

The Sword of the Messiah and the Concept of Liberation in the Fourth Gospel

The complex political history of post-exilic Judaism reveals that the Jews were under the rule of various foreign nations. There is little evidence that the Jews attempted any sort of revolt under Persian and Ptolemaic rule, but from the Maccabean revolt in 168/167 B.C.E. to the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132 C.E., a period that is sometimes called “revolutionary Judaism”, Palestinian Jewish society was characterized by oppression, conflict, injustice, resistance and occasional violent outbursts ⁽¹⁾. Especially Horsley has provided an important corrective to the older picture of first-century Palestine as a “hotbed of violent rebellion”, in arguing that the Jewish resistance to Roman rule was basically non-violent ⁽²⁾.

An important response to the oppression under Antiochus IV was an upsurge of apocalypticism amongst faithful Jews in order to find purpose and meaning in their present situation ⁽³⁾. Apocalypticism was at the very heart of Palestinian Judaism and provided the vehicle of eschatological convictions by offering comfort, hope and a perspective, rooted in the power, faithfulness and justice of God ⁽⁴⁾. As an essentially non-violent “quietist” reaction to foreign rule (and often to the Jewish aristocracy), Jewish apocalyptic literature depicted “a vast struggle in which the people of God are spectators of a cosmic

⁽¹⁾ See, e.g., F.J. MURPHY, *The Religious World of Jesus*. An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism (Nashville 1991); R.A. HORSLEY, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*. Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine (Minneapolis 1993); R.A. HORSLEY–J.S. HANSON, *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs*. Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus (Harrisburg 1999); L.L. GRABBE, *An Introduction to First Century Judaism*. Jewish Religion and History in the Second Temple Period (Edinburgh 1996).

⁽²⁾ HORSLEY, *Jesus*, chap. 3-5.

⁽³⁾ HORSLEY–HANSON, *Bandits*, 16-20; cf. M. HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism*. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period (Philadelphia 1974) I, 253.

⁽⁴⁾ Cf. HORSLEY, *Jesus*, 143-145; HORSLEY–HANSON, *Bandits*, 16-20; C. ROWLAND, *Christian Origins*. An Account of the Setting and Character of the most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism (London 2002) 54-61.

drama unfolding before them”⁽⁵⁾. Accordingly, Palestinian messianic apocalypticism expected God’s cataclysmic liberation of his people to happen through his messiah.

It is against this background that we shall understand Jesus and his movement. This raises various questions. What was Jesus’ concept of liberation? Whom and from whom did he liberate? How did Jesus accomplish his goal? Were Jesus and his followers quietists or activists? We will address these questions from the perspective of the Fourth Gospel. Hence, the aim of this article is to elucidate how the Johannine messiah will liberate God’s people and establish a new age of justice and peace. As far as I am aware, in the past thirty years, only a few works have contributed to the subject of liberation in the Fourth Gospel⁽⁶⁾, and the Johannine concept of Jesus’ “sword” as the means of liberation is an entirely untouched subject. We shall argue that, within the historical-political context of revolutionary Judaism and the literary context of Palestinian messianic apocalypticism, the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as a messiah who liberates the world at large by means of his Spirit-imbued word and who hands over this “sword” to his followers to continue his mission in the world.

We shall start to examine the concept of the messiah as a liberator in the Palestinian apocalyptic traditions (section I) as a possible background against which to understand the Johannine Jesus. Then, in section II, we will turn to the Fourth Gospel and elucidate the concepts of oppression, liberation and Jesus’ “sword”, as well as the transfer of this “sword” to the disciples. Finally, we shall make some conclusions.

⁽⁵⁾ ROWLAND, *Origins*, 99. Sociologically, the apocalyptic literature came from the oppressed or a group in crisis rather than from the ruling class (G.W.E. NICKELSBURG, “Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism”, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* [ed. D. HELLHOLM] [Tübingen²1989] 641-654).

⁽⁶⁾ F. HERZOG, *Liberation Theology*. Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel (New York 1972); J.P. MIRANDA, *Being and the Messiah*. The Message of St. John (Maryknoll 1977); S. RAYAN, “Jesus and the Poor in the Fourth Gospel”, *Bible Bhashyam* 4 (1978) 213-228; D. RENSBERGER, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia 1988); R.J. KARRIS, *Jesus and the Marginalized in John’s Gospel* (Collegeville 1990); W. HOWARD-BROOK, *Becoming Children of God*. John’s Gospel and Radical Discipleship (Maryknoll 1994); S. MOTYER, “Jesus and the Marginalised in the Fourth Gospel”, *Mission and Meaning*. Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell (eds. A. BILLINGTON–T. LANE–M. TURNER) (Carlisle 1995) 70-89.

I. The Sword of the Messiah in Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism

This section will examine the main apocalyptic writings that envisage the liberation of “Israel” by God’s messiah as a “quietist” reaction against oppression ⁽⁷⁾. The agenda consists of two leading questions. Whom and from whom will the messiah liberate? How will the messiah liberate? Although *Psalms of Solomon* and the non-biblical Qumranic writings are not strictly apocalypses, they reflect apocalyptically informed expectations and have been considered since apocalypticism is broader than the literary genre of apocalypse.

We also need to account for our comparison of messianic apocalypticism with the Fourth Gospel. First, Palestinian apocalyptic literature is about the only source available as evidence for the orientation and motivation of Jewish resistance to Roman rule ⁽⁸⁾. Second, messianic ideas seem to have been developed primarily within Palestinian Jewish apocalypticism. Third, both messianic apocalyptic literature and the Fourth Gospel reflect a non-violent reaction (at least on behalf of the people); instead, they awaited God’s end-time intervention through his messiah. Fourth, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is given the title of and confessed as (ὁ) Χριστός (1,17.41; 9,22; 11,27; 17,3; 20,31), and Jesus also identifies himself as such (4,25-26; cf. 10,24-25). More particularly, the language of the Spirit descending on Jesus and “resting” or “remaining” on him (1,32-33) probably alludes to Isaiah 11,2, which presents the Davidic messiah on whom the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge and liberating power rests (Isa 42,1 may also be in view if we accept the more difficult reading of ὁ ἐκλεκτός in 1,34) ⁽⁹⁾. The portrayal of Jesus as the Davidic messiah may also be confirmed by the various references to Jesus’ kingship (1,49; 6,15; 12,13.15; chaps. 18-19), many of which have messianic connotations. In sum, this invites an investigation of the messianic traditions in Palestinian Jewish apocalypticism, especially of those texts that are rooted in Isaiah 11 (and 42).

Due to the plurality of messianic expectations in Judaism, we shall

⁽⁷⁾ “Israel” may refer to the whole nation or to a remnant, dependent on the author’s theology.

⁽⁸⁾ HORSLEY, *Jesus*, 129-131.

⁽⁹⁾ Cf. G.M. BURGE, *The Anointed Community*. The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition (Grand Rapids 1987) 54-62; M. TURNER, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts — Then and Now* (Carlisle 1999 [rev. edn]) 58-59.

use “messianic” rather loosely, namely as referring to an anointed (eschatological) figure who would act as God’s agent (in the last days) to liberate “Israel” (and to rule over her in justice and peace) ⁽¹⁰⁾. Hence, we shall examine those texts that evoke the concept of a messiah, even if the literal term משיח or χριστός does not occur. We will neither elucidate Jewish messianism at large, nor attempt to homogenize the diverse messianic ideas, but merely examine the specific activities of a messianic liberator.

1. *Psalms of Solomon*

The *Psalms of Solomon* is a collection of eighteen psalms which were almost certainly written in Palestine in the wake of Pompey’s conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E.. Historical allusions to this event are found in 2,1-2; 8,15-21; 17,7-14. We also have in 2,26-27 in all probability an allusion to Pompey’s assassination in Egypt in 48 B.C.E.. We cannot be certain how close in date the other Psalms are to the three that refer to Pompey, but scholars assume that the final collection of the Psalms took place before 40 B.C.E. ⁽¹¹⁾.

The Psalms are highly polemical in that they give a negative evaluation of both the Hasmonean dynasty and the subsequent Roman rule in Palestine. According to the psalmist, the reason for the Roman invasion by Pompey is the illegitimate usurpation of the priesthood and the Davidic throne by the Hasmoneans and their consequent defilement of the Jerusalem temple (2,1-3; 8,6-13; 17,4-6) ⁽¹²⁾. Consequently, God used Pompey/Rome to bring judgment on Israel (2,4-21; 8,15-21; 17,7-14), as he had done in the past by using foreign

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cf. *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (eds. J. NEUSNER–W.S. GREEN–E.S. FRERICHs) (Cambridge 1987) ix; G.S. OEGEMA, *The Anointed and his People. Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (JSPSS 27; Sheffield 1998) 21-27; M.A. ELLIOTT, *Survivors of Israel. A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids–Cambridge 2000) 436.

⁽¹¹⁾ M. DE JONGE, “The Psalms of Solomon”, *Outside the Old Testament* (ed. M. DE JONGE) (Cambridge 1985) 161; R.B. WRIGHT, “Psalms of Solomon”, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth) (New York 1985) II, 641. K.R. Atkinson, however, argues that *PsSal* 17 reflects the time of Herod the Great and puts its date between 37-30 B.C.E. (“On the Use of Scripture in the Development of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran: New Light from *Psalms of Solomon* 17”, *The Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity* [ed. C.A. EVANS] [JSPSS 33; Sheffield 2000] 109).

⁽¹²⁾ Cf. WRIGHT, “Psalms”, II, 651; DE JONGE, “Psalms”, 163, 168.

nations like Assyria and Babylon ⁽¹³⁾. Those who had remained righteous (probably including the author and his circle) had to flee (17,16-18), but their hope is in the messiah, the legitimate Davidic king whom God will raise up to liberate “Israel” and to bring justice and “peace” (17,21–18,12) ⁽¹⁴⁾.

An important observation is that *Psalms of Solomon* does not depict a conflict between the Jews and the Romans, but between the righteous and the wicked. In Psalm 1, the author speaks as Jerusalem personified and it is evident that not all Israelites had been righteous and faithful (cf. 2,3) ⁽¹⁵⁾. The author is clear that, based on God’s judgment, a sifting will take place between the righteous and the sinner (2,33-35; cf. Pss 3–4, 13–15), between “the house of the righteous/Israel” (3,6-8; 7,10; 9,11; 10,8; 17,42) and “the house of the sinner” (12,3; 15,11). The righteous will be disciplined, purified and “saved” but the sinner will be destroyed and go to Sheol (12,6; 13,7; Pss 13–15). The ἄρχοντες represent the Jewish rulers who are evaluated negatively (5,11; 8,16.20; 17,12.20.22.36) and hence are put on the side of the sinner. Moreover, the people that are depicted negatively in 1,8; 2,3; 4,1.8; 8,11-12; 17,6 probably refer to priests, teachers of the law, rulers, etc. Thus, the righteous or “Israel” includes the author and his community, and the sinner refers not only to the Romans but also to the Hasmoneans and their supporters, i.e., the Jewish ruling class.

Let us now return to Psalms 17–18 and examine the specific activities of the messiah by which he will liberate “Israel”. These two Psalms envisage a Davidic messiah who is endowed with the Spirit, wisdom, understanding and might (17,21.37; 18,7), which echoes Isaiah 11,2. This messiah will destroy the wicked, judge the nations, liberate “Israel” and rule over her as God’s appointed king (17,21-46; cf. Isa 11,4-9). That the psalmist does not have the entire restoration of Israel in mind may be clear from the references to the judgment of the ἄρχων who represents the Jewish ruling class (17,20.22.36), and of

⁽¹³⁾ In fact, Pompey was first welcomed by the Jewish rulers as the bringer of “peace” (8,16-18), but this *pax Romana* is the ironical counterpart of the lasting “peace” that the messiah will establish (17,26-32). Pompey’s assassination was also considered as a judicial act of God (2,25-29). Atkinson, however, interprets the “man foreign to our race” (17,7) as referring to Herod the Great (“Use”, 109).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Hence, the psalmist and his group are quietists (cf. 12,5); they verbally attack their enemies but have no realistic means to secure political control (WRIGHT, “Psalms”, II, 642-643).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Cf. DE JONGE, “Psalms”, 163; WRIGHT, “Psalms”, II, 651.

the Jewish “sinner” (17,5-7.20.23.25.36). Hence, the envisaged messiah is the liberator of the psalmist’s community (¹⁶).

It is important to observe how the messiah will accomplish his task. First, he will destroy the sinner by the word of his mouth (17,24.35), which reflects Isaiah 11,4 (LXX). This judgment aspect of his word is also apparent in the use of κρίνω (17,26.29), διακρίνω (17,43) and ἐλέγχω (17,25.36). Second, he will cleanse “Israel” (17,22.30), and gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness, i.e., he will reveal to them God’s righteousness so that they can live accordingly (17,26; cf. the imagery of the messiah as shepherd in 17,40-41). The messiah himself is taught by God (17,32), and in turn he is expected to instruct/discipline Israel (παιδέω [17,42]; cf. the knowledge and teaching that the messiah is expected to bring in Isa 11,9; 42,4). In fact, 17,43 indicates that his words are aimed at having a purifying effect (τὰ ῥήματα αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένα), namely, to “judge” among Israel. Similarly, under his rod of disciplinary teaching, the messiah will morally guide people (18,7-8). From this we may conclude that the messiah will liberate and restore “Israel” precisely through his revelatory teaching. The messiah will then not only destroy the sinner with the word of his mouth, but will also instruct/discipline Israel with this same word (λόγος στόματος αὐτοῦ in 17,24.35 and ῥάβδος παιδείας in 18,7 are parallel terms; cf. Isa 11,4 which is alluded to and where the LXX translates שֶׁבַע [“rod”] by λόγος). In other words, the messiah’s word has a twofold effect: for the righteous person who has been cleansed it will result in justice (17,26.43) and moral guidance (18,7); for the sinner it will bring about destruction (17,24-25.35-36).

To probe further regarding the means by which the messiah realizes his mission, 17,33-34 reveals that the messiah’s liberation is not based on human military means but on divine power. In fact, 17,35-37, alluding to Isaiah 11,2-4, explains that God endowed his messiah with the Spirit that provides him with wisdom and power to liberate and judge (cf. 18,7). If we also recognize the connection of ideas employed by “word”, “might” and “Spirit” in 17,36-37 (ἐν ἰσχύι λόγου; δυνατὸν ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ), in combination with Isaiah 11,2 (πνεῦμα ἰσχύος [LXX]) and Isaiah 11,4 (ἐν πνεύματι χειλέων [LXX]), then we may suggest that the messiah’s words have such powerful effect because they are Spirit-imbued words.

(¹⁶) Cf. ELLIOTT, *Survivors*, 490-491.

In conclusion, the hope for the liberation of “Israel” from bondage to foreign and domestic oppressors lies for the author of *Psalms of Solomon* in the concept of a future Davidic messiah that is strongly rooted in Isaiah 11. The messiah will sift the righteous and the sinner by his Spirit-imbued word of wisdom and power that has a twofold effect: for the righteous it will bring cleansing, liberation and restoration; for the sinner it will announce judgment and destruction. Some scholars contend that the psalmist portrays a “spiritual” messiah rather than a political militant one⁽¹⁷⁾. However, although the messiah in *Psalms of Solomon* certainly has a spiritual side (his source of liberation is divine), we cannot dichotomize this from the political dimension (liberation from the Romans and illegitimate Jewish rulers) and militant dimension (the violent aspect can hardly be denied in, e.g., 17,24-25.35)⁽¹⁸⁾. Hence, the traditional picture of a political warrior-messiah is still present, but it has been supplemented with that of a Spirit-empowered teacher-messiah.

2. Qumran

The Essene community at Qumran might have originated as a faction within the anti-Seleucid coalition (the Hasidim?) of the Maccabean period during the latter part of the second century B.C.E., but was destroyed during the first Jewish revolt in 66-70 C.E., and most of the sectarian scrolls can be dated to the first century B.C.E.⁽¹⁹⁾. In the Qumran literature, we find the conceptualization of three eschatological figures — occasionally a prophet like Moses, and more often the messiahs of Aaron and Israel (1QS 9,11 is the *locus classicus* for this expectation, but cf. CD 7,17-21; 1Q28a col 2,11-22;

⁽¹⁷⁾ DE JONGE, “Psalms”, 174; J.H. CHARLESWORTH, “Messianology in the Biblical Pseudepigrapha”, *Qumran-Messianism. Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. J.H. CHARLESWORTH *et al.*) (Tübingen 1998) 30-31; cf. HORSLEY-HANSON, *Bandits*, 106.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Cf. J.J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York 1995) 54-55.

⁽¹⁹⁾ MURPHY, *World*, 188-189; J.J. COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids–Cambridge² 1998) 146-150. See also G. Boccaccini’s challenging thesis that the Essenes at Qumran were an offshoot of Enochic Judaism (*Beyond the Essene Hypothesis. The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* [Grand Rapids 1998]). References to Qumran literature are taken from F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ–E.J.C. TIGCHELAAR, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden–Grand Rapids 1997-1998).

4Q174 f1-3 col 1,10-13; 4Q175 5-18) ⁽²⁰⁾. Collins argues that the dual messianic offices of priest and king imply a critique of the combination of these offices by the Hasmoneans ⁽²¹⁾. The end time is marked not only by the coming of the messiahs but also by an eschatological war between the powers of Light and Darkness. The Prince of Light (archangel Michael) and the Sons of Light (including the Qumran community) are pitted against the Prince of Darkness (Belial) and the Sons of Darkness, who are assisted by, *inter alia*, the “Kittim”, which probably refers to the Romans ⁽²²⁾. The Qumran literature anticipated a legitimate high priesthood, a restored Davidic monarchy and a purified remnant of Israel at whose core would be the Qumran community ⁽²³⁾.

Since Qumran messianism was not monolithic, we shall first elucidate the messianic ideas in a few individual texts and then determine whether these portrayals contain common elements. 1Q28b col 5,21-26 echoes Isaiah 11 and presents a messiah endowed with the Spirit of knowledge and power who will bring judgment and “salvation” with the power of his mouth, with the רוח of his lips. It would probably not be too wide of the mark to claim that the powerful רוח of his mouth either refers to the Spirit of might or to the effect of his Spirit-endowment. 4Q161 presents a Davidic messiah who will participate in the eschatological war against the *Kittim*/Romans ⁽²⁴⁾, and Isaiah 11,1-5 is even cited in its entirety (f8-10 col 3,11-16). This suggests that the powerful effect of the רוח of the messiah’s lips is due to his endowment of the Spirit. Perhaps this is why in line 19 the

⁽²⁰⁾ The clause about the two messiahs in 1QS 9,11, however, is absent in 4QS^e (J.H. CHARLESWORTH, “Challenging the *Consensus Communis* Regarding Qumran Messianism [1QS, 4QS MSS]”, *Qumran-Messianism*, 120-134).

⁽²¹⁾ COLLINS, *Scepter*, 95. G.S. Oegema argues more specifically for a priestly-royal messiah in the earlier literature (1QS, 1Q28a, 1Q28b, 4Q161, 4Q175, CD) as a reaction to the Hasmonean priest-kings, and for a royal messiah in the later writings (4Q174, 4Q246, 4Q285) as a reaction to the Herodian kings (“Messianic Expectations in the Qumran Writings: Theses on their Development”, *Qumran-Messianism*, 53-82). Atkinson even argues that Davidic messianism emerged at Qumran only during the Herodian period (35 B.C.E.-70 C.E.) (“Use”, 112-123).

⁽²²⁾ MURPHY, *World*, 206-208; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 155-157, 166-171.

⁽²³⁾ C.A. EVANS, “The Messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. R.S. HESS–M.D. CARROLL R.) (Grand Rapids 2003) 90.

⁽²⁴⁾ Atkinson, dating 4Q161 as Herodian, argues that the *Kittim* symbolize the Romans and their Herodian allies (“Use”, 117).

execution of the messiah's enemies by the רוח of his lips can be directly related or attributed to God's support of the messiah with the Spirit of might. 4Q534 col 1,8-10; 2,7-16 probably alludes to Isaiah 11 and 42 when it depicts God's Chosen One filled with wisdom and knowledge who will cause destruction by the רוח of his breath⁽²⁵⁾.

The picture that emerges from these texts is that of a Spirit-empowered Davidic messiah rooted in Isaiah 11 (and 42) who will sift the righteous and the wicked through the רוח of his mouth. The issue then is the nature of what exactly comes out of the messiah's mouth, indicated by רוח שפתיו in Isaiah 11,4. The word שפה can mean "lip" but also "speech", and the semantic domain of רוח contains both "breath" and "Spirit", so that the expression רוח שפתיו may simply mean "the breath of his lips" but it can also refer to the messiah's Spirit-imbued word. There are good reasons to assume that probably both references are in view. First, the wisdom and knowledge provided by the Spirit in Isaiah 11,2 probably form the basis for the messiah's Spirit-imbued speech in Isaiah 11,4. Moreover, the powerful effect of the messiah's words in Isaiah 11,4 should probably also be attributed to this Spirit of might of Isaiah 11,2. Second, the LXX translation of Isaiah 11,4 explicitly states that words come out of the messiah's mouth ($\delta \text{ λόγος τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ}$), and the intended parallelism with πνεῦμα χειλέων suggests that these words are Spirit-infused. Hence, we may conclude that the means of the messiah's sifting the righteous and the wicked is his Spirit-imbued word.

Other writings rather highlight a messiah with a teaching role. 4Q175 5-13 speaks both of the eschatological Prophet who will bring God's revelatory teaching (with negative consequences for those who reject it) and of a royal-political messiah who will execute judgment, and lines 14-20 present the idea of a priestly messiah who will teach the law. The teaching function implicit in the epithet "the Interpreter/Teacher of the law" in CD 7,18 and 4Q174 f1 col 1,11 probably refers to the same priestly messianic figure⁽²⁶⁾. 4Q541 f7 4-6

⁽²⁵⁾ É. Puech interprets the entire expression רוח נשמתו in col 1,10; 2,7 as "his Spirit" (*Qumrân Grotte 4.XXII. Textes araméens première partie* 4Q529-549 [DJD 31; Oxford 2001] 134, 143, 146).

⁽²⁶⁾ Cf. M.A. KNIBB, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge 1987) 264-266; COLLINS, *Scepter*, 114-115. P.R. Davies argues that the Damascus community expected only a single teacher-messiah and not a dual or Davidic messiahship ("Judaisms in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Case of the Messiah", *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context* [eds. T.H. LIM *et al.*] [Edinburgh 2000] 219-232). However, the diarchic view remains widely held.

possibly refers to judgment or a sifting of the wicked and the wise ones through the messiah's word, and 4Q541 f9 col 1,2-3 depicts a priestly messiah who will perform acts of cleansing by means of divine teaching⁽²⁷⁾. These texts, then, depict a priestly teacher-messiah who will sift the righteous and the wicked through his teaching in that it brings moral guidance and purification for the righteous and judgment for the wicked.

In sum, although the Qumran literature portrays various messianic figures, they appear to have some common traits. Judgment is an important function of both the teacher-messiah and the royal messiah, and occurs when the revelatory words of the teacher-messiah's mouth are rejected (4Q175; cf. 4Q541) and when the royal messiah will strike the wicked with the Spirit-imbued word of his mouth (1Q28b, 4Q161, 4Q534). The common denominator, then, appears to be what comes out of the mouth of the eschatological figure, whether a revelatory divine word or a powerful Spirit-infused word. Moreover, this revelatory teaching would interpret the law to the righteous and cleanse and guide them, and the Spirit's providing the royal messiah with wisdom also has a "salvific" dimension in that it establishes justice for the righteous. This revelatory teaching or Spirit-imbued word of the messiah's mouth, then, sifts the righteous (including the Qumran community) and the wicked (the Romans and the Hasmoneans [or Herodians if one dates some writings later]). Thus, Qumran's diarchic view of the messiah — the traditional Davidic Spirit-empowered messiah of Isaiah 11 and a teacher-messiah — envisages a similar means by which the messiah liberates and sifts "Israel", namely by the divine or Spirit-imbued word of his mouth.

3. *Similitudes of Enoch*

Since the *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37-71) does not seem to refer to any specific historical crisis it is difficult to date. Collins argues for a date somewhere between 40 B.C.E. and 66 C.E.: (i) 56,5-7 may allude to the invasion of Palestine by the Parthians in 40 B.C.E.; (ii) 67,5-13 may reflect Herod's attempt to cure himself in the hot springs of Callirhoe; (iii) there is no reference to the first Jewish revolt⁽²⁸⁾. In this case, combined with references in 46,4-6; 48,8; 53,5;

⁽²⁷⁾ We used the text as reconstructed by PUECH, *Qumrân*, 239-244.

⁽²⁸⁾ COLLINS, *Imagination*, 178; cf. ELLIOTT, *Survivors*, 492; G.W.E. NICKELSBURG, *1 Enoch. A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36*;

62,3 to the kings and the powerful (large landowners), the Enochic community of the righteous (38,1) might have perceived itself as persecuted (47,1-2) by the Romans and perhaps the impious Herodian dynasty⁽²⁹⁾.

The main concern in the *Similitudes* is the fate of the righteous and the wicked, as the opening of the first parable reveals (38,1-2)⁽³⁰⁾. Hence, the *Similitudes* also depicts a sifting between the righteous and the wicked: the righteous, i.e., those who reject this world and who have faith in God and his messiah, will dwell in heaven and on a transformed earth (e.g., 39,4-7; 41,2; 43,4; 45,3-5; 48,7; 51,5; 58,1-6; 60,6), but the wicked, i.e., those who have denied God and his messiah, will be punished and go to Sheol (e.g., 38,2; 41,2; 45,1-2.6; 46,4-8; 48,10; 53,2-5; 54,1-10; 56,5-8; 60,6; 67,8-13; 69,27-28). The Enochic community seems to be a narrower group than the entire Jewish people, which is indicated by phrases such as “the community of the righteous/holy” (38,1; 62,8) and “the house(s) of his congregation” (46,8; 53,6), as well as by the collective terms “the righteous/chosen/holy” which may point to a consciousness of community⁽³¹⁾. The Enochic community will be liberated from the wicked, especially the kings and the mighty and rich landlords, i.e., the ruling/upper class, by a messianic figure who will neutralize or annihilate their power and wealth (46,4-7; 48,8; 53,5; 62,1-13; 63,1-12)⁽³²⁾.

This messianic figure is called “Son of Man”, “Elect One” (cf. Isa 42,1), “Righteous One” or “Messiah”⁽³³⁾, is endowed with the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, might and righteousness (49,3; 62,2; cf. Isa

81-108 (Minneapolis 2001) 7, 63. Contra an early date (94-64 B.C.E.) (R.H. CHARLES, “1 Enoch”, *APOT* [ed. R.H. Charles] [Oxford 1913] II, 171) and a late date (70-135 C.E.) (M.A. KNIBB, “The Date of the Parables of Enoch: A Critical Review”, *NTS* 25 [1979] 345-359). We used M.A. Knibb’s translation, based on the Ethiopic text (“1 Enoch”, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* [ed. H.F.D. SPARKS] [Oxford 1984] 169-319).

⁽²⁹⁾ Cf. COLLINS, *Imagination*, 191; CHARLESWORTH, “Messianology”, 40.

⁽³⁰⁾ Cf. MURPHY, *World*, 262; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 179-181.

⁽³¹⁾ COLLINS, *Imagination*, 182, 191; ELLIOTT, *Survivors*, 496-500; NICKELSBURG, *1 Enoch*, 64.

⁽³²⁾ Cf. ELLIOTT, *Survivors*, 495-502; NICKELSBURG, *1 Enoch*, 47, 63.

⁽³³⁾ These epithets refer to the same individual (J.C. VANDERKAM, “Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37-71”, *The Messiah. Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* [ed. J.H. CHARLESWORTH] [Minneapolis 1992] 169-191; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 183-184).

11,2), and will exercise judgment on the wicked and bring “salvation” to the righteous (e.g., 45,3; 46,4-6; 48,7; 49,4; 51,1-5; 52,4-9; 53,3-7; 55,4; 61,8-9; 62,2-3.7-16; 69,27-29). Again, the issue is how the messiah is envisaged to carry out his liberating task. He will judge the wicked by the word of his mouth (62,2 ⁽³⁴⁾; cf. 61,9; 69,29), which reflects Isaiah 11,4 (LXX). This word is characterized by wisdom (“the word of his mouth” in 62,2 corresponds to “the wisdom of his mouth” in 51,3) and liberating power (69,29; cf. 52,4-9). We suggest, then, that this messianic figure is able to judge and liberate through his words of wisdom and power precisely because the Spirit has endowed him with these qualities (49,3).

To conclude, in reaction to the oppression of Rome and the Jewish aristocracy, the author of the *Similitudes* also draws on Isaiah 11 (and possibly Isa 42) to envisage the future liberation of his community through a messiah who will sift the wicked and the righteous by means of his Spirit-imbued word of wisdom and power.

4. 4 *Ezra*

The apocalypse of 4 *Ezra* (2 *Esdras* 3–14) was written in Palestine at the end of the first century C.E., and although its fictional setting is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.E., the real historical setting is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by the Romans (3,1) ⁽³⁵⁾. Hence, the Babylonian exile becomes the literary occasion for exploring the theological issues, especially that of divine justice, raised by the recent tragedy (e.g., 3,20-36; 4,22-25; 5,28-30; 6,55-59). Although Ezra’s hardest questions are not explicitly answered, the comfort offered is that God has created two worlds (7,50) and will bring the new age in which his justice will be fully manifested ⁽³⁶⁾. 4 *Ezra* also depicts a sifting between the righteous and the wicked (e.g., 7,35-36.47.60-61.76-99), and, again, the liberation or “salvation” (by the messiah) is not for the entire Jewish nation; instead, merely a remnant will be saved, which

⁽³⁴⁾ Although all MSS have “and the Lord of Spirits sat on the throne of his glory”, it is often emended to “and the Lord of Spirits set *him* on the throne of his glory”, which fits the direct context (61,8-9; 62,3.5.8-9) (cf. CHARLES, “1 Enoch”, II, 227).

⁽³⁵⁾ M.E. STONE, *Fourth Ezra*. A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra (Minneapolis 1990) 10; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 195-196. The text of 4 *Ezra* is most widely preserved in Latin.

⁽³⁶⁾ Cf. STONE, *Fourth Ezra*, 35-36; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 201-205.

poses a great dilemma for Ezra (3,36; 7,51.60.138-140; 8,1-3.55-56.61-62; 9,15-16.21; 12,34; 13,48; 14,9) ⁽³⁷⁾.

4 *Ezra* contains three messianic passages. First, 7,28-29 shows that the messiah will be revealed and live for four hundred years after which he will die, but this passage does not assign any specific role to him. Second, the so-called “eagle vision” (chaps. 11–12) describes the pronouncement of judgment on the eagle, i.e., Rome, by the lion, which is identified as the Davidic messiah in 12,31-32 ⁽³⁸⁾. Third, in the vision of “the man from the sea” (chap. 13), the messiah reappears at the eschaton to judge the wicked and liberate “Israel”. Although the “man from the sea” in 13,1-13 is not explicitly identified as the messiah, the similarity in task (judgment and liberation), the allusions to Isaiah 11,4 in 13,4.10-11, the designation of the messiah and “the man from the sea” as “son” in 7,28; 13,32, and the parallel between 13,25-26 and 12,31-32 strongly suggest that this figure is none other than the messiah ⁽³⁹⁾.

This messianic figure will judge and destroy the wicked, deliver the righteous and establish justice and peace (12,31-34; 13,10-13.25-50) ⁽⁴⁰⁾, and once more we need to consider how the Davidic messiah will accomplish this. The messiah will destroy the wicked by means of, *inter alia*, “a flaming breath from his lips” (*de labiis eius spiritum flammae* [13,10-11]), which closely resembles the killing of the wicked by the רוח שפתי in Isaiah 11,4. Since the Latin *spiritus* has the same ambiguity as the Hebrew רוח, denoting “breath” or “Spirit”, the expression could refer to the messiah’s Spirit-imbued word (cf. section I.2 above). This view coheres with the powerful fiery voice from the messiah’s mouth in 13,4.33, and the forensic speech of the lion in 11,37-38; 12,1.31. The lion-messiah in chapters 11–12 seems to be less violent than the man-messiah in chapter 13: whereas the function of the former is judicial and his speech to the eagle reads like a legal indictment, the voice of the latter has a violent effect (13,4.10-11), although the legal element is also present (13,37-38) ⁽⁴¹⁾.

⁽³⁷⁾ Cf. STONE, *Fourth Ezra*, 151, 171, 209; COLLINS, *Imagination*, 209; ELLIOTT, *Survivors*, 504-513. Note also the concept of “survivors” (6,25; 7,28; 9,7-8; 13,16.19), and in 4,38; 7,68, Ezra even contends that everyone is unrighteous.

⁽³⁸⁾ The three heads most probably represent the emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian (STONE, *Fourth Ezra*, 10; Collins, *Imagination*, 206).

⁽³⁹⁾ Cf. CHARLESWORTH, “Messianology”, 38.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Elliott argues that in 12,32-34 the messiah judges Israel and no longer the eagle (*Survivors*, 506-507).

⁽⁴¹⁾ Cf. STONE, *Fourth Ezra*, 40, 209-213, who consequently denies royal-military terminology to refer to the messiah’s activities.

In sum, *4 Ezra* portrays a non-nationalistic Davidic warrior-messiah rooted in Isaiah 11, who will liberate “Israel” from the Romans not by human military means but by supernatural agency, namely, through forensic speech (11,36-46; 12,31-34) or a Spirit-imbued word (13,9-11)⁽⁴²⁾.

5. Conclusion

Although the Palestinian messianic apocalyptic literature presents no homogenous view of the messiah and his functions, some common traits can be detected. In order to respond to the present political-religious crises, messianic apocalypticism envisaged the new age of peace and justice (God’s rule) on earth to occur through God’s Spirit-endowed messiah, and many of the texts we elucidated draw on or allude to Isaiah 11 (esp. v. 4), and sometimes Isaiah 42. We argued that the primary and powerful means by which the messiah executes judgment, sifts the righteous and the wicked, and establishes the new age is his Spirit-imbued word (of wisdom and power). Although messianic apocalypticism emphasizes the judgment aspect of the messiah’s Spirit-imbued word, this is not its only function. In *Psalms of Solomon* and Qumran, the messiah is also expected, with this same word, to provide cleansing, moral instruction and justice for the righteous. However, whereas *Psalms of Solomon* envisages only one messiah in whom both aspects of judgment and teaching are combined, Qumran could visualize two messiahs — the Davidic warrior-messiah and a teacher-messiah. Thus, Palestinian messianic apocalypticism developed, with various nuances, the picture of a Davidic Spirit-empowered messiah of Isaiah 11,1-4.9; 42,1.4 (certainly the teaching function).

We further discovered that, in Palestinian apocalyptic literature, the principal religious-political conflict is not between Israel and Rome but between the righteous and the wicked (whether the latter be Romans or Jewish aristocracy, collaborators or apostate high-priestly rulers)⁽⁴³⁾. The messianic figures that the apocalyptic literature presents, then, are

⁽⁴²⁾ Although *2 Baruch*, compiled around the same time as *4 Ezra*, also depicts a traditional warrior-messiah, it does not reveal by what means he will achieve his task. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* do not shed more light on our agenda either. The apocalypse of Revelation, contemporary with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, is more informative: it describes a messianic figure who destroys the wicked by a two-edged (s)word from his mouth (19,13-15; cf. 1,15-16; 2,12.16-17).

⁽⁴³⁾ Cf. HORSLEY, *Jesus*, 133, 140; HORSLEY–HANSON, *Bandits*, 245.

not envisaged as liberating the whole of Israel but a righteous Israel-within-Israel⁽⁴⁴⁾. Although the imagery of warfare is present in these writings, there is no evidence that the messianic figures were expected to have any real military function. Instead, the warfare is “spiritualized” in that the messiah will destroy the wicked by means of a spiritual or supernatural (though real and violent) force, namely, the Spirit-imbued word of his mouth⁽⁴⁵⁾. Messianic apocalypticism did not advocate human violent revolution but supported a “quietist” attitude in that it envisaged a liberation by God’s messiah, which was nevertheless real and violent⁽⁴⁶⁾. Hence, Palestinian messianic apocalypticism expressed a spirituality that was rooted in political and remnant ideologies. We now turn to the Fourth Gospel to examine to what extent the Johannine Jesus adheres to this picture.

II. Oppression, Liberation and the Sword of the Messiah in the Fourth Gospel

In the introduction to section I, we mentioned that the Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus as the Spirit-endowed Davidic messiah, but now we need to examine how the Johannine messiah operates⁽⁴⁷⁾. If the Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus as a messianic liberator, we must find out whom, and from whom or what he will liberate. Moreover, by what means does Jesus liberate? Should we agree with Collins’ observation that “[t]here is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that Jesus wielded a sword against anyone, either by hand or mouth”⁽⁴⁸⁾? Can the Johannine Jesus and his movement be regarded as quietists, activists or anything else? We mentioned at the outset the virtual silence of scholarship on the subject, and consequently we will start to address these issues by elucidating the Johannine concepts of oppression, liberation and Jesus’ “sword”. Due to the limitations of this article, we can merely sketch

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Cf. Elliott, who makes a convincing case that Second Temple Judaism depicted an a-nationalistic messianology, i.e., a messiah-for-the-elect (*Survivors*, 469-514).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Cf. HORSLEY–HANSON, *Bandits*, 130.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Cf. COLLINS, *Scepter*, 55; ID., *Imagination*, 277-278.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ For general treatments of Jesus as messiah in the Fourth Gospel, see M. DE JONGE, “Jewish Expectations about the ‘Messiah’ according to the Fourth Gospel”, *NTS* 19 (1973) 246-270; D. NEUFELD, “‘And When That One Comes’: Aspects of Johannine Messianism”, *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. C.A. EVANS–P.W. FLINT) (Grand Rapids 1997) 120-140.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ COLLINS, *Imagination*, 278.

the contours of John's understanding of liberation by Jesus' "sword", but we hope to develop this idea further in the future.

Most scholars would date the Fourth Gospel in the period 80-95 C.E., i.e., in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and the failed attempt of revolutionary Judaism to liberate itself from the Romans. John's intended audience could partly (but not exclusively) have consisted of non-Christian Jews, many of whom were probably disillusioned, and for this traumatic post-70 C.E. Jew, the Fourth Gospel provides an alternative perspective of comfort and hope⁽⁴⁹⁾. Jesus redefines the main pillars or symbols of Judaism: he is the new temple (2,19-21), supersedes Torah (1,17; 5,39-47), redefines entry into the eschatological age (3,3-6), reinterprets the use of the sabbath (7,21-23), etc. Moreover, as we shall see, Jesus also redefines and subverts various messianic expectations of Palestinian apocalypticism.

1. *Oppression*

John's dualistic worldview visualizes a conflict between the realm "from below", which is characterized by the devil, flesh, darkness, death, sin, lies, and the realm "from above", to which belongs God, Jesus, Spirit, light, life, freedom, truth. This realm "from below" is called "the world" (8,23), and is essentially a hostile, evil environment (1,10-11; 3,19; 7,7; 15,18-19; 16,33)⁽⁵⁰⁾. The devil is "the ruler of this world" (12,31; 14,30; 16,11), and is portrayed as a murderer, liar and "the evil one" (8,44; 17,15; cf. 1 John 3,8). Sin in the Fourth Gospel is primarily the sin of unbelief, of rejection of Jesus (8,24; 16,9), which results in death (8,21.24). Those who commit sin are in fact enslaved to sin (8,34) and belong to the devil (8,44; cf. Judas [6,70; 13,2.27]; 1 John 3,8). Within John's dualism, one belongs either to God/Jesus or to the devil, and hence people in general are "from the world" — they belong to the world and to its ruler the devil (cf. 1,18; 3,6; 8,23.47)⁽⁵¹⁾. The main oppression, then, is a spiritual oppression that everyone experiences and that comes from the devil.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Cf. MOTYER, "Jesus", 87-88; ID., *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and "the Jews"* [Carlisle 1997] 73, 103-104, 113-114.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Cf. S.B. MARROW, "Κόσμος in John", *CBQ* 64 (2002) 96-100.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Cf. S. PEDERSEN, "Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel: John 8", *New Readings in John. Literary and Theological Perspectives* (eds. J. NISSEN-S. PEDERSEN) (JSNTSS 182; Sheffield 1999) 187-190; MIRANDA, *Being*, 100-102. Contra B.J. MALINA-R.L. ROHRBAUGH, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis 1998) 246.

The oppression of the devil can also take other forms. “The Jews”, i.e., those Jews who are hostile and opposed to Jesus, especially from among the religious leaders (e.g., 5,16-18; 6,41.52; 7,1; 8,31-59; 9,13-34; 10,31-39), belong to the devil (8,44) ⁽⁵²⁾. These Jewish rulers caused religious-social oppression for fellow Jews who were open to Jesus, which seems to have been primarily the threat of excommunication, and hence of becoming a social outcast (7,13; 9,22.34; 12,42; 16,2; 19,38; 20,19), though even murder was in view (16,2). Moreover, the Roman rule in general caused political-religious oppression (cf. 18,31; 19,18.38), and the contrast between Jesus and Pilate in John 18–19 and the fact that “the Jews” clearly align themselves with Rome (19,15) indicate that Pilate and the Roman rule he represents are also “from this world”, and hence can be seen as an expression of the rule of the devil ⁽⁵³⁾.

The Fourth Gospel also depicts other categories of oppression. The sinful Samaritan woman was probably a social outcast and hence had to draw water at an unusual time (4,6-7.17-18). Other people experienced physical oppression that also resulted in social-religious oppression since their illness prevented them to participate fully in various social and religious activities. The ill man at the pool of Bethesda had not been able to take part in the social-religious life of his day for thirty-eight years (5,5-7). Similarly, the man born blind was a beggar (9,8), was stigmatized as a sinner (9,2.34) and would probably not be allowed to worship in the temple — even after his miraculous healing he was expelled by the religious system (9,34).

2. *Liberation and Jesus' Sword*

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is depicted as a messianic liberator who will set people free from the oppressive conditions described above. Jesus is being sent “from above” to the realm from below, i.e., the world, to save or liberate people in the sense of giving them eternal life (1,4.9-13; 3,16-17; 8,12; 12,46-47; 17,6). At the arrival of his “hour”, Jesus announced the judgment and conquest of the world and its ruler (12,23.31; 16,8.11.32-33; cf. 1 John 3,8). The imminent cosmic defeat in 12,31 is immediately followed by the picture of

⁽⁵²⁾ Cf. MOTYER, *Father*, 46-57; *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (eds. R. BIERINGER–D. POLLEFEYT–F. VANDECASTEELE–VANNEUVILLE) (Louisville 2001).

⁽⁵³⁾ Cf. M. HENGEL, “The Kingdom of Christ in John”, ID., *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh 1995) 342-343.

cosmic restoration in 12,32, and, as 12,33 reveals, both aspects — the judgment of the devil and the liberation of humankind — refer to the future cross as the place where Jesus ultimately gives his life for the life of the world and deals with sin (3,14-15; 6,51; 12,24; 19,30) ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

We shall now probe further into how Jesus liberates people and establishes the new age of justice and peace. Jesus' main activity in the Fourth Gospel is teaching (6,59; 7,14-17.28.35; 8,2.20; 18,19-20) and he is frequently addressed as "Teacher" (1,38; 3,2; 8,4; 11,28; 13,13-14; 20,16). Moreover, Jesus is introduced as the incarnate Word who has come to reveal God through his revelatory words (1,14-18; 3,34). We suggest, then, that Jesus' teaching or revelatory word is the primary means by which he accomplishes his liberating mission ⁽⁵⁵⁾. Hence, Jesus was questioned precisely regarding his teaching (18,19).

Regarding the nature of Jesus' "sword", it is Spirit-imbued, contains liberating truth and is "double-edged". First, Jesus can speak God's revelatory words because Jesus is endowed with the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge and liberating power (1,32-34; 3,34-36; cf. n. 9), which implies that the Spirit provides Jesus with wisdom and knowledge that probably forms the basis for his teaching ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Moreover, the Spirit is also active in or through Jesus' words: the "living water" that Jesus offers (4,10.14) refers, *inter alia*, to his Spirit-imbued teaching (cf. 7,38-39) ⁽⁵⁷⁾, and in 6,63, Jesus explicitly states that his words are permeated by the Spirit. Second, Jesus himself is depicted as the embodiment, source and dispenser of truth (1,14.17; 8,40.45-46; 14,6; 18,37), and, in 8,31-32, Jesus states that those who abide in his word will know the truth that liberates. Similarly, in 17,17, Jesus mentions that God's word, which Jesus proclaims, is or contains truth. Third, Jesus' word is "double-edged" in that it sifts people — accepting Jesus' teaching brings liberation and restoration but rejection results in immediate judgment and continued oppression (e.g., 3,15-18.36; 5,24; 6,35; 9,41; cf. 10,19).

Regarding the effects of Jesus' "sword", it liberates, cleanses, gives life and judges. In reply to the obvious lie of the Jews in 8,33 —

⁽⁵⁴⁾ For the cross as an atonement for sin, see M. TURNER, "Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell", *EvQ* 62 (1990) 99-122.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Cf. C. BENNEMA, *The Power of Saving Wisdom. An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT II/148; Tübingen 2002) 117-122.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Cf. BENNEMA, *Power*, 161-167.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ TURNER, *Spirit*, 61-63; BENNEMA, *Power*, 183-185.

they were enslaved to Rome — Jesus points out their greater enslavement, namely, to sin and to the devil (8,34.44), but from this spiritual oppression the truth in Jesus' word can liberate (8,31-32.36.51). This coheres with the cleansing dimension of Jesus' word in 15,3 and 17,8.17. Jesus' word is also life-giving in that it provides participation in the divine life (ζωή) that is shared by the Father and the Son (17,2-3.8.20-21). The “living water” in 4,10.14 refers to Jesus' life-giving word, and in 6,63 Jesus states that his Spirit-imbued words are (i.e., produce) life. Thus, the picture that emerges is that Jesus' Spirit-imbued word of truth can provide people with liberation from sin, cleansing and partaking in the divine life. The reverse side of the “sword”, however, is that this same Spirit-imbued word can bring judgment if it is rejected (3,18; 5,24; 8,45-47; 12,48-49). Although the purpose of Jesus' coming was not to judge the world, in the sense of condemning it (3,17; 8,15; 12,47), judgment is the inevitable, immediate consequence of rejecting Jesus and his word (though the eschatological dimension is also retained [5,28-29; 12,48]).

To give some examples of how Jesus liberates the oppressed by his Spirit-imbued word. Jesus' life-giving Spirit-imbued word or “living water” offered to the Samaritan woman provides spiritual liberation for her and many other Samaritans (4,41-42), and Jesus also offers religious liberation by proposing a new locus and mode of worship (4,21-24). The liberating word offered for his son in 4,50 also effects spiritual liberation for the Herodian collaborator and his household (4,53) ⁽⁵⁸⁾. To the ill man at the pool, Jesus spoke a liberating word (5,8-9), which was not only a physical liberation but also a social-religious one — he could enter the temple again (5,14) — and even a spiritual one if one recognizes that Jesus links the man's illness and (his) sin in 5,14. Jesus' words have liberated the disciples from the world and given them life (6,68; 17,8.14). In case of the man born blind, Jesus' word in 9,7 provides physical liberation from blindness and social liberation from economic dependency (9,8), and, again by a revelatory word, spiritual/religious liberation from a condemning Judaism (9,34-38) ⁽⁵⁹⁾. Even Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus and the heated debates with “the Jews” show his concern

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Ὁ βασιλικός probably refers to a Jewish official in Herod's court and hence was considered a collaborator (cf. KARRIS, *Jesus*, 58-61).

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Motyer's essay “Jesus” is an excellent treatise of the socially marginalized, and KARRIS, *Jesus*, 73-95 draws attention to the socially oppressed group of women.

also for their spiritual liberation. Jesus' word of rebuke in 18,11 aimed to liberate Peter from militant activism⁽⁶⁰⁾. In his dialogue with Pilate in 18,33–19,11, Jesus implicitly offers political liberation from oppressive rules such as Rome since his non-violent kingdom is not “from this world”. However, although Jesus' kingdom is not from this world — its source is not “from below” — yet it exists and operates in this world, and the demand for an exclusive allegiance to Jesus and his rule will inevitably clash with loyalties to regimes and ideologies “from this world”⁽⁶¹⁾.

At whom is Jesus' “sword” aimed, i.e., who are the recipients of Jesus' teaching, and for which purpose? Jesus' teaching is not merely for the Jewish nation but for the world at large (8,26; 18,20). This is not surprising if one remembers that Jesus' entire mission was geared towards the world (1,9; 3,16-17; 10,16; 11,51-52; 12,47; 16,28; 17,18), and that everyone is in need of spiritual liberation. Moreover, Jesus' interaction with so-called “outsiders”, such as the Samaritans, “the Greeks” in 12,20-23 and Pilate, also reveals that his liberating mission goes beyond Israel's physical and ethnic borders (cf. 10,16). In fact, the purpose of Jesus' “sword” is to sift the world and to constitute a new “Israel”, a new community that is liberated from spiritual oppression and that demonstrates an exclusive allegiance to Jesus and his kingdom.

3. The Transference of the Messiah's Sword to the Disciples

After his departure, Jesus will send to his disciples the Spirit-Paraclete to continue his mission in this world. As “the Spirit of truth”, the Paraclete will mediate the liberating truth present in Jesus' words to the disciples to inform and empower their liberating witness to the world (14,26; 15,26-27; 16,12-15). Moreover, connecting 16,8-11 with 16,12-15, the Paraclete will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment in order to liberate the world precisely through the disciples' witness because the world cannot see or know the Paraclete (14,17). People who are confronted with the disciples' Paraclete-imbued witness of truth are in fact confronted with Jesus' Spirit-imbued word itself and hence this witness is expected to have the same liberating effects. That is, the correlated witness of the

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Cf. HOWARD-BROOK, *Children*, 378.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Cf. RENSBERGER, *Faith*, 96-100, 116-118; HOWARD-BROOK, *Children*, 399-400; HENGEL, “Kingdom”, 340-341, 355.

Paraclete and the disciples also results in salvation or judgment, dependent on whether one accepts or rejects it (15,20; 16,8-11; 17,14-20; cf. 4,39). Thus, Jesus hands over his “sword” to his disciples and commands them to continue his liberating mission in this world by means of their Paraclete-imbued witness to the truth (cf. 20,21-23) ⁽⁶²⁾.

4. Summary

According to the Fourth Gospel, people in general are “from the world”, under the rule of the devil, enslaved to sin, and hence experience primarily a spiritual oppression. The devil can also operate through human beings (Judas, Pilate), religious institutions (the Judaism of “the Jews”) or political entities (Rome) (cf. Belial and the *Kittim* in Qumran). In addition to, or perhaps as an expression of, this spiritual oppression, people also suffer from physical, social, political and religious oppression. Although Jesus primarily liberates from the world and the spiritual oppression of the devil, sin, judgment and death, he also provides liberation from other forms of oppression and implicitly from derivative rulers such as Rome and “the Jews”, and often these are not watertight categories. Therefore, liberation in the Fourth Gospel should be seen as holistic. Jesus liberates people from oppression primarily by means of his Spirit-imbued word of truth, which is double-edged in that it liberates and gives life to those who accept it, but it results in (immediate) judgment, continued oppression and eventually death for those who reject it. Jesus’ “sword” is aimed at the world at large to sift it and to constitute a liberated community of people who live in exclusive allegiance to him and his rule, which will inevitably clash with an allegiance to Rome or to any other regime or ideology that has its source in this world and hence ultimately belongs to the devil’s rule. Jesus’ new society transcends and subverts any “worldly” society in that it no longer belongs to the world but still operates in the world. After his departure from this world, Jesus will hand over his “sword” to his disciples, who will continue his liberating mission in this world by means of their Paraclete-imbued witness.

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⁽⁶²⁾ For a comprehensive elaboration of the disciples’ Paraclete-empowered ministry, see BENNEMA, *Power*, 221-247. For the actual transference of the “sword”, see C. BENNEMA, “The Giving of the Spirit in John’s Gospel—A New Proposal?”, *EvQ* 74 (2002) 195-213.

Our study of Palestinian Jewish messianic apocalypticism and the Fourth Gospel demonstrates important points of contact, but the Fourth Gospel also significantly redefines and subverts various Jewish messianic expectations. First, both messianic apocalypticism and the Fourth Gospel “spiritualize” the concept of messiahship, in that the source of the messiah’s liberating power is supernatural rather than human military. Additionally, the Fourth Gospel also spiritualizes the concept of liberation, claiming that all people primarily need to be liberated from the spiritual oppression of sin and the devil (although cf. the notion of Belial in Qumran). Nevertheless, these concepts are still related to social-religious-political realities of this world. Second, as in messianic apocalypticism, the Johannine messiah is also expected to sift the righteous and the wicked rather than liberating the nation Israel from the Romans. However, whereas for messianic apocalypticism this is the liberation of “Israel” at the end of the age, the Fourth Gospel depicts the liberation of the world at large which has already started now. The Fourth Gospel has pulled the future into the present — all people are invited now to enter the true Israel inaugurated by Jesus. Third, we argued, contra Collins, that the Johannine Jesus uses for this sifting/liberation a similar “sword” to that of the messianic figures in Palestinian apocalypticism, namely, the Spirit-imbued word of truth from his mouth. Similar to *Psalms of Solomon* and Qumran, the Fourth Gospel depicts this eschatological liberator as a teacher-messiah⁽⁶³⁾. The continuation of Jesus’ liberating mission in this world is guaranteed through the transference of Jesus’ “sword” to his disciples.

Jesus’ subversive programme of liberation, then, presents a radical alternative to Torah-centred mainstream Judaism (as represented by “the Jews”), to withdrawal from the world (Qumran community), to go “quietly” underground (the apocalyptic literature), to nationalistic militancy (social bandits [Barabbas in 18,40], messianic pretenders, Zealots) and to collaboration with the Romans (Herodians)⁽⁶⁴⁾. The Johannine Jesus is not a militant activist, but neither is he a pacifistic quietist; he debated fiercely with “the Jews”, interacted incisively with Pilate, drove people out of the temple, etc. Jesus is a “revolutionary” in that he demands an exclusive allegiance to himself and constitutes a society that operates subversively in this world⁽⁶⁵⁾.

⁽⁶³⁾ Cf. Davies’ suggestion that the teaching activity of the messiah in the gospels may be more significant than any “Davidic” title (“Judaisms”, 232).

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Cf. MOTYER, *Father*, 87-102.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Cf. HORSLEY, *Jesus*, 324-326.

Our findings have implications for how we understand the Fourth Gospel. We have not read the Fourth Gospel as a two-level drama, i.e., John's retelling of the Jesus-story to match the story of his own community. Scholars who have gone down this route, paved by Martyn and Brown, have often depicted a so-called "Johannine community" that is oppressed or persecuted by post-70 C.E. synagogue Judaism and (hence) inward-looking or "sectarian" ⁽⁶⁶⁾. Instead, we contended that John's intended audience was much wider (but it could nevertheless have included a "Johannine community") ⁽⁶⁷⁾. Moreover, the schism in the Fourth Gospel is not between an inward-looking Johannine community and synagogue Judaism (as Martyn and his supporters would have it) but between those who accept Jesus' word and those who reject it, between the new "Israel" and the world at large. Hence, our reading discourages a treatment of the Fourth Gospel as a document from a sectarian community alienated or withdrawn from the world, which might lead to a view that the Fourth Gospel has no interest in reaching out to outsiders and the marginalized ⁽⁶⁸⁾. Instead, we argued that the Fourth Gospel challenges believers to reach out to the world at large, cross social barriers, witness to the truth, and alleviate oppression ⁽⁶⁹⁾.

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⁽⁶⁶⁾ J.L. MARTYN, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville 32003); R.E. BROWN, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (London 1979); RENSBERGER, *Faith*, 25-29; M.W.G. STIBBE, *John as Storyteller. Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge 1992) 56-58, 150; HOWARD-BROOK, *Children*, 20-24, 49-50. Cf. the extensive list of scholars mentioned by MOTYER, "Jesus", 72 n. 9; ID., *Father*, 13 n. 21.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Cf. MOTYER, "Jesus", 87-88; ID., *Father*, 212-215; R. BAUCKHAM, "The Audience of the Fourth Gospel", *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (eds. R.T. FORTNA-T. THATCHER) (Louisville 2001) 101-111. See also T.S. DOKKA, "Irony and Sectarianism in the Gospel of John", *Readings* (eds. J. NISSEN-S. PEDERSEN) 83-107; T. HÄGERLAND, "John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?", *JSNT* 25 (2003) 309-322.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ So, e.g., RENSBERGER, *Faith*, 124-130 (but see Motyer's criticism ["Jesus", 73-74]); MALINA-ROHRBAUGH, *Commentary*, 59-61, 237-245.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Cf. Motyer's essay "Jesus".

SUMMARY

This article elucidates the Johannine concept of Jesus' "sword" as the means of liberation against a background of Palestinian messianic apocalypticism. It is argued that the Johannine Jesus is depicted as a messiah who liberates the world at large from the spiritual oppression of sin and the devil by means of his Spirit-imbued word of truth. In addition, Jesus also provides physical, social, religious and political liberation. Jesus' programme of holistic liberation is continued by his disciples through the transference of his "sword" in the form of their Paraclete-imbued witness.