

JESUS AND ISAIAH

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Abstract

The Jesus Seminar assigns the OT quotations attributed to Jesus in the Gospels as the work of the early church (Funk, 1993). More recently, Geza Vermes ends his study on *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (2003) by concluding that Scripture did not play an important role in Jesus' teaching. Now while it is correct that formidable difficulties stand in the way of reconstructing *how* Jesus used Scripture (not least because the Gospels are written in Greek), I will argue in this paper that such blanket scepticism is unwarranted. By examining eight examples of Jesus' possible use of the book of Isaiah (5:1-7; 6:9-10; 29:13; 53:1-12; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1-2), I will conclude that at least half of them can be regarded as going back to Jesus in some form. While this is some way from Kimble's (1994) claim that the Gospel tradition presents an accurate picture of Jesus' use of Scripture, it does allow us to draw some conclusions. Not only was Jesus a teacher and healer, he was also an interpreter of Scripture.

1. Introduction

1.1 Jesus as interpreter of Scripture

If the Gospels portray Jesus as a healer and teacher of wisdom, they also portray him as an interpreter of Scripture. The four Gospels record Jesus quoting about fifty different passages of Scripture, along with at least twice that number of allusions and echoes.² Of course, we know from the rest of the New Testament that Scripture interpretation was important to the early church and so we must reckon with the possibility that some of their exegesis has been read back into the life of Jesus. We cannot, therefore,

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2 E.g. references to biblical characters such as Abel, Abraham, Noah, Lot, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah.