

## Abstract

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**Title:** Jesus and the forgiveness of sins: An aspect of his prophetic mission

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This study investigates the topic of forgiveness of sins in the mission of the historical Jesus. Gospel material that pertains to the question is authenticated by the use of criteria for historicity and interpreted within the wider context of first-century Judaism as part of a broader reconstruction of Jesus' career as a healer and prophet. Questions posed and answered concern the historical plausibility of the Gospel accounts of how Jesus purported to forgive sins, the meaning that such an activity would have conveyed to his contemporaries, and its implications for his identity. The method combines criteria conventional to historical Jesus research with a tradition-historical analysis informed by ancient progymnastic rhetoric.

Jesus' announcement of forgiveness is found to be attested across multiple sources, dissimilar to primitive Christian theology, and coherent with his activity as a healer and prophet. All this speaks in favour of the basic historicity of the topic. The study suggests that Jesus was guided by his distinctively literal interpretation of the Book of Isaiah's eschatological prophecies to announce God's forgiveness as part of his own mission as the Prophet-Messiah.

At the same time, the alleged controversy over forgiveness between Jesus and his adversaries includes elements that are implausible within a first-century Jewish setting and incoherent with historical Jesus traditions. An analysis of Mark 2.1-12 with the help of ancient textbooks suggests progymnastic rhetoric as the force behind the elaboration of this episode.

The results carry implications for the understanding of how the gospel tradition developed, for the formulation of the criterion of discontinuity, and for the recognition of Jesus' place within early Judaism as marked by both contextual appropriateness and contextual distinctiveness.

**Keywords:** Bible, New Testament, Gospels, historical Jesus, early Judaism, criteria, tradition, sin, forgiveness, christology, ecclesiology, priests, prophets, angels, blasphemy, healing, illness, faith, eschatology, restoration, Isaiah, Messiah, rhetoric, *Progymnasmata*, chreia, apomnemoneuma