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RT 435 Sources for the Life of Jesus
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**Jesus' Self-Understanding
According to the So-Called Q Material
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§1. Introduction

Ever since the work of H. J. Holtzmann in the latter part of the nineteenth century,¹ a large number of New Testament scholars have looked to the two-document theory as the most likely solution to the Synoptic problem. In this view, the chronological framework and the narrative accounts of Matthew and Luke are seen as coming principally from the Gospel of Mark (or a slightly different edition, no longer extant), whereas many of their discourses are derived from a hypothetical document named "Q" (presumably from the German *Quelle* – source), sometimes identified with the Matthean λόγια mentioned by the early church father Papias.²

Numerous attempts have been made to reconstruct Q from the canonical gospels. Moffatt gives his own view and sketches those of sixteen others.³ Rosché has pointed out that 487 different verses of Luke have been assigned to Q by eleven different New Testament scholars, even though the most common suggestions involve only about two hundred verses.⁴

Even the existence of Q has come under renewed attack in recent years,⁵ not only from those who deny that Mark was written before Matthew,⁶ but also from those who reject the Matthean priority but account for the Q material as entirely oral,⁷ partially oral,⁸ written but too complex to be a single document,⁹ or due to Luke's use of Matthew.¹⁰ A number of scholars have come forward to defend the existence of Q as a single written

¹ H. J. Holtzmann, *Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* (1863).

² Cited in Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.16.

³ James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 197-202.

⁴ Theodore R. Rosché, "The Words of Jesus and the Future of the 'Q' Hypothesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960), 216.

⁵ Nigel Turner, "Q in Recent Thought," *Expository Times* 88 (1969), 324-28.

⁶ W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951).

⁷ Rosché, "Words of Jesus," *JBL* 79 (1960), 210-20.

⁸ Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 113-16.

⁹ E. P. Sanders, "The Overlaps of Mark and Q and the Synoptic Problem," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972-73), 453-65.

¹⁰ A. M. Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 55-88; R. T. Simpson, "The Major Agreements of Matthew and Luke Against Mark," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-66), 273-84.

document, however,¹¹ and at present the mass of New Testament work which rests upon Q makes it unlikely that the majority will soon abandon belief in its existence.

In this century, several studies have been made of Q's picture of Jesus by scholars of both liberal¹² and conservative¹³ persuasion. Recently, interest in the new field of redaction criticism, in which the gospels are studied as complete works, seems to have reawakened interest in studying Q as a whole. So, H. E. Tödt devotes considerable attention to Q as it speaks of the Son of man,¹⁴ and R. A. Edwards has published a preliminary paper on the theology of Q¹⁵ and is preparing a full-blown book on the subject.

The purpose of *this* paper is to examine the so-called Q material to consider what it has to say about Jesus' opinion of himself. Since almost all of Q is discourse material in which Jesus is speaking, no attempt will be made to remove the small amount of material not found in his mouth from the large amount that is, though such passages will be noted in passing. For the sake of brevity, we shall speak of Jesus' opinion, etc., even though it is recognized that many do not think the Q material gives us Jesus' own statements.

As regards a definition of Q, we shall not pre-judge the issue of its existence, nature or extent, but follow the suggestion of Rosché:¹⁶

... the least committal of all definitions of "Q" is the description of the location of its material, viz., that it is the non-Markan common material found in Matthew and Luke.

For convenience, the English synopsis of Throckmorton¹⁷ will be employed, which uses the Revised Standard Version of the gospels for its text and the Huck-Lietzmann synopsis¹⁸ for order and section numbering. In each citation we shall give the common section number from these synopses as well and the chapter and verse reference in Matthew and Luke. Both gospels will be quoted where the differences seem to be significant; otherwise the Matthean account will be given. Italicized words in a Scripture quotation will be my emphases. Occasional reference will be made to the Greek when appropriate.

In attempting to interpret this material, we shall try to make as few assumptions as possible about early church history. First priority in exegesis will be given to the near

¹¹ F. G. Downing, "Towards a Rehabilitation of Q," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964-65), 169-81; K. P. G. Curtis, "In Support of Q," *Expository Times* 84 (1972-73), 309-10.

¹² Adolf Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke*, translated J. R. Wilkinson (New York: Putnam, 1908).

¹³ A. T. Robertson, *The Christ of the Logia* (New York: Doran, 1924).

¹⁴ Heinz E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

¹⁵ Richard A. Edwards, "An Approach to a Theology of Q," *The Journal of Religion* 4 (1971), 247-69.

¹⁶ Rosché, "Words of Jesus," 211.

¹⁷ Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., ed., *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1967).

¹⁸ Albert Huck and Hans Lietzmann, *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, 9th ed., translated F. L. Cross (New York: American Bible Society, 1935).

context in the Q material, and second, to the more distant Q context. Occasional reference will be made to Old Testament allusions, as the OT was known to be in existence at this time, and Q assuredly refers to it several times.

The order of discussion will be as follows. In section two we shall consider Jesus' statements about his own person and nature. Section three will deal briefly with Jesus' view of his mission and message, and section four will speak of Jesus' destiny. Finally, we shall summarize the results of our study in section five.

§2. Jesus' Understanding of His Person

For convenience, let us divide the material about Jesus' person into two categories. In the first, we shall consider passages which apply some title or epithet to Jesus. In the second, let us examine those materials which speak of his person with using such terms.

Titles Applied to Jesus

Interestingly enough, the title "Christ" is not found in Q, whether applied to Jesus or not. At first sight this seems quite striking, yet further reflection seems to modify this impression. The Q material is virtually nothing but Jesus' own discourse, and Jesus only rarely uses the term himself. This in Matthew and Luke, the word appears on Jesus' lips on eight occasions, but only two of these are found in both Matthew and Luke. Each of these two times, the Gospel of Mark is also present, and therefore the material is not in Q by definition. But if the Triple Tradition of 480 verses has the word "Christ" in Jesus' mouth only twice, its non-occurrence in Q, only 170 verses in length, may well be accidental.¹⁹

Son of Man

On the other hand, the term "Son of man" is rather common in Q, more so than any other designation but "Jesus." In #49 (Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-60), a man says to Jesus, "I will follow *you* wherever *you* go." Jesus answers, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the *Son of man* has nowhere to lay his head." Likewise in #65 (Mt 11:7-19; Lk 7:24-35), after applying Malachi 3:1 to John the Baptist as one who would prepare the way, Jesus says:

John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon";
the Son of man came eating and drinking and they say, "Behold a glutton
and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

These passages alone show that the Q material applies the title "Son of man" to Jesus, even though the first is occasionally assumed to be merely proverb in which "son of man" means no more than "mankind,"²⁰ and the second an Aramaic idiom meaning "I."²¹

¹⁹ Joseph B. Tyson, *A Study of Early Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 184-85.

²⁰ Edwards, "Theology of Q," 260.

²¹ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (1949), 70f, cited in Tödt, *Son of Man*, 115n4.

There are, moreover, three passages in which Matthew or Luke alone has “Son of man” when the other has “I, me” or “my.” In #19, the Beatitudes, Mt 5:11 has, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely *on my account*.” Lk 6:22 ends with “on account of the Son of man” instead. In #60 (Exhortation to Fearless Confession, Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8), the situation is similar, whereas in #189 (The Rich Young Man, Mt 19:28; Lk 22:29), it is Matthew which has “Son of man” when Luke has “me.” These passages suggest that Jesus was understood to have used the term “Son of man” interchangeably with the first person pronoun as a self-designation. At least this seems more probably than a widespread plot to introduce “Son of man” into the Q material (not to mention Mark, M and L) where it was otherwise unknown.

Besides these “Son of man” passages, there are four others in which Matthew and Luke agree on the use of the term but which might in isolation be assumed to refer to some unknown figure other than Jesus. In #86 (Mt 12:32; Lk 12:10), we have:

And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Both passages occur in contexts which clearly indicate that Jesus is to be understood as the Son of man, and in both cases the contexts are totally Q material, although admittedly not the same Q material.

The context is somewhat less helpful in #158 (Mt 24:43-44; Lk 12:39-40), which reads:

But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night (Lk: at what hour) the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Still, even here both passages are followed by the Q parable contrasting the faithful and wicked servants, which seems to put Jesus’ disciples in the role of servants and Jesus as returning master.

The third passage, #184 (Mt 24:25-27; Lk 17:22-24), has:

So if they say to you, “Lo, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out; if they say, “Lo, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. For as lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man.

The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, “Lo, there!” or “Lo, here!” Do not go, do not follow them. For as the lightning flashes ... so will the Son of man be in his day.

Both of these are followed (Lk immediately, Mt about nine verses later) by a comparison of the coming of the Son of man to the days of Noah, another Q passage of this sort.

Finally, in #87 (Mt 12:38-42; Lk 11:29-32), Jesus says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Then Matthew and Luke diverge:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation.

Without making any guesses about the original reading in a hypothetical Q document, both extant gospels agree in paralleling the activities of the Son of man with those of Jonah. But agree by following this passage with another from Q:

The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold, something greater than Jonah *is here*. The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon *is here*.

But in this passage, Jesus identifies himself (“is here”) with the Son of man, who is to be a sign to “this generation.”

Thus, whatever one may think of the authenticity of the title “Son of man” as a self-designation of Jesus, it seems clear that the Q material so describes him. But what is meant by the title?

First of all, “Son of man” is used of Jesus while present with his disciples in his earthly ministry (## 49, 65, presumably #86), where he is lowly (#49, “nowhere to lay his head”; #86, less guilt incurred blaspheming him than the Holy Spirit), but not ascetic (#65, “eating and drinking”). Even so, he is already claiming to be a prophet greater than Jonah, and a sage wiser than Solomon.

In addition, Jesus calls himself “Son of man” in regard to the time of his absence, when his followers will face severe persecution and temptation to deny him (##19, 60). In the latter passage (Mt 10:32-33; Lk 12:8-9):

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before me, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before me will be denied before the angels of God.

Jesus will repay them by public acknowledgment, possibly after their death but before their resurrection (“in heaven”), possibly at his coming kingdom (“of heaven”). The thrust of #19 is similar (“your reward is great in heaven”).

Yet Jesus also calls himself “Son of man” in his eschatological coming as judge and ruler (##158, 184, 189). Although we shall postpone most of our discussion of these passages until later, it is these, #189 especially (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:29-30), which suggest the origin of the term “Son of man”:

In the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The obvious allusion is to Daniel 7:13-14, which reads:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the *Ancient of Days* and was presented before him. And to him *was given* dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Lord

Another title applied to Jesus is κύριος – “lord, master.” This epithet occurs only twice in the material we are considering, and these are in somewhat different contexts. In #49 (Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-60), just after Jesus answers a potential disciple that “the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head,” another says, “*Lord*, let me first go and bury my father.” On this occasion it is not Jesus himself who uses the title. Yet, since Jesus makes no attempt to refuse this form of address, it would seem that Q sees the term as appropriate.

The other passage using “Lord” likewise has others speaking, but in this case (#42: Mt 7:21-22; Lk 6:46, 13:26-27) the “others” are themselves quoted by Jesus:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father ... On that day many will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evil doers.”

Why do you call me “Lord, Lord” and not do what I tell you? (6:46)

Then you will begin to say, “We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.” But he will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.” (13:26-27)

What, if anything, can be made of this title? The Greek κύριος has rather modest meanings on the one hand: “owner, master, husband,” but on the other hand extends through political rulers to a form of address for deity in both Jewish and pagan usage.²² But what can be said of Jesus’ lordship in these two passages? In #49, the person addressing Jesus is a potential disciple, and therefore nothing more need be implied than a respectful form of address, like our English “sir.” Jesus’ response, however, is certainly arresting, and it causes one to wonder how he understood the term. To the man’s request to go and bury his father, he responds, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Mt 8:22; Lk 9:59-60). Thus Jesus sees his lordship, even during his public ministry, as transcending even the closest family ties. Contrast this with Deuteronomy 24:5,

When a man is newly married he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.

Apparently Q pictures Jesus as claiming a greater lordship than the OT allows to human government.

Our other passage (#42) seems to confirm this. The latter part pictures Jesus as the eschatological Lord who controls men’s access to the kingdom (indirectly in Luke, through the parable of the householder). As with the term “Son of man,” we see Jesus as Lord both during his public ministry and at his return to institute his kingdom. Matthew, in addition, implies that he is also called “Lord” during an intervening absence (Mt 7:22), when many will be prophesying and performing miracles in his name.

Son (of God)

In Q, the title “Son of God” is used explicitly only by Satan (#8: Mt 4:3-10; Lk 4:3-12), where it occurs twice in the temptation of Jesus. This passage is also noteworthy as the only clearly narrative section in Q. The usual English rendering “if you are the Son of God” tends to conceal the fact that the Greek use of the particle εἰ with the present indicative verb gives a condition assumed to be true,²³ which would therefore better be translated “since you are the Son of God.” In Satan’s mouth, this might be understood as a forced admission (as, perhaps, from several demons in other gospel accounts), but it seems more likely in this context to be a concession for the sake of argument, probably tinged with mockery or irony. Clearly the title is intended to mean more than “a son of God like all other human beings,” as Satan assumes that Jesus as Son should be able to do miracles and to count on the special intervention of God for his protection.

²² Walter Baur, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 459-61.

²³ F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §§ 360, 371; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1004-22.

In another passage (#67: Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-27), Jesus calls himself the “Son.” Although the genitive “of God” is not given, it is implied as strongly as possible:

I thank, thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered *to me* by my Father; and no one knows the Son (Lk: who the Son is) except the Father, and no one knows the Father (Lk: who the Father is) except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

This passage not only reinforces the former one, but it introduces an intimate personal relationship between the “Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” and Jesus. The “all things” handed over to Jesus would seem, from the context, to be the lordship of heaven and earth or knowledge of the Father. The term “no one” would seem to mean “no other man on earth” at least. Thus Jesus appears as mediator of revelation concerning God. How this is to be understood relative to the revelation in the OT scriptures is not indicated. We also see in the statement, “No one knows the Son except the Father,” a picture of Jesus as a mysterious being whose real nature is hidden from those around him.

Non-Titular Indications of Jesus’ Person

Having exhausted the so-called Q material which speaks of Jesus under a specific title (except for a possible title we shall mention later in this section), we turn now to materials which speak of his person without using such designation. For convenience, let us divide this material into two parts” (1) negatively, the unworthiness of others relative to Jesus, and (2) positively, the greatness of his own person or activity.

Unworthiness of Others

Under this topic one would naturally think of John the Baptist’s statements of unworthiness relative to Jesus, both in his preaching and when Jesus came to him for baptism. By our definition, however, neither of these incidents are in Q, for the first (#4) occurs in the Triple Tradition, and the second (#6) is found only in Matthew. It is true that a part of #4 (Mt 3:12; Lk 3:17) is in Q: “and with fire. His winnowing fork ...” This appears to require some more context to make sense, thereby raising questions about the extent or existence of Q as a written document, but these matters are beyond the scope of this paper.

In #46 (Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10), a centurion seeking Jesus to heal his servant says, “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.” Jesus’ response highly commends the officer’s faith.

Jesus himself, in #62 (Mt 10:37-39; Lk 14:26-27) makes a much stronger statement of this sort:

He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Here, indeed, Matthew might seem to imply that one can be worthy of Jesus, but if so, it is only when that person has denied even himself (“take his cross”). Luke is even more explicit, but does not use the term “worthy.” Compare this with #49, discussed under “Lord” (page 6, above).

Greatness of Jesus’ Person or Activity

Turning to the positive aspect of this material, #92 (Mt 13:16-17; Lk 10:23-24) is significant. Jesus tells his disciples they are especially blessed because of what they are seeing:

Many prophets and righteous men (Lk: kings) longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

This seems to presuppose the OT prophecies of his coming; otherwise, how would these men know enough to long for these things? In a somewhat similar vein is #87 (Mt 12:38-42; Lk 11:29-32), cited on page 5. Jesus is greater than the prophet Jonah and greater than the wise king Solomon.

An even stronger statement is made in #65 (Mt 11:7-19; Lk 7:24-35). Having identified John the Baptist as the (Messianic) forerunner of Malachi 3:1, as the end of the law and the prophets, and as the greatest person born of women, Jesus nevertheless continues, “Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven (Lk: of God) is greater than he.” But by implication, it is Jesus who is to be king of this coming kingdom, and therefore so much the further above John!

The immediately preceding section (#64: Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:18-23) is also Q and only separated from #65 for convenience. Here the Messianic implications are even clearer, as John uses something like a title when he asks Jesus, “Are you *he who is to come*, are shall we look for another?” Title or not, it is clear that John is referring to someone who is expected, presumably on the basis of OT prophecy.²⁴

Another indication of the greatness of Jesus’ activities (and indirectly of his person) is found in #66 (Mt 11:20-24; Lk 10:13-15), which immediately follows the above sections in Matthew but not in Luke:

²⁴ S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament and in the Time of Jesus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951).

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Because they rejected Jesus, the inhabitants of these cities, though Jews, will fare worse than the pagans of Phoenicia.

Less obvious, but in my opinion more striking, is the significance for Jesus' person of his lament over Jerusalem in #167 (Mt 23:37-39; Lk 13:34-35):

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold your house is forsaken (Mt: and desolate). And I tell you, you will not see me (Mt: again) until you say, "Blessed is *he who comes* in the name of the Lord."

In addition to the judgment called down on Jerusalem for rejecting Jesus and the phrase "he who comes" that we noticed in #64, the temporal scope of the saying is noteworthy. The first sentence seems to encompass a large sweep of salvation history, something like Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees in #154 (esp. Mt 23:35; Lk 11:50) and Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Yet the "how often" of sentence two then seems to give Jesus an existence over the same hundreds of years of Israel's history! Likewise the figure of the mother bird protecting its chicks, here applied to Jesus ("would *I* have gathered"), is always applied to God in the OT: Ruth 2:12; Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4 and 91:4.

To summarize the Q material on Jesus' person, we have seen that Jesus is pictured as a Messianic figure, although the usual title "Messiah" or "Christ" is not used. Instead the more ambiguous "Son of man" is employed (following Daniel 7:13) to designate Jesus both before and after he receives his Messianic rule. The term "Lord" is used of Jesus only twice, yet a lordship over man's closest ties and fondest hopes is envisioned. "Son" or "Son of God" also occurs, and it is apparently to be understood in terms of a unique relationship between God the Father and Jesus, rather than as a general designation for mankind or the righteous. A precedent for "Son" as a Messianic title can be found in Psalm 2:7. Another possible title, though we have treated it under the other material, is "he who is to come," which is once quoted from Psalm 118:26.

Going beyond the titles, we see Jesus' person as exalted above all men, greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, greater than John the Baptist. He alone understands God, and he himself is understood by no one but God. In fact, Jesus is put in the place of God in Q's citation of Malachi 3:1, in the "hen and chicks" figure, and in his "often" calling Israel to himself. It would appear, then, that there is little ground for a lower view of Jesus in the Q material than that found in the later NT writings, although there is a greater

air of mystery about him. In fact, Wrede's "Messianic secret"²⁵ seems to be present in Q also!

§3. Jesus' Understanding of His Mission and Message

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent messengers to Jesus asking, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus' answer (#64: Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:18-23) will serve to outline this section:

Go and tell John what you hear and see, the blind receive their sight, 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 takes no offense at me.

Thus Jesus' activities consisted of: (1) healing, (2) preaching (and teaching), and (3) confrontation ("blessed is he who takes no offense"), to which we shall add (4) gathering disciples. Let us look at Jesus' mission and message under these headings.

Healing

According to #64, Jesus saw a significant part of his mission to be healing. This in itself should warn us against the too-facile assumption that the Q material comes from a sect which saw Jesus only as a teacher and knew little or nothing of his other activities. This particular passage lists healings of several maladies, both local (blindness, deafness, lameness) and general (leprosy), as well as resurrection of the dead. In #85 (Mt 12:22-30; Lk 11:14-23), exorcism of demons is mentioned, and in #46 (Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10), the centurion's servant is cured of some unspecified disease. No nature miracles are mentioned in Q, but #66 (Mt 11:20-24; Lk 10:13-15) speaks of unnamed "mighty works" which were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, and perhaps in Capernaum also.

Preaching and Teaching

Volumes have been written on the preaching and teaching of Jesus, and anything at all detailed on the subject is far beyond the scope of this paper. It is clear that, according to Q, this activity was a very significant part of Jesus' mission. The justification for adding "teaching" when our introductory quotation only mentions preaching is the sign-seeking incident of #87 (Mt 12:38-42; Lk 11:29-32). There we are told of "the preaching of Jonah" and the "wisdom of Solomon," and corresponding to each, the "something greater" in Jesus' activity. So, in regard to form, we can characterize Jesus' message as preaching and teaching, or alternatively, as prophecy and wisdom.²⁶ In any case, no attempt will be made to sort the material into such categories.

²⁵ Wilhelm Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttingen, 1901); ET by James C. Greig (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1972).

²⁶ It is interesting, in the light of Bultmann's claim that proverbial materials in the gospels are later borrowings from the Jewish stock of proverbs, that we have in #87 an attribution of proverbs to Jesus.

As regards content, Jesus' message includes considerable ethical material, involving attitudes toward God and man, life in general, and one's self in particular. Although this teaching contains numerous parallels with the OT legal, prophetic and wisdom literature, as well as with the later rabbinic literature, many feel there is a certain fresh flavor to the whole. In fact, Jesus claims to offer an unprecedented view of God, as we noted in #67: "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

The other major topic of Jesus' preaching and teaching is the kingdom of God. Most, but not all, of this material is eschatological, and therefore it finds its principal parallels in the OT prophetic and apocalyptic literature. In #64, Jesus speaks of proclaiming "good news," but the term is not explicitly defined in Q. However, in Luke 16:16, which is *otherwise* a Q passage (parallel to Mt 11:12), the "good news" is associated with the kingdom of God, and in both gospels the kingdom seems to be distinguished chronologically from "the law and the prophets," with the division occurring at the coming of John the Baptist:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence ...
For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently.

We shall return to this subject in section four.

Actually, Jesus' teaching cannot be easily separated into ethical and eschatological either, as the last judgment will involve individual behavior, the kingdom itself will be characterized by righteousness, and Jesus' disciples are to live each day in the light of the coming kingdom. In any case, it is clear that Jesus' preaching and teaching are pictured as new in some sense, and as heralding a new era, at least in God's dealings with Israel, for whom the law and the prophets were given.

Confrontation

As we read in #64, "blessed is he who takes no offense at me," Jesus' mission was not seen merely as a series of wonders to astound the senses, nor of teachings to grip the heart and mind, but it was also intended to confront men with the necessity of making a decision for or against his claims and message. Terrible judgments would await those who rejected him (#66, above, page 10; #87, page 5), especially the scribes and Pharisees (#154 or 210), for whom is reserved his longest and most scathing rebuke.

Yet even for his followers, Jesus' message calls for more than an easy decision to jump on the Messianic bandwagon. The blessings (#19: Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23) are directed toward the future, but the hard things come first. The disciple will have to leave family and security (##49, 62) to face shame and death (#62) in order to follow Jesus.

Gathering Disciples

According to Q, Jesus' activities of healing and teaching would lead to a confrontation which would produce disciples as well as enemies. Jesus saw these disciples as "babes" (#67: Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21) in contrast to the "wise and understanding," as "poor" (#64: Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22) rather than rich. Yet he immediately began to reveal hidden things about God to them (#67) in order to make them wise, and he promised in the kingdom to make them rich and happy (#19) and greater than John the Baptist (#65: Mt 11:11; Lk 5:28). To the twelve apostles he promised that they would be rulers over the twelve tribes of Israel (#189: Mt 19:28; Lk 22:29-30).

Not only did he make disciples himself through his ministry, but he also sent out his disciples to confront men with the kingdom, to teach, work miracles, and to proclaim judgment on those who rejected them as likewise rejecting Jesus and God (#139: Mt 9:37-39, 10:7-16; Lk 10:1-16).

As indicated above, the disciples were called upon to put even love for family and self behind love for Jesus (##49, 62). They were warned to expect persecution, since they were like lambs sent into the midst of wolves (#58: Mt 10:16; Lk 10:3), that they would face opposition from their closest relatives (#61: Mt 10:34-36; Lk 12:51-53), perhaps even death (#62: Mt 10:38; Lk 14:27). Yet even the loss of life was nothing compared to the greater danger of rejecting Jesus (#60: Mt 10:28; Lk 12:4):

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Instead, steadfastness in persecution would be the way to true happiness (#19):

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In summary, our examination of Jesus' mission and message according to Q shows one who performed miracles at least on a par with Elijah and Elisha, who taught that a new age had arrived with the coming of John the Baptist, yet who proclaimed himself the central actor of this new age, the one who alone could reveal the Father. He confronted men with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting him, warning them of the judgment to come. He made those who accepted him his disciples and sent them out on the same mission, preparing them for suffering now that they might have joy and great reward in his kingdom.

§4. Jesus' Understanding of His Destiny

Let us now examine the Q material for the picture it gives us of the results Jesus expected from his activities. For convenience we shall divide the subject into five parts: (1) opposition and rejection, (2) death and resurrection, (3) parousia, (4) judgment, and (5) kingdom.

Opposition and Rejection

According to Q, Jesus saw not only opposition to his disciples, but also rejection of his own claims and growing opposition to himself. In #64, mentioned several times already, he says, “Blessed is he who takes no offense at me,” obviously opening up the possibility that some would be offended. He saw the perversity of his opponents (#65: Mt 11:18-19; Lk 7:33-34), who could somehow find fault both with the asceticism of John the Baptist and with his own non-ascetic behavior. The opposition is even more pronounced in his opponents’ ability to ascribe his exorcisms to Beelzebul while ascribing theirs to God (#149: Mt 12:22-30; Lk 14:14-23, selecting only the materials not found in Mark).

Jesus’ statement regarding the extent of salvation also suggests that a general rejection is foreseen (#40: Mt 7:13-14; Lk 13:23-24):

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

And some one said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and not be able.

Likewise Jesus’ lengthy rebuke of the Pharisees (#154) certainly sees a very influential segment of Palestinian Judaism in the opposition camp.

Death and Resurrection

The Q material is unusually sparse on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Yet I believe it would be incorrect to assert that nothing of this sort appears.

First, let us notice (#167: Mt 23:37-39; Lk 13:34-35) that Jesus rebukes Jerusalem for consistently “killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent.” Then he says, “You will not see me again until you say ...” What is Jesus planning to do? Go away, or be killed? In #62 (Mt 10:38; Lk 14:27), he says a disciple must “take his cross and follow me.” Although frequently understood figuratively, the literal meaning, that Jesus will be crucified and that his disciples must be ready to follow him, makes perfectly good sense. Would it not be a striking coincidence if this statement got into Q by accident even though its author(s) know nothing of the manner of Jesus’ death?

In any case, #154 (Mt 23:34-36; Lk 11:49-51) makes it clear that some of Jesus’ disciples will die under persecution (following his example?):

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah ... Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.

Therefore the wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah ... Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation.

Thus Jesus' own generation is singled out to receive punishment far beyond the ordinary. Their killing of Jesus, in view of his status in Q, would certainly make this woe more understandable.

What is to be done with the "sign of Jonah" (#87: Mt 12:39; Lk 11:29)? Here, too, it is certainly an impressive "accident" that this rather obscure prophet who was "buried" three days and three nights in a "whale" was chosen to give his name to a sign relating to Jesus, who (according to tradition outside Q) was buried "three days and three nights" in the earth. But this is just what we must assume, if Q knows nothing of Jesus' burial and resurrection! Attempts to find another interpretation of the sign of Jonah, e.g., that his preaching was the sign,²⁷ or that the repentance of the Gentiles was the sign,²⁸ do not erase *this* striking coincidence, nor does the absence of any specific reference to the whale in Luke. These arguments only show that there may be even more resemblances between Jonah and Jesus than this one.

It cannot be fairly maintained that the Q material knows nothing of bodily resurrection, as though its author(s) denied the doctrine. #60 (Mt 10:28; Lk 12:4-5) contrasts killing the body only with killing both body and soul. In #62 (Mt 10:39; Lk 17:33), Jesus assures his disciples, "He who loses his life will find it." #46 (Mt 8:11; Lk 13:28) pictures Abraham, Isaac and Jacob feasting in the eschatological kingdom. Nor is resurrection confined only to eschatology, for in #64 Jesus raises the dead during his public ministry.

In summary, the Q material sees Jesus (1) rebuking the Jews for killing the prophets while warning them they will soon not see him for some time; (2) urging his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him, to lose their lives that they might regain them; (3) warning his generation that the blood-guilt of many generations would come upon them, yet offering them one more sign, that of Jonah. It is difficult to avoid references to Jesus' death and resurrection in these statements, though it is clear that no atonement or resurrection theory is here worked out. The significance of this fact will depend strongly on whether Q is seen, for instance, as an independent sayings-document reflecting the peculiar theology of some early Christian sect, or as a group of sayings intended to supplement the Markan narratives and reflecting Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings.

²⁷ A. W. Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (CBCNEB: Cambridge: University Press, 1963), *ad. loc.*

²⁸ Paul D. May, "The Community of Q," (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1967), cited in Edwards, "Theology of Q," 268.

Parousia

More specific are the references in Q to the return of Jesus some time in the future. In #167 (Mt 23:37-39; Lk 13:34-35), Jesus ends his lamentation over Jerusalem with the statement:

Behold your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me (Mt: again) until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Here Jesus speaks of his return in the words of Psalm 118:26, employing the phrase “he that comes” discussed briefly in section two. This psalm also contains (v 22) the cryptic passage concerning the stone which the builders rejected (Triple Tradition, #204: Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10-11; Lk 20:17), which raises the possibility that Jesus is here alluding to his rejection and exaltation as well as to his return and acclamation.

In #158 (Mt 24:43-51; Lk 12:39-46), Jesus tells his followers to be prepared for his return, “for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” A similar theme is seen in #184 (Mt 24:26-41; Lk 17:22-30), where the coming of the Son of man is compared to the sudden coming of the flood in Noah’s day. In addition, this return will be unmistakable. “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Mt 24:27; parallel in Lk 17:24).

So the return of Jesus will be sudden and unexpected, but unmistakable, apparently exalted and glorious.

Judgment

Q also pictures a coming judgment which seems to occur at or after the parousia. John the Baptist warns the crowds of one coming after him (#4: Mt 3:11-12; Lk 3:16-17):

He will baptize you ... with fire, his winnowing fork is in his hand and we will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Presumably this is the time when Jesus’ opponents, who have rejected his message and his claims, will face their condemnation. To the Pharisees he says (#86: Mt 12:37; Lk 11:19):

If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?
Therefore they shall be your judges.

To Chorazin and Bethsaida, “It will be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you” (Lk 10:14, par. Mt 11:22). Similarly, Jesus sends out his disciples with the warning that “it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment (Lk: that day) for Sodom and Gomorrah” than for the towns that reject their message (Mt 9:15; Lk 10:12).

In fact, Jesus warns his whole generation, saying (#87: Mt 12:41; Lk 11:32):

The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

In this verse and the following one, the presence of long-dead Ninevites and the Queen of the South places the judgment at a future eschatological resurrection.

John the Baptist's remark above (#4) and the following passage picture Jesus himself as the eschatological judge (#42: Mt 7:22-23; Lk 13:26-27):

On that day many will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...? Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil doers."

Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me all you workers of iniquity."

Possibly in this category is the statement which says Jesus will acknowledge those who acknowledge him and deny those who deny him (#90: Mt 10: 32-33; Lk 12:8-9), which is set before the Father (Matthew) or the angels (Luke).

Thus we see a future judgment with Jesus as judge, apparently before God and his heavenly host, but certainly in the presence of the resurrected dead, where Jesus will judge men for their response to himself and to God's revelation, consign his foes to unquenchable fire, and gather his disciples ("wheat") to himself ("granary").

Kingdom

The chronological relationship of the kingdom to the other events described in this section is somewhat complex, but it is not out of place to discuss it last.

First of all, we should note that in some sense the kingdom of God begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, so that Jesus can say (#65: Mt 11:12-13; Lk 16:16):

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone enters it violently.

In agreement with this, Jesus sees the kingdom as present in his own ministry. He argues with the Pharisees (#86: Mt 12:28; Lk 8:20):

But if it is by the Spirit (Lk: finger) of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Yet there is also some form of the kingdom which works slowly and unobtrusively as in the parable of the leaven (#98: Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21), for neither the activity of John the Baptist nor Jesus could be called “unobtrusive”! Perhaps this is the form of the kingdom envisioned for Jesus’ followers in the period while he is to be away (#158: Faithful Servants; #195: Parable of the Talents/Pounds), when they are to be “salt” and “light” to the world (#20), when they are to face the persecutions discussed in section three (##19, 58, 61, 62).

There is a third aspect of the kingdom as well, which seems to be associated with the return of Jesus. His disciples are to pray for the kingdom to come (#30: Mt 6:10; Lk 11:12), to look forward to the day when they will receive the kingdom of heaven and its rewards (#19: Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23), and presumably to lay up treasures for it now in heaven (#32: Mt 6:19-21; Lk 12:33-34). At this time Jesus will return suddenly, judge his enemies, reward his friends, and begin his rule in association with his apostles, who will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (#189: Mt 19:28; Lk 22:29-30).

§5. Conclusions

Having now completed a brief examination of the so-called Q material for information on Jesus’ self-understanding, let us summarize the results. Notice that we have attempted to base our discussion on the exegesis of this material as it stands (using the definition of Q prescribed in section one), rather than upon assumptions about the pre-literary history of the material.

Summary of Results

We have seen that Q pictures Jesus as a man, yet much more than a man, in agreement with Tödt.²⁹

The transcendent sovereignty of the Son of man has attained so high an importance that prerogatives of God pass over to [him].

This is quite broadly evidenced in the Q material, although most of the data has been collected in our section two.

Jesus is seen as a coming king, who proclaims both a present and future kingdom, the former apparently being internal and individual, the latter glorious and universal. At the inception of the eschatological kingdom, Jesus as Son of man will judge men on the basis of their response to him before his parousia.

In addition, Jesus is seen as a miracle worker, even though the Q material (by our definition) contains almost no narrative. Likewise he appears as a preacher and teacher,

²⁹ Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition*, 52

or prophet and wise man, and it is not surprising that the discursive nature of Q gives more scope to the display of these characteristics.

But all of these characteristics may be summarized under the title “Messiah,” at least as that title is understood in the NT, where OT passage involving each of these aspects are applied to Jesus. Of course, the absence of the term “Messiah” from Q is surprising, yet “Son of man” seems to be a functional equivalent which retains a greater ambiguity. A certain mystery about the person of Jesus is as clearly present in Q as in Mark.

Jesus’ destiny is thus to reign, but not immediately. Instead, he is to be absent from the world for some time and then return suddenly in a glorious and unmistakable way. Jesus’ absence itself seems to be associated with opposition to him, and remarks occur which suggest that he will be killed by crucifixion. In that case, as we have suggested, resurrection would be assumed. But the only evidence whether this resurrection would be immediate or eschatological lies in the intriguing “sign of Jonah.” There is no discussion of the atoning significance of Jesus’ death, nor any statements about his person explicitly based upon his resurrection.

Significance of Results

What is the significance of the results we have just summarized? Some things may be said which are relatively model-independent; others will depend strongly upon one’s view of Q.

First of all, at the point when this material was first written down, we must contend with a belief in the person of Jesus which is consistent with his being deity but which does not seem to be consistent with a lower view of him. Of course Jesus is distinguished from the Father, but as much can be said for the mysterious “angel of the LORD” in the OT. This seems to go beyond representation of the Messiah in the extra-canonical apocalyptic literature.

Second, Jesus is pictured in his earthly ministry as a combination of miracle-worker, prophet and wise man. Any alleged disjunction of these features would thus have to precede Q.

Third, the kingdom which Jesus proclaims is likewise complex, both a present phenomenon spreading quietly like leaven in dough and an eschatological event to be seen everywhere like lightning. Any attempt to see a simpler picture must therefore also “go behind” Q.

On the other hand, the significance of other features, such as the negative ones: lack of explicit reference to the term “Christ,” to his death, atonement and resurrection – will depend strongly on what is to be made of the Q material. Thus if a minimal Q of about 200 verses is seen as a separate document which circulated independently and which represented the only theological statement acceptable to its author(s), then one may

imagine an early sect for which the death and resurrection of Jesus was unknown or (more defensibly) unimportant.

If, however, Q is seen as a larger document, perhaps including some of the material peculiar to Matthew or Luke, and overlapping the Triple Tradition in places, then it is not clear that any such theological distinctions can be maintained. Thus the term “Christ” appears in Mt 11:2, which is otherwise a part of Q by our working definition, and the “sign of Jonah” is quite reasonably explained in material peculiar to Matthew. As Palmer has ably pointed out,³⁰ on the assumption that Matthew and Luke used Mark, it would not be possible to reconstruct Mark were it not extant, for substantial parts of Mark were used by Matthew alone, and a number of verses occur in Luke alone. Therefore a minimal Q is methodologically suspect even though men may have insufficient data to agree on a larger specific version. But even the existence of Q as a written source is being increasingly questioned, as noted in section one.

Whether written or oral, independent or only a part of Matthew, the Q-material may have been intended as a supplement to the Markan narrative, as seems to be the case in regard to miracles. Thus Mark concentrates upon miracles and Q has almost none, yet Q mentions Jesus’ many miracles almost incidentally several times. Perhaps the fact that Mark’s rather scanty discourse material already includes material about the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection has led the compiler of Q to refrain from further illustrations of this subject.

³⁰ Humphrey Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 225-31.