Christ Stopped at Ephraim (John 11:54)

Markus Bockmuehl

Christ stopped at Eboli: *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. Set in Mussolini's Italy, Carlo Levi's (1902–1975) landmark memoir, like Francesco Rosi's 1979 movie of the same title, chronicles the internal exile of this anti-fascist, urbane Jewish doctor and artist from Turin. In 1935, he spent a year among remote, bone-crushingly poor and culturally desolate southern villages of what is now the province of Basilicata. So poor and so desolate, indeed, that it seemed even the coming of Christ had passed them by. History itself never traveled beyond the provincial town of Eboli—into a land where, "as is the way with symbols," Christ's sojourn and absence are above all literal.[1] And yet, amidst the grim struggles of peasants abandoned by the bourgeoisie and a

[1] "Ma la frase ha un senso molto piú profondo, che, come sempre, nei modi simbolici, è quello letterale" (Carlo Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* [Torino: Einaudi, 1945], 1). Levi continues, "Christ never came this far, … just as the Romans never came, content to garrison the highways without penetrating the mountains and forests, nor the Greeks, who flourished beside the Gulf of Taranto. … No one has come to this land except as an enemy, a conqueror, or a visitor devoid of understanding. … But to this shadowy land, that knows neither sin nor redemption from sin, where evil is not moral but is only the pain residing forever in earthly things, Christ did not come. Christ stopped at Eboli" (Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli: The Story of a Year*. trans. F. Frenaye [New York: Farrar, Straus & Co.], 4).

pathetically ineffectual church, Levi himself ends up bridging this gulf as a physician to the poor—his existentialist humanism almost hinting at traces of a substitute messianic presence.[2]

Christ also stopped for a time at Ephraim, although in this case almost certainly as a matter of historical fact: "Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples."[3] Similarities between these two temporary sojourns are evocative, even if in some ways antithetical: Carlo Levi's stay turns on the idea of Christ himself having forsaken the hinterland, while in the latter Christ visits it, Levi-like, for refuge—and, as we shall see, according to later legend even for a permanent miracle.

In John's Gospel, Christ pauses for a period of refuge at a time of acute danger to his life. Following turbulent events after raising Lazarus at Bethany, Jesus quits the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem to draw breath, away from any limelight, in the obscure "city" (πόλις) of Ephraim.[4]

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[2] The NT scholar Paula Fredriksen once listed it among her "five best books on sin." While reflecting on Levi's service as "a kind of cross-class penance," she did not note the irony of his self-portrayal in a quasi-sacrificial, redemptive humanist agency. See Fredriksen, "The Best Books on Sin," July 23, 2012, https://fivebooks.com/best-books/paula-fredriksen-on-sin/.

[3] John 11:54 NIV.

[4] Modern English translations prefer "town," while NIV even alters πόλις to "village." As we will see, John's nomenclature is likely correct.

This is a move that echoes previous escapes to mountains, the Jordan valley, and elsewhere.[5] Jesus, the evangelist tells us, "remained" (ἔμεινεν) or, as many early manuscripts have it, "spent time" (διέτριβεν) at Ephraim with the disciples.[6] He stayed for an unspecified period of possibly several months,[7] before returning once more to Bethany in time for his final Passover (12:1).

But why this place and what transpires there during this time of internal exile? John discloses nothing—except that the place is selected because Jesus's life is in danger and he can no longer circulate openly in public (11:53–54). Jesus retreats into messianic secrecy and safety.

The following argument examines the meaning of John 11:54 first in relation to a little-noted change in William Wrede's view of the "Messianic Secret" in Mark and John and of the historical possibility of messianic consciousness in the life of Jesus. Turning from there to christological secrecy in John's Gospel more generally, we finally consider geographic,

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[5] Cf. John 6:15; 6:22–25; 7:1–14; 8:59; 10:39–40. The theme of a messiah in secret is attested by many other texts, starting arguably with 1:10–11, 26, 31–33; 2:24; 3:2.

[6] Paul Katz argues that, everywhere else, John links Jesus's identified locations with named or known individuals, and that here too Jesus is therefore likely hosted by friends ("Wieso gerade nach Efrajim? (Erwägungen zu Jh 11,54)," *ZNW* 88 [1997]: 130–34).

[7] Punctuated only by the visit to Bethany to raise Lazarus, the three or four months between Jesus's December pilgrimage to the temple for Hanukkah (10:22) and his arrival at Bethany six days before Passover (12:1; late March or April, if not specifically just before April 3, 33) are marked by extended stays (ἔμεινεν), first near the Jordan (10:40; Aenon?) and then at Ephraim (11:54).

archaeological, religious, and reception-historical dimensions of the withdrawal to Ephraim, before suggesting conclusions for its interpretation.

Re-Wreding the Messianic Secret?

In the present century, Johannine critics have been affirming the Fourth Evangelist's close knowledge of Mark with increasing confidence for almost as long as their predecessors once denied it with equally poised certainty among the assured results of scholarship.[8] One possible correlation concerns the scholarly trope known as the "Messianic Secret," which has its epicenter in the Gospel of Mark. From the start, Mark's demons repeatedly recognize Jesus as Messiah, but he warns them to remain silent about him[9] and similarly prohibits publicity around his healing miracles.[10] Even the disciples are included in such instructions to silence about his

[8] For the denial, see most famously Percival Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938); for the affirmation of "certainty" about dependence, see, e.g., Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Messianic Secret in the Fourth Gospel: On the Fundamental Importance of Mark for John's Rewriting of the Story of Jesus," in *Rewriting and Reception in and of the Bible*, ed. Jesper Høgenhaven, Jesper Tang Nielsen, and Heike Omerzu, WUNT 396 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 109 and passim; Eve-Marie Becker, Helen K. Bond, and Catrin H. Williams, eds., *John's Transformation of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

[9] Mark 1:23–25, 34; 3:11–12; 5:7; cf. 9:20.

[10] Mark 1:43–45; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26.

identity.[11] This is perhaps in part because, unlike the demons, they are cast as roundly uncomprehending, despite benefitting from Jesus's private instruction on matters like the kingdom parables, the transfiguration, or the coming messianic birth pangs.[12]

Generations of students have rightly imbibed these facts as crucial to Mark's Gospel. More specifically, they have been taught to associate the study of this "Messianic Secret" explicitly with William Wrede's (1859–1906) work of that title.[13] Jesus himself, Wrede explains there, expressed no messianic aspirations during his lifetime. It was a claim his followers first applied to the risen Jesus, and only then gradually transferred back to his earthly life in their narratives about him. Jesus's messianic identity was never more than "proleptic."[14]

Textbooks have long since declared Wrede's book comprehensively mistaken or at least in need of substantial correction and greater nuance. At the same time, his definitive views on the subject are still widely thought to be those of his 1901 book, whose influence in Anglophone scholarship was greatly prolonged by the seventy-year delay of its English translation. Standard

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[11] E.g., Mark 8:30; 9:9.

[12] E.g., Mark 4:10–13, 40–41; 6:51–52; 7:18; 8:17–21, 33; 9:5–12, 19, 32; 10:24–33; 13:3–4, 21, 35–37; 14:41; and possibly 16:6, 8.

[13] William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); ET: William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).

[14] So, e.g., Hans Rollmann and Werner Zager, "Unveröffentlichte Briefe William Wredes zur Problematisierung des messianischen Selbstverständnisses Jesu," *JHistModTheol* 8 (2001): 277.

treatments in English continue to assume as unproblematic that Wrede's Jesus never claimed messianic identity or secrecy during his lifetime and did not "become" Messiah until after the resurrection: "Only in the later tradition, according to Wrede, did the idea arise that Jesus was Messiah during his lifetime. In Wrede's opinion, the tradition could not have developed in this way if Jesus had actually claimed to be the Messiah."[15]

Such textbook assurances notwithstanding, it has been known for over two decades that Wrede's famous book did *not* in fact represent his last thought on the subject. He had anticipated without objection that his 1901 viewpoint would be regarded as "radical."[16] And yet, by the time he wrote to his former teacher and benefactor Adolf von Harnack on January 2, 1905, he had changed his mind about the likelihood that Jesus had a messianic self-consciousness: "I am more inclined than before to believe that Jesus regarded himself as chosen to be the Messiah."[17] To be sure, he continued to regard Mark as a creative redactor rather than a historically reliable source. He still doubted that Jesus could have been regarded as "Son of God" even on Harnack's

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[15] William Baird, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann*, vol. 2 of *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 148–20. Cf., e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 625; Walter Schmithals, "Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Spruchquelle," *HTS* 64 (2008): 355.

[16] Wrede, *Messiasgeheimnis*, vi.

[17] In Rollmann and Zager, "Briefe," 317: "Ich bin geneigter als früher zu glauben, daß Jesus selbst sich als zum Messias ausersehen betrachtet hat."

historically evaporated understanding[18] and denied that Paul was in any meaningful sense Jesus's interpreter or "continuer" (*Fortsetzer*).[19] Nevertheless, he now considered it historically likely that Jesus did after all harbor a messianic claim or aspiration. But in that case, might this carry pragmatic and equally historical repercussions for the concern about secrecy? Rather than being reduced to a literary and apologetic counsel of convenience, the Messianic Secret lays claim to the realm of historic plausibility in the life of Jesus himself.

John's Messiah in Secret

What does all this entail for John's Gospel? Like Mark (1:1, 11), John makes the messianic identity of Jesus clear from the very first chapter—and he famously associates that identity throughout with strikingly exalted christological claims. What sense might it make, therefore, to speak of a Messianic Secret in John? Wrede himself, for one, thought that the Messianic Secret also had a Johannine dimension. Although he accepted no substantive links to Markan or

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[18] Jesus made no claim to divine sonship and to assert otherwise is to add to his gospel: "Der Satz: 'Ich bin der Sohn Gottes', ist von Jesus selbst nicht in sein Evangelium eingerückt worden, und wer ihn als einen Satz neben anderen dort einstellt, fügt dem Evangelium etwas hinzu" (Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums: Sechzehn Vorlesungen*, 5th ed. [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901], 92; cf. 91).

[19] "Daß Jesus 'Sohn Gottes' in dem von Ihnen angedeuteten spezifischen Sinne gewesen sie [*sic:* read *sei*], bezweifle ich allerdings meinerseits.… kann ich [Paulus] nicht als Interpreten und Fortsetzer Jesu in dem Sinne anerkennen, wie man diese Prädikate sonst in der Geschichte zu gebrauchen pflegt" (Wrede in Rollmann and Zager, "Briefe," 317).

Synoptic themes, his programmatic volume regards both Gospels as distant from "the real life of Jesus," and he compared John's treatment to what one might see in applying a large magnifying glass to Mark's composition.[20] (Significantly for our purposes, too, he included no comment on John 11:54.[21]) Others have since explored aspects of a possible Johannine Secret more fully, some finding in it unambiguous proof of dependence on Mark,[22] or a clear reader-response driven case that the Gospel's real "truth" and message is not the Son so much as the medium—the Fourth Gospel—itself.[23]

Purely at the textual level, there is plenty of Johannine emphasis on the hiddenness of Jesus. The world did not perceive him and his own did not accept him (1:10–11). The Messiah is present but unknown, so that the Baptist's mission is to allow him to be revealed to Israel (1:26, 29, 31). Even as Word made flesh (1:14), he evidently still chooses to reveal his glory only at particular signal moments (2:11; cf. 17:24): his revelatory miracle at Cana remains discreet for the benefit apparently only of his disciples (2:11). Jesus then visits Jerusalem for the Passover

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[20] Wrede, *Messiasgeheimnis*, 145.

[21] Wrede, *Messiasgeheimnis*, 179–206, especially 181–83.

[22] Engberg-Pedersen, "Secret," following an unreconstructed account of Wrede.

[23] Patrick Chatelion Counet, "Het messiasgeheim in Johannes: Analyse van het impliciete gebod tot zwijgen," *TvT* 41 (2001): e.g., 279 (citing in support John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1991], 459; Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 [1972]: 46): "Dit 'medium' bestaat uit zowel het leven van Jezus, het paradigma van zijn gedrag, als uit *het Johannesevangelie zelf*.… 'Ho logos ho sos aletheia estin' (17, 17): *Uw boek* is waarheid" (ital. mine).

and performs signs, but without "entrusting himself" to the people (2:24). The fact that Nicodemus comes by night (3:2) evidently suits both parties. It seems this "teacher in Israel" is not himself a disciple; that question resurfaces later in the Gospel with Joseph of Arimathea, who is one in secret (κεκρυμμένος, 19:38).

Jesus's recurrent avoidance of public prominence has the effect of keeping important aspects of his true identity hidden from the comprehension even of the disciples, as also in Mark. Though they may have "seen his glory" and "believed" in him at Cana, they never seem to understand the source of his true nourishment (4.32–33), his heavenly destination, or his way to the Father (14:4–8).

Famously, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus "again" flees alone to a mountain explicitly to avoid a messianic acclamation by force (6:15).[24] Ancient scribes appreciated the dramatic nature of the narrative. Codex Sinaiticus adds that this was not an excursion but an escape (φεύγει not ἀνεχώρησεν), while Codex Bezae draws intertextually on Mark 6:46 to suggest its purpose was for prayer (κἀκεῖ προσηύχετο). Surprisingly, but perhaps for reasons to which we return below, the need for such evasive isolation is short-lived: John's Jesus shuns the limelight only until the morning (τῇ ἐπαύριον, 6:22).

Themes of both secrecy and disclosure intensify considerably in chapter 7. Having at first rebuffed his brothers' encouragement to reveal himself publicly at the festival of Sukkot (7:2–9), Jesus nevertheless travels to Jerusalem "secretly" or perhaps "as if in secret" ([ὡς] ἐν κρυπτῷ,

[24] ἁρπάζειν αὐτὸν ἵνα ποιήσωσιν βασιλέα … ἀνεχώρησεν πάλιν εἰς τὸ ὄρος αὐτὸς μόνος.

7:10).[25] For the first half of the festival, he is nowhere to be seen (7:14), but after that he emerges to speak confidently in public (παρρησίᾳ), thereby provoking the question of his messianic identity (7:25–31). The crowds briefly muse about what an improbably Galilean messiah could possibly mean by "going away"—perhaps to the Greek-speaking diaspora (7:35; cf. 12:20) where they cannot find him (7:25–42; cf. 8:21–22)? All in all, it does seem that for all his proclamation and striking self-identifications, John's Messiah at the same time remains hidden in several epistemologically decisive respects. It is not that he is actively trying to conceal his identity, as in Mark; but finding him is decidedly a matter of divine gift rather than of human quest or resolve: "This is why I said to you that no one is able to come to me unless it has been given to them from the Father" (6:65; cf. 8:19). John, much like Mark and Matthew, goes on to appeal to Isaiah in attributing the people's incomprehension to the fact that God has actively blinded them.[26]

Part of what is hidden and incomprehensible about the Johannine Messiah is evidently his preexistence. At no point throughout the Gospel do his own people—from the disciples to "the Jews"—receive him as the coeternal Word (1:10–11). They cannot recognize or accept that it

[25] The misgivings of NA[28] notwithstanding, ὡς is far better supported across the full range of manuscripts. Its secondary omission in א D 1424 and a handful of versions could express scribal intent (e.g., to prevent any impression of Jesus merely pretending secrecy) at least as plausibly as its insertion supposedly "to soften the force of the expression ἐν κρυπτῷ" (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [New York: American Bible Society, 1994], 185).

[26] John 12:37–41, quoting Isa 6:10; cf. Mark 4:12; Matt 13:13, 15.

was he whom Abraham rejoiced to see at Mamre (8:53, 56–58) and whom Isaiah saw in the temple (12:41). His identity as Messiah is concealed from them. In relation to the Pharisees, this is either because he does not observe the Sabbath according to their halakic prescription (9:16; cf. 5:16, 18; 7:22–23), or because he appears to them a sinner (9:24–32), or else demon-possessed and mad (10:20–21). The key question of whether or how this obscure and controversial Jesus could possibly be the Messiah is not only implicit throughout the text but also repeatedly made explicit, by no means always in a hostile fashion.[27]

It is shortly before the beginning of the passion narrative, following the raising of Lazarus at Bethany and the decision of the Sanhedrin (11:45–50), that Jesus retreats to Ephraim (11:54)—the episode that will occupy us more fully below. Even after returning from there, further open controversy resumes about a Messiah who "must be lifted up" (12:34 cf. 3:14; 8:28)—and once again this leads Jesus to disappear into hiding (12:36).

This hiddenness of the Messiah is repeatedly questioned in the Gospel, and not only by his brothers. Even among the Twelve, Judas "not Iscariot" (possibly Thaddeus?[28]) evidently

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[27] Arguably more "neutral" queries might include 1:45–46; 4:25–26, 29; 7:26–27, 31, 41; 10:24–25; 12:34.

[28] This debated suggestion ostensibly rides on the supposed substitution of Thaddeus for "Judas son of James" in the Lukan list of the Twelve (Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13; cf. Matt 10:3 // Mark 3:18). New Testament scholars continue to contradict each other on this point with merry abandon but with little evidence, some declaring it "likely" (Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003], 197) or "probable" (Grant Osborne, "The Gospel of John," in *Cornerstone*

finds the ministry's seeming hide-and-seek reluctance a little trying, not to say Pythonesque: "Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" (14:22).

And yet, this is only ever one pole of a key Johannine dialectic. Jesus in fact repeatedly alternates between concealment and public confession. The Fourth Gospel tracks a parallel but contrary narrative of disclosure in which Jesus, having previously acted in secret (ἐν κρυπτῷ, 7:4, 26; cf. 11:54) or spoken "in figures" (ἐν παροιμίαις, 16:25, 29; cf. 10:24; 11:14), will now or soon speak plainly and openly (παρρησίᾳ, 16:25, 29; cf. 7:4, 26; 18:20). Indeed, for our purposes it seems particularly important to note the frequency with which John's story closely sequences secrecy and withdrawal with Jesus appearing decisively in public to declare or manifest the glory of God. Chapters 6 and 7, 11 and 12 are among the more obvious examples, but there are others. Secrecy and withdrawal do not compromise but accentuate and reinforce the public claims of divine sonship.

Biblical Commentary, ed. Philip W. Comfort, 20 vols. [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007], 13:216) without further ado, while others finding "no basis in reality" (John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 5 vols. [New York: Doubleday, 1991–2016], 3:200), substituting for this conflation a new one with its basis in the imagination: a Jude might theoretically have left the Twelve and been replaced by a Thaddeus during the pre-Easter ministry (Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:198 and n1). Judas-not-Iscariot's identification with Thaddeus dates back at least to the third-century Abgar Legend and associated texts, reflected in apocryphal Acts (e.g., Thaddeus; Simon and Jude) and traditions from Edessa and later from Armenia.

Marianne Meye Thompson rightly draws attention to the ambivalent narrative contours of this "Hidden Messiah" dynamic: "John contrasts speaking "openly" (or with *parrēsia*) and speaking figuratively (10:24; 11:14; … 16:25, 29), characterizes Jesus as speaking publicly and openly (7:26; 18:20), and indicates that at times Jesus was not able to work publicly (11:54) or that people were unable to speak publicly about him (7:4, 13) or were fearful of doing so. When Jesus does not work or speak with *parrēsia*, publicly or openly, he is waiting for "his hour" to arrive or refusing to seek his own honor."[29] At the same time, the Gospel never compromises Jesus's claim to have spoken his message openly and for all to hear: "Jesus' claim to have spoken openly, in the synagogue and temple, and to have said nothing 'in secret' does not include his lengthy final discourse to his disciples. But his claims about his own mission from God and his call to believe have been laid out repeatedly in public discourse; these are indeed the substance of the written Gospel."[30]

All in all, then, the Fourth Evangelist clearly unfolds his own version of a Messianic Secret—even if here it is more about his divine sonship. To be sure, John's secret is never exactly Delphic in its opacity; nor does his Jesus ever emulate Epicurus's counsel to "live obscurely" (λάθε βιώσας[31]). Unlike in Mark, one gets no sense of deliberate obscurity over his teaching. As Morna Hooker suggests, the difference is that in John, "The glory has been

[29] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 168.

[30] Thompson, *John*, 369.

[31] Epicurus, frag. 551.

revealed, but men have been blind.… The veil in John is on the human side."[32] That veil covers even the disciples. The only exceptions are John the Baptist and the Samaritan woman's converted compatriots (e.g., 1:33; 4:39–42).[33] John's Jesus imposes no secrecy on his messianic identity; instead, the focus is on the inability to comprehend who he is as Son of Man and Son of God. And yet, in this way, and for different reasons, both Mark and John come to share the motif of christological hiddenness.

At the same time, for John and perhaps also for Mark, there is an almost gnomic, prudential sense that silence and concealment allow a potential Messiah to bide his time and choose his moment without his agenda being hijacked or alienated. Notwithstanding a degree of continued scholarly posturing by Wrede's heirs and successors,[34] it is this that links messianic hiddenness at the literary and theological level quite plausibly to its social and political context

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[32] Morna D. Hooker, "The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret," *NTS* 21 (1974): 50.

[33] So also Engberg-Pedersen, "Secret," 119.

[34] E.g. Engberg-Pedersen, who sharpens this point: "In John, the Markan motif of the Messianic secret became the motif of the hiddenness of the only Son of God.… Mark has invented and developed this motif…." The idea that it might in some form be traditional, let alone historically realistic, is dismissed as "quite empty" and patently untrue because of the apathy with which it is treated by Matthew and Luke (Engberg-Pedersen, "Secret," 121; cf. 115; contrast Wrede, *Messiasgeheimnis*, 145, for the fierce denial, even in 1901, that Mark had invented the Messianic Secret).

in the lifetime of Jesus, as we now know Wrede himself came to see late in life. In fact, it reflects key aspects of Jewish messianic expectation from antiquity to the present day.[35]

Ephraim

The Ephraim episode certainly feeds into such a narrative of epistemic concealment and disclosure, representing a culminating episode of messianic secrecy on the threshold of the passion week and Jesus's final Passover visit to Jerusalem. But does this geographic location signify anything more than a symbolic cipher or punctuation in the narrative?

Even its location remains sufficiently shadowy to prevent any uncontested archaeological or topographical identification. Josephus has Vespasian's troops sweep it up in the spring of 69 CE, seemingly on an afternoon's stroll through the pleasant Judean hill country from Caesarea on their way to Jerusalem—and shortly before Vespasian's elevation to higher duties in Rome. The legion marches south through the toparchies of Gophna and Acrabattene, installing garrisons along the way in the apparently adjacent "small cities" of Bethel (?) and Ephraim, Βήθηγά τε καὶ

[35] Elements of "messianic secrecy" in eighteenth-century Hasidic groups are analyzed by Mor Altshuler, *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism*, BSJS 39 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Hiddenness and secrecy about the messiah's identity are indeed par for the course and continue to the present day. One might compare the controversies around R. Yitzhak Kaduri's (1898–2006) widely reported sealed note about the name of the messiah (e.g., Yosef, " הפתק של הרב כדורי - המשיח: יהושוע" *News1*, January 23, 2007, http://www.news1.co.il/Archive/001-D-121332-00.html).

Ἐφραὶμ πολίχνια (*J.W.* 4.551).[36] A few months later, interestingly, that region's temperate climate and secure environment would encourage Titus to have Jewish aristocratic refugees from the siege of the capital withdraw (ἀνεχώρουν, cf. John 11:54) from Jerusalem to the small city (πολίχνιον) of Gophna in order to wait out the end of the war in complete safety (μετὰ πάσης ἀσφαλείας, *J.W.* 6.115–116).

Josephus thus locates Ephraim a little under twenty kilometers from Jerusalem's Damascus Gate as the crow flies, but its precise coordinates remain disputed. There is a good *prima facie* case to associate it with the "district (nome) of Aphairema," which both 1 Maccabees and Josephus describe as having been transferred from Samaria to the territory of Judea by Demetrius II Nicator (145–41 BCE).[37] That episode plausibly accounts for a measure of ambiguity in the sources between "Aphairema" the district and Ephraim the city, on the border of the biblical territory of Benjamin.[38]

More promisingly, perhaps, Eusebius's *Onomasticon* (ca. 320) identifies Ephraim as a "village" rather than a city in his day (νῦν ἐστι κώμη), but nevertheless as the largest village near

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[36] That Bethel and Ephraim were neighboring towns is also the view of Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.9.4 (GCS 1:344), who recounts his journey with a Jewish Jesus-believer "in the wilderness of Bethel and Ephraim" (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τῆς Βαιθὴλ καὶ Ἐφραΐμ) on his way up from Jericho to the Judean hills.

[37] 1 Macc 11:34; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.127.

[38] ἀφαίρεμα denotes a separation, tribute, or reserved portion. Jonathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 41 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 432, suggests a deliberate play on words.

the northern administrative border of the district of Roman Aelia (i.e., Jerusalem). He links it to Ephron (Josh 15:9) or Aphra (Josh 18:23), five Roman "milestones" due east of Bethel and twenty north of Jerusalem.[39] Epiphanius (ca. 315–403) is in broad agreement with this topography, although evidently dependent on Eusebius and perhaps characteristically a little more opaque. He identifies Ḥaphra (Ophra?) in Benjamin or Ephraim "five miles East of Bethel" as a "large village" and former city. It is for Epiphanius the place to which Jesus flees in both John 6:15 and 11:54, and he goes on to report that when Jesus withdrew to "the city of Ephraim" in John 11:54, he performed the miracle of permanently expelling all snakes and reptiles from the territory of the town.[40] The sixth-century Madaba Map, likewise, implies a compatible geolocation of Ephraim northeast of Bethel (Luz) and Rimmon.[41]

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[39] Eusebius *Onomasticon*: καὶ νῦν ἐστι κώμη Αἰφραίμ τῆς Βηθὴλ ἀπὸ σημείων ε′ πρὸς ἀνατολάς (28.4); καὶ ἔστι νῦν κώμη Ἐφραΐμ μεγίστη περὶ τὰ βόρεια Αἰλίας ὡς ἀπὸ σημείων κ′ (86.1); Ἐφραΐμ ἐγγὺς τῆς ἐρήμου, ἔνθα ἦλθεν ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν. κεῖται καὶ ἀνωτέρω Ἐφρών (90.18; GCS 11.1: 90). For the proximity of (this) Ephron to Bethel see also 2 Chr 13:19.

[40] Epiphanius, *On Weights and Measures* 67 (MS Brit. Mus. Or. Add. 17148, 74a–b; James E. Dean, ed., *Epiphanius*' *Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935], Syriac 114, English 72–73); cf. *Panarion* 29.2.5. As noted above (n36), he makes one additional reference to "the wilderness of Bethel and Ephraim" in passing at *Panarion* 30.9.4.

[41] "Ephron or Ephraim: the Lord went there" (Εφρων ἡ Εφραιμ ἔνθα ἦλθεν ὁ Κ[ύριο]ς). In addition to neighboring "Luza which is also Bethel," the map also includes Gophna to the

On the strength of this collective evidence, even if to date for no compelling archaeological reasons, most modern scholars have confidently identified Ephraim/Aphra with modern et-Taybeh الطيبة , one of the Holy Land's last remaining Christian villages,[42] nineteen kilometers north of Jerusalem and seven kilometers northeast of Beitin (ancient Bethel).[43] Although fuller excavations have yet to be carried out, extant remains include a large Byzantine church of Saint George, plausibly suggesting a pilgrimage site.[44] The possibly gradual change of name from 'Aphra to et-Taybeh ("good" or "kind") could be a medieval Islamic development intended to avoid associations of 'Aphra with Arabic *'afrit* (عفريت "demon")—a euphemistic

west—as well as "Akrabim, which is now Akrabittin," apparently about 30 km due north near Neapolis (Nablus) and Mount Ebal.

[42] Note, e.g., Maria C. Khoury, "Taybeh's Plea for the Last Christians of the Holy Land," *Road to Emmaus* 11, no. 4 (2010): 3–43.

[43] Among recent verdicts see, e.g., Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Place-Names in the Fourth Gospel: 2. Bethany (Jn 1:28; 11:18) and Ephraim (Jn 11:54)," *RB* 120 (2013): 98: Taybeh "remains the prime candidate for the Ephraim of Jn 11:54" (similarly Jerry A. Pattengale, "Aphairema (Place)," *ABD* 1:275; Pierre Médebielle, *Ephrem-Taybeh et son histoire chrétienne* [Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate, 1993]; Yoel Elitzur, *Ancient Place Names in the Holy Land: Preservation and History* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004], 268–72; Robert D. Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr: A Study of the Historical Geography of the Levant*, HACL 8 [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019], 63; and many others).

[44] Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, "Place-Names," 98.

substitute that is also historically attested for at least one of the several other Middle Eastern villages called ‘Aphra or et-Taybeh.[45]

This identification has much to be said for it and has at times approached the status of a consensus, although there have always been dissenting voices. Among the most influential of the latter has long been that of W. F. Albright, who favored Khirbet Samiyeh/Khirbet Marjameh, located five kilometers northeast of Taybeh at ‘Ain Samiyeh.[46] Its topography, archaeology, and greater distance from Bethel make it a less likely candidate.

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[45] See e.g., Richard Hartmann, “Zum Ortsnamen aṭ-Ṭajjiba,” *ZDMG* 65 (1911): 536-38, noting the possible original Taybet el-Ism طيبة الاسم, “the good name”; also Gustaf Dalman, *Orte und Wege Jesu*, 3rd ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1924), 231. An “inn of Tibtah/Tayibtah” (פונדקא דטיבתא) marks the Caesarean rabbis’ halakic boundary for doubtful tithe in y. Demai 2:1, 22c, and in the Rehob Inscription (ופנדקה דטביתה), but this concerns a different Taybeh, ten kilometers from the coast between Nablus and Netanya. Cf. Michael Avi-Yonah, “Gazetteer of Roman Palestine,” *Qedem* 5 (1976): 101; Efraim Orni, “Ṭayyiba, Al-,” *EncJud* 19:562.

[46] W. F. Albright, “The Ephraim of the Old and New Testaments,” *JPOS* 3 (1923): 36–40; W. F. Albright, “Ophrah and Ephraim,” *AASOR* 4 (1922): 124–33. Murphy-O’Connor, “Place-Names,” 96, dismisses Albright’s view as “entirely sentimental” because he thought Khirbet Samiyeh/Khirbet Marjameh a more plausible place to spend the cold months before Passover. Support for Samiyeh came from Avi-Yonah, “Gazetteer,” 29, 56, 101, who identified Ephraim as the closely adjacent “Khirbet el-Bayadir.” Similarly, Henry O. Thompson, “Ephraim (Place),” *ABD* 2:556, and, emphatically, Ehud Keinan et al., “Where Was the City of Ephraim?” *PEQ* 147 (2015): 223–24.

Some have in recent years advocated for Khirbet el-Maqatir (خربة المقاطير), an interesting fortified site adjacent to the modern Highway 60 from Ramallah to Nablus in the western outskirts of the town of Deir Dibwan and opposite the Israeli "outpost" of Giv'at Asaf, one-and-a-half kilometers southeast of Beitin and 15 km north of Jerusalem, and thus also in the neighborhood identified by Josephus and others.[47] It appears to be the only walled settlement in the vicinity, which might make it eligible as a "city."

El-Maqatir goes back to the Bronze Age, but was abandoned during the exile and only rebuilt by the Hasmoneans around 100 BCE, with subsequent restorations following earthquakes in 64 and 31 BCE.[48] The Roman-era defensive settlement benefited from strong fortifications, including a surprisingly large tower,[49] walls, and an elaborate system of subterranean passages, caves, and cisterns.[50] Underground caves yielded the remains of seven women and a boy who

[47] The center of the site is located at 31.9151° N, 35.2500° E (What3Words, w3w.co/never.breakaway.proton; Palestine Grid MR 173780 146930). Giv'at Asaf is an unauthorized "outpost" (מאחז) rather than an authorized settlement, i.e., illegal under Israeli as well as international law (although successive right-wing governments have encouraged retroactive legalization).

[48] Cf., e.g., Scott Stripling et al., "A Scarab of Psametik I from Kh. el-Maqatir," *PEQ* 149 (2017): 193–94.

[49] A reconstruction by the site architect is offered at https://www.ritmeyer.com/product/image-library/buildings/towers/ephraim-tower/.

[50] Scott Stripling, "חירבת אל־מקטיר בגבול בנימין־אפרים," *Qad* 150 (2015): 82.

had hidden there but were killed by the Romans in the year 69,[51] which is also the latest date of the otherwise well-attested coins from the First Revolt.[52] Coinage from Tyre, from the Emperor Trajan and from Year 3 of the Bar Kokhba revolt (i.e., 134–135) might imply the site's temporary revival and re-engagement in the Jewish national cause. During the Byzantine period, the site was home to a monastery.[53] Excavators also turned up three *miqva'ot* (ritual immersion baths) in a small area along with unusually high proportions of late Second Temple stoneware,[54] suggesting a notable degree of Jewish observance.[55]

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[51] Hezki Baruch, "Victims of Great Revolt Brought to Rest in Ofra," *Israel National News*, September 1, 2017, https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/234892.

[52]Stripling, "אל־מקטיר," 81. Suetonius, *Vesp.* 6.3 confirms the new emperor's troops in Palestine swore allegiance to him *apud ipsum*, i.e., in person, on July 11, 69 (a week earlier according to Tacitus, *Hist*. 2.79), before his departure for Alexandria and eventually Rome, where he arrived in mid-70.

[53] On Khirbet el-Maqatir see further Stripling, "אל־מקטיר"; early *IEJ* excavation reports include Bryant G. Wood, "Khirbet el-Maqatir, 1995–1998," *IEJ* 50 (2000): 123–30; Bryant G. Wood, "Khirbet el-Maqatir, 1999," *IEJ* 50 (2000): 249–54; Bryant G. Wood, "Khirbet el-Maqatir, 2000," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 246–52; also Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Gospel of John and Archaeology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 108.

[54]Stripling, "אל־מקטיר," 81.

[55] Because of its property in preserving the religious purity of food and liquids, stoneware was in first-century Judea and Galilee typically favored by halakhically observant Jews—a

The evidence continues to favor et-Taybeh. El-Maqatir's proximity and location southeast rather than northeast of Bethel contradict the evidence of Eusebius, Epiphanius, and the Madaba Map. Its archaeological footprint might seem to question even the diminutive πολίχνιον for what would have to be an almost implausibly "small city"—particularly given Josephus's deliberate objection in the same context to minor villages *falsely* considered small cities (ψευδοπολίχνιον, *J.W.* 4.552: Caphethra). Unlike Taybeh with its view of the Jordan valley, el-Maqatir is also not self-evidently "near the wilderness" (John 11:54) or a significant point of reference for Vespasian's main conquests en route to Jerusalem.

Origen and the Rabbis on the Meaning of Ephraim

Early readers did not always know what to make of John 11:54, although along with similar passages, it was repeatedly cited to justify both flight from persecution and desert monasticism as something the Lord himself "both taught and practiced."[56]

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function it probably also serves in John 2:6; cf. m. Beṣah 2:3. See Roland Deines, *Jüdische Steingefässe und pharisäische Frömmigkeit: Ein archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Joh 2,6 und der jüdischen Reinheitshalacha zur Zeit Jesu*, WUNT 2/52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 166–236.

[56] E.g., Cyprian, *Laps.* 10:196: *et docuit et fecit* (*De Lapsis; De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, ed. Maurice Bévenot, *Cyprianus: Opera* 1 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1972]); Athanasius, *Fug.* 12 (*Athanase: Deux apologies*, ed. Jan M. Szymusiak, rev. ed., *Sources chrétiennes* 56 [Paris: Cerf, 1987]). See further Elias J. Bickermann, "Utilitas crucis: Observations sur les récits du procès de Jésus dans les Évangiles canoniques," *RHR* 112 (1935): 213–16.

Origen's commentary on John may here serve to illustrate the preferred patristic approach of characterizing Christ's withdrawal as exemplary: this is what Jesus meant by saying, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another" (Matt 10:23).[57] By this teaching, Origen insists, the Word wants to prevent us from rushing hastily and irrationally into martyrdom.[58] Cyril of Alexandria follows this reading: in John 11:54, Jesus teaches us "to yield before the fever pitch of those who are angry and not to thrust ourselves into danger, not even when it is for the sake of the truth.… When we are overtaken by dangers, we should stand firm, but when they are coming, we should step out of the way because of the uncertainty of the outcome."[59]

Interestingly for our purposes, Origen then explicitly compares this retreat to Ephraim with the Messianic Secret in Matthew. Although he gives no impression of close geographic

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[57] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.198–199 (from Ronald E. Heine, trans. and ed., *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, 2 vols., *The Fathers of the Church* 80 and 89 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989], 2:333; GCS 10:417–418).

[58] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.192 (trans. Heine, *Origen*, 2:332): ἀναγεγράφθαι νομίζω βουλομένου τοῦ λόγου ἐπιστρέφειν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ θερμότερον καὶ ἀλογιστότερον ἐπιπηδᾶν τῷ ἕως θανάτου ἀγωνίζεσθαι περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ μαρτυρεῖν.

[59] David Maxwell, ed. and trans., *Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on John*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013–2015), 2:97 (Edward Bouverie Pusey, ed., *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini In D. Joannis Evangelium*, 3 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1872], 2:296: διδάσκει δὲ καὶ ἡμᾶς ὑπείκειν ταῖς τῶν ὀργιζομένων ἀκμαῖς, καὶ μὴ ἐπιῤῥίπτειν ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς κινδύνοις, μηδ' ἂν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας ὦσιν· ἀλλὰ καταλαμβανομένους μὲν ἵστασθαι, μέλλοντας δὲ ἀναδύεσθαι, διὰ τὸ τῆς ἐκβάσεως ἄδηλον).

knowledge, he insists that "this is like what is written in Matthew"[60] about the Messiah's withdrawal from Judea to begin his ministry in the Galilean territory of Naphtali and Zebulon (4:12–13). Origen similarly draws a link with Jesus's retreat to the garden in the Kidron valley that ends in his arrest—a point he finds himself defending elsewhere against the charge of Celsus's Jew that Jesus was caught "while trying to hide and escape most disgracefully."[61] In more problematically anagogical terms, Origen insists that Christ no longer walks openly among the Jews "because the Word of God is not among the Jews."[62] Similar replacement rhetoric leads Origen to explain that the word "Ephraim" etymologically denotes the "fruitfulness" of the gentiles as the younger brother. In his homilies on Joshua, Jeremiah and the Psalms, Origen concedes that Ephraim repented from great sin in failing to cast out the Canaanites from their midst and in dividing the kingdom so that Samaria became emblematic for all schism and heresy.[63] But just as Manasseh is passed over and left behind in Ephraim's favor (Gen 48:13–

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[60] Τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν καὶ τὸ ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ματθαῖον γεγραμμένον (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.202 (trans. Heine, *Origen*, 2:334)).

[61] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.202 (trans. Heine, *Origen*, 2:334); *Cels.* 2.9 (κρυπτόμενος μὲν καὶ διαδιδράσκων ἐπονειδιστότατα ἑάλω), 10.

[62] καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θεοῦ λόγος ἐν Ἰουδαίοις, καὶ ἀπελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν—λέγω δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.211 [trans. Heine, *Origen*, 2:336]).

[63] See e.g. *Homilies on Joshua*, ed. Thomas P. Halton and Cynthia White, trans. Barbara J. Bruce, vol. 105 of The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 186-87; Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings 28, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. John Clark Smith, vol. 97 of The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic

20), so now the latter's fruitful harvest has been gathered and continues in place of the forgotten elder people: Jesus "remains" with his people in Ephraim, i.e. fruitfulness, to the present day.[64]

Writing a little over a century later, St Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-73) further develops the unexpected blessing of Ephraim in two hymns about the city that bears his name in John 11.54. Jacob figuratively crossed his arms to favour the younger brother Ephraim over the older Manasseh (Gen 48.13-14). So also the Messiah embraced the mystery of the Cross when he fled Judaea's hostile leaders to shelter first as an infant in Egypt (where Ephraim was born of a pagan mother) and then before his final Passover in the supposedly non-Jewish (!) city of Ephraim. Ephrem finally declares that city's numerical value by *gematria* to equal the sum of "cross" and "crucified".[65]

University of America Press, 1998), 308–309; *Homilies on the Psalms: Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*, trans. Joseph W. Trigg, vol. 141 of The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 315, 406.

[64] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 28.213-14, 221-22 (trans. Heine, *Origen*, 2:336-37). The etymology here rides on the commonplace that the name אפרים ("Ephraim") derives from the word פרי ("fruit"), an idea inherited from Philo (*Prelim. Studies* 40; *Alleg. Interp.* 3.93–94; *Sobriety* 28; *Migration* 205) and anticipated in Gen 41:52 (cf. Hos 9:16; 14:8).

[65] Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity* 20-21 (ed. Ignatius Ephraem II Rahmani, *S. Ephraemi Hymni de Virginitate: Ephrem's Hymns on Virginity*, Syriac Studies Library 143 [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press/G&C Kiraz, 2006 (=rep. 1906)], 55-61; trans. Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* [New York: Paulist Press, 1989], 345-53). The *gematria* at 21.7 (=McVey

Rabbinic literature might have been expected to contribute geographic or sociocultural insights of its own, but it appears surprisingly silent about the city of Ephraim.[66]

That said, one other intriguing, admittedly tangential and non-geographic connection does merit acknowledgement, even if it has little or no direct bearing on John 11:54. The rabbis do link the Messiah to the name Ephraim. He himself is repeatedly known as Ephraim or Messiah ben Ephraim, or Messiah ben Joseph, who is put to death before the coming of Messiah ben David (e.g., b. Suk 52a–b, citing Zech 2:3 and 12:10; cf. y. Sukkah 5:2, 23b),[67] perhaps in

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21.8) evidently makes "Ephraim" (ܐܦܪܝܡ: 1+80+200+10+40=331) the sum of "cross" (ܨܠܝܒܐ: 90+30+10+2+1=133) and "crucified" (ܨܠܝܒ̈ܐ: 7+100+10+80+1=198).

[66] The name of the Israeli settlement of Ma'aleh Ephraim reflects no ancient settlement of that name, and is located fifteen kilometers northeast of Taybeh, well outside the area envisaged by the ancient sources here in view.

[67] Cf. also the medieval midrash Num. Rab. 14:1. My brief summary here is indebted to Jonathan Kaplan, "Ephraim: II.B. Rabbinic Judaism," in *Dress—Essene Gate*, vol. 7 of *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013); Martha Himmelfarb, "The Messiah Son of Joseph in Ancient Judaism," in vol. 2 of *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Raʿanan S. Boustan and Alex Ramos, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 771–90; David Campbell Mitchell, "Messiah bar Ephraim in the Targums," *AS* 4 (2006): 221–41; David Campbell Mitchell, "Messiah Ben Joseph: A Sacrifice of Atonement for Israel," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 10 (2007): 77–94.

battle against God's enemies.[68] The Messiahs of David and Ephraim will collaborate like Moses and Aaron in achieving Israel's redemption.[69] More controversially, some have thought Messiah ben Ephraim's suffering or death to carry an atoning function, possibly even in pre-Christian texts.[70] Joseph Heinemann and others suggested a much-debated, specifically second century connection between the suffering and dying Messiah ben Ephraim and the defeat of Bar Kokhba.[71] And particularly in the ninth-century homiletical midrash Pesiqta Rabbati, some scholars have in recent years suspected a distinct influence of Christian messianism. In a view

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[68] E.g., Tg. Ps.-J. Exod 40:11b (through Joshua's descendant Messiah ben Ephraim, Israel will defeat Gog); cf. Tg. Jon. Isa 53; also Deut 33:17.

[69] E.g., Tg. Song 4:5: תרין פריקיך דעתידין למפרקיך משיח בר דויד ומשיח בר אפרים; similarly, 7:4.

[70] So David Campbell Mitchell, "A Dying and Rising Josephite Messiah in 4Q372," *JSP* 18 (2009): 181–205; David Campbell Mitchell, "Firstborn Shor and Rem: A Sacrificial Josephite Messiah in 1 Enoch 90.37-38 and Deuteronomy 33.17," *JSP* 15 (2006): 211–28; Mitchell, "Messiah Ben Joseph"; cf. somewhat differently the controversial arguments of Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[71] Joseph Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim," *HTR* 68 (1975): 1–15; cf. David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus," *AJSR* 10 (1985): 143–48; previously, Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel, from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 492–501.

with some surprising similarities to that of Ephrem, the homilist here engages a Messiah whose name is Ephraim, who stands in a special relationship to God, is the son of Joseph, humbly ministers to the meek and calls disciples, is despised and suffers on Israel's behalf, returns from heaven as judge, and promises salvation and the resurrection of the dead.[72]

Concluding Observations

In John 11:54, Jesus withdraws from threats and conflict in Jerusalem to the quietness and security of Ephraim. John's Jesus, like Mark's, operates in a narrative involving both hiddenness and (continual or eventual) public disclosure around his true identity—a christological or messianic "secret." Far from merely "schematic," as Bultmann thought,[73] John 11:54 develops a theme distinctively located in the life of Jesus, and which both evangelists develop for specific literary and theological aims—Mark focusing on the Messiah, John on the pre-existent Son of God. Just as William Wrede, the Messianic Secret's archevangelist, eventually came to accept that messianic consciousness and its corollaries have their place in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, so we have inquired here into the historical locus of John 11:54.

Regardless of whether the small "city" of Ephraim should be located at modern Taybeh, it served Jesus's purpose in providing a refuge among friends at a modest but safe distance from Jerusalem, perhaps in a markedly observant Jewish context and free from threats of Roman and

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[72] See Pesikta Rabbati 37.1-2; cf. 36.1; 34.2. Cf. further Rivka Ulmer, "The Contours of the Messiah in *Pesiqta Rabbati*," *HTR* 106 (2013): 142–43 and passim.

[73] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 412n3.

high priestly harassment or arrest. As throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus's retreat from controversy or hostility is temporary and deliberate, facilitating reflection, prayer, and renewal for the task he has come to fulfill.[74] Early Christian readers saw this retreat from conflict and persecution as literally exemplary as well as symbolic, and popular legend came to associate his salvific presence in Ephraim with the miraculous expulsion of serpents from its territory. The nearby wilderness beckoned, but Jerusalem's Mount of Olives remained constantly visible on the distant horizon, both physically and metaphorically—and, with them, his coming "hour" (12:23). This is why Christ stopped at Ephraim.

[74] This frequently noted theme of the impending passion also impressed itself on Charles de Foucauld's imagination during his 1898 retreat in the village (*Meditations of a Hermit*: *The Spiritual Writings of Charles de Foucauld* (London: Oates & Washbourne, 1930), 94–129.