

John the Baptizer in the Gospel Traditions
Notes for Harvard Mandaean Conference
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The Q Source and the Earliest Traditions

The Q source is widely held to be the material common to Luke and Matthew, but not found in Mark. Scholars believe that it was a collection of the sayings of Jesus around the time of 50 C.E. Basing the discussion on the Lukan version of Q, a very distinctive portrait of John the Baptist emerges within the text. It is clear that John plays an important role from the beginning as the Q material begins with him instead of Jesus. In Luke 3:7-9 John is speaking to the multitudes, calling them a "brood of vipers," and somewhat chastising them for not being more involved in the movement and with their own lives. This is the most solid Q example scholars have because it is word for word with Matthew in Greek. For such a document to start with John the Baptist instead of Jesus has strong implications and definitely displays the significance and importance John held to the author/people of the time. John is out in the wilderness of Judea baptizing all that come to him. Q even has John saying in Luke 3:16-17 that he baptizes people with water yet there is one greater than he who will come and baptize the multitudes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus is considered the leading figure of Christianity, well it was based on him, but nevertheless John is considered one of the major players in the movement and considered significant by the author of Q. In Luke 7:18-23, one finds John sending two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is "he who is to come or shall we look for another?" Jesus heals a few people and then sends John's disciples back to tell "John what you have seen and heard." To begin with, John is on the scene before Jesus ever arrives into the picture plus John has his own disciples. He is an important leader of a community of followers in the wilderness, preparing the way of YHVH, and is doing so with his own set of followers independent of Jesus. By Luke 7:24-26 one sees the importance John holds in a question Jesus asks to the crowds about John. This is the main statement scholars have regarding John the Baptist. Jesus spoke to the crowds concerning John asking, "what did you go out into the wilderness to behold?" From this simple question, there are three answers offered; a reed shaken in the wind, a man clothed in soft raiment, and a prophet. After two failures, the people give the answer Jesus was looking for in their third response. "A prophet, yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." Being a prophet is the highest rank one can obtain in Judaism, so for Jesus to say John is more than a prophet has strong implications as to his status within the religious community. It shows that even Jesus is of the opinion that John is someone special, doing what the LORD has commanded him to do, and that the people should listen to and heed his words carefully for he is "more than a prophet." Adding to this is Jesus' statement in Luke 7:27 where he is referring to John as the one spoken about in Malachi 3, saying this is he (John) of whom it is written, "behold I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee." Luke 7:28 contains one of the most important statements about John spoken by Jesus. "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John." This simple statement adds considerably to the portrait of John in the Q source. Here is Jesus, considered to be the son of man, speaking of John as the greatest of all those born of women. Being born from Mary, this puts Jesus into that group as well. The Q source also adds to John's profile by explaining what not eating and drinking mean. In Luke 7:31-34, it states that John has come eating no bread and drinking no wine. This shows

the reader that John was a vegetarian and abstained from wine, unlike the Son of man and others who are considered gluttons and wine bibbers. Also an important addition to the role John plays is Luke 16:16 where it reads "the law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently." Here is an excellent verse showing the status John was afforded. Reading this, one notices that it is John who has brought a new covenant to the land of Israel and not Jesus. In addition, Luke 11:2-4 has Jesus' disciples coming up to him asking to be taught the prayer John taught his own disciples. Here we have Jesus' own disciples asking him not for his own prayer, but the one John taught his disciples and Jesus begins "when you pray, say..." Preserved here is quite possibly the very prayer John taught his disciples and it is of such importance that the disciples of Jesus wish to learn it too. There are a handful of teachings throughout Luke that are attributed to Jesus but are without any context. Scholars have suggested that these could very well be the original teachings of the Baptist. Some of these teachings are like blessed are the poor (6:20), be merciful (6:32), a blind man can not lead the blind (6:39), do not be anxious about your life (12:22), and no servant can serve two masters (16:13). It can and has been argued that these could have come from John. He and Jesus have geographic connections - Wadi el Yabis and the Jordan River. Family wise their mothers are related, both baptize, and both have disciples. Both carry very thematic teachings like care for the poor, repent and baptize, accept sinners, and the coming kingdom. It could be that these were the original teachings of John and are attributed to Jesus because he picked them up when he picked up the Baptist movement when John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod. Luke 3:10-14 is what scholars label as "maybe Q" - at least entertained as being a possible part of Q but not exactly fitting the definition. It is the only major teaching of John scholars can ascribe to him without doubt. This teaching contains many of the same themes as the various other teachings as stated above, attributed to Jesus but without any context. Here one can see John is telling the people if "you have two coats, give one away," that sinners (tax collectors) are welcome in the kingdom also, and not to take money under false pretenses. Luke 7:29-30 is also with the "maybe Q" group of texts. Although set in parentheses, these too sound familiar to 3:10-14 above in that sinners (tax collectors) are accepted because they had been baptized by John and that the Pharisees and the lawyers had rejected God's purpose since they rejected the baptism of John. Given such evidence, one can draw the conclusion that such teachings could be from the original Q source and that the various other out of context teaching running throughout Luke 6, 11, and 12, which are attributed to Jesus, could actually be those of John the Baptist.

The Markan Contribution

Mark contains many notable additions to the Q portrait of John. This gospel was written around 70 C.E. and has the tendency not to tell the reader secrets, instead letting them figure things out for themselves. Mark 1:2-3 is crediting Isaiah with a prophecy that isn't entirely his own. Instead, it is a combination of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. "Behold I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare thy way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Mark is utilizing a Qumran (pesher) style of combining texts to get his message across to the reader. He does this as an introduction to John (like Q he begins with John the Baptist). From Mark, scholars are able to add to their professional portrait of John and one of the first examples is Mark 1:6. It reads, "now John was clothed with camel's hair and had a leather girdle around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey." Mark is describing some of the physical characteristics of John's daily life in the wilderness of Judea. Scholars learn what he wore while "preparing the way" and what he ate (since it is already known that he neither ate nor

drank) "locusts and wild honey." As a side note, locust in Greek is akris and manna is ekris (only one letter difference) - it is possible that the Greek was translated incorrectly and John ate manna (honey wafer) instead of locusts. Mark 1:9 also adds to the portrait that John in the Jordan baptized Jesus of Nazareth. After Jesus came out of the water, he saw the Spirit descending upon him like a dove, Mark 1:10-11. Here, Mark is relaying to the reader that this is more of a personal disclosure to Jesus in that only Jesus saw the spirit and the voice said, "thou art my beloved son." Mark has Jesus in 1:14 coming onto the scene after John was arrested - almost signaling that since the main person/teacher (John) is removed from the scene, now one must come to take up the movement. Mark contains a wonderful story of John's capture and subsequent death by the hands of King Herod. Mark 6:14 introduces the plot in that Jesus has been preaching and casting out demons and when Herod heard of it, some said, "John the Baptizer has been raised from the dead." Then in Mark 6:16-29 the fate of John is told in detail - this is a very important addition to our running portrait of John the Baptist. Josephus records that Herod seized John and most likely took him to his palace/fortress Machaerus. While there, Herodias' daughter danced seductively for Herod and in return he promised her anything, up to half of his kingdom. She asked for the head of John the Baptizer on a platter at the instruction of her mother (presumably because of his rejection of Herod and Herodias' relationship). To stay true to his word, Herod sent a soldier to behead John and brought it in on a platter as requested. The reader is also made aware that after this had taken place, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. Another interesting addition Mark makes is Mark 8:27-30. Jesus and his disciples were heading to the village of Caesarea Philippi and he asked them "who do men say that I am?" Their first answer was "John the Baptizer." Presented here is a strong indication of the importance John had in his time that the disciples and general public would say that Jesus was John the Baptist. John had done many great things in the desert (preaching, baptizing, etc.) and when Jesus comes along doing similar actions, the people begin to think John has come back from the dead in another form. Some scholars have even suggested that John and Jesus looked similar physically. From these reports, the general public, disciples, and even King Herod feel that John the Baptist has come back from his execution and if Jesus and John did in fact look similar, it would make sense that such reports would begin to circulate. Mark 9:9-13 details a conversation between Jesus and his disciples regarding the scribes recording that Elijah must come first. Jesus says to them (Mk. 9:12) that "Elijah does come first to restore all things" and then poses a question (Mk. 9:12) "how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?" He is alluding to Daniel 7:13 "I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven," yet the Son of man is not suffering in that text. He then goes on to say in Mark 9:13, "but I tell you that Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him"(Zechariah 13:7). Jesus is clearly hinting here that John is Elijah return but as it is written of him? Scholars are not sure what this is in reference to, but there are four suffering servant hymns - Isaiah 42, 49, 50,53. Jesus may not be referring to a specific line of text, but a combination of these Isaiah hymns to form a "corporate role" so to speak for any servant of God, here John. Mark is showing the reader the importance John not only held to his disciples, but the high regard that Jesus himself held John to be. Finally in Mark 11:27-33, the chief priests, scribes, and elders confront Jesus asking "by what authority are you doing these things or who gave you this authority?" It is as if John is the benchmark test against which all things are measured and if you cannot speak to that, then Jesus will not speak to you. Mark is giving the information as he received it. He is not pushing an objective per se, it appears as though he presents the material fairly - showing the events in John's life and portraying the

events in Jesus' life without editing either for a specific purpose. From Mark (as discussed above), scholars have learned a great deal relating to John's clothing, his diet, disciples, and the manner in which he met his death. Also, readers are shown the importance in which John was held to his own disciples, the public at large, to Herod, and even to Jesus. From Mark, scholars are able to draw a fairly detailed and complete profile of who the historical figure of John the Baptist was.

Matthew's Editing: A Theological Construct

Matthew incorporates the Mark and Q material without any major problems. These two sources are complementary to each other, with Q laying the foundation portrait of John through his sayings, teachings, role and Mark coming in with additional material concerning John's life and importance to the people, building upon that foundation a more complete composite of the historical figure. For the purposes of Matthew's objective, Mark and Q are like two interlocking pieces of a puzzle; although separate works, they come together easily and are indeed compatible/complementary to each other. Matthew does have an objective he is pushing throughout his material and it is readily apparent to even an unskilled observer. As an overall blanket statement, it could be said that Matthew "sanitizes" Mark. He is pushing the notion that Jesus must increase and John must decrease. Whenever there arises a problem in conflict with this, Matthew tends to eliminate such problems and offers explanations/clarifications in some instances, more on that in a bit. Matthew generally leaves the material, as it is when nothing bothers his intentions, but opts to rewrite when a conflict arises. His utilization of the Q source (teachings) usually stay the same, however he shortens Mark (stories). However, Matthew does keep many of the same elements of Mark and Q, most notably the clothes and food, baptizing, arrest of John, and fasting are all the same. Now on to some specific examples of the differences. Matthew 3:3 is using the same basic quote as Mark attributed to Isaiah and the difference here is Matthew is only quoting Isaiah and not a combination of that and Malachi. Here he is removing the appearance of ignorance. Matthew 3:7 has John calling only the Pharisees and Sadducees a "brood of vipers." In Q, everyone is called this - clearly Matthews intention is to slam the other religious sects of Judaism (as he does later in Ch. 23). One of the major differences Matthew has is in his explanation of the baptism of Jesus by John. Chapter 3:13-17 records this event and Matthew adds his own little twists. First, he feels the need to explain why Jesus would need to be baptized (for he is without sin right?). Jesus comes saying (Mt. 3:15) "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." In 3:17, the voice from heaven came making a public announcement, as opposed to the private disclosure in Mark saying, "this is my beloved Son." Matthew 11:12-13 differs from Q (Lk. 16:16) in that Q has John bringing the new covenant and here it only has the prophets prophesizing up until him and not "since then the good news of the kingdom is preached" as in Lk. 16:16. Matthew 11:18-19 tells the reader that John came neither eating nor drinking, differing from Q (Lk. 7:31-34) where one is told what he did not come eating (bread) of drinking (wine). In Matthew 14, the death of John is shortened but has no emphasis change. Another major difference in Matthew is that in 17:9-13, he does have Jesus saying John is Elijah already come but drops the Mk. 9:13 comment "as it is written of him." The final major difference is that he completely drops Luke 3:10-14 "maybe Q" from his writings. This is certainly an important teaching of John and one of the only solid examples of such and there exists no trace of it anywhere in Matthew. Throughout all of Matthew's skillful edits/modifications, it would appear that his concerns are that his Lord Jesus must be set above all others, including John the Baptist. In this regard, he does not include the birth of John, he has

nothing about the suffering of John, and shortens the John material to give the reader less of it as to emphasize Jesus. Matthew shortens Mark's stories (sanitizes Mark) and keeps Q's teachings pretty much the same. He shortens, edits, eliminates problems, and explains an conflict that would make Jesus appear less.

Later Developments

Beyond the Biblical traditions there are numerous later sources relating to John the Baptist and the world surrounding him during the early first century of the Common Era. Each ancient source contributes its own distinct view and piece of the historical puzzle of recreating the life, mission, and teachings of John. We now need to look back from a historical-critical point of view to see what can be known about John the Baptist and how we know it. Some of these major sources include Q, Mark, Matthew, Thomas, Josephus, Pseudo-Clementines, Infancy Gospel of James, Shem-Tov Matthew, and later gospels of the Ebionites, Nazoreans, and Hebrews. Each one presents its own unique depiction of John and events surrounding his life and will be examined closely. Starting with biblical material, the Lukan version of Q should be examined first. In 7:24-26, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people concerning John and asking what it is they went out to the wilderness to see? He asks the same question three times and finally says John is "more than a prophet." Jesus also tells the crowd in 7:28 that "among those born of women none is greater than John." From Q, it is learned John "came eating no bread and drinking no wine." In 16:16, it states "The law and prophets were until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed." A possible original teaching by John the Baptist may be found in 16:18 (although not formally considered part of Q) and it reads, "anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Finally, from Q scholars are presented with a prayer, by Jesus, which John taught his disciples - "Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. Give us each our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation." Mark also presents various traditions on John the Baptist. From Mark, one learns John appears and is baptizing in the wilderness (1:4). An important commentary on John's clothes is contained in 1:6 where it describes garments of "camel's hair with a leather girdle around his waist." It goes on to state he ate locusts and wild honey. Scholars are also able to retrieve from Mark traditions of his baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river, Herod's arrest and execution of John because of Herodias, and that John's disciples fast while those of Jesus do not (2:18). Matthew too contains biblical material concerning John. Here is found references to John's clothing of camel hair and a leather girdle and to his dietary habits of eating locusts and wild honey. John's baptism is explained as a baptism of repentance (3:11) and that he baptizes Jesus (3:13). Found in 11:9-12, Jesus is addressing a crowd, telling them John is indeed more than a prophet, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John, and the law and prophets were until John. Matthew also portrays John coming neither eating nor drinking (11:18). From Matthew, one learns of John's arrest (14:3), his objection to Herod's adultery (14:4), and his death at the request of Herodias (14:5-13). Finally, in 17:12, Jesus is speaking with the inner three concerning Elijah's coming and says "Elijah has already come," referring to John. The last biblical material on John comes from Luke-Acts. From this material it is known that John is six months older than Jesus and their mothers (Mary and Elizabeth) are related, cousins perhaps. In Luke 1:80 it is revealed John grew up in the wilderness from childhood and remained there "until the day of his manifestation to Israel." Luke 1:15 explains John as being given a Nazirite vow (while still a child) and as a requirement of that

vow "he shall drink no wine or strong drink." John's baptism is for repentance and appears to be the only one taught in Alexandria and known to Apollos until his meeting with Paul (Acts 18:24-19:1). Knowledge of John and his role in the early "Christian" movement would not be possible by a study of biblical material alone. Continuing the search, we find a wealth of independent and secondary sources that contain numerous references to John the Baptist. First on this list is the Gospel of Thomas, which like Q is a sayings gospel containing 114 sayings of Jesus. It was discovered in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt where it is believed they remained buried since the 4th century. Only one in the entire gospel explicitly refers to John. In 46:1-2 it reads, "Jesus said 'From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women, no one is so much greater than John the Baptist that his eyes should not be averted'." Thomas 52:1-2 is not specifically about John the Baptist, yet may be read as referring to him indirectly. It states, "his disciples said to him (Jesus) 'Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel and they all spoke of you.' He said to them 'you have disregarded the living one who is in your presence, and have spoken of the dead'." Next comes the respected Jewish historian Josephus. There are two copies of his work: one Greek and the other Slavonic, each adding information to this evolving story. First, in the Greek version we find a reference to John in Antiquities of the Jews - written in the 90's while Domitian is in power. This work is a little more liberal with information than the earlier Jewish War and as such might be the reason John is mentioned. King Herod's army had a battle with the neighboring King Aretas and Herod suffered a military defeat. Josephus records that some of the Jews thought the destruction of Herod's army came from God as a punishment of what he did against John. Herod feared John's influence over the people and as a result had John sent out to Macherus where he was eventually beheaded. Recorded in the Slavonic version of Josephus we find that John would not allow wine or intoxicating drink anywhere near him. Also, that his lips "knew no bread," so much so that he did not even eat the unleavened bread traditional at the Passover feast. It is recorded John put animal's hair upon his body wherever it was not covered by his own hair. John dipped or cleansed the people who came to him in the waters of the Jordan. Slavonic Josephus also records that John ate only natural things: locusts and wild honey. The group of writings known as the Pseudo-Clementines claim to be the work of Clement (of Rome). Possibly written in the early 3rd century, the works, valuable for our purposes, record a discussion between Peter and Clement regarding Jewish sects and the disciples of John the Baptist. The first of two references records in 1.54.8, "Now the pure disciples of John separated themselves greatly from the people and spoke to their teacher as if he were concealed." Could this be an early reference to the Mandeans? The second reference comes from 1.60.1-4 where the disciples of John are talking with the disciples of Jesus and saying, "He (John) is the Christ and not Jesus...just as Jesus spoke concerning him, namely that he is greater than any prophet who had ever been." They also say John is greater than Moses and Jesus and therefore he is the Christ. Another interesting source to be considered is Shem-Tov's Hebrew Matthew. Written in the 14th century, a treatise written by Shem-Tov contains a Hebrew version of the complete text of Matthew. It contains several differences from the Greek copy of Matthew regarding John the Baptist. In 11:11 Jesus says, "among all those born of women none has risen greater than John the Baptist." Shem-Tov's version ends the sentence here without adding the phrase concerning those least in the kingdom being greater than he. Recorded in 11:13 it states, "For all the prophets and the law spoke concerning John" unlike the Greek version's "law prophesied until John." There exist other early Christian literature classified as "gospels" which need to be examined in addition to the earlier gospels (Q, Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, and Thomas). These later gospels were probably written during the 2nd century C.E. and appear to be somewhat

dependent (literally) upon the earlier Gospels. The first of these is the Gospel of the Ebionites. Epiphanius quotes passages of the Gospel of the Ebionites (sect of Greek speaking Jewish-Christians) in his work Heresies and is the reason scholars are able to have the three fragments concerning John today. In 30.13.6, the reader is made aware that John was baptizing for repentance in the Jordan River during the days of King Herod of Judea. The names of John's parents are mentioned here as being Zechariah (a priest) and Elizabeth. The next fragment, 30.13.4-5, records John wearing a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist and that he ate wild honey and manna with oil (not locusts as in other writings). In the third and final fragment, 30.13.7-8, Jesus comes and is baptized by John. Next is the Gospel of the Nazoreans, which was probably written for Jewish-Christians, and scholars have a fragment of this work as recorded by Jerome in his work Against Pelagius. It is recorded that "John the Baptist baptized for the remission of sins" and he baptized Jesus (3.2). Jerome also records, in his Commentary of Isaiah, a quote from the Gospel of the Hebrews. Though John the Baptist is not specifically referenced, Jesus' baptism is and that event is generally held that John is the one who performed the duty. The Gospel of the Hebrews has the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus as he emerges from the water as if he were the perfect human (human to divine: Aryanism). Last of these later gospels is the Infancy Gospel of James or Protoevangelium of James, which claims to have been written by Jesus' brother James. This was probably done so to give the work some credibility because James was the leader of the Jerusalem Church after the death of Jesus, although he is doubted as having actually written it himself. Two passages in this work deal directly with John the Baptist. In the first, 22:5-9, the name of John's mother is given as Elizabeth and it tells of how she hid John from Herod as he was slaughtering infants (for fear he too would be killed). In the second passage, 23:1-9, John's father's name is recorded as Zechariah and it is told Herod had Zechariah killed for not revealing where his son had been hidden. Taking a step back for a moment, we can now see the magnitude John plays in the history of the early "Christian" movement. An examination of the references to him, accompanied by their respective authors has just been presented. However, a question must be posed at this stage, what does this all mean? Armed with this knowledge, what can we say about John (what are the facts, how do we know them, and in what way are they presented)? Looking individually at the major source materials with a critical eye makes any reader question the accuracy of any one account, yet taken as a whole, the materials, texts, and traditions all push certain motifs and facts surrounding the life of John the Baptist. Although each text, source material, or tradition presents its own version of the occurrences surrounding John, we are able to extract the core meaning from such sources and can confirm their validity by cross-checking these with other known reliable sources. Certain aspects about John, his life, career, mission, practices, and teachings are held to be "true" with reasonable certainty, indisputable if you will. Scholars know the John was born in Israel to a mother and father named Zechariah and Elizabeth. He is living in the wilderness for most of his life. John is baptizing people who come to him in the Jordan River for the remission of sins/repentance. Jesus came and received his baptism from John in the Jordan River. John's clothes consisted of a garment made of animal's hair, most likely camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist and his diet consisted of wild honey and something else (manna or locusts/ekris or akris). We know that John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine (or intoxicating drink). It is also known that John objected to Herod's taking of Philip's wife and viewed it as an act of adultery. In reaction, Herod had John arrested and imprisoned (most conceivably at the desert fortress Macherus) and eventually ordered John beheaded. Scholars know John the Baptist was held in high regard by the people of Israel during his time and thereafter evident by the large

numbers of people flocking to him in the wilderness, by John having disciples of his own, and by Jesus himself claiming that "among those born of women none has risen greater than John the Baptist." John taught repentance and baptism as preparation for the time of God which was near. He accepted sinners into his ministry, taught that people should care for the poor, and spread the word of the coming kingdom of God. John taught devotion to God and rejection of world as displayed by his clothing, diet, and wilderness lifestyle. John also had devoted followers/disciples who viewed him as the Christ after his death and survive today as modern-day Mandeans living mostly in Iraq and Iran. It is only through the consolidation and consideration of all ancient sources: New Testament, Gnostic scriptures, traditions, church historians, independent and secondary materials (complementary and contradictory) that scholars can discover the original, historically accurate picture of John as a member, believer, and righteous leader of the early "Christian"/baptismal movement. Looking at the approach taken by the Jesus Seminar, it could be argued that their methods are questionable in terms of historical methodology. The Jesus Seminar claims to have considered all the available historical evidence related to John the Baptist and Tatum's book is a summary of the seminar's deliberations and votes to bring readers a concise sketch of the historical figure of John the Baptist. Their inclusion of Josephus, Pseudo-Clementines, and other early Christian gospels is commendable, yet their assessment and interpretation of such sources in constructing a historically accurate portrait of John may be suspect. It would appear the members of the Jesus Seminar have an underlying motive or agenda in their deliberations and votes. They appear to accept very little as "true" facts (i.e. there was a person named Jesus - 96% agree, John baptized Jesus - 91% agree, etc.). What the Jesus Seminar agrees on as fact (not much apparently) comes almost exclusively from the New Testament. Instances in which material is sketchy or comes from independent and secondary sources, the Jesus Seminar exclude it as fiction. Examples include John and Jesus being related - 5% agree, Mary and Elizabeth are related - 3% agree, Herodias' daughter asked for John's head on a platter - 24% agree. The Jesus Seminar's approach quite possibly began with good and noble intentions but the methods they employed and the results of their study are flawed in terms of historical methodology.