

JEWISH ARGUMENTS AGAINST JESUS AT THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY C E
ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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The Fourth Gospel emanated from a Christian community which originated within a synagogal framework but, over the years, had broken loose from this setting.¹ The separation was at least in part the result of the excommunication of Christians from the synagogue (9:22, 34, 12:42, 16:2).² The rupture between the two religious groups was complete. In the ensuing aftermath of the separation, there was no real dialogue between them any more, only embitterment and polarization.

The question I want to address in this contribution is whether the actual criticism can be ascertained which the Jews presented against the Johannine Christians in the historical situation in which the Gospel was composed, that is, in the last decade of the first century C E.³ Is it possible, historically speaking,

¹ For various reconstructions of the history of the Johannine congregation, see, *inter alios*, J Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York and Evanston 1968 (Nashville 1979²), R E Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, New York-London 1979, J Louis Martyn, 'Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community,' *L'Évangile de Jean sources, redaction théologie* (ed M de Jonge, BETL 44) Gembloux/Louvain 1977 (repr 1987), reprinted in J Louis Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History Essays for Interpreters*, New York 1978, 91-121, M Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, London-Philadelphia 1989, M Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage ein Lösungsvorschlag* (WUNT 67), Tübingen 1993.

² The historical relationship between this excommunication of Christians from the synagogue and the incorporation of the so-called 'Burkat ha-Minim' in the *Shemoneh Esreh*, proposed and defended by J Louis Martyn in 1968 (see n 1), is now called into question by many authors on the subject. Useful discussions of this question include R Kimelman, 'Burkat ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,' *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (3 vols, ed E P Sanders *et alii*) London 1980-1982, 2: 226-244, D Moody Smith, 'Judaism and the Gospel of John,' *Jews and Christians Exploring the Past, Present, and Future* (ed J H Charlesworth) New York 1990, 76-96, Ph Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways'" from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,' *Jews and Christians The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70-135* (ed James D G Dunn, WUNT 66) Tübingen 1992, 1-25, esp 6-11, and P W van der Horst 'The Burkat ha-Minim in Recent Research,' in his *Hellenism - Judaism - Christianity Essays on Their Interaction*, Kampen 1994, 99-111.

³ R E Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols, The Anchor Bible 29-29A) New York 1966-1970, 1: lxxx-lxxxvi 'The Date of the Final Written Form of the Gospel.' The traditional view which locates the writing of the Gospel of John somewhere in Western Asia Minor, in or near Ephesus, seems to me to be very defensible. The clues for localizing the origin of this Gospel in Western Asia Minor include the references to a vehement conflict between Jews and Christians there in Rev 2:9 and 3:9, see Brown, *John* 1: 103-104. The arguments of K Wengst, *Bedrangte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus Der historische Ort des Johannes-evangeliums als Schlüssel zu seiner Interpretation* (Biblich-theologische Studien 5), Neukir-

to say something about the content of the objections the Jews raised against the Johannine Christians?

The question I intend to discuss is, of course, an extremely precarious one. The Gospel of John finds itself, to a high degree, in a literary and theological world of its own. Although most students of John's Gospel agree that it shows traces of the conflict between Jews and Christians of the late first century, it remains incredibly difficult to draw conclusions with regard to the historical context in which the Gospel took shape. We do not have the Jewish voice in the conflict. We only have what the author of the Gospel made the Jews say. Obviously, the portrayal which we have of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel is coloured by the biased perspective of the evangelist who saw them, he viewed them subjectively, negatively, and not without gross generalizations.⁴ The Jews in the Fourth Gospel are to a large extent the fabrication of the author and his community. Consequently, the criticisms leveled against Jesus or his followers by Jews in the Gospel of John cannot be taken *prima facie* to reflect the objections raised against Jesus and the Church by the Jewish opponents of the Johannine community.

A simple example taken from John 8:15 may illustrate this fact. In this passage the Pharisees say to Jesus: 'You are testifying on your own behalf, your testimony is not valid.'⁵ This objection betrays the evangelist's 'forensic' interest in the various testimonies in favour of Jesus' authority so clearly⁶ that one cannot possibly consider the content of John 8:15 an objection that was ever actually raised from Jewish quarters against Christians, let alone against Jesus. In this case, as in many similar cases, the exegete can do little more than assume that the evangelist makes the Jewish opponents in his narrative reject what he himself confessed, simply because he regarded the Jews as his opponents.

Yet, with due caution, it seems to me to be possible to isolate within the Fourth Gospel at least some traces of the objections Jews raised in the controversy with the Johannine Church. It is obviously true that the controversy is couched in a literary form. But at certain places within this literature, one can find an echo of the historical reality surrounding the Gospel and its author. I shall try to identify three objections raised from the Jewish side.

chen-Vluyn 1981, in favour of Syria as the place of composition have not convinced me.

⁴ On the 'Jews' in the Gospel of John, see J. Ashton, 'The Identity and Function of the *Iou daioi* in the Fourth Gospel,' *NT* 27 (1985) 40-75.

⁵ Quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, *The Holy Bible*, New York/Oxford 1989.

⁶ M. J. J. Menken, 'Jezus tegenover de Farizeeën in het vierde evangelie. Joh. 8,12-20,' *Joden- dom en vroeg christendom. Continuïteit en discontinuïteit* (eds. T. Baarda, H. J. de Jonge, and M. J. J. Menken) Kampen 1991, 103-117, esp. 107-109.

1 *Jesus is not the agent of God's definitive eschatological intervention, for the eschatological agent was to remain forever, whereas Jesus has died*

In John 12:34 the crowd of Jerusalem says to Jesus 'We have heard from the law that the messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?'⁷ This remark comes after a series of events (12:20-29) which have led to Jesus' announcement that he would be lifted up from the earth (12:32). (a) Some Greeks, *i.e.*, gentiles, come to see Jesus (12:20-22). (b) Jesus proclaims that now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23-26). (c) The voice of God comes from heaven saying that He has glorified his (*i.e.*, God's) name and will glorify it again (12:28-29). (d) Then Jesus announces the judgment of the world, the defeat of the ruler of the world, and his own exaltation from the earth (12:31-32). It is to the announcement of Jesus' exaltation that the crowd reacts with the objection mentioned (12:34) 'We have heard from the law that the messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?'

For several reasons the reaction of the crowd is most peculiar. First, it is surprising that the crowd understands perfectly that by 'being lifted up' Jesus means, among other things, 'disappearing definitively', 'not being present any more'. The evangelist characterises the people in Jerusalem as if they were already fully acquainted with the idea of Jesus' departure and absence after his death. With such a depiction of the crowd, this understanding of Jesus' words, which Christians had not reached until after Jesus' death, is ascribed by the evangelist to the crowd in Jerusalem before Jesus' death.

Secondly, it is very strange that, according to John, the people do not ask *to what place* Jesus was to be lifted up, or *how* he was to be lifted up, or *for what reason* this was to happen, or *on what ground* Jesus believed that he would be lifted up. It is also remarkable that the crowd does not ask why Jesus even utilises the phrase 'lifted up' at all, instead of simply saying that he will die. The evangelist pretends that all these obvious questions were not questions to the crowd at all. Instead of posing one of the more predictable questions just mentioned, the crowd is depicted as raising a christological objection. According to the law⁸ the messiah would remain forever, but Jesus said that he

⁷ For an instructive discussion of this passage, see M. de Jonge, *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (SBL/SBS 11) Missoula 1977, Chapter IV 'Jewish Expectations about the "Messiah" according to the Fourth Gospel' 77-116, esp. 94-96.

⁸ W. C. van Unnik, 'The Quotation from the Old Testament in John 11:34,' *NT 3* (1959) 174-179, reprinted in W. C. van Unnik, *Sparsa collecta: The Collected Essays* (3 vols., NT S 29 31), Leiden 1973-1983, I: 64-69, has argued that John is probably referring to Ps 89:37. Other candidates are Ps 60 (61): 8, Ps 109 (110): 4, and Isa 9:6. For the use of 'law' as a design

would be lifted up. The objection is clearly that if Jesus will be taken away, he cannot be the messiah.

We see that the crowd in John does not say what they might have been expected to say, and that their objection is something very unexpected. The reaction of the crowd is, so to speak, illogical. This is probably an indication that the evangelist, in lieu of developing a more natural course of his narrative, has allowed the story to be determined by truly historical, contemporary, current Jewish criticism of the Christian recognition of Jesus as the messiah. If so, the content of that criticism must have been that Jesus could not be the messiah since he had died and disappeared.

According to the Jews of John's day the death of Jesus prevented him from answering the description of God's definitive eschatological agent given in the Jewish eschatological literature. The notion that the anointed one of the Lord would bring a lasting period of bliss, occurs in, *inter alia*, *Pss. Sol.* 17:4, *I Enoch* 49:1; 62:14, and *Orac. Sib.* III, 49-50.⁹ The same idea occurs in the Qumran fragment 4Q246, col. II, lines 5 and 9: 'His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom.' The Jewish opponents argued that, because Jesus had died, and had not brought this lasting period of bliss, Jesus was not the definitive eschatological agent Christians believed him to be.

We can not be sure, of course, that the Jewish opponents at the end of the first century C.E. phrased their criticism in the form 'Jesus is not *the Christ* ...', or 'Jesus is not *the messiah*' Jewish eschatological expectations at the end of the first century C.E. varied widely, and there is no clear evidence that warrants the idea that Jews of this period used the term 'the Christ' or 'the messiah' as a standard term for God's final eschatological representative. The phrase 'the Christ', which John places on the lips of the Jewish opponents in 12:34, probably reflects standard Christian usage. The Jewish opponents themselves may well have used some other phrase. Nevertheless, it is plausible that John 12:34 is a reaction to historical, contemporary criticism from Jewish quarters. This criticism was that Jesus could not be God's definitive eschatological agent because he had died and had not remained forever.

nation of scripture in general, see e.g. John 10:34; 15:25; and W. Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (eds. K. and B. Aland; 6th edition) Berlin/New York 1988, 1099, *sub voce*, νόμος 4b.

⁹ These sources are referred to by, e.g., C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John*, London 1956, 356 (2nd ed.; London 1978, 427).

2. Jesus was someone who led the Jewish people astray.

The Gospel of John relates in chapter 7 that Jesus went from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Booths. Before Jesus appeared in the temple, a somewhat secret discussion, something like a whispering campaign, took place among the crowds in Jerusalem. 'While some were saying, "He is a good Man," others were saying, "No, he is deceiving (πλανῶ) the crowd"' (7:12). In vv. 47-49 this criticism is repeated. In this passage the Pharisees fear that even the temple police 'have been deceived' (πεπλάνησθε).

Such a scene, in which a discussion takes place in which various opinions about Jesus are recorded one after another, is obviously a traditional literary device. Other examples occur in John 7:40-44, 9:16, and 10:19-21.¹⁰

The literary construction of John 7:12 is also part of a more comprehensive literary scheme used by the evangelist in chapter 7. According to this scheme, Jesus, before coming to the temple in v. 14, acted 'in secret' (7:4 ἐν κρυπτῷ), but from v. 14 onward, after going up into the temple, Jesus stepped into the limelight and acted publicly.

The influence of the literary form of John 7:1-14, and especially of 7:12, is therefore obvious in the text. Does this also mean, however, that the contents of v. 12 with the various opinions about Jesus are merely a literary or Johannine concoction without any ground in, or impulse from, historical reality?

Here it is relevant to notice that, by the end of the first century C.E., the argument that Jesus was a deceiver of the Jewish people occurs several times. In Matt 27:63 the chief priests and the Pharisees complain before Pilate about 'that impostor' Jesus (ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος). In Luke 23:2 the members of the Sanhedrin accuse Jesus before Pilate saying: 'We found this man perverting our nation' (διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν). According to the chief priests, the leaders, and the Jewish people, Jesus is one who 'was perverting the people' (Luke 23:14 ἀποστρέφοντα τὸν λαόν). Justin Martyr states that Jesus' healings and raising of dead people gave the Jews cause to call Jesus 'a sorcerer ... and a deceiver of the people' (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 69:7: μάγον ... καὶ λαοπλάνον). Justin also says that, after Jesus' death, the Jews of Jerusalem sent out missionaries into the world in order to caution the Jews about the sect of 'a certain Jesus, a Galilean deceiver' (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 108:2: ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ τινος Γαλιλαίου πλάνου). That Jews spoke about Jesus as a πλάνος is also suggested by *T. Levi* 16:3 (2nd century C.E.) and *Acts Thom.* 48 and 96

¹⁰ See also 7:25-31, 46-52; 11:36-37, 11:45-46; furthermore Mark 6:14-16 par and 8:28-30 par.

(3rd century C E) In this connection it is perhaps significant to note that, according to *b Sanh* 43a (and 107b),¹¹ Jesus had been killed 'because he had practised sorcery and led Israel astray'¹²

From the last quarter of the first century C E Christians were apparently convinced that Jews considered Jesus a deceiver who had led Israel astray. But the extensive prevalence of this conviction among Christians seems to justify the conclusion that, by the end of the first century C E, there was indeed something like a standard accusation which Jews used against Jesus to the effect that Jesus was one who had practised sorcery and deluded Israel. An additional argument for assuming that Jews really used this argument against Jesus may be found in the fact that the accusation of *πλανᾶν* or *πλανος* was quite common between religious groups of different convictions. Christians themselves readily used this accusation in disputes with other Christians, see, e.g., 1 Tim 4 1, 1 John 2 26, 3 7, 2 John 7, 2 Thess 2 11, etc.

It should be noted that blaming someone as a *πλανος* (deceiver) was not an unequivocal accusation. The terms *πλανος* and *πλανᾶν* (deceive) have more than one connotation. In Matt 27 63 the nuance is that of a false prophet. In John 7 the primary nuance is that of a false teacher who disseminates erroneous, misleading doctrines about the law (see 7 47-49). Elsewhere the deceit of the deceivers is associated with false messianic claims (e.g. Luke 21 8, 2 John 7). The overtones of the words *πλανᾶν* and *πλανος* in early Christian and contemporary Jewish sources vary widely.¹³ It is no longer possible, therefore, to ascertain what the Jewish accusation that Jesus was 'a deceiver' precisely implied, when Jews confronted the Johannine Christians with this reproach. There can hardly be any doubt, however, that John yields sufficient grounds to assume that one of the Jewish arguments against Christians at the end of the first century C E was that Jesus was a deceiver who had led Israel astray. It is probable, as Barrett rightly states, that John knew this charge as one already circulating among the Jews in Asia in his day.¹⁴

¹¹ H L Strack, P Billebeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 vols., Munchen 1926-1928, 1 1023-1024 (ad Matt 26 66), sub 5b

¹² The passages quoted here are discussed more fully in a section entitled 'Jewish polemic and Christian responses' in Graham N Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew*, Edinburgh 1992, 237-246

¹³ In Luke 23 2, 14 the reference is to a political deceiver of the public and a rebel, but here the words *planan* and *planos* are not used

¹⁴ C K Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* 259 (314 in 2nd ed.) Cf R E Brown, *John* 1 307, on 7 12 'deceiving the crowd' 'This was a charge advanced by the Jews in their debates with the Christians (Justin *Tyrpho* lxix 7)'

3. *Jesus is not the agent of God's definitive eschatological intervention because the place where he comes from is known, a village on earth; he has not appeared by revelation from the secrecy of God.*

In John 7:27 the evangelist makes the people of Jerusalem declare that, in their opinion, Jesus cannot be the messiah since they know where Jesus is from. It is their conviction that when the messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.

In the view of the evangelist the Jewish opposition against Jesus during his lifetime did not only come from the Jewish leaders, but also from ordinary people in Jerusalem. In order to substantiate this view the evangelist has to place some argument against Jesus on the people's lips. The argument he uses is: he cannot be the messiah, for we know from where he comes. The reference is to Jesus' descent from Galilee (7:41), more particularly, from Nazareth (1:45; 18:5,7; 19:19). A related objection had already been raised against Jesus by the Jews in 6:42: 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?'

The argument against Jesus in John 7:27 is clearly phrased in typically Johannine language; γινώσκω with indirect question, πόθεν + εἰμί (to be), and οἶδα with indirect question, are favourite phrases in John and typical of his style.¹⁵ Yet it is possible to find here an echo of a Jewish anti-Jesus polemic that really existed.

According to several Jewish apocalyptic writings from the end of the first century C.E., the agent of God's eschatological intervention will appear through his being 'revealed' after having been hidden for a long time. This is the way the Son of Man is expected to come in the Book of Parables in *1 Enoch* (62:29) as well as in 4 Ezra (13:32).¹⁶ *1 Enoch* 62:7 says: 'From the beginning the Son of Man was hidden', but 69:29 announces that 'from then on ... the Son of Man has appeared.' In 4 Ezra 13 the Son of Man is said to come 'from the sea', but the sea is an image for the secrecy in which God keeps the Son of Man hidden from the eyes of those who dwell on earth (13:52) until he will be 'revealed' (13:32). Ultimately, the Son of Man tradition adopted in *1 Enoch* and 4 Ezra goes back to Daniel 7. But in *1 Enoch* as well as in 4 Ezra,

¹⁵ E. Ruckstuhl & P. Dschulnigg, *Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage im Johannesevangelium. Die johanneischen Sprachmerkmale auf dem Hintergrund des Neuen Testaments und des zeitgenössischen hellenistischen Schrifttums* (NTOA 17), Freiburg i/d Schweiz-Göttingen 1991, 108, 145.

¹⁶ On the question of whether there was an expectation of the Son of Man in first-century Judaism at all (there was) and whether *1 Enoch* and 4 Ezra reflect this expectation (they do), see John J. Collins, 'The Son of Man in First-Century Judaism,' *NTS* 38 (1992) 448-466.

the coming Son of Man is also designated as 'messiah' In *1 Enoch* 48 10 and 52 4 he is called 'his (that is, God's) messiah' In 4 Ezra the Man from the sea of chapter 13 has to be identified with the Lion of chapter 12, which is called 'the messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days'

On the basis of such traditions concerning the Son of Man as exemplified in *1 Enoch* and 4 Ezra, Jews could claim, therefore, that for Jesus to be the messiah, he ought to have come forward from God's secrecy, from outside human history, from the realm of God, and not from a village in Galilee According to the apocalyptic tradition to which these Jews appealed, the place from which the messiah originated prior to his public appearance in the world was *not on earth, but in the sphere of God*

The objection raised against Jesus' messiahship in John 7 27 is so clearly in agreement with the contemporary Son of Man tradition as preserved in *1 Enoch* and 4 Ezra that it is difficult not to assume that the objection is based on that Son of Man tradition The objection is likely to have existed and circulated in Jewish circles outside the Johannine community

For the Jewish, non-Christian origin of the objection to Jesus' messiahship voiced in John 7 27 the following observation may serve as an additional argument It is almost unimaginable that any Christian would call attention to the incompatibility of Jesus' descent from a village or town on earth with the tradition of the apocalyptic Son of Man who was supposed to come from the realm of God No Christian would have allowed the recognition of Jesus' messianic authority to be endangered by such a reference to the Son of Man tradition The objection must stem, therefore, from Jewish opposition against the Christians

The reason why the evangelist John was not afraid to record this objection in his Gospel is that, in his theological view, Jesus' descent from Nazareth did not matter anyhow, since Jesus came from God (1 1-14, 31, 7 2-18, etc) Jesus had been hidden with God Subsequently, he had been revealed by God The people of Jerusalem, however, do not know this They think they know where Jesus is from, but in reality they are ignorant of his true place of origin from the Father (6 41, 7 27-29, 42, 52, 8 23, 9 29, 19 9)

This entire discussion illustrates a typical example of Johannine irony John observes that, for Jesus to be the messiah, the Jews of Jerusalem state the condition that he must not have come from a place they know However, they do not recognise that Jesus, by virtue of his coming from God, fulfils their condition exactly From John's perspective, Jesus is the messiah according to the condition which the Jews of Jerusalem themselves establish But they simply fail to see this

An uncertain case Jesus cannot be the messiah, for the messiah must not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem (7 41-42) A Jewish or a Christian argument?

John 7 40-42 has the literary form we met already in 7 12 a number of different opinions about Jesus is enumerated one after another¹⁷ Some in the crowd say he is the prophet Others say he is the messiah Others again say he is certainly not the messiah The last mentioned opinion is backed up with the following argumentation 'Surely the messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' (7 41-42)

Commentators are divided as to the precise intention of the evangelist in vv 41-42 There are two possibilities

(1) The evangelist was convinced that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but he represents the opponents of vv 41-42 as ignorant of Jesus' descent from Bethlehem If this is what John means, he presents the opponents' objection as without ground, Jesus' messiahship remains unaffected

(2) The evangelist himself was ignorant of Jesus' descent from Bethlehem He introduces an existing argument against the Christian claim that Jesus is the messiah, viz that in order to be the messiah, Jesus ought to have come from Bethlehem The evangelist does not care to answer this objection because he considered both this objection and the two other opinions about Jesus recorded in vv 40-41 irrelevant¹⁸ What matters to the evangelist is not whether or not Jesus is called prophet or messiah, nor whether or not he is from Bethlehem, but that he comes from God

The possibility cannot be ruled out that the evangelist was aware of the tradition of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem¹⁹ In that case he makes the opponents fall into the trap of their own ignorance their objection, based on the scripture, is in fact a confirmation of Jesus' messiahship Such an ironical strategy has good parallels in John's Gospel²⁰

However, it is also possible that the evangelist himself was unaware of the

¹⁷ See above, n 10

¹⁸ M. de Jonge, *Jesus Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* 93 'It is clear that, by assigning to 7 40-44 the place in the structure of chapter 7 which he did assign to it, he [i.e. John] not only indicates that an inner-Jewish discussion of prophethood and messiahship connected with Jesus does not penetrate into the real secret of Jesus' mission, but also that the matter of Jesus' Davidic descent and the question of his birthplace are not of essential importance'

¹⁹ Barrett, *St John* 273 (330 in 2nd ed.) 'We may feel confident that John was aware of the tradition that Jesus was born at Bethlehem'

²⁰ Brown *John* 1 cxxxvi, R.E. Brown *The Birth of the Messiah*, New York 1977 516

tradition of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. The stories about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2, Luke 2) are no doubt relatively late,²¹ they probably originated as a Christian answer to such criticism as expressed in John 7 42.²²

In either case the evangelist must have heard that Jesus' messiahship was (or could be) called into question by the fact that Jesus was not known to be a native of Bethlehem in accordance with Mic 5 1.

The problem, however, is that this objection could arise just as easily among Christians, whenever they read Mic 5 1, as among non-Christian Jews. The problem was solved by Matthew and Luke independently by the end of the first century C.E. when they located Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. But it cannot be ascertained whether their solution was an apologetic reaction to an objection raised by non-Christian Jews, or by Christians who wished to see Mic 5 1 fulfilled by Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. An additional problem is the fact that, in Jewish literature, apart from the exegetical literature on Mic 5 1, the issue of Bethlehem as the messiah's birthplace does not play a role until rather late (*y Ber 5a, Midr Rabba 51 on Lam*).²³ The possibility remains, therefore, that the objection launched against Jesus' messiahship in John 7 41-42 originated in Christian circles. We cannot be sure, then, that we are confronted with a Jewish objection in this passage.

Conclusions

The Gospel of John mentions several objections raised by Jews against the Christian assessment of Jesus. Some of these objections can only be interpreted as products of John's literary and theological strategy. Other objections, however, reflect arguments that already existed outside the Johannine community and were leveled against the Christian appreciation of Jesus by non-Christian Jews in the late first century C.E. The latter category of objections includes

²¹ I do not believe that John knew any of the synoptic Gospels. On this issue, see now D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth Century Research* (Minneapolis 1992), J. D. G. Dunn, 'John and the Oral Gospel Tradition,' *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (ed. H. Wansbrough, JSNTSup 64), Sheffield 1991, 351-379, and D. Moody Smith, 'Historical Issues and the Problem of John and the Synoptics,' *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge* (ed. M. C. de Boer, JSNTSup 84), Sheffield 1993, 252-267.

²² Pace R. E. Brown in his otherwise illuminating 'Appendix III. Birth at Bethlehem,' *The Birth of the Messiah* 512-516.

²³ R. E. Brown, *John* 1 330, idem, *Birth of the Messiah* 513-515, Strack-Billerbeck 1 83.

the following:²⁴

1. Jesus cannot be the agent of God's definitive eschatological intervention since, according to the scripture, that agent would remain forever, whereas Jesus has died (John 12:34).

2. Jesus was a deceiver who has led the people of Israel astray (John 7:12, 47).

3. Jesus cannot be God's final eschatological envoy because Jesus' place of origin (Nazareth in Galilee) is known, whereas God's eschatological envoy, before being revealed and appearing publicly in the world, was expected to have been kept hidden in God's secrecy (John 7:27).

²⁴ This list of objections does not claim to be exhaustive. Other issues may have played a role as well. James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, London-Philadelphia 1991, 220-229, e.g., convincingly argues that, for proponents of emerging rabbinic Judaism, Christian claims for Jesus as God's self-revelation had gone too far. From the Jewish perspective, Johannine Christianity had abandoned the fundamental confession that God is one.