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Jesus and the Rites of Repentance

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The question as to whether Jesus preached repentance has been discussed in historical Jesus research over the past twenty years, apparently without any scholarly consensus being at hand. This article seeks to eliminate some unnecessary confusion from the debate by investigating early Jewish conceptions of repentance and suggesting that a distinction should be maintained between moral and ritual repentance. It argues that Jesus, while most probably expecting moral repentance of his followers, did not uphold the customary rites of repentance. The article suggests some reasons for Jesus' avoidance of traditional penitential prayers and practices, which may account for the instances of strong criticism against him indicated by the synoptic Gospels.

More than twenty years have passed since E. P. Sanders first offered his radical reinterpretation of the historical Jesus' attitude to sinners, repentance, and forgiveness.[1] Apart from making a clear, and largely acclaimed, distinction between the two categories of 'common people' and 'wicked' in first-century Palestine, Sanders proposed a new explanation to account for the seeming fact that Jesus' behaviour towards the latter was a matter of dispute between Jesus himself and at least some of his co-religionists. If Jesus simply preached that God would take pity on the wicked and forgive them if only they repented, Sanders argued, he would not have been criticized but rather praised for what he was doing. Nor can we conceive realistically of a situation where Jesus provoked serious opposition for reversing the theoretical order of 'repentance first, then forgiveness' to an opposite 'forgiveness first, then repentance'.[2] Sanders instead

1 E. P. Sanders, 'Jesus and the Sinners', *JSNT* 19 (1983) 5–36. Sanders reiterated his proposal in *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) 174–211, and, in slightly more cautious terms, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993) 226–37.

2 N. H. Young, '"Jesus and the Sinners": Some Queries', *JSNT* 24 (1985) 73–5, challenges the latter argument by pointing to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, where the question of how faith, good works, and justification are interrelated played no minor role. However, this simply serves to make the point: the sixteenth-century debate presupposed a long chain of events and theological re-interpretations – among others, Paul's theologizing of the Christ event, Augustine's reading of Paul, Luther's reading

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suggested that what was so controversial about Jesus' attitude could have been that he did not require the wicked to repent at all. As John's effort to prepare Israel eschatologically had not succeeded in bringing together the entire people through the traditional means of repentance, Jesus sought and found another way to include even the wicked into the coming Kingdom: by *not* demanding repentance, restitution, and reform of lifestyle.

This complete inversion of the earlier scholarly picture of Jesus was thoroughly questioned by Dale C. Allison a few years later.[3] According to Allison, the theme of repentance is attested far too broadly in the synoptic Gospels to be explained away as the result of redactional theologizing. In the synoptic tradition Allison finds represented those four aspects that he distinguishes within the concept of repentance – 'restitution, confession, prayer for forgiveness, and the resolve to avoid future sins'.[4] Taken together with the sayings that express a disappointment on Jesus' part over Israel's rejection of the Baptist and Jesus himself, and the fact that the early Church preached repentance, this attestation warrants for Allison that Sanders's proposal cannot stand. However, Allison concedes that there may be a grain of truth in Sanders's theory. Perhaps Jesus' view of repentance did differ somehow from other contemporary views.[5] Similarly, Norman Young's 'queries' in response to Sanders's article include the suggestion that Jesus entertained a 'different concept of repentance', a concept that did not involve the ritual aspect or aspects of repenting.[6] In my view, a clearer notion of what repentance actually meant to first-century Jews, not only as moral action but also as ritual behaviour, is precisely what we need in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of Jesus' attitude and the criticism it occasioned. The present article aims at contributing to this understanding.

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of Augustine, and Luther's religious experience. Only at the end of this chain would it appear meaningful to analyse the relationship between repentance and forgiveness in temporal terms – or at least no one seems to have argued about these distinctions one and a half millennia earlier.

3 D. C. Allison, 'Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E.P. Sanders', *JSNT* 29 (1987) 57–78. Others who have criticized Sanders's picture include B. D. Chilton, 'Jesus and the Repentance of E. P. Sanders', *TynBul* 39 (1988) 1–18, and J. D. Choi, *Jesus' Teaching on Repentance* (Binghamton: Global Publications, 2000).

4 Allison, 'Jesus and the Covenant', 71.

5 Allison, 'Jesus and the Covenant', 70.

6 Young, '"Jesus and the Sinners"', 75; see also the earlier remark by P. Fiedler, *Jesus und die Sünder* (BET 3; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976) 228. N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Vol 2, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 257–8, claims that the major point at which Jesus' conception of repentance differed from that of his contemporaries was the non-sacrificial character of the former. The present article does not, for practical reasons, go into Jesus' view on the Temple and its cult; suffice it to say that sacrifice does not seem to be as central to the first-century Jewish concept of repentance as one would perhaps expect.

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The Necessity of Moral Repentance

'Repent' and 'repentance' are commonly employed to translate μετανοεῖν and μετάνοια in the NT. It is usually acknowledged that these Greek words, in their turn, represent the well-known Semitic תשובה concept. If indeed John the Baptist and Jesus did call for 'repentance', they probably used the Aramaic verb תוב to designate the phenomenon.[7] The theme of repentance, the return to a way of life in accordance with God's covenant with Israel, is nearly ubiquitous in first-century Judaism. Repentance in the moral sense – ceasing to sin and instead doing what the Torah prescribes – is referred to already in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew verb שוב means both to 'turn away' *from* evil deeds and to 'turn' *to* God and the commandments.[8] The underlying idea of the latter usage appears to be that God's covenant with Israel is irrevocable and that it is always possible for Israel to return to keeping her covenantal obligations. A similar notion is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. To give just one example, the *Rule of the Community* speaks both of 'turning away from evil' and 'turning (back) to truth'.[9] In the Greek deuterocanonical books and pseudepigrapha, μετανοεῖν is one of the terms employed to refer to the same process.[10] In non-Jewish literature, this Greek word lacks two important connotations inherent in the Hebrew verb. First, μετανοεῖν may denote a purely intellectual process which does not necessarily lead to practical action. It may at times be translated simply as 'to change one's mind' or 'to feel regret'.[11] Second, the Greek term does not imply the notion of turning back, returning to an ideal relationship which once existed. However, when employed in Jewish writings, these two aspects, originally deriving from belief in the covenant,

7 J. G. Crossley, 'The Semitic Background to Repentance in the Teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus', *JSHJ* 2 (2004) 138–57.

8 Turning away from sin, e.g., 1 Kgs 13.33; Jer 36.7; Ezek 18.21; Jonah 3.8, 10; turning to God, e.g. 1 Sam 7.3; Neh 1.9; Isa 55.7.

9 1QS 5.1, 14 and 6.15 respectively. A few more examples of moral repentance from Qumran: 1QH[a] 6.24; 8.25; 14.6; 4Q171 ii, 2–4. See further B. Nitzan, 'Repentance in the Dead Sea Scrolls', *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (2 vols.; ed. P. W. Flint and J. C. Vanderkam; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 2:145–70 (146–52).

10 Crossley, 'The Semitic Background', presents a rather elaborate theory to explain the Gospels' use of μετανοεῖν to represent תוב/שוב, as opposed to LXX's predilection for ἐπιστρέφειν. This does not appear as puzzling as Crossley would have it, if one takes into view the fact that μετανοεῖν was actually employed for שוב in Ecclus 48.15. While ἐπιστρέφειν stays closer to the Semitic original, μετανοεῖν is more of an idiomatic Greek expression. Since the translation of Jesus' and the Baptist's sayings into Greek was a process that begun already in oral proclamation of the gospel, it comes as no surprise that a literal, word-for-word correspondence with the 'original' is lacking.

11 See e.g. Plutarch *Moralia* 163f; *Galba* 6.4. On other occasions, non-Jewish authors do attach notions of changed behaviour to the terminology of repentance, as pointed out by G. D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke–Acts* (Academia Biblica 4; Atlanta: SBL, 2002) 66–9.

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are attached also to the Greek expression. This can be seen from a passage in the Greek text of Ben Sira:

> Yet to those who repent (μετανοοῦσιν) he grants a return, and he encourages those who are losing hope. Turn back (ἐπίστρεφε) to the Lord and forsake (ἀπόλειπε) your sins; pray in his presence and lessen your offense. Return (ἐπάναγε) to the Most High and turn away (ἀπόστρεφε) from iniquity, and hate intensely what he abhors. (Ecclus 17.24–26 NRSV)

Philo devotes one section of *De virtutibus* to the virtue of repentance (μετάνοια; *Virt* 175–86). He makes clear that the 'first and most necessary' act of repentance is the transition or return from idolatry to monotheism, that is, the return to the covenant that we have already seen forms the basis of the Jewish concept of repentance (178–80). Still, it remains necessary for all Jews, not only those who have explicitly apostasized, to repent from their sins by keeping the Law (180–83). Whatever else 'repentance' may mean to Philo, it certainly involves 'improvement' (βελτίωσις) of life.[12]

This is naturally not to say that all first-century Jews would have shared a common opinion on what it meant to repent. For the Qumran sectarians, adherence to the community's way of life was the primary expression of their status as people who had 'returned to the law'. They may also have viewed their repentance as predetermined by God rather than as a voluntary act.[13] At the other end of the spectrum, Philo regarded repentance as an act of human free will and its objective as a more sophisticated way of thinking and acting. Notably, though, all Jewish descriptions of repentance in this period seem to agree that repentance includes turning away from evil, turning (back) to God and his covenant and, as a result of this, a reformed way of life. The fact that few first-century pieces of Jewish literature deal with repentance as their primary topic should not be taken as evidence that the concept was unimportant. Like monotheistic worship, for example, repentance was taken for granted as a characteristic expression of Jewish piety. It was not a sectarian concern that had to be intensely promoted in rivalry with competing positions. This explains why almost *none* of our sources treat repentance as their principal concern, while nearly *all* of them mention the concept with approval.

12 Philo *Abr* 17; *PraemPoen* 167; also *Fug* 99, 160; *SpecLeg* I.102–103. See P. Borgen, *Philo, John and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (BJS 131; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 210–6; D. Winston, 'Philo's Doctrine of Repentance', *The School of Moses: Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion: In Memory of Horst R. Moehring* (SPM 1; ed. J. P. Kenney; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 29–40; E. Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (SPM 2; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996) 203; Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke–Acts*, 87–9.

13 See D. A. Lambert, 'Topics in the History of Repentance: From the Hebrew Bible to Early Judaism and Christianity' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004) 99–146.

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Did Jesus share the notion of moral reform as an intrinsic part of the sinners' returning to God? As has frequently been noted, the theme of high moral standards recurs in all the major sources usually recognized by scholars as having some potential of preserving Jesus' teaching – Q, Mark, M, L, John, and *Thomas*.[14] Furthermore, the theme of moral reform recurs not only in different sources but also in a variety of forms: in overt ethical instruction (Q 6.27–30), in Jesus' parables (Matt 21.28–31), and in the narrative material (Luke 19.1–10). This is not to deny that some of these passages derive from redactional activity or to allege that all of them are necessarily sayings of the historical Jesus or episodes that faithfully narrate events that indeed took place. On the other hand, in the face of the occurrence of this theme throughout a broad spectrum of forms and sources, it is hardly possible to dismiss these passages *in toto* as creations of the early Church, for that would invalidate the criterion of multiple attestation and almost exclude the possibility of knowing anything about the historical Jesus.[15] Are we to think, then, that Jesus demanded high morals of some people but not of others? That is difficult to imagine, at least if we operate within the paradigm of a Jesus who expected the coming of God's kingdom and regarded it his mission to prepare Israel for this eschatological event. Provided that Jesus' concept of the kingdom did not differ totally from all other known Jewish eschatological conceptions, he would have envisioned it as a state of affairs where people were going to live harmoniously in obedience to God's will. If, as appears likely, Jesus intended his meals to anticipate the eschatological banquet, it seems inconceivable that he would have consented to 'tax collectors and harlots' continuing their respective ungodly practices while participating in this realization of the kingdom.[16] Rather, he would have expected anyone who participated in these meals to adjust their behaviour in accordance with Jesus' own practice and the demands of the coming kingdom. Not surprisingly, a majority of scholars appear to have found incredible the notion of a Jesus who did not demand radical moral reform of those sinners who were willing to follow him, in one sense or another.[17] If 'repentance' is used in its broad

14 Q 6.27–46; 11.42; 16.13; Mark 3.35; 7.8–13, 20–23; 9.41–48; 10.17–27; Matt 5.17–37; Luke 16.19–31; John 5.14; cf. 8.11; *GThom* 45. See also Chilton, 'Jesus and the Repentance', 2–4. Throughout the present article, I will suppose the accuracy of the common two-source hypothesis, including the assumption that Q existed as a written source for Matt and Luke, although I do not regard my argument here to be dependent on that theory.

15 By and large, I accept the methodology and criteria for historical Jesus research laid out by J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991–) 1:167–95.

16 On the eschatological dimension of Jesus' meals, see, e.g., O. Hofius, *Neutestamentliche Studien* (WUNT 132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 32.

17 See Fiedler, *Jesus und die Sünder*, 226; *idem*, 'Gottes Vergebungsbereitschaft und Heilswille', *Jesus von Nazaret – Spuren und Konturen* (ed. L. Schenke et al.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004) 164–92 (166–8); Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 252–8.

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sense of changing to an improved way of life, we may safely assume that Jesus did call sinners to repentance.

Ritual Repentance

But if Jesus indeed expected moral reform, as we have found likely to be the case, how should one explain the criticism levelled at him for consorting with 'sinners'? It is important to bear in mind that repentance, as commonly understood in first-century Judaism, entailed not only moral reform but also ritual elements. While many definitions of 'rite' or 'ritual' have been proposed in comparative religious studies, the terms here refer to

> those conscious and voluntary, repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences. (Verbal behavior such as chant, song, and prayer are of course included in the category of bodily actions.)[18]

This definition has the advantage of clearly excluding what was termed 'moral repentance' above: both the interior feeling of regret, which is mental and therefore non-bodily, and the outward actions of a morally reformed life, which may be bodily but not stylized or symbolic. It leaves us with a set of symbolic actions which first-century Jews would normally perform as an integral part of repenting.

At the centre of ritual repentance in this sense were the confession and prayer for forgiveness noted by Allison.[19] Strictly speaking, the two need not and cannot normally be separated, for a confession of sin usually implies a request for forgiveness, and the latter naturally presupposes that one admits to have failed. Penitential prayer is explicitly mentioned as a means of repentance in a few passages in the Hebrew Bible. Some of these passages depict penitential prayer as the correct way of repenting for those who cannot, for one reason or another, reconcile God through sacrifice in the Temple.[20] Elsewhere this kind of prayer is employed also by those who, on the narrative level, do have access to the Temple.[21] The phenomenon recurs with increasing frequency in early Jewish literature in Greek. The book of Baruch includes penitential prayer, together with sacrifices, in its description of national repentance after the destruction of Jerusalem (Bar 2.8). The *Prayer of Manasseh* expounds the Chronicler's brief mention of the king's prayer for forgiveness (2 Chron 33.18–19) by giving the peniten-

18 E. M. Zuesse, 'Ritual', *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols.; ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987) 12:405–22 (405).

19 Allison, 'Jesus and the Covenant', 71.

20 1 Kgs 8.46–50 = 2 Chron 6.36–39; Lam 3.40–42; Dan 9.13; Hos 14.2–3; Jonah 3.8.

21 1 Kgs 8.33 = 2 Chron 6.24; 2 Chron 33.18–19 LXX.

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tial prayer text in full and describing Manasseh as 'repenting'.[22] Furthermore, Ben Sira regards penitential prayer as a proper way of repenting not only of full-scale apostasy or in times of national calamity, but also in the everyday piety of the righteous (Ecclus 17.24–25; 39.5).[23] Even Philo, for all his spiritualizing tendencies, sometimes indicates that repentance without an explicit confession of sin is not complete.[24] Josephus confirms the picture, for example in his reworking of 1 Kgs 21.27. In the biblical narrative, King Ahab, on hearing Elijah's words of judgment, rends his clothes, mourns, and fasts in sackcloth. Josephus adds that it was also by confessing (ἀνθομολογούμενος) his sins that Ahab appeased God.[25]

Most relevant to the present topic, however, are some texts that prescribe public confession of sin for those who have actually renounced the covenant more definitely than through occasional deviation from the commandments. The first is the well-known passage in the *Rule of the Community* that presumably describes the annual renewal ceremony, symbolizing how converts pass into the covenant by entering the Qumran community:

> And let the Levites recount the transgressions of the sons of Israel, the iniquities of which they are guilty, and their sin during the rule of Belial. And let all who pass into the covenant confess after them, saying: We have transgressed, we have done iniquity, we have sinned, we have acted wickedly . . . (1QS 1.22–25)

To enter the community is, from a Qumran point of view, to return (שוב) to the true Mosaic covenant.[26] Those outside the community are apostates, sinners; a formulaic penitential prayer is necessary for anyone who wants to repent and re-enter the covenant. That this is not merely the sectarian opinion of an isolated group is evidenced by a text in Philo's writings. Philo treats the topic of how apostates from Israelite religion may return to true monotheistic faith at the end of his treatise *De praemiis et poenis*. Of such reverts (μετανενοηκότες) Philo surely

22 *PrMan* 8, 13. The Greek terms in this prayer are μετανοεῖν and μετάνοια, while the LXX translation of 2 Chron 33.18 employs ἐπιστρέφειν and the corresponding Hebrew text does not mention repentance explicitly.

23 See R. A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (SBLEJL 13; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998) 82–6. By contrast, the *Book of Jubilees* explicitly states that repenting once a year is sufficient to procure the forgiveness of sins (*Jub* 5.17–18). This reference to the Day of Atonement indicates that 'to repent' is a ritual concept here too, involving ascetic practices (Lev 16.31; *Jub* 34.18–19) and perhaps, as in later writings, a public confession of sins. Nevertheless, the narration of Judah's repentance through prayer and mourning in 41.23–25 indicates that *Jubilees* does not necessarily restrict penitential practices to the annual ceremony.

24 Philo *LegAll* II.78; *Somn* II.292; but cf. *Congr* 107.

25 Josephus *Ant* VIII.362; similarly VII.153, 320–21; IX.175–76.

26 1QS 5.8, 22; 6.15; 4Q171 2.2–4; CD 15.9, 12; 16.1–2, 4–5; 19.16.

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expects an 'improvement' (βελτίωσις) of moral life, certainly including the observation of the Mosaic Law. That, on the other hand, is not all that is needed:

> If they accept the mighty works [of God], not as intended for destruction but for warning, and convert (μεταβάλωσι) with a feeling of shame in their entire soul, accuse themselves for their error, and also declare and confess (ἐξαγορεύσαντες δὲ καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες) whatever sins they have committed – first by themselves and with a cleansed mind, in order to gain a conscience without lies or disguise, then also orally (γλώττῃ), for the [moral] improvement of those who hear it – they will acquire the benevolence of the saving and gracious God. (Philo *PraemPoen* 163)

Qumran and Philo obviously would not agree on what it means to keep the covenant, but once again this makes the point of convergence even more striking: anyone who has renounced the covenant must repent, and repentance entails a public confession of sin.[27] One senses that Philo's pragmatic explanation for the requirement of public confession is his own rationalization, and this is in fact corroborated by a comparison with Aseneth's repentance according to *Joseph and Aseneth*. The latter episode differs from the Philonic text by describing the conversion of a non-Israelite to the true monotheistic worship. Yet the two texts resemble each other, as they deal with the procedures undertaken by people who turn from idolatry to the sovereign God – and Aseneth's conversion is called μετάνοια, too (*JosAsen* 15.7–8; cf. 9.2). Painfully aware of her former errors, Aseneth experiences severe internal conflict before she is bold enough to address God in penitential prayer. Twice she reasons with herself, 'without opening her mouth' (11.3, 15). She is fully aware that an explicit confession of sins is her only hope for reconciliation (11.10–14, 18), but her courage fails at the precise moment when she is about to begin her prayer (11.15). The third time, at last 'she opened her mouth to God' (11.19) in a penitential prayer. Aseneth's confession, bringing her repentance to completion, is in no way prompted by an eagerness to convert others. When the virgins and the nurse in her house enquire about Aseneth's moaning and groaning, and about her wasted face, she blames it all on a terrible headache (10.6; 18.4). Her conversion does not concern anyone but God; nevertheless it must take the form of an oral confession.[28]

27 See H. Thyen, *Studien zur Sündenvergebung: Im Neuen Testament und seinen alttestamentlichen und jüdischen Voraussetzungen* (FRLANT 96; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 123–4. The discussion of penitential prayer in J. Leonhardt, *Jewish Worship in Philo of Alexandria* (TSAJ 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 132–3, unfortunately ignores *PraemPoen* 163.

28 R. D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (JSPS 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 121–4, hesitates to take Aseneth's asceticism and confession as evidence for a fixed ritual of conversion to Judaism, arguing that her repentance proper takes place already in 9.2. For my part, I would rather take μετενόει in 9.2 as an inchoative imperfect, marking the beginning of repentance rather than its end. The striking similarities

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Finally, this procedure may be alluded to in Josephus's *Jewish War*. Josephus reproduces a speech that he claims to have given in front of the Jews who refuse to submit to the Romans, as Josephus would have wished them to do. His strategy in this speech is to depict the resistant population as revolting against the will of God and, in effect, having dishonoured the covenant (*Bell* V.401). Josephus concludes his speech by pointing to the only way still left for these violators of the law:

> Yet there is a way of rescue left, if you wish, and the Deity is easily reconciled to those who confess and repent (ἐξομολογουμένοις καὶ μετανοοῦσιν). (Josephus *Bell* V.415)

Whether or not Flavius Josephus, when making his speech or writing the *War*, did actually think that Jewish resistance to Roman power was tantamount to violating the Mosaic covenant is not a relevant question here. What lends support to the thesis is rather that some people are depicted as having renounced the covenant and in need of repentance exactly through a confession of sins.

This aspect of repentance is not prominent in the teaching attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. There is the petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, but it does not conform to the standards of first-century Jewish pentitential prayers, as will be shown below. Furthermore, there is no firm evidence for Jesus' having required a public confession of sins of the 'sinners' to mark a renewed pledge to the covenant; on the contrary, as we shall see, he appears to have opposed such a practice. This could in fact be the reason why Jesus' attitude to the sinners met with strong opposition: to the common mind, although Jesus' dining companions had changed their way of living, they had not repented in a complete and proper manner. In a sense they were still, therefore, sinners.

'We have Abraham as our ancestor'

Penitential prayer is commonly recognized as an established genre in Jewish literature.[29] The Hebrew Bible contains some texts that clearly belong to this form and exhibit weaker or stronger traits of formalization, especially as regards the expressions employed in the confession proper. Both individuals and the nation as a whole sometimes confess by a simple 'I/we have sinned'

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between the narration in chs. 10–13 and other Jewish descriptions of repentance can hardly be incidental. Furthermore, it is immediately after Aseneth's prayer in chs. 12–13 that the morning star rises and the celestial figure appears to announce that her conversion has been accepted, indicating that the prayer brings her repentance to completion.

29 See Werline, *Penitential Prayer*, 2–4; S. von Stemm, *Der betende Sünder vor Gott: Studien zu Vergebungsvorstellungen in urchristlichen und frühjüdischen Texten* (AGJU 45; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 218–23; Nitzan, 'Repentance in the Dead Sea Scrolls', 160–1.

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(חטאנו/חטאתי).[30] Other confessions utilize two, three, or even more synonyms to articulate the sins that have been committed. The repetitive effect does not come out fully in English translations, but is conspicuous in Hebrew:

> We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly (חטאנו והעוינו רשענו) . . . (1 Kgs 8.47; cf. 2 Chron 6.37)
>
> [We] have sinned; we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly (חטאנו העוינו . . . הרשענו). (Ps 106.6)
>
> [We] have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances (חטאנו ועוינו הרשענו ומרדנו וסור ממצותך וממשפטיך). (Dan 9.5)

In early Jewish penitential prayers, the same tendency to multiply synonyms is found.

> We have sinned, we have done wickedly (חטאנו רשענו). (CD 20.28–29)[31]
>
> [We] have sinned, we have been ungodly, we have done wrong (ἡμάρτομεν ἠσεβήσαμεν ἠδικήσαμεν) . . . (Bar 2.12)
>
> We have transgressed, we have done iniquity, we have sinned, we have acted wickedly (נעוינו פשענו חטאנו הרשענו). (1QS 1.24–25)

Other multiplying devices, too, are employed in some of the prayer texts. Accordingly, the *Prayer of Manasseh* has the penitent king voice both his confession and the actual petition for forgiveness in repetitous terms: 'I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned . . . forgive me, O Lord, forgive me!' (*PrMan* 12–13). 'Lord, Lord, King', Mordecai begins his prayer according to Greek Esther 4.17b.[32] Daniel's penitential prayer likewise repeats the petition for forgiveness and deliverance in slightly varying terms:

> O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen (אדני שמעה אדני סלחה אדני הקשיבה) . . . (Dan 9.19)

Such texts indicate what penitential prayer was expected to be in the first century CE, although there were other styles of confessing besides.[33]

30 Individual confession: 1 Sam 15.24; 2 Sam 12.13; 24.10 = 1 Chron 21.8. Communal: Judg 10.10, 15; 1 Sam 7.6; Neh 1.6*bis*; Jer 14.7, 20.

31 The same formula is used in Dan 9.15. Similar formulae are found in Lam 3.42; Greek Dan 3.29; Bar 1.17–18; *JosAsen* 12.4; *mYoma* 3.8; 4.2; 6.2. See further Werline, *Penitential Prayer*, 23–4; Nitzan, 'Repentance in the Dead Sea Scrolls', 156 n. 39.

32 Likewise the high priest Simon in 3 Macc 2.2; cf. *ApocMos* 25.3; 32.2.

33 Perhaps it is the repetitive style of praying that Philo alludes to when recommending that sinners propitiate God with 'sacred repetitions' (παλινῳδίαις ἱεραῖς; *Somn* II.292) in order to gain forgiveness. Παλινῳδία is usually taken to mean 'recantation', but to translate it as 'repetition' appears to be equally possible; cf. παλινῳδεῖν in *MutNom* 53 and *s.v.* παλινῳδία LSJ.

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Turning to the contents of customary penitential prayers, one finds God's covenant with Israel to be a predominant theme in nearly all the texts preserved.[34] Some prayers, in the Hebrew Bible and in early Jewish literature, explicitly remind God of the covenant that he made with Abraham and his posterity.[35] Not infrequently does the penitent call to mind God's faithfulness to his covenant, manifest in his wonderful dealings with Israel, and refers to this fidelity as the grounds for God's accepting the prayer of repentance.[36] God is also reminded of previous occasions when he exhibited a willingness to forgive.[37] By contrast, the Israel of past and present times is pictured as treacherous, wicked, and deserving of punishment.[38] At times, this even amounts to an explicit confession of the ancestors' sins.[39] This makes the role of the forebears somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, the fathers were sinners just as the repentant generation. Their failings thus add to contemporary Israel's burden of sin, increase God's punishment on her, and necessitate repentance. On the other hand, the fathers were the original recipients of God's covenantal grace and also righteous examples to imitate. For that reason, Abraham and other ancient relatives are frequently named in the prayers as a means of prompting God's mercy. Sometimes the mention of the ancestors may serve simply to remind God of his covenant, as already noted.[40] However, a slight shift of emphasis occurs when the prayers ascribe positive personal qualities to the forebears. For example, the national penitential prayer in Nehemiah mentions not only God's covenant with Abraham but also the latter's fidelity before the Lord (Neh 9.7–8).[41] The *Prayer of Manasseh* plainly states that the patriarchs were not sinners:

> Therefore you, O Lord, God of the righteous, have not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin against you, but you have appointed repentance for me, who am a sinner. (*PrMan* 8)

When Manasseh begins his prayer by invoking the 'God of our ancestors, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and of their righteous offspring' (*PrMan* 1), the idea involved is therefore perhaps not merely that God's fidelity will result in

34 See Werline, *Penitential Prayer*, 170–2; Stemm, *Der betende Sünder vor Gott*, 221–3.

35 Neh 9.7–8; Bar 2.34–35; *PsSol* 9.8–10; *AssMos* 3.9; 4.2 (cf. 11.17); *LAB* 22.7; 4Q508 3.2–3; cf. Lev 26.42; 2 Macc 1.2, 5; *Jub* 22.13–15.

36 Ps 106.45; Jer 14.21; Dan 9.4; Greek Esth 4.17a, f, g, h; 3 Macc 2.10–12; *LAB* 12.9; 19.8; 1QS 1.18–22; 4Q504 1–2.5.6–11; Josephus *Ant* XI.144; possibly also Philo *SpecLeg* II.196; cf. *TJud* 19.3.

37 Ps 106.23, 30; 4Q504 1–2.2.7–11.

38 Deut 9.27; Dan 9.5–14; 1QS 1.22–25.

39 Ps 79.8; 106.6; Jer 14.20; Lam 5.7; Dan 9.8; Tob 3.3–4; Bar 3.4–5; 2 Esd 8.31; 1QS 1.25; CD 20.28–29; 4Q504 1–2.6.5–6; 4.6–7; cf. Lev 26.40; Jer 3.25; Neh 9.2.

40 This may be the case in, e.g., Deut 9.27; 3 Macc 6.3; *ApocrEzek* (*PChBeatty* 185 frg 1 r. 10–11).

41 Cf. also 2 Macc 1.2, 5.

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forgiveness, but also that the righteousness of the ancestors will bring some favour on the penitent. The same notion may be implied in texts that speak of God forgiving and sparing his people 'for the sake of' Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[42] An even more prominent role is assigned to the righteous departed by those texts that speak of them as intercessors for the living. In its extant form, the book of Baruch depicts the penitents in Jerusalem as imploring God to hear also the prayer of the dead of Israel, but those departed are clearly conceived of as sinners who need to confess their own evil deeds (Bar 3.4). Philo, by contrast, presents the fathers as currently interceding for their sinful posterity. In the section of *De praemiis et poenis* already quoted above, where Philo discusses the repentance of apostates, he states that those who return to the true faith have, as it were, three advocates or intercessors (παράκλητος). One of the three is moral improvement. Concerning the remaining two, Philo writes:

> [They have] three . . . intercessors for their reconciliation to the Father: the first is the mildness and goodness of the one entreated, who always gives forgiveness precedence over revenge; the second is the holiness of the founders of the nation, for in their souls, which have put away their bodies, they offer an unwrought and naked service to the King, constantly and effectively interceding for their sons and daughters, and the Father grants them the privilege of having their prayers heard. (Philo *PraemPoen* 166)

In Philo the notion of the saints' intercession appears to be fully developed.[43] To sum up the covenantal theme in customary penitential prayer, then, this motif is present in a number of ways in different specimens: as appeals to God's covenantal fidelity, as reminders of his previous mercies, as confessions of ancestral sin, as references to the ancestors' merits, and as the notion of the righteous departed as intercessors.

Turning from this institutionalized pattern of prayer to the penitential prayer suggested by Jesus, one first of all notices that Jesus agrees with other strands of first-century Judaism on a fundamental point: people need to acknowledge their sins and failings and implore God to forgive them. The very existence of the Lord's Prayer indicates that Jesus was principally positive towards praying and that he was even concerned about the details of how to pray.[44] In these respects he was no

42 Greek Dan 3.35; cf. *LAB* 35.3; *TLevi* 15.4; *TAsh* 7.7. A variant of this theme is expressed in *LAB* 19.11, where God promises to remember Moses' rod and spare the people whenever they sin. See also Thyen, *Studien zur Sündenvergebung*, 66–7, 72.

43 Cf. Philo's interpretation of Gen 4.10 in *DetPotIns* 70; *QuaestGen* 1.70; see Thyen, *Studien zur Sündenvergebung*, 122–5. Ideas of post-mortem intercession were neither peculiar to Philo (2 Macc 15.12–14; *1 En.* 39.5) nor universally embraced (see shortly below).

44 The derivation of the Lord's Prayer from the historical Jesus is usually, and in my view convincingly, argued for by the criteria of dissimilarity (e.g. the *Abba* address) and coherence. Multiple attestation could be added if one does not suppose the inclusion of the prayer in Q. See further, with literature, Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:294.

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different from most of his religious contemporaries. For example, Josephus claims that the Pharisees had their views on how to perform prayers correctly (*Ant* XVIII.15). On the other hand, there are a number of important distinctive traits to be noted in Jesus' prayer for forgiveness, as regards both form and content.

First, as far as the formal features of confessional prayer are concerned, his petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer is, by comparison, remarkably concise and to-the-point. It does not even contain an explicit confession of sin but immediately asks for pardon – 'forgive us our debts' (Matt 6.12; cf. Luke 11.4). That human beings need God's forgiveness is as self-evident as the previously (Matt 6.11) implied fact that they need bread to live.

Second, and more important, the petition for forgiveness downplays the role of covenantal theology, which is so prominent in institutionalized penitential prayers of the Second Temple era. It may in fact be the case that Jesus, preserving the legacy of John the Baptist, left out the customary references to the righteous fathers on purpose. Pointing out the often neglected continuity between John and Jesus, Allison has repeatedly drawn attention to a piece of teaching that the two seem to have had in common, namely, the dismissal of Abrahamic descent as a security in face of the impending judgment.[45] Regardless of how one evaluates Allison's interpretation of Jesus' 'kingdom and children' saying (Mark 10.15; Matt 18.3; John 3.3, 5; *GThom* 22, 46) in an anti-covenantal fashion,[46] one must at least ponder the possibility that John's clear-cut denunciation of trust in Israelite lineage (Q 3.8) was taken over by Jesus.[47] Indeed, there is nothing to indicate the contrary in the historical Jesus tradition. It is telling that Luke, who has an interest in depicting Jesus as a preacher of repentance in the traditional sense, also is the one who pictures descent from Abraham as a privilege in his Gospel.[48] Still, even Luke does not present Israelite ancestry *alone* as the sufficient grounds for salvation, but acceptance of Jesus' ministry, which is directed towards fellow Jews, along with its ethical implications. With all likeliness, that also comes close to how the

45 D. C. Allison, 'The Continuity between John and Jesus', *JSHJ* 1 (2003) 6–27 (16–9); see *idem*, 'Jesus and the Covenant', 58–61. See also L. Schenke, 'Jesus und Johannes der Täufer', *Jesus von Nazaret* (ed. Schenke et al.) 84–105 (90–1, 99–100).

46 See W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97) 2:757–8.

47 For the historicity of Q 3.7–9, see R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTS 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 173–8; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:27–32, 71–2 n. 40. See also J. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation – Geschichte – Wirkungsgeschichte* (BZNW 53; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 301–2.

48 Luke 13.16; 16.19–31; 19.9; cf. Luke 1.55, 73; Acts 3.13, 25; 7.2–8; 13.26. On the prominence of the repentance theme in Luke, see H. Merklein, 'Die Umkehrpredigt bei Johannes dem Täufer und Jesus von Nazaret', *BZ* 25 (1981) 29–46 (40–41); Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke–Acts*, especially 159–91. It does not follow that every exclusively Lukan reference to repentance is redactional; see n. 78 below on Luke 13.2–5.

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historical Jesus viewed his own mission. Yet, when speaking of the eschatological banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, Jesus accentuates that people from east and west – presumably Gentiles – will be among the participants, while some of his (Jewish) audience will be excluded (Q 13.29, 28).[49] Hence, although John may not have envisaged the salvation of Gentiles in the way Jesus appears to have done, the two prophets agreed on a crucial point: one cannot refer to one's lineage from Abraham and count on God's forgiveness and salvation.

These cautions against an exaggerated confidence in the merits of the forebears are not wholly unparalleled in early Jewish literature. Especially the notion of righteous ancestors like Abraham powerfully interceding for first-century Jews was sometimes questioned.[50] Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* has the crowd ask the prophetess Deborah to pray for them after her physical death, but Deborah's reply is dismissive:

> Deborah replied, saying to the people: 'While still alive, a human being can pray for himself and for his children, but after death he can neither pray nor remember anybody. Therefore do not put your hope in your fathers. For they will be of no merit to you, unless you are found to be similar to them . . .' (*LAB* 33.5)

This passage is a clear piece of polemic against the belief in post-mortem intercession held by Philo and others, which was mentioned above. Yet it should not be taken as an unambiguous rejection of covenantal theology or the concept of ancestral merits. Shortly after relating Deborah's death, the *Biblical Antiquities* narrates the call of Gideon by an angel of the Lord. Gideon remarks that God appears to have forgotten his covenantal promises to Israel, since the chosen people is suffering at the hands of Midianites (*LAB* 35.2; cf. Judg 6.13). Faced with this accusation, the angel responds:

> 'You have not been handed over for nothing, but your own plots have done this to you. For since you left the promises which you had received from the Lord, this evil came upon you, and you did not remember the commandments of God which those who were before you gave to you. Therefore you have come under the repulsion of your God. But he will himself have mercy on the people of Israel, as no one has mercy, yet not for your sake but for the sake of those who are asleep.' (*LAB* 35.3)

Employing an angel as his mouthpiece this time, the author of the *Biblical Antiquities* advocates the opinion that the departed forebears are 'sleeping' – which explains why they cannot intercede for their posterity. Still, Gideon and his contemporaries (and, implicitly, the Jews of the author's day) do profit from their

49 See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:309–17.

50 See R. Le Déaut, 'Aspects de l'intercession dans le Judaïsme ancien', *JSJ* 1 (1970) 35–57 (44–5).

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Israelite ancestry: as heirs to the covenant, they can rest assured that God will ultimately take pity on them. By comparison, John the Baptist takes one step further, by declaring descent from Abraham to be of no value in the face of the impending judgment. Accordingly, the confession of sins evidently involved in the Baptist's concept of repentance may have varied from customary penitential prayers by the omission of the covenantal theme, although there is no direct evidence for this.[51] Jesus' avoidance of the same motif in his suggested petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer coheres perfectly with his predecessor's attitude and with Jesus' own tendency to relativize 'covenant thinking', evident in a number of different ways.[52]

While Jesus' prayer for forgiveness lacks conventional references to the covenant, it includes a different motivation for God's forgiving those who sin, namely, the petitioner's act of forgiving. The theme of reciprocal human forgiveness as a prerequisite for acquiring God's forgiveness is well attested in the synoptic material and poses a difficulty to the view that Jesus preached completely unconditional forgiveness. Apart from its attestation in the Lord's Prayer in both versions and its concluding remark in Matthew (6.14–15), this motif recurs in the possibly independent version of Mark 11.25 and is echoed in Matt 5.23–24; 18.23–35; Luke 6.37; 17.3–4 (cf. Matt 18.15, 21–22). Not all these passages necessarily preserve sayings of the historical Jesus literally. Taken together, they nevertheless show that the notion was widely recognized at an early stage to have formed part of Jesus' proclamation. Further, this theme runs contrary to the tendency of the early Church to view God's forgiveness as christologically or sacramentally grounded.[53] Thus, the criteria of multiple attestation, in different sources and forms, and dissimilarity argue strongly in favour of this theme as part of Jesus' teaching. One could add that it is coherent with Q 6.27–28, 35cd, which presupposes the *imitatio Dei* concept, and with the invocation of God as Father. In the Q saying, Jesus says that the way of becoming God's children is to imitate God by loving both friend and foe. Correspondingly, according to the sayings on forgiveness, it is necessary for the children of God to replicate his willingness to forgive in order to be in a

51 John's notion of repentance appears to have been more traditional than Jesus', as already the frequent attestation of μετάνοια in connection with the Baptist demonstrates (see Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:73 n. 45). It involved a confession of sins (Mark 1.5; cf. perhaps Luke 11.1) and plausibly fasting (Mark 2.18). On the other hand, a few features did stand out as unconventional, most notably of course the baptism.

52 Allison, 'Jesus and the Covenant'; T. Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (BIS 55; Leiden: Brill, 2001); *idem*, 'Jesus, Judaism and the Covenant', *JSHJ* 2 (2004) 3–27. This is not to say that Jesus was unaffected by or indeed rejected every notion of a covenant; see Holmén, 'Jesus, Judaism and the Covenant', 5.

53 Forgiveness through Jesus' death and/or resurrection: Matt 26.28; Luke 24.46–47; Acts 5.31; Eph 1.7; Heb 9.22; 10.18; through Christian baptism: Acts 2.38; in 'Jesus' name', by faith in Jesus, or the like: Luke 24.47; Acts 10.43; 13.38; 26.18; Col 1.14.

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position to call God their Father and ask him for forgiveness.[54] As commentators usually remark, the notion of forgiving one's fellow human beings as a precondition for being forgiven by God is found elsewhere in early Judaism, and more specifically in Ecclus 28.2–4. None of Jesus' contemporaries would likely have objected were somebody to emphasize that God's merciful nature requires any penitent to have mercy on his or her neighbour. What may have offended some of them is rather Jesus' preaching of reciprocal forgiveness as the *sole* ground for asking God's forgiveness, neglecting or even opposing covenantal theology in this respect. As far as Ben Sira is concerned, he combines his strong admonitions to forgiving one's neighbour with reverence for the covenants with Abraham (Ecclus 44.19–21) and Moses (24.23; 28.7). Jesus appears to have left out this aspect in his preaching on how sinners were to enter the kingdom of God, and for this he was criticized.

Can the Wedding Guests Fast?

Another factor that may have contributed to Jesus' avoidance of customary penitential practices pertains to the rites that usually accompanied the prayer of confession. There is no compelling reason for supposing that Jesus opposed various bodily postures or gestures in connection with prayer for forgiveness, such as standing,[55] kneeling,[56] prostrating oneself,[57] and extending one's hands.[58] Other penitential actions, though, involved a symbolism that apparently did not square with Jesus' perception of his mission. Most prominent among such accompanying rites was fasting. Fasting is prescribed in the Hebrew Bible for the annual Day of Atonement (Lev 16.29–31). Whereas the biblical account ascribes expiatory effect to the high priestly rituals in the sanctuary and with the scapegoat, first-century writers display a tendency to emphasize the people's activities on this day. Philo simply names the day 'the Fast' and states that penitential prayers bring about God's forgiveness.[59] On other occasions, too, and especially in the case of national distress, public fasting is employed as a means of seeking reconciliation

54 See V. Auvinen, *Jesus' Teaching on Prayer* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University, 2003) 242.

55 Greek Dan 3.25; Josephus *Ant* XI.143.

56 Ezra 9.5; 1 Esd 8.70; 3 Macc 2.1; *ApocMos* 32.3; *AssMos* 4.1 (cf. 11.17); *JosAsen* 11.1x, 15, 19; cf. *PrMan* 11.

57 Deut 9.25; Ezra 10.1; 1 Esd 8.88; *ApocMos* 32.1; *JosAsen* 10.15–16; *Vita Adae* 36.1; 40.1; *VitProph* 4.13; 1QH^a 4.18; 8.14; Josephus *Ant* XI.141.

58 Isa 1.15; Lam 3.41; Ezra 9.5; Ecclus 38.10; 1 Esd 8.70; 3 Macc 2.1; *AssMos* 4.1; *JosAsen* 11.15, 19; *Sib Or* 4.166; Josephus *Ant* XI.143.

59 Philo *Mos* 2.23–24; *SpecLeg* I.187; II.196; see *LegAll* III.174; *Post* 48; *Congr* 107. Similarly, *LAB* 13.6 employs the expression 'the fast of mercy' (*ieiunium misericordiae*) for the Day of Atonement.

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with God.[60] Sinful individuals also fast, or at least abstain from delicious food, as a sign of repenting from their evil deeds.[61] Further, some early Jewish writings recommend a more extended use of fasting by proposing it as a means of repentance not only for the especially wicked but also for those who commit less grave sins. Thus, Ben Sira both presupposes and supports the practice of repenting by fasting, plausibly on a regular basis (Ecclus 18.21; 34.26). One of the *Psalms of Solomon* similarly advocates fasting as part of the laudable piety practiced by the righteous:

> The confidence of the righteous ones comes from God, their saviour; sin upon sin does not remain overnight in the house of a righteous person. The righteous one always inspects his house to remove transgression when he fails. He atones for his sin of ignorance by fasting and by humbling himself, and the Lord cleanses every pious man and his house. (*PsSol* 3.6–8)

This testifies that fasting was viewed, at least in some circles, as expiatory.[62] Apart from fasting as a sign of grief,[63] repenting frequently included other symbols of mourning: penitents rend their clothes,[64] put on sackcloth or other mourning garments,[65] sit in ashes,[66] tear their hair or beard,[67] and weep.[68] The penitential prayer, too, often takes the form of a lament. Dirges not seldom display repetitive traits that are similar to the style of confessional prayer.[69]

Jesus' position on fasting can be established with a high degree of certainty from Mark 2.19. As a number of scholars have pointed out, (2.19b and) 2.20 should

60 1 Sam 7.6; Ezra 9.5; 10.6; Neh 1.4; 9.1; Isa 58.3–5; Jer 14.12; 36.6–7; Dan 9.3; Joel 2.12; Jonah 3.7–8; Greek Esth 4.16–17; Bar 1.5; 1 Esd 8.70; 9.2; *LAB* 22.7; 30.4–5; Josephus *Ant* V.159; VI.22.

61 1 Kgs 21.27; *ApocMos* 29.10; *JosAsen* 10.1, 17; 13.9; *TReub* 1.9–10; *TJud* 15.4; 19.2; *VitProph* 4.14; Josephus *Ant* V.166; VIII.362.

62 See M. Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul's Letters* (CBNTS 26; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995) 40–1, 200; Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, 131–3.

63 Fasting is described as mourning in, e.g., 2 Sam 1.12; Ezra 10.6; Esth 4.3; Dan 10.2–3; Jdt 8.6; 2 Esd 10.4; *ApocMos* 29.7; *TReub* 1.10; *VitProph* 4.3; Josephus *Ant* XI.147. See especially the etiological account of Jacob's mourning for Joseph as the type for fasting on the Day of Atonement in *Jub* 34.12–19.

64 Ezra 9.3, 5; Jer 36.24; Joel 2.13; 1 Esd 8.68, 70; *LAB* 46.4; *ParJer* 2.1–2, 10; Josephus *Ant* XI.141; cf. Gen 37.34; 2 Sam 1.11.

65 Isa 58.5; Dan 9.3; Jonah 3.5; *JosAsen* 10.8–11, 14; 13.2–4; *LAB* 30.5; Josephus *Ant* VII.327; VIII.362; cf. Gen 37.34; Jer 6.26; Amos 8.10; Jdt 8.5.

66 Job 42.6; Isa 58.5; Dan 9.3; *JosAsen* 10.2, 15; 13.2, 7; cf. Jer 6.26.

67 Ezra 9.3; 1 Esd 8.68; Josephus *Ant* XI.141 (all describing Ezra's repentance on behalf of Israel); *JosAsen* 11.1x; cf. Amos 8.10.

68 Joel 2.12 (cf. 4Q266 11.5); Ezra 10.1; Neh 1.4; Tob 3.1; Bar 1.5; 1 Esd 8.88; *ApocMos* 9.3; 13.1; 27.3; *AssMos* 3.8; *JosAsen* 9.2; 10.1, 3, 15; 13.7; *LAB* 22.7; *ParJer* 2.5, 10; *TSim* 2.13; *TAbr* [A] 14.12; *Vita Adae* 9.2; *VitProph* 4.9–10; Josephus *Ant* VII.153; XI.142; see Philo *Deus* 138. In addition, *Jub* 41.23–25 portrays Judah as acquiring forgiveness 'since he pleaded much and since he mourned'.

69 See 2 Sam 19.1; Amos 5.16; 4 Macc 16.7.

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be taken as a post-Easter addition to the historical core tradition in 2.19. The function of 2.20 is to provide an explanation for the fact that the early Church did fast while Jesus had not. Accordingly, the historicity of 2.19a is supported by the criterion of dissimilarity.[70] In contrast to John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus and his followers did not fast. It remains uncertain how extensive Jesus' rejection of fasting actually was. Clearly it must have ruled out the practice of regular voluntary fasting that some Christian sources depict as distinctive of Pharisees and possibly other religious movements.[71] On the other hand, it is less likely that Jesus and his disciples refused to fast even on the Day of Atonement in accordance with the regulation in Lev 16. Such an obvious transgression of the Law would certainly cause criticism of a much more serious nature than the curious question in Mark 2.18 implies.[72] The crucial question concerns what lies between these two extremes: would Jesus have required the 'sinners' to repent, not only by changing their way of living, but also through fasting? A negative answer appears most likely. Jesus' motivation for not fasting in Mark 2.19 includes the notion of a joyful wedding feast being in progress.[73] If this happy occasion rules out an expression of grief like regular fasting on the part of those already present at the banquet, it can hardly require anybody to wail, mourn, and fast in order to be accepted as a wedding guest. Further, the saying or sayings preserved in Q 7.31–35 offer(s) independent attestation of Jesus' disregard for fasting and mourning as proper means of repenting. First, Q 7.32b contrasts 'wailing' with 'playing the flute' and 'dancing' to mark the difference between Jesus and the Baptist, regardless of whether the 'you' refers to 'this generation' or to John and Jesus.[74] Then, 7.33–34 depicts the same contrast in concrete terms: John's piety included fasting, while Jesus was 'eating and drinking'. Although the portrayal in 7.34b of Jesus as 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' is an accusation allegedly made by his opponents, and consequently should be taken to represent neither Jesus' view of himself nor historical facts, it is valuable exactly as a clue to why Jesus met with strong opposition. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of the charge: it is too outspoken and embarrassing to have been created by the early Church; it is dissimilar to early Christian attitudes towards the sinners; and it coheres with

70 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:439–50; Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, 134–57.

71 Luke 18.12; *Did* 8.1; see E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990) 82.

72 See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:501–2 n. 210; D. C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 174. Note, in addition, Philo's statement that even those who else seem to be irreligious do honour the Day of Atonement by fasting (*SpecLeg* I.186).

73 This is paralleled by the rejection of fasting on the Sabbath and feast days in Jdt 8.6; *Jub* 50.12; cf. *mTa'an* 2.8.

74 See A. J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 205–6.

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other synoptic material (Mark 2.16; Matt 21.31).[75] What is especially noteworthy in Q 7.34b is that this accusation combines two charges against Jesus – one being his neglect of fasting, the other being his companionship with sinners. Yet, the two charges are intrinsically related, for the accusers seem to presuppose that lack of restraint in eating and drinking is exactly what one would expect of a sinner. If the toll collectors and sinners had really repented through fasting, before joining Jesus in table companionship, they would no longer have been sinners. The accusation makes sense only if Jesus did not require such an act of repentance of the sinners to whom he directed his mission. It appears that it was his notion of God's eschatological kingdom as somehow already present that excluded, for Jesus, the traditional mourning rites of repentance. Not only fasting, but also customary forms of lament-like penitential prayer were ruled out as the kingdom was already in the midst of Jesus and his companions.

Instances of Ritual Repentance in the Gospels

To all that has been said above one may object that there are two passages in the synoptic Gospels that apparently call for repentance in an explicitly ritual sense. First, Q 10.13 states that 'Tyre and Sidon . . . would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes', had these cities witnessed those mighty deeds which Jesus has now performed in Chorazin and Bethsaida. At first glance, this logion seems to quote Jesus as expecting his Galilean contemporaries to repent through rites imported from the realm of mourning. Second, the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector in Luke 18.10–14 culminates in Jesus' declaration that the toll collector 'went down to his home justified', ostensibly because he had been 'beating his breast' and asking for mercy. Again, Jesus appears to recommend his audience to repent through an expression of grief. These two passages need to be considered separately.

As far as the saying in Q 10.13 is concerned, it can hardly be dismissed as an instance of *Gemeindebildung*. While Bethsaida figures some times in the canonical Gospels, Chorazin is not mentioned a single time in the rest of the NT, let alone

75 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:259–60; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:150–1; see Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 174; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 259–60; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 204–5; M. Casey, *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002) 129–45. Admittedly, the historicity of the saying in its canonical form has sometimes been doubted, primarily because of the 'Son of Man' expression; see Thyen, *Studien zur Sündenvergebung*, 142; Fiedler, *Jesus und die Sünder*, 136–45; R. W. Funk and R. W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Polebridge, 1993) 180, 303; J. Becker, *Jesus von Nazaret* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996) 208–9.

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as a place where Jesus performed miracles. Inventing a saying that accused these marginal villages of unbelief would be a curious strategy indeed.[76] Thus, we cannot ignore the probability that Jesus did claim that Tyre and Sidon ought to have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and correspondingly, that the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida should have acted analogously on seeing Jesus' miracles. However, it is important to maintain the distinctions here. The logion does *not* say that Chorazin and Bethsaida should repent in sackcloth and ashes. Jesus apparently acknowledged customary penitential practices as appropriate for Tyre and Sidon, that is, in the face of the oracles against them in the Hebrew Bible.[77] The same would hold true for the approving mention of the Ninevites' repentance in Q 11.32: their conversion through customary penitential practices, including fasting (Jonah 3.6–9), was the proper response to Jonah's preaching. While these two Q passages imply that Jesus blamed his own audience for not responding adequately to his teaching and preaching, in fact neither of them attributes to Jesus an expectation that those who witnessed his ministry should repent either by fasting or in 'sackcloth and ashes'.[78] The saying in Q 10.13 does not tell what kind of repentance Jesus expected from the Galilean villages, and this leaves the possibility that he envisaged moral improvement and acceptance of himself as God's envoy.

When it comes to the episode in Luke 18.10–14, it is doubtful whether it should be counted among the parables originally told by the historical Jesus. Holmén sums up the argument of a majority of scholars who favour historicity, by characterizing the pericope as 'beautifully coherent with the genuinely Jesuanic attitude towards sinners and toll collectors'.[79] What is being invoked here is, of course, the

76 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:270–1; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:740 n. 69; Becker, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 79. Those who refute the historicity of Q 10.13 usually presuppose a failed Q-community mission in Galilee; see Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*, 181, 320.

77 See R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn., 1994) 214; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 329–30.

78 See Lambert, 'Topics in the History of Repentance', 199. In Lambert's view, the fact that Q 10.13–15 and 11.31–32 do not explicitly exhort Jesus' audiences to repentance lends support to his argument that 'the presence of μετάνοια in the Synoptic Gospels is largely due to later editors of gospel traditions who introduced the term' (218). Unlike Lambert (200), I regard Luke 13.2–5 as a historical piece of Jesus' teaching (see Becker, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 63–4), demonstrating that he did preach some kind of repentance.

79 Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, 126. Historicity is argued or assumed by a wide range of scholars, including: Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 449; Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*, 369 (voted pink by the Jesus Seminar); C.-H. Sung, *Vergebung der Sünden: Jesu Praxis der Sündenvergebung nach den Synoptikern und ihre Voraussetzungen im Alten Testament und frühen Judentum* (WUNT 2.57; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993) 242–7; Becker, *Jesus von Nazaret*, 94–7; P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. Vol 1, *Grundlegung: Von Jesus zu Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd edn., 1997) 88;

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'criterion of coherence', recognized by most historical-Jesus scholars as a valid means of positively assessing the historicity of sayings that cohere with other, previously authenticated, material.[80] The positive stance towards the toll collector expressed in Luke 18.10–14 is indeed consistent with Jesus' own attitude. But is the concept of repentance? In accordance with what has been demonstrated so far in this article, the answer must be negative. Nowhere else in the Gospels are 'tax collectors and sinners' admonished to repent in this way, by standing in the Temple and striking their breasts – another sign of repentance taken over from the realm of mourning.[81] Instead, as we have seen, penitential practices of this kind are directly rejected in a saying which is very likely to come from the historical Jesus (Mark 2.18), and there are other sayings to support the contention that the outward display of anguish and grief over one's sins as a means of acquiring God's forgiveness did not find a place in the historical Jesus' teaching and practice (Q 7.31–35). Consequently, rather than being coherent with Jesus' proclamation, Luke 18.10–14 is incoherent with authenticated sayings.

Scholars who recognize that the negative 'criterion of incoherence' is a valuable tool for disqualifying sayings as coming from the historical Jesus usually proceed to point out that it must be used with caution.[82] It is indeed virtuous to be cautious. Yet, the recognition of a concept in Luke 18.10–14 which is inconsistent with historical sayings of Jesus serves to invalidate the argument commonly forwarded in favour of the derivation of this parable from Jesus, that is, the alleged coherence of this pericope with other deeds and sayings of the historical Jesus. To maintain the historicity of this parable, therefore, some other criterion than that of coherence has to be brought into play. To the present writer, the actual incoherence of the pericope, together with the fact that both the emphasis on repentance and the high regard for the Temple agree very well with Lukan theology,

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Choi, *Jesus' Teaching on Repentance*, 227–38; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 125; E. Rau, *Jesus – Freund von Zöllnern und Sündern: Eine methodenkritische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000) 114–21; Auvinen, *Jesus' Teaching on Prayer*, 230–2; J. D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*. Vol 1, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 532–3 n. 210.

80 See R. H. Stein, 'The "Criteria" for Authenticity', *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) 1:225–63 (250–1); Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:176–7; H. W. Shin, *Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem in Historical Jesus Research: The Search for Valid Criteria* (CBET 36; Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 190–5.

81 See Luke 23.27, 48; *JosAsen* 10.1, 15; 11.1x, 15; Josephus *Ant* IV.320; further F. G. Downing, 'The Ambiguity of "The Pharisee and the Toll-Collector" (Luke 18:9–14) in the Graeco-Roman World of Late Antiquity', *CBQ* 54 (1992) 80–99 (92–3); *s.vv.* κοπετός, κόπτω BDAG.

82 See Stein, 'The "Criteria" for Authenticity', 249–50 (who employs the term 'The Criterion of Contradiction of Authentic Sayings'); Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:176–7; Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, 35.

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indicate that the passage probably does not stem from the historical Jesus.[83] If this argument is accepted, despite the certain amount of circularity which it inevitably involves, we may conclude that there are no sayings with a convincing claim to historicity that require or commend traditional rites of repentance.

Conclusions

The historical Jesus took a controversial view on repentance. While sharing the common belief that moral improvement was necessary for sinners, he did not require the traditional rites included in the concept of repentance to be carried out. The reason for Jesus' rejection of these rites – penitential prayer, fasting, and other signs of mourning – appears not to have been a general denunciation of ritual expressions of piety, but his view that these specific rites were incompatible with his message. Two aspects were involved. First, Jesus' indifference towards or even criticism of traditional covenantal theology led him to question the contents of customary penitential prayers, which appealed to God's covenant with Israel as the grounds for his mercy and forgiveness. Second, Jesus saw his meals with the sinners as proleptic realizations of the eschatological banquet. These joyful occasions ruled out all penitential practices expressing grief and sorrow; notably fasting, but with all probability also conventional prayer formulas that came close to lamentation.

As far as the sources tell us, the historical Jesus did not suggest alternative rites of repentance to replace traditional practices. He certainly taught his followers to pray for forgiveness in a fixed, and hence ritual, way (the Lord's Prayer). However, this prayer was, like the petition for daily bread, to be said habitually by those who had already been accepted as followers and companions. It did not function as a public confession of sins to mark the repentance of the real 'sinners'. Rather, it appears that Jesus thought it sufficient for the sinners to associate with him, and almost certainly to heed his moral preaching, in order to gain God's forgiveness and be prepared to enter the kingdom. Thus, in this respect, he ascribed to himself no little importance.

83 The historicity of Luke 18.10–14 is questioned by Fiedler, *Jesus und die Sünder*, 228–33; Sanders, 'Jesus and the Sinners', 6; M. D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTS 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989) 667–70; R. A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2nd edn., 1993) 218; W. Schmithals, 'The Parabolic Teachings in the Synoptic Gospels', *JHC* 4 (1997) 3–32 (13). If Downing, 'The Ambiguity', is correct, 18.14a is a piece of Lukan redaction, and the episode as told by Jesus in fact entailed a refutation of the toll collector's way of repenting. However, I find it hard to believe that the episode could have ended without any obvious point being made (Q 7.32, being a similitude, is not analogous, *pace* Downing).

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