

Thomas Kazen employs results from recent research on the development of Jewish legal interpretation during the Second Temple period for analyzing Synoptic gospel narratives of Jesus' conflicts about the Sabbath, purity and divorce. He shows how a framework of prophetic criticism and a traditional view of torah explains Jesus' stance better than ideas of unique authority.

In this study of motives and arguments in Jesus' halakic conflicts, Thomas Kazen suggests a way beyond the use of traditional criteria of authenticity. Employing results from recent research on the development of halakah during the Second Temple period, which outlines trajectories and areas of tension within and between various Jewish movements, the author revisits the Synoptic conflict narratives about Sabbath observance, purity rules and divorce practices. Kazen disentangles theological motives from reasonable historical explanations and suggests relative dates and contexts for motives and arguments often ascribed to Jesus. He questions interpretations which focus on unique authority and suggests that Jesus' stance is better explained within the framework of prophetic criticism and a traditional Israelite understanding of Torah. With this study he contributes as much to our understanding of halakic development during the Second Temple period as he does to our understanding of the historical Jesus and his relationship to contemporary movements.