (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 71–107, especially pp. 84–85, 92–107.

20 Flusser, *Gleichnisse*, pp. 270–273.

differs on this point. One is that Jesus understood the kingdom of heaven as not only God's kingship but as we have noted, a kind of intermediary epoch between the historical period and the end of history. In his messianic timetable it occupied the same place that is represented in other Jewish tripartite systems as "the Days of the Messiah." The fact that Jesus spoke about the period of the kingdom of heaven, instead of the Days of the Messiah, hints at his own messianic self-awareness.

We have indicated<sup>21</sup> that in Judaism the coming of an eschatological Redeemer and the kingdom of heaven are two different structures. So it was in Jesus' mind. This explains why Jesus did not try to bring these two independent systems into a complete harmony. He recognized that the kingdom of heaven is a dynamic power with an imminent tendency to spread on earth, but he did not say (nor did he probably believe) that the final realization of the kingdom of heaven would culminate with the coming of the Son of Man<sup>22</sup> and the Last Judgment. Evidently he could not claim—as I believed before—that the Son of Man would arrive in the moment when, so to say, the invisible church would simply become identical with the visible Church. This would mean that the end of the period of the kingdom would come in the fullness of time (Eph. 1:10), when all the potential elect of God will take the kingdom of heaven in possession. However, such an "ecclesiastic" notion of a separate unity of the elect did not fit the open-mindedness of the "historical" Jesus.<sup>23</sup> According to Jesus, the hour of the coming of the Son of Man is known only to his heavenly Father (see Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). "The Son of Man<sup>24</sup> will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to another" (Luke 17:24).<sup>25</sup> One should remember that the Jewish sages also warned

21 See note 13.

22 In one of my studies ("Jesus and the Sign of the Son of Man," *Judaism*, pp. 526–534), I have tried to show that Jesus evidently identified himself with the future Son of Man. If I am correct, this would be his second coming.

23 About the elect in the synoptic Gospels, see the preceding chapter, "Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem," pp. 237–250.

24 The words "in his days" are not attested in the best manuscripts.

25 The whole passage is in Luke 17:22–24, 26–32, 34–37. The preceding passage

those who had attempted to discover the hidden date of redemption.

While the tripartite division of time was not an invention of Jesus, he accepted it<sup>26</sup> and adopted it into his personal inspiration. The older Jewish form was bipartite. At the end of history there would be judgment, and the post-historical future would be the eschatological "age to come (עוֹלָם הַבָּא)." This is also the eschatology of the earlier apocalyptic literature of the Dead Sea Sect<sup>27</sup> and that of John the Baptist.

When the centrality of the Messiah increased, however, the conception of the messianic era emerged. It created a tendency to insert this era into the current eschatological scheme. The solutions were not simply a compromise, as is often thought today. The only possibility was to let the messianic era follow our historical period, placing the Days of the Messiah prior to the post-historical era, "the age to come." In so doing, a clear division between history and "post-history" was finally achieved. "The Days of the Messiah"

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(Luke 17:20–21) seems to be an interpretive creation, a kind of doublet to the following Luke 17:23. See p. 110. In any case, the futuristic "kingdom of God" is surely Lukan terminology. See also the Last Supper in Luke 22:16 and 18!

- 26 See Luke 18:29–30 (and Mark 10:29–30; Matt. 19:20): "No one who has left his home . . . for the sake of the *kingdom of God*, will fail to receive many times as much *in this age* and, *in the age to come*, eternal life." See also the "eternal life" in Matt. 25:46.
- 27 There is, however, an analogy between the common Jewish division into three periods and the time-table of the Dead Sea Sect; there the three periods are the biblical past (evidently more or less the period until the destruction of the first Temple), the present wicked period (the "days of the rule of Belial," 1QS 2:19) and the purely eschatological time. In the time of a (new) creation God "will create My temple and establish it for Myself [God] for all times" (the Temple Scroll 29:7–10). See also above chap. 10 n. 12. In any case, this tripartite division is by no means identical with that of Jesus and the parallel Jewish sources. Steve Notley has called my attention to the Book of Tobit 14:4–5. There Tobit speaks about the first "House of God which will be burned." After returning from the Babylonian exile, the Jews "will rebuild the House of God, though it will be not like the former one." And in the future, "the House of God will be rebuilt with a glorious building for all generations for ever." The third temple is the splendid eschatological temple. One can show that this eschatological hope did not come into existence after the destruction of the Second Temple. It was only strengthened after the destruction by the Romans.

belong, strictly speaking, to the history of mankind, while the "age to come" is considered beyond current history.<sup>28</sup> The final epoch contains the last judgment, a new heaven and earth, a resurrection and eternal life.<sup>29</sup>

Today, it is impossible to know exactly when this tripartite eschatology was formulated. In rabbinic Judaism a precise distinction between the messianic age and the "age to come" was very quickly forgotten, and the pertinent early rabbinical sayings are too short to indicate their thinking fully. In any event, this kind of eschatology was without doubt already firmly established in the second half of the first century A.D. This can be recognized also from rabbinic literature. Almost all the Jewish sages who tried to calculate the duration of the messianic period lived in the second half of the first century or in the second century A.D.<sup>30</sup> They evidently thought that after this period the "age to come" would begin. The teaching of Jesus may even be the earliest unequivocal evidence for this messianic time-table.

I am sure that the roots of Jesus' messianic time-table lay in contemporary rabbinic thought, but if one wants to see this more clearly, one has to ask for help from three apocalyptic texts, all of which were written at the very end of the first century A.D. One of

28 See P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde* (Tübingen, 1934), pp. 64–67 and especially 71–77, and M. Zobel, *Gottes Gesalbter* (Schocken, Berlin, 1938), pp. 69–74, 125–129. See also Schürer, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 537–547, and Billerbeck, op. cit., pp. 4b:799–976. See also *B. Sanh.* 91b, especially the words of Rabbi Samuel, and *Sifre* to Deuteronomy on Deut. 6:6, ed. L. Finkelstein, reprint (New York, 1969), p. 62 and the note there; Nachmanides, *Torat Ha-Adam*, ed. H. D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 300–303: "One calls the age after the resurrection of the dead 'the age to come.'" And see the sources there. See also my *Gleichnisse* (above note 9), pp. 270–272, 280–281. According to rabbinic sources, Moses and the prophets referred to the future until the messianic age, but "the age to come" was outside of their scope. Jesus, however, put the limit *before* the days of the Messiah (see Matt. 11:13). By the way, the term "the age to come" is attested in 1 Enoch 71:15. See also above p. 139 n. 12 end.

29 Paul already knew this eschatological scheme and modified it according to his outlook. See 1 Cor. 15:23–28; H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen, 1989), pp. 315–320.

30 *B. Sanh.* 99a, Midrash to Ps. 90:15 and parallels. See Volz, op. cit., pp. 226–228 and Zobel, op. cit., pp. 72–73.

them is the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. The Last Days are there described in chapters 20–21. According to this book the messianic reign will endure a thousand years.<sup>31</sup> At the end of this period the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the dead will take place (Rev. 20:11–15). After this (Rev. 21:1), says the author, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” Then the Holy City, the new Jerusalem will come out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2).

The two other apocalyptic texts from the same period resemble one another. One is the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch,<sup>32</sup> and the other is Fourth Ezra.<sup>33</sup> The eschatological material in the Apocalypse of Baruch is contained in chapters 29–30, 39–42 and 72–74. The author mostly describes the messianic era, and only hints at the “age to come.” The end of the messianic era is described in 30:1, “And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, that then all who sleep in hope of him will rise.”<sup>34</sup> After the resurrection, judgment will follow. Especially interesting is the content of 32:1–6, where the author speaks about the destruction of the First Temple, the rebuilding of Zion (32:1–2), and the second destruction (32:3). Finally, the Temple will be renewed “in glory and will be perfected into eternity” (32:4). It will happen “when the Mighty One will renew His creation.” This description of the eschatological Temple very much resembles the Temple Scroll from Qumran (29:7–10).<sup>35</sup> In the time of a new creation God “will create My Temple and

31 This opinion was accepted by some Jewish Sages (see Volz, *op. cit.*, pp. 226–228) and is also attested in one of the variants in 4 Ezra 7:28. See also *Tanna de-vei Eliyahu* (or: *Seder Eliyahu*) (Wien, 1902), pp. 6–7, and the commentary of M. Friedmann there. The text is quoted in *B. Sanh.* 97a/b; *B. Av. Zarah* 9a. About the number 2000 years see, Volz, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

32 See *Apocalypse Syriacque de Baruch*, ed. P. Bogaert (Paris, 1969), especially pp. 415–420.

33 *The Fourth Ezra*, ed. M. Stone (Minneapolis, 1990), especially pp. 92–93, 112–118.

34 The temporal limitations of the messianic period is also hinted at in 40:7.

35 See above note 27.

establish it for Myself [God] for all times." By the way, also according to Revelation 21:1–2, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, will come down out of heaven after the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Thus, this will happen in the "age to come."<sup>36</sup>

Even more instructive for our study is Fourth Ezra (chapters 7 and 12:32–36).<sup>37</sup> There the different content of the messianic age and the age to come is clearly indicated. The Messiah "will deliver in mercy the remnant of my people. . . and he will make them joyful until the end comes, the day of Judgment" (12:34). The author is more explicit in 7:29–31.

For my Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and he shall cause to rejoice those who remain for four hundred years.<sup>38</sup> And after these things my servant the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. And the world shall be turned back to the primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings; so that no one shall be left. And after seven days the world which is not awake shall be raised and that which is corruptible shall perish. . . and the treasures shall give up the souls which have been committed to them. And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment....<sup>39</sup>

We see that according to this passage, at the end of the messianic days, the Messiah and all mankind shall die, and then the new creation and the Last Judgment will take place. It may be helpful for the reader at this point to outline the main points in the two eschatological systems and the specific position held by Jesus.

36 But see 4 Ezra 7:26

37 See Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–93, 112–113, 367–370. In a vision in 4 Ezra chapter 13, the Davidic Son of Man is described (see 4 Ezra 13:3, "something like a figure of a man flew with the clouds of heaven," an allusion to Daniel 7:13!), but in 4 Ezra he becomes a supernatural messianic savior, and his appearance there does not form a part of any eschatological system. He is *not* the eschatological judge.

38 Other variants: "thirty" and "a thousand."

39 The next parallel to the quotation from Fourth Ezra is in *Tanna de-vei Eliyahu* (see above, note 31) pp. 6–7 where we read that after our period there will be 1000 years (Days of the Messiah) and after these 1000 years there will come the future age, about which it is written, "When evening comes, there will be light" (Zech. 14:4). See also there, pp. 21, 29, 31.

Bipartite System	Jesus	Tripartite System
a. The present wicked age.	a. The "biblical" age until John the Baptist.	a. The present age.
b. The Last Judgment (usually with the Son of Man as judge).	b. The present realization of the kingdom of heaven.	b. The messianic era.
c. End of this world and a new creation.	c. The Last Judgment with the Son of Man as judge, resurrection, beginning of the "age to come" and eternal life.	c. Last Judgment.
		d. End of this world. The post-historical "age to come," resurrection, eternal life, a new creation.

In Jesus' personal eschatological perspective, the second stage of redemption, the messianic era, is to be identified with the realization of the kingdom of heaven. "No one who has left his house... for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life" (Luke 18:29-30; Mark 10:29-30; Matt. 19:20). This will happen after the Last Judgment, performed by the Son of Man. Then the wicked "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). Luke 20:33-35 furnishes a further confirmation for this concept of Jesus: "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry, nor be given in marriage." Finally, we hear, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32).<sup>40</sup> Thus, according to Jesus, the period of the kingdom of Heaven will precede the coming of the Son of Man and his last judgment. This will be the time of the resurrection of the dead. In that post-historical age to come, the resurrected will be a kind of new creation—they will be like angels (see also 1 Cor. 15:42-54).

40 See above p. 66 n. 20.

Only a few scholars have paid adequate attention to the nature and history of the two eschatological ages, both in Judaism and in Jesus' eschatology. One cannot blame them, because the differences between the messianic age and the age to come is not well documented, neither in rabbinism nor in early Christianity. In both, this messianic time-table was almost forgotten. In the Gospels it is better preserved than in rabbinic writings, but already in the Gospels the critical moment of history became the Cross, and the messianic chronology of the "historical" Jesus was only of secondary importance. Although the terms "the Days of the Messiah" and "the age to come" coexist in rabbinic writings until now, the difference between these two ages became almost instantly meaningless. Thus the best witnesses for the Jewish tripartite chronology are the three apocalyptic texts from the end of the first century A.D. Through the Book of Revelation, from time to time it has been partially renewed by chiliastic movements even until our own day.

We do not know when in Jewish thought the messianic age was harmonized with the former two-fold concept of the unredeemed world and the time of salvation. As I already said, Jesus seems to be the earliest witness for this new system. His creative spirit and his high, messianic self-awareness have changed its structure. In addition I have noted that even though the figure of the Son of Man is foreign to rabbinic sources,<sup>41</sup> Jesus has integrated this sublime character from current apocalyptic expectations (which were evidently also the hope of the Baptist). Therefore in the eschatological system of Jesus the coming of the Son of Man was postponed, together with the Last Judgment, to the distant future. This change was the crux of the conflict between the Baptist and Jesus. Nevertheless, I believe that Jesus came to the conclusion that he himself would eventually be revealed as the divine Son of Man.<sup>42</sup>

The most important innovation of Jesus was his identification of the messianic age with the rabbinical kingdom of heaven. He

41 But see Billerbeck, *I op. cit.*, pp. 486, 956–959. The Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 is sometimes in rabbinical sources in the third century A.D. identified with the Messiah, but the divine figure of the Son of Man as the eschatological judge in the Last Judgment does not appear in rabbinical sources.

42 See Flusser, "Jesus and the Sign of the Son of Man," *Judaism*, pp. 515–534.

borrowed the concept of "the kingdom" from an independent system, and incorporated it into another rabbinical redemptive framework, namely, the tripartite time-table. The identification by Jesus of the Messianic age and the kingdom of heaven in which Jesus would have the central task is, by the way, an additional proof that Jesus was sure that he was the Messiah. In his answer to John the Baptist he claimed (Matt. 11:4-6; Luke 7:22-23) that his own blessed activities show that the time of salvation is here. There were at that time many who believed that John was Elijah. Jesus described John as the man who opened the way for the realization of the kingdom (Matt. 11:12-15). He finished his words by saying that "if you want to accept it, he [John] is Elijah who is to come." According to popular belief, Elijah will announce the coming of the Messiah.<sup>43</sup> "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"<sup>44</sup> Jesus was not wrong when he asserted that before the "day of the Son of Man" the age of the kingdom of heaven will *still* come. Those who are shown to be wrong are the modern adherents of the "acute eschatology" of John.

The results of the present study have important consequences for the evaluation of the messianic self-awareness of Jesus. He adopted contemporary Jewish interpretations which divided history, and he identified the Days of the Messiah with the period of the kingdom of heaven. Our study indicates that for Jesus the messianic period no longer lay as a hope in the future. It had already begun with John the Baptist, and Jesus was now the Messiah. It is also possible to understand how Jesus modified the structure of the concept of the kingdom of heaven. In the understanding of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven became more dynamic than in rabbinic thinking. Since according to Jesus the kingdom was identical with the messianic period, it was no longer, as in rabbinic thought, an eternal suprahistorical entity. It became a dynamic force which broke

43 About the future coming of Elijah, see Zobel, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-68; Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, vol. 4b:779-798; Volz, *op. cit.*, 195-197.

44 It is astonishing to discover that Jesus' messianic time-table is not far from the tripartite eschatological scheme of the eccentric medieval thinker, Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132-1202). He divided history into: the history of the Old Testament, the present period of New Testament grace, and the future period of Spirit. But the differences in content are not small.

through into the world at an identifiable point in history. The kingdom of heaven began to break through with John, and Jesus — the Messiah — was in the center of the movement.<sup>45</sup> “He who is not *with me* is against me, and he who does not gather *with me* scatters” (Matt. 12:30).

45 “If I drive out demons *by the finger of God*, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). As already said [above, p. 261] the “finger of God” is taken from Exodus 8:15[19]. By this quotation Jesus hints to the understanding that through himself God’s redemption had already begun. See the eschatological prayer of Sir. 36:1–22, especially verses 6–7:

Show signs anew and work further wonders,  
make Thy hand and Thy right arm glorious.

Through Jesus’ healings God repeats the “signs” and “wonders” of the liberation from bondage in Egypt.

DAVID FLUSSER

# JESUS

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