Notes on
John

2 0 0 8 E d i t i o n

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Introduction

WRITER

The writer of this Gospel did not identify himself as such in the text. This is true of all the Gospel evangelists. Nevertheless there is evidence within this Gospel, as well as in the writings of the church fathers, that the writer was the Apostle John.

The internal evidence from the Gospel itself is as follows. In 21:24 the writer of "these things" (i.e., the whole Gospel) was the same person as the disciple whom Jesus loved (21:7). That disciple was one of the seven disciples mentioned in 21:2. He was also the disciple who sat beside Jesus in the upper room when He instituted the Lord's Supper and to whom Peter motioned (13:23-24). This means that he was one of the Twelve since only they were present in the upper room (Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14). The disciple whom Jesus loved was also one of the inner circle of three disciples, namely, Peter, James, and John (Mark 5:37-38; 9:2-3; 14:33; John 20:2-10). James died in the early history of the church, probably in the early 40s (Acts 12:2). There is good evidence that whoever wrote this Gospel did so after then. The writer was also not Peter (21:20-24). This evidence points to John as the disciple whom Jesus loved who was also the writer of this Gospel. The writer claimed to have seen Jesus' glory (1:14; cf. 1:1-4), which John did at the Transfiguration. There are several Johns in the New Testament. This one was one of Zebedee's sons who was a fisherman before Jesus called him to leave his nets and follow Him.

> "To a certain extent each of the Gospels reflects the personality of its author, but in none of them is there a more distinctive individuality manifested than in John."[1]

The external evidence also points to the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (ca. A.D. 130-200), wrote that he had heard Polycarp (ca. A.D. 69-155), a disciple of John. It was apparently from Polycarp that Irenaeus learned that, "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, had himself published a Gospel during his residence in Ephesus in Asia."[2] Other later church fathers

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[1]Merrill C. Tenney, "The Author's Testimony to Himself," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):223. In this article the writer showed how John projected his personality into his writing of this Gospel.

[2]Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:1.

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supported this tradition including Theophilus of Antioch (ca. A.D. 180), Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, and Tatian.[3] Eusebius (fourth century) also specifically mentioned that Matthew and John among the apostles wrote the Gospels that bear their names.[4]

Some scholars have rejected this seemingly clear evidence and have refused to accept Johannine authorship. This criticism comes from those who hold a lower view of Scripture generally. Answering their objections lies outside the purpose of these notes.[5]

PLACE OF WRITING

Eusebius wrote that John ministered to the church in Ephesus, which Paul had founded (Acts 19:1-20), for many years.[6] The Isle of Patmos where John spent some time in exile is close to Ephesus (cf. Rev. 1:9-11). As previously noted, Eusebius wrote that John composed his Gospel when he was at Ephesus.[7] During the first century, that city was one of the largest centers of Christian activity in the Gentile world.[8]

DATE

A few scholars believe John could have written this book as early as A.D. 45, the date when Saul of Tarsus' persecutions drove many Christians out of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:1-4).[9] There are two main problems with such an early date. First, John seems to have assumed that the Synoptic Gospels were available to the Christian public. There is some doubt about this since it assumes an assumption, but most scholars believe, on the basis of content, that John selected his material to supplement material in the Synoptics. This would put the fourth Gospel later than the Synoptics. Second, according to early church tradition the Apostle John lived long into the first century. This would make a later date possible even though it does not prove a later date. Some students of the book believe that John 21:18-22 implies that Peter would die before John did, and Peter died about A.D. 67. In general, most authorities reject a date this early for these and other reasons.

Some conservatives date the Gospel slightly before A.D. 70 because John described Palestine and Jerusalem as they were before the Roman destruction (cf. 5:2).[10] This may be a weak argument since John frequently used the Greek present tense to describe things

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[3]Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 267; Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *John-Acts*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 5-6.

[4]Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 3:24:3-8.

[5]For treatment of these views, see Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 68-81, and books on Bible Introduction.

[6]Eusebius, 3:24:1.

[7]Ibid., 3:24:3-8.

[8]For discussion of Antioch of Syria and Alexandria, Egypt as possible sites of composition, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: Revised Edition*, pp. 54-55.

[9]E.g., Edwin R. Goodenough, "John: A Primitive Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945): Part 2:145-82.

[10]E.g., Morris, p. 30; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, pp. 531, 177-205.

in the past.[11] Some who hold this date note the absence of any reference to Jerusalem's destruction in John. However there could have been many reasons John chose not to mention the destruction of Jerusalem if he wrote after that event. A date of writing before the destruction of Jerusalem is also a minority opinion among scholars.

Many conservative scholars believe that John wrote his Gospel between A.D. 85 and 95.[12] Early church tradition was that John wrote it when he was an older man. Moreover even the early Christians regarded this as the fourth Gospel and believed that John wrote it after the Synoptics. It is not clear if John had access to the Synoptic Gospels. He did not quote from any of them. However, his choice of material for his own Gospel suggests that he probably read them and chose to include other material from Jesus' ministry in his account to supplement them.[13]

The latest possible date would be about A.D. 100, though some liberal scholars date this Gospel in the second century. The Egerton papyrus that dates from early in the second century contains unmistakable allusions to John's Gospel.[14] This seems to rule out a second century date.

It seems impossible to identify the date of writing very exactly, as evidenced by the difference of opinion that exists between excellent conservative scholars. A date sometime between A.D. 65 and 95 is probable.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES AND PURPOSE

John's presentation of Jesus in his Gospel has been a problem to many modern students of the New Testament. Some regard it as the greatest problem in current New Testament studies.[15] Compared to the Synoptics, which present Jesus as a historical figure, John stressed the deity of Jesus. Obviously the Synoptics present Jesus as divine also, but the emphasis in the fourth Gospel is more strongly on Jesus' full deity. This emphasis runs from the beginning, with the Word becoming flesh (1:1, 14), to the end, were Thomas confessed Jesus as his Lord and God (20:28). John's purpose statement (20:30-31) explains why he stressed Jesus' deity. It was so his readers would believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and thereby have eternal life.

The key word in the book is the verb "believe" (Gr. *pisteuo*), which appears 98 times. The noun form of the word (Gr. *pistis*, "faith") does not occur at all. This phenomenon shows that John wanted to stress the importance of active, vital trust in Jesus. Other key

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[11]Ibid., p. 531, argued that the verb *estin*, in 5:2, never appears elsewhere in the New Testament as a historical present. It is possible that this is the only place where *estin* is a historical present.

[12]E.g., Tenney, "John," p. 9; Blum, p. 268; Carson, p. 82; Mark L. Bailey, in *The New Testament Explorer*, p. 154.

[13]R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 32.

[14]Tenney, "John," p. 9; Carson, p. 82.

[15]E.g., Blum, p. 268.

words are witness, love, abide, the Counselor (i.e., the Holy Spirit), light, life, darkness, Word, glorify, true, and real.[16] These words identify important themes in the Gospel.

John's unique purpose accounted for his selection of material, as was true of every biblical writer. He omitted Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, exorcizing demons, parables, transfiguration, institution of the Lord's Supper, agony in Gethsemane, and ascension. He focused on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, the Jewish feasts, Jesus' private conversations with individuals, and His preparation of His disciples (chs. 13—17).

John selected seven signs or miracles that demonstrate that Jesus was the divine Messiah (chs. 2—12). He also recorded the discourses that Jesus gave following these signs that explained their significance. Moreover he stressed Jesus' claims that occur in the seven unique "I am" statements (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

About 93 percent of the material in John's Gospel does not appear in the Synoptics.[17] This fact indicates the uniqueness of this Gospel compared with the other three and explains why they bear the title "Synoptic" and John does not. All four Gospels are quite similar, though each of them has its own distinctive features. John, on the other hand, is considerably different from the others. Specifically, it stresses Jesus' deity stronger than the others do. It is, I believe, impossible to determine for certain whether or not John used or even knew of the Synoptic Gospels.[18] I suspect that he did.

Another difference between the Synoptics and the fourth Gospel is the writers' view of eschatology. They all share the same basic view, namely, that the Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement of the messianic kingdom. However the Synoptic writers stressed the future aspects of eschatology more than John who put more emphasis on the present or realized aspects of eschatology. This is not to say that John presented the kingdom as having begun during Jesus' first advent. He did not. He did stress, however, the aspects of kingdom life that Christians currently enjoy as benefits of the new covenant, which Jesus inaugurated with His death. These include especially the Holy Spirit's ministries of indwelling and illuminating the believer. Such a shift in emphasis is understandable if John wrote later than the other Gospel evangelists. By then it was clear that God had postponed the messianic kingdom, and believers' interest was more on life in the church than it was on life in the messianic kingdom (cf. chs. 13—17).

> "It is . . . quite possible that one of John's aims was to combat false teaching of a docetic type. The Docetists held that the Christ never became incarnate; everything was 'seeming.'[19] That the docetic heresy did not appear in the first century seems clear, but certain elements that later were to be embodied in this heresy seem to have been quite early."[20]

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[16]Tenney, "John," p. 12.

[17]Blum, p. 269.

[18]For discussion of this issue, see Morris, pp. 43-45, and James D. Dvorak, "The Relationship Between John and the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:2 (June 1998):201-13.

[19]The Greek word *dokein*, meaning "to seem," is the origin of the name of this heresy.

[20]Morris, p. 31.

> "We have suggested that the Fourth Gospel was addressed to two groups within the Johannine community, each of which represented an extreme interpretation of the nature of Jesus: one which did not accept him as God, and the other which did not accept him as man (see the introduction, xxiii; also Smalley, *John*, 145-48). The perfectly balanced christology of the Fourth Gospel was intended, we believe, to provide a resolution of this theological crisis: to remind the ex-Jewish members of the group, with their strong emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, that the Christ was divine; and to insist, for the benefit of the ex-pagan members (with their docetic outlook), that Jesus was truly human."[21]

The context of Jesus' ministry accounts for the strong Jewish flavor that marks all four Gospels. Yet John's Gospel is more theological and cosmopolitan than the others.

> "It has . . . a wider appeal to growing Christian experience and to an enlarging Gentile constituency than the others.
>
> "The Synoptics present him for a generation in process of being evangelized; John presents him as the Lord of the maturing and questioning believer."[22]

As a piece of literature, John's Gospel has a symphonic structure.

> "A symphony is a musical composition having several movements related in subject, but varying in form and execution. It usually begins with a dominant theme, into which variations are introduced at intervals. The variations seem to be developed independently, but as the music is played, they modulate into each other until finally all are brought to a climax. The apparent disunity is really part of a design which is not evident at first, but which appears in the progress of the composition."[23]

Tasker described the fourth Gospel as "the simplest and yet the most profound of the Christian Gospels."[24]

ORIGINAL RECIPIENTS

The preceding quotation (of Tenney's commentary on John) implies that John wrote primarily for Christians. This implication may seem to be contrary to John's stated purpose (20:30-31). Probably John wrote both to convince unbelievers that Jesus was the Son of God and to give Christians who faced persecution confidence in their Savior. The word "believe" in 20:31 may be in the present tense implying that Christian readers

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[21]Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 101.
[22]Tenney, "John," p. 4.
[23]Idem, "The Symphonic Structure of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:478 (April-June 1963):117-18. Tenney identified the major themes as the signs, the sonship and messiahship of Christ, and eternal life.
[24]Tasker, p. 10.

should continue believing. It could be in the aorist tense suggesting that pagan readers should believe initially. An evangelistic purpose does not exclude an edification purpose. Indeed, all 66 books of the Bible have edifying value for God's people (2 Tim. 3:16-17). John's purpose for unbelievers is that they might obtain eternal life, and his purpose for believers is that we might experience abundant eternal life (10:10).

John explained Jewish customs, translated Jewish names, and located Palestinian sites. These facts suggest that he was writing for Gentile readers outside Palestine. Furthermore the prologue seems addressed to readers who thought in Greek categories. John's inclusion of the Greeks who showed interest in seeing Jesus (12:20-22) may also suggest that he wrote with them in view. Because of John's general purposes it seems best to conclude that the original readers were primarily Gentile Christians and Gentile unbelievers.[25]

> "By the use of personal reminiscences interpreted in the light of a long life of devotion to Christ and by numerous episodes that generally had not been used in the Gospel tradition, whether written or oral, John created a new and different approach to understanding Jesus' person. John's readers were primarily second-generation Christians he was familiar with and to whom he seemed patriarchal."[26]

The writer did not indicate the geographical location of the original recipients of his Gospel. This was undoubtedly intentional since the message of John has universal appeal. Perhaps its first readers lived in the Roman province of Asia, the capital of which was Ephesus.

Summary of Gospel Introductions				
Gospel	**Matthew**	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**
Date	40-70 probably 40s	63-70 probably 60s	57-59 probably 50s	65-95 probably 90s
Origin	Palestine	Rome	Caesarea	Ephesus
Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	Gentiles
Emphasis	King	Servant	Man	God

OUTLINE

I. Prologue 1:1-18

- A. The preincarnate Word 1:1-5
- B. The witness of John the Baptist 1:6-8
- C. The appearance of the Light 1:9-13
- D. The incarnation of the Word 1:14-18

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[25]Carson, pp. 87-95, argued that John's purpose was to evangelize Jews and Jewish proselytes. This has not been a popular view in the past, and his arguments do not convince me.
[26]Tenney, "John," p. 10.

II. Jesus' public ministry 1:19—12:50

A. The prelude to Jesus' public ministry 1:19-51

1. John the Baptist's veiled testimony to Jesus 1:19-28
2. John the Baptist's open identification of Jesus 1:29-34
3. The response to John the Baptist's witness 1:35-42
4. The witness of Philip and Andrew 1:43-51

B. Jesus' early Galilean ministry 2:1-12

1. The first sign: changing water to wine 2:1-11
2. Jesus' initial stay in Capernaum 2:12

C. Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem 2:13—3:36

1. The first cleansing of the temple 2:13-22
2. Initial response to Jesus in Jerusalem 2:23-25
3. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus 3:1-21
4. John the Baptist's reaction to Jesus' ministry 3:22-30
5. The explanation of Jesus' preeminence 3:31-36

D. Jesus' ministry in Samaria 4:1-42

1. The interview with the Samaritan woman 4:1-26
2. Jesus' explanation of evangelistic ministry 4:27-38
3. The response to Jesus in Samaria 4:39-42

E. Jesus' resumption of His Galilean ministry 4:43-54

1. Jesus' return to Galilee 4:43-45
2. The second sign: healing the official's son 4:46-54

F. Jesus' second visit to Jerusalem ch. 5

1. The third sign: healing the paralytic 5:1-9
2. The antagonism of the Jewish authorities 5:10-18
3. The Son's equality with the Father 5:19-29
4. The Father's witness to the Son 5:30-47

G. Jesus' later Galilean ministry 6:1—7:9

1. The fourth sign: feeding the 5,000 6:1-15
2. The fifth sign: walking on the water 6:16-21
3. The bread of life discourse 6:22-59
4. The responses to the bread of life discourse 6:60—7:9

H. Jesus' third visit to Jerusalem 7:10—10:42

1. The controversy surrounding Jesus 7:10-13
2. Jesus' ministry at the feast of Tabernacles 7:14-44
3. The unbelief of the Jewish leaders 7:45-52
[4. The woman caught in adultery 7:53—8:11]
5. The light of the world discourse 8:12-59
6. The sixth sign: healing a man born blind ch. 9
7. The good shepherd discourse 10:1-21
8. The confrontation at the feast of Dedication 10:22-42

I. The conclusion of Jesus' public ministry chs. 11—12

1. The seventh sign: raising Lazarus 11:1-44
2. The responses to the raising of Lazarus 11:45-57
3. Mary's anointing of Jesus 12:1-8
4. The official antagonism toward Lazarus 12:9-11
5. Jesus' triumphal entry 12:12-19
6. Jesus' announcement of His death 12:20-36
7. The unbelief of Israel 12:37-50

III. Jesus' private ministry chs. 13—17

A. The Last Supper 13:1-30

1. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet 13:1-20
2. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 13:21-30

B. The Upper Room Discourse 13:31—16:33

1. The new commandment 13:31-35
2. Peter's profession of loyalty 13:36-38
3. Jesus' comforting revelation in view of His departure 14:1-24
4. The promise of future understanding 14:25-31
5. The importance of abiding in Jesus 15:1-16
6. The warning about opposition from the world 15:17-27
7. The clarification of the future 16:1-24
8. The clarification of Jesus' destination 16:25-33

C. Jesus' high priestly prayer ch. 17

1. Jesus' requests for Himself 17:1-5
2. Jesus' requests for the Eleven 17:6-19
3. Jesus' requests for future believers 17:20-26

IV. Jesus' passion ministry chs. 18—20

A. Jesus' presentation of Himself to His enemies 18:1-11

B. Jesus' religious trial 18:12-27

1. The arrest of Jesus and the identification of the high priests 18:12-14
2. The entrance of two disciples into the high priests' courtyard and Peter's first denial 18:15-18
3. Annas' interrogation of Jesus 18:19-24
4. Peter's second and third denials of Jesus 18:25-27

C. Jesus' civil trial 18:28—19:16

1. The Jews' charge against Jesus 18:28-32
2. The question of Jesus' kingship 18:33-38a
3. The Jews' request for Barabbas 18:38b-40
4. The sentencing of Jesus 19:1-16

D. Jesus' crucifixion 19:17-30

1. Jesus' journey to Golgotha 19:17
2. The men crucified with Jesus 19:18
3. The inscription over Jesus' cross 19:19-22
4. The distribution of Jesus' garments 19:23-24
5. Jesus' provision for His mother 19:25-27
6. The death of Jesus 19:28-30

E. The treatment of Jesus' body 19:31-42

1. The removal of Jesus' body from the cross 19:31-37
2. The burial of Jesus 19:38-42

F. Jesus' resurrection 20:1-29

1. The discovery of Peter and John 20:1-9
2. The discovery of Mary Magdalene 20:10-18
3. The appearance to the Eleven minus Thomas on Easter evening 20:19-23
4. The transformed faith of Thomas 20:24-29

G. The purpose of this Gospel 20:30-31

V. Epilogue ch. 21

A. Jesus' appearance to seven disciples in Galilee 21:1-14
B. Jesus' teachings about motivation for service 21:15-23
C. The writer's postscript 21:24-25

Exposition

I. PROLOGUE 1:1-18

Each of the four Gospels begins with an introduction to Jesus that places Him in the historical setting of His earthly ministry. Matthew connected Him with David and Abraham. Mark associated Him directly with John the Baptist. Luke recorded the predictions of His birth. John, however, declared Him to be the eternal Son of God. Many writers have referred to John's prologue as a theological prologue because this evangelist stressed Jesus' connection with the eternal God.

As with many introductions, this one contains several key terms that recur throughout the remainder of the book. These terms include life and light (v. 4), darkness (v. 5), witness (v. 7), true (i.e., genuine or ultimate) and world (v. 9), as well as Son, Father, glory, and truth (v. 14). The Word (as a Christological title, v. 1) and grace (v. 14) are also important theological terms, but they occur only in the prologue.

> "But supremely, the Prologue summarizes how the 'Word' which was with God in the very beginning came into the sphere of time, history, tangibility—in other words, how the Son of God was sent into the world to become the Jesus of history, so that the glory and grace of God might be uniquely and perfectly disclosed. The rest of the book is nothing other than an expansion of this theme."[27]

Some writers have identified a chiastic structure in the prologue. R. Alan Culpepper's is essentially as follows.[28]

A The eternal Word with God vv. 1-2
- **B** What came through the Word: creation v. 3
  - **C** What we have received from the Word: life vv. 4-5
    - **D** John's purpose: to testify vv. 6-8
      - **E** The Incarnation and the world's response vv. 9-10
        - **F** The Word and His own (Israel) v. 11
          - **G** Those who accepted the Word v. 12a
            - **H** He gave them authority to become God's children v. 12b
          - **G'** Those who believed in the Word v. 12c
        - **F'** The Word and His own (Christians) v. 13
      - **E'** The Incarnation and the church's response v. 14
    - **D'** John's testimony v. 15
  - **C'** What we have received from the Word: grace v. 16
- **B'** What came through the Word: grace and truth v. 17

A' The eternal Word from God v. 18

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[27]Carson, p. 111.

[28]R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981):1-31.

Jeff Staley also saw a chiasm in these verses, though his perception of the parts is slightly different from Culpepper's.[29]

A The relationship of the Logos to God, creation, and humanity vv. 1-5
- **B** The witness of John (negative) vv. 6-8
  - **C** The journey of the Light/Logos (negative) vv. 9-11
    - **D** The gift of empowerment (positive) vv. 12-13
  - **C'** The journey of the Logos (positive) v. 14
- **B'** The witness of John (positive) v. 15

A' The relationship of the Logos to humankind, re-creation, and God vv. 16-18

These structural analyses point out that all that John wrote in this prologue centers on God's gift of eternal life that comes to people through the Word (v. 12). This emphasis on salvation through Jesus continues to be central throughout the Gospel (cf. 20:30-31).

A. THE PREINCARNATE WORD 1:1-5

John began his Gospel by locating Jesus before the beginning of His ministry, before His virgin birth, and even before Creation. He identified Jesus as co-existent with God the Father and the Father's agent in providing creation and salvation.

1:1 The Bible identifies many beginnings. The beginning that John spoke of was not really the beginning of something new at a particular time. It was rather the time before anything that has come into existence began. The Bible does not teach a timeless state either before Creation or after the consummation of all things.[30] Time is the way God and we measure events in relationship to one another. Even before God created the universe (Gen. 1:1) there was succession of events. We often refer to this pre-creation time as eternity past. This is the time that John referred to here. At the beginning of this eternity, when there was nothing else, the Word existed.

> "John is writing about a new beginning, a new creation, and he uses words that recall the first creation. He soon goes on to use other words that are important in Genesis 1, such as 'life' (v. 4), 'light' (v. 4), and 'darkness' (v. 5). Genesis 1 described God's first creation; John's theme is God's new creation. Like the first, the second is not carried out by some subordinate being. It is brought about through the agency of the *Logos*, the very Word of God."[31]

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[29]Jeff Staley, "The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel's Narrative Structure," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48:2 (April 1986):241-63.

[30]This was a pagan Greek philosophical concept. Origen held it, as do some modern eastern religions and some uninformed Christians, but it is not a biblical teaching.

[31]Morris, pp. 64-65.

Obviously the word "Word" (Gr. *logos*; Aram. *memra,* used to describe God in the Targums[32]) to which John referred was a title for God. Later in this verse he identified the Word as God. He evidently chose this title because it communicates the fact that the Word was not only God but also the expression of God. A spoken or written word expresses what is in the mind of its speaker or writer. Likewise Jesus, the Word (v. 14), was not only God, but He was the expression of God to humankind. Jesus' life and ministry expressed to humankind what God wanted us to know (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). The word "word" had this metaphorical meaning in Jewish and Greek literature when John wrote his Gospel.

> "To the Hebrew 'the word of God' was the self-assertion of the divine personality; to the Greek the formula denoted the rational mind that ruled the universe."[33]

> "It has not been proven beyond doubt whether the term *logos,* as John used it, derives from Jewish or Greek (Hellenistic) backgrounds or from some other source. Nor is it plain what associations John meant to convey by his use of it. Readers are left to work out the precise allusions and significance for themselves. John was working with allusions to the Old Testament, but he was also writing to an audience familiar with Hellenistic (Greek) thought, and certain aspects of his use of *logos* would occur to them. Both backgrounds are important for understanding this title as John used it in 1:1, 14."[34]

John adopted this word and used it in personification to express Jesus as the ultimate divine self-revelation (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). In view of Old Testament usage it carries connotations of creation (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; Ps. 33:6), revelation (Isa. 9:8; Jer. 1:4; Ezek. 33:7; Amos 3:1, 8), and deliverance (Ps. 107:20; Isa. 56:1).

John's description of the Word as with God shows that Jesus was in one sense distinct from God. He was the second person of the Trinity who is distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit in the form of His subsistence. However, John was also careful to note that Jesus was in another sense fully God. He was not less God than the Father or the Spirit in His essence. Thus John made one of the great Trinitarian statements in the Bible in this verse. In His essence Jesus is equal with the Father, but He subsists as a separate person within the Godhead.

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[32]The Targums are Aramaic translations of the Old Testament.

[33]Tenney, "John,", p. 28.

[34]W. Hall Harris, "A Theology of John's Writings," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament,* p. 190.

There is probably no fully adequate illustration of the Trinity in the natural world. Perhaps the egg is one of the best. An egg consists of three parts: shell, yolk, and white. Each part is fully egg yet each has its own identity that distinguishes it from the other parts. The human family is another illustration. Father, mother, and child are all separate entities yet each one is fully a member of its own family. Each has a different first name, but all bear the same family name.

Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to this verse to support their doctrine that Jesus was not fully God but the highest created being. They translate it "the Word was a god." Grammatically this is a possible translation since it is legitimate to supply the indefinite article ("a") when no article is present in the Greek text. However, that translation here is definitely incorrect because it reduces Jesus to less than God. Other Scriptures affirm Jesus' full deity (e.g., vv. 2, 18; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; et al.). Here the absence of the indefinite article was deliberate.

> "As a rule the predicate is without the article, even when the subject uses it [cf. vv. 6, 12, 13, 18, et al.]."[35]

Jesus was not a god. He is *God*.

> "John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous."[36]

John 1:1 is the first of many "asides" in this Gospel. An aside is a direct statement that tells the reader something. They are never observable events but are interpretive commentary on observable events. This commentary reveals information below the surface of the action.

> "Some asides function to *stage* an event by defining the physical context in which it occurs. Other asides function to *define* or specify something. Still other asides *explain discourse*, telling why something was said (or was not said, e.g., 7:13, 30). Parallel to these are others that function to *explain actions*, noting why something happened (or did not happen)."[37]

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[35]A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 767. See also E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933):12-21.

[36]C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, p. 156.

[37]Tom Thatcher, "A New Look at Asides in the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):430. Thatcher identified 191 asides and charted them by type on pages 434-39.

1:2 The Word was not only in the beginning and with God (v. 1). He (v. 14) was also in the beginning with God. This statement clarifies further that Jesus was with God before the creation of the universe. It is a further assertion of Jesus' deity. He did not come into existence. He always existed. Moreover Jesus did not become deity. He always was deity. Verse 2 clarifies the revelation of verse 1 that is so concise and profound (cf. Gen. 1:1-2).[38]

1:3 John next explicitly declared what was implicit in the Old Testament use of the word "word." Jesus was God's agent in creating everything that has come into existence (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14). It was the second person of the Trinity who created the universe and all it contains. However, John described the Word as God's agent. The Word did not act independently from the Father. Thus John presented Jesus as under God the Father's authority but over every created thing in authority. Jesus' work of revealing God began with Creation because all creation reveals God (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20).

John characteristically stated a proposition positively (part "a" of this verse) and then immediately repeated it negatively for emphasis and clarification (part "b" of this verse).

1:4

> ". . . we move on from creation in general to the creation of life, the most significant element in creation. Life is one of John's characteristic concepts: he uses the word 36 times, whereas no other New Testament writing has it more than 17 times (Revelation; next come Romans with 14 times and 1 John with 13 times). Thus more than a quarter of all the New Testament references to life occur in this one writing."[39]

Jesus was the source of life. Therefore He could impart life to the things He created. Every living thing owes its life to the Creator, Jesus. Life for humankind constitutes light. Where there is life there is light, metaphorically speaking, and where there is no light there is darkness. John proceeded to show that Jesus is the source of spiritual life and light as well as physical life and light (cf. 5:26; 6:57; 8:12; 9:5; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3; 20:31). Metaphorically God's presence dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin by providing revelation and salvation (cf. Isa. 9:2). Jesus did this in the Incarnation.

1:5 As light shines (present tense for the first time) in the darkness, so Jesus brought the revelation and salvation of God to humanity in its fallen and

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[38]See David J. MacLeod, "The Eternality and Deity of the Word: John 1:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:637 (January-March 2003):48-64.
[39]Morris, p. 73.

> lost condition. He did this in the Incarnation. As the word of God brought light to the chaos before Creation, so Jesus brought light to fallen mankind when He became a man.
>
> Furthermore the light that Jesus brought was superior to the darkness that existed both physically and spiritually. The darkness did not overcome (Gr. *katelaben*, "lay hold of," cf. 6:17; 8:3-4; 12:35; Mark 9:18) and consume the light, but the light overcame the darkness. John did not view the world as a stage on which two equal and opposing forces battle; He was not a philosophical dualist. He viewed Jesus as superior to the forces of darkness that sought to overcome Him but could not. This gives humankind hope. The forces of light are stronger than the forces of darkness. John was here anticipating the outcome of the story that he would tell, specifically, Calvary. Though darkness continues to prevail, the light can overcome it.[40]

> "The imagery of John, though limited to certain concepts and expressed in a fixed vocabulary, is integrated with the total theme of the Gospel. It expresses the conflict of good with evil, culminating in the incarnation and death of Christ, who brought light into darkness, and, though He suffered death, was not overcome by it."[41]

Throughout these introductory verses John was clearly hinting at parallels between what Jesus did physically in Creation and what He did spiritually through the Incarnation. These parallels continue through the Gospel, as do the figures of light and darkness. Light represents both revelation and salvation. Likewise darkness stands for ignorance and sin (3:19-20; 8:12; 12:35, 46).

B. THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST 1:6-8

John the Apostle introduced John the Baptist because John the Baptist bore witness to the light, namely, Jesus. John the Baptist was both a model evangelist pointing those in darkness to the light and a model witness providing an excellent example for believers who would follow him.[42] John the Baptist introduced the Light to a dark world. He inaugurated Jesus' ministry. Therefore mention of him was appropriate at the beginning of the Apostle John's account of Jesus' ministry.

1:6 In introducing John the Baptist the writer stressed that God had sent him. The name "John" means "God is gracious." John was a prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who bore witness to the light

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[40]See David J. MacLeod, "The Creation of the Universe by the Word: John 1:3-5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:638 (April-June 2003):187-201.

[41]Merrill C. Tenney, "The Imagery of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:481 (January-March 1964):21. This article contains discussion of about 20 images that John used.

[42]See David J. MacLeod, "The Witness of John the Baptist to the Word: John 1:6-9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):305-20.

(Exod. 3:10-15; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:4; cf. John 3:17). He was a man in contrast to the Word who was God. The other Gospel writers described John with the words "the Baptist," but John the Evangelist did not. He probably called him simply John because this is the only John that the Apostle John mentioned by name in his Gospel. He always referred to himself obliquely either as the disciple whom Jesus loved or as the other disciple or in some other veiled way.

1:7 John the Baptist was the first of many witnesses to the light that John the Apostle identified in this Gospel (cf. 4:39; 5:32, 36-37, 39-40; 8:18; 10:25; 12:17; 15:26-27; 18:13-18, 37). The Apostle John frequently used courtroom terminology in his Gospel to stress the truthfulness of the witnesses to the Light. John the Baptist bore witness to the light of God's revelation but also to the person of the Light of the World (8:12). This Gospel stresses the function of John the Baptist as a witness to the light.[43] The other Gospels also identified his origin and character in their introductions (Matt. 3; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:5-24, 57-80).

John the Baptist's ultimate purpose was eliciting belief in Jesus (cf. vv. 35-37). That was also John the Evangelist's purpose in writing this book (20:30-31). Consequently John the Baptist's witness is an important part of the argument of the fourth Gospel. It was not immediately apparent to everyone that Jesus was the Light. Both Johns needed to identify Him as such to them.

> "Since the Reformation, theologians have viewed saving faith as simultaneously encompassing three components—*notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. In *notitia* the individual becomes aware of the conditions, promises, and events that constitute divine revelation, especially the events surrounding God's consummate self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In *assensus* the individual expresses objective confidence in the truthfulness of these claims (Rom. 10:9; Heb. 11:3, 6; 1 John 5:1). In *fiducia* the individual places his or her personal trust in Jesus Christ. Central to this threefold model is a single key assumption: Faith, as presented in the New Testament, necessarily entails the recognition and acceptance of specific, objective content."[44]

1:8 Perhaps the writer stressed the fact that John the Baptist was not the Light because some people continued to follow John as his disciples long after he died (cf. 4:1; Mark 6:29; Luke 5:33; Acts 18:25; 19:1-7).

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[43]John often emphasized something by simply repeating it, as he did here with the word "witness."

[44]Timothy Paul Jones, "The Necessity of Objective Assent in the Act of Christian Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):150.

> "A Mandaean sect still continues south of Baghdad which, though hostile to Christianity, claims an ancestral link to the Baptist."[45]

John the Baptist's function was clearly to testify that Jesus was the Light. He was not that Light himself.

The reason the writer referred to John the Baptist in his prologue seems obvious. As the Word came to bring light to humanity, so God sent John the Baptist to illuminate the identity of the Light to people.

C. THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIGHT 1:9-13

The first section of the prologue (vv. 1-5) presents the preincarnate Word. The second section (vv. 6-8) identifies the forerunner of the Word's earthly ministry. This third section introduces the ministry of the Incarnate Word.

> "Two points receive special emphasis: one is the astonishing fact that the Word of God, true God as he is, took upon him human nature, and the other is the even more astonishing fact that when he did this, people would have nothing to do with him."[46]

1:9 There are two possible interpretations of this verse. One is that the true Light enlightens every person who comes into the world (Gr. masculine participle *erchomenon*, AV, and NASB and NIV margins). The other is that the true Light comes into the world and enlightens everyone (Gr. neuter participle *erchomenon*, NASB and NIV). The second option seems preferable since the Incarnation is so much in view in the context. The point is that Jesus as the Light affects everyone. Everyone lives under the spotlight of God's illuminating revelation in Jesus Christ since the Incarnation (cf. 1 John 1). His light clarifies the sinfulness and spiritual need of human beings. Those who respond to this convicting revelation positively experience salvation. Those who reject it and turn from the light will end up in outer darkness. They will experience eternal damnation.

The Quakers prefer the first of the two interpretations above. They use this verse to support their doctrine of the "inner light." They believe that God has placed some revelation in the heart of every person. A person can elicit that revelation by meditation. This is not general but special revelation. Their view is very close to the charismatic belief that God gives new revelation today. Non-charismatics see no basis in Scripture for this view. We believe that while God now illuminates the revelation that He has previously given He does not give new revelation now.

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[45]Blum, p. 272. Mandaism was a non-Christian type of Gnosticism. See Morris, p. 57.
[46]Ibid., pp. 82-83.

The word "true" is one that John used repeatedly in this Gospel. "True" (Gr. *alethinon*) here refers to what is the ultimate form of the genuine article, the real as opposed to the counterfeit. John did not mean that Jesus was "truthful" (Gr. *alethes*). Jesus was not only a genuine revelation from God, but He was also the ultimate revelation (cf. 4:23; 6:32; 15:1; 17:3).

John usually used the word "world" (Gr. *kosmos*) in a negative sense in this Gospel (cf. v. 10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14). It does not refer to this planet as a planet but to the inhabited earth fallen in sin and in rebellion against God. It is the world of humanity darkened by sin.

1:10 Jesus entered the world that He had created in the Incarnation. Yet the world did not recognize Him for who He was because people's minds had become darkened by the Fall and sin (12:37). Even the Light of the World was incomprehensible to them (cf. Matt. 13:55). The Light shines on everyone even though most people do not see it because they are spiritually blind.

John drew attention to the world by repeating this word three times. However the meaning shifts a bit from the world and all that is in it, in the first two occurrences of the word, to the people in the world who came in contact with Jesus, in the third occurrence.

> "The world's characteristic reaction to the Word is one of indifference."[47]

1:11 More seriously, when Jesus visited His own creation (Gr. *idia*, neuter), the creatures whom He had created (Gr. *idioi*, masculine) did not receive Him but rejected Him. The specific people whom Jesus visited in the Incarnation were the Jews. They were His own in a double sense. He had not only created them but also bought them for Himself out from the nations. Jesus had created the earth as a house, but when He visited it He found it inhabited by people who refused to acknowledge Him for who He was. In the Incarnation Jesus did not come as an alien; He came home.

1:12 The contrast with rejection is acceptance. Not everyone rejected Jesus when He came. Some accepted Him.[48] To these He gave as a gift the authority (Gr. *exousian*) to become God's children (Gr. *tekna*). Receiving Jesus consists of believing in His name. Believing therefore equals receiving. "His name" summarizes all that He is. To believe in His name means to accept the revelation of who Jesus is that God has given. Because that revelation includes the fact that Jesus died as a substitute

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[47]Ibid., p. 85. See his additional note on "the world," pp. 111-13.

[48]See David J. MacLeod, "The Reaction of the World to the Word: John 1:10-13" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (October-December 2003):398-413.

sacrifice in the place of sinners, belief involves reliance on Jesus for salvation rather than on self. It does not just mean believing facts intellectually. It involves volitional trust as well.

> "In the gospel of John belief is viewed in terms of a relationship with Jesus Christ, which begins with a decision to accept rather than reject who Jesus claims to be. This leads to a new relationship with God . . .
>
> ". . . in the Johannine writings . . . *pisteuo* ["believe"] with *eis* ["in" or "into"] refers to belief in a person."[49]

In one sense all human beings are the children of God: we are His creatures. However the Bible speaks of the children of God primarily as those who are His spiritual children by faith in Jesus Christ. The new birth brings us into a new family with new relationships. Clearly John was referring to this family of believers since he wrote that believing in Jesus gives people the right to become God's children. The New Testament speaks of the believer as a child of God and as a son of God. Technically it describes us as children by birth, the new birth, and as sons by adoption. John consistently referred to believers only as children of God in his Gospel. He did not call us the sons of God. In this Gospel Jesus is the only son of God. "Children" draws attention to community of nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4) whereas "sons" emphasizes rights and privileges.

When a person offers you a gift that has cost him or her much, it does not become yours until you receive it from that person. The beautifully wrapped package in the outstretched hand of the giver will do the receiver no good until he or she reaches out and takes it. Likewise reception of God's gracious gift of eternal life is necessary before a person can benefit from it. Receiving a gift from someone else does not constitute a meritorious act or good work, and the Bible never regards it as a work. It is simply a response to the work of another.

1:13 The antecedent of "who" is those who believe in Jesus' name (v. 12). Their new life as children of God comes from God. It does not come because of their blood, namely, their physical ancestors. Many of the Jews believed that because they were Abraham's descendants they were the spiritual children of God (cf. ch. 8; Rom. 4; Gal. 3). Even today some people think that the faith or works of their ancestors somehow guarantees their salvation. However, God has no grandchildren. People become the children of God by personally trusting in Christ.

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[49]Harris, p. 223. The context determines whether John had genuine or inadequate belief in view in any given passage. Ibid., pp. 225-26.

New life does not come because of physical desire either. No amount of wanting it and striving for it will bring it. The only thing that will is belief in Jesus.

> "The term 'flesh' (*sarx*) is not used by John to convey the idea of sinfulness, as it often does in Paul's writings. . . . Rather, it is indicative of weakness and humiliation as seen in 1:14. It simply affirms that in the Incarnation Jesus became fully human."[50]

Third, new spiritual life does not come because of a human decision either, specifically, the choice of a husband to produce a child. It comes as the result of a spiritual decision to trust in Jesus Christ. The Greek word for "man" here is *andros* meaning "male." The NIV interpreted it properly as "husband" here.

New spiritual life does not come from any of these sources but from God Himself. Ultimately it is the result of God's choice, not man's (cf. Eph. 1:4). Therefore the object of our faith must be God rather than our heritage or race, our works, or our own initiative.

This section of the prologue summarizes the theological issue involved in the Incarnation. It is in a sense a miniature of the whole Gospel.

D. THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD 1:14-18

John's return to the Word in verse 14 from verse 1 introduces new revelation about Him. Though still part of the prologue, the present section focuses on the Incarnation of the Word.

1:14 The Word, who existed equal with God before anything else came into being, became a human.[51] This is the most concise statement of the Incarnation. He did not just appear to be a man; He became one (cf. Phil. 2:5-9). Yet He maintained His full deity. The word "became" (Gr. *egeneto*) usually implies a complete change, but that was not true in Jesus' case. He did not cease to be God. Flesh in Scripture has a literal meaning, namely, material human flesh, and a metaphorical meaning, human nature.[52] Here John used it in the metaphorical sense. God the Son assumed a human, though not sinful, nature.

> "John does not say, 'the Word became man,' nor 'the Word took a body.' He chooses that form of expression which

[50]Ibid., p. 206. See also Morris, p. 89.
[51]See Harris, pp. 189-92, or Morris, pp. 102-11, for fuller discussions of the title *Logos*.
[52]A second, less used, metaphorical meaning is all that we were in Adam before our regeneration (cf. Rom. 7:5).

> puts what he wants to say most bluntly. It seems probable that he was confronted by opponents of a docetic type, people who were ready to think of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God but who denied the reality of his humanity. They thought of him as only appearing to live a human life. Since God could not, on their premises, defile himself by real contact with humankind, the whole life of Jesus must be appearance only. John's strong term leaves no room for such fancies. He is clear on the deity of the Word. But he is just as clear on the genuineness of his humanity."[53]

Jesus literally lived among His disciples. The Greek word *eskenosen*, translated "dwelt" or "lived," is related to *skene*, meaning tabernacle. As God's presence dwelt among the Israelites in the tabernacle, so it lived among them in the person of Jesus temporarily (cf. Exod. 25:8-9; 33:7, 11).[54] Solomon thought it incredible that God would dwell on the earth (1 Kings 8:27), but that is precisely what He did in Jesus.

For the first time, John equated the Word and Jesus, but this is the last reference to the Word in this Gospel. From now on, John referred to the Word by His historical name, Jesus, and to the personal terms "Father" and "Son."

> "As the preexistent Son of God, he was the Creator of the world and the Executor of the will of the Father. As the incarnate Son of God, he exercised in his human existence these same powers and revealed effectively the person of the Father."[55]

The glory that John and the other disciples beheld as eyewitnesses refers to the god-like characteristics of Jesus (cf. Exod. 33:22; Deut. 5:22; Isa. 60:1; 1 John 1:1-2). God's character and qualities came through Jesus as a human son resembles his human father, except that the likeness in Jesus' case was exact (Phil. 2:6). The disciples saw Jesus' glory clearest at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). His relationship to the Father was unique, and so was His similarity to the Father. Jesus' relationship to God as His Son was unique (Gr. *monogenous*, cf. v. 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) even though we can become children of God (vv. 12-13). He is eternal and of the same essence as the Father. "Only begotten"

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[53]Morris, pp. 90-91.

[54]Merrill C. Tenney, "The Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):300-8, discussed the influence of the Hebrew Bible on John's teaching in this Gospel. John contains the second largest number of quotations and allusions to the Old Testament in the Gospels after Matthew. Ibid., p. 303.

[55]Idem, "John," p. 33.

does not mean that there was a time when Jesus was not, and then the Father brought Him into being.[56]

Particularly grace and truth marked the glory of God that Jesus manifested. Grace in this context refers to graciousness (i.e., goodness, Heb. *hesed*), and truth means integrity (i.e., truthfulness, Heb. *yemet*, cf. v. 17). The Incarnation was the greatest possible expression of God's grace to humankind. It was also the best way to communicate truth accurately to human understanding. Nevertheless many people who encountered Jesus during His ministry failed to see these things (v. 10). Neither grace nor truth is knowable apart from God who has revealed them through Jesus Christ.[57]

1:15 John the Baptist was another witness beside John the Apostle and the other disciples of Jesus who testified to Jesus' person.

> "John the Baptist is one of six persons named in the Gospel of John who gave witness that Jesus Is God. The others are Nathanael (John 1:49), Peter (John 6:69), the blind man who was healed (John 9:35-38), Martha (John 11:27), and Thomas (John 20:28). If you add our Lord Himself (John 5:25; 10:36), then you have seven clear witnesses."[58]

Even though John the Baptist was older and began his ministry before Jesus, He acknowledged Jesus' superiority to himself.

> "In a society where age and precedence bestowed peculiar honour, that might have been taken by superficial observers to mean John the Baptist was greater than Jesus."[59]

Jesus' superiority rested in His preexistence with the Father and therefore His deity. John the Baptist's witness to Jesus' identity was important to the writer of this Gospel (cf. vv. 6-8, 19-36).

1:16 The glory of God that Jesus manifested was full of grace and truth (v. 14). From the fullness of that grace all people have received one expression of grace after another.

There are several possible interpretations of the phrase "grace upon grace" (NASB, Gr. *charin anti charitos*). The problem is the meaning of the preposition *anti* here. Some interpreters believe that John was saying grace

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[56]*Monogenes*, literally "one kind," means unique or only.

[57]Morris, p. 95. See also David J. MacLeod, "The Incarnation of the Word: John 1:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:641 (January-March 2004):72-88.

[58]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:287.

[59]Carson, p. 131.

follows grace as ocean wave follows wave, washing believers with successive blessings.[60] The NIV "one blessing after another" effectively expresses this view, and the NASB "grace upon grace" implies it. Another translation that gives the same sense is "grace to meet every need that arises (see 2 Cor. xii. 9)."[61] It is true that God keeps pouring out His inexhaustible grace on the believer through Jesus Christ, but is this what John meant here?

A second view is that the Greek preposition *anti* means "instead of" here as it often does elsewhere.[62] According to this interpretation John meant that God's grace though Jesus Christ replaces the grace that He bestowed through Moses when He gave the law. Verse 17 seems to continue this thought and so supports this interpretation.

I wonder if John may have intended both ideas. He could have been thinking of God's grace in Jesus Christ superseding His grace through Moses and continuing to supply the Christian day by day. This interpretation recognizes John's mention of the fullness of God's grace as well as the contrast in verse 17.

Another less acceptable view is that *anti* means "corresponds to."[63] The grace we receive corresponds in some way to the grace Jesus receives from the Father. However, *anti* rarely has this meaning by itself, though it does occasionally when it combines with other nouns. Furthermore this interpretation offers no connection with verse 17.

A fourth view, also inadequate from my viewpoint, is that *anti* means "in return for."[64] Yet the idea of God giving us grace in return for grace that we give to him is foreign to the New Testament. God initiates grace to human beings.

1:17 Whereas Moses was the individual through whom God gave His law to His people, Jesus Christ is the one through whom He has manifested abundant grace and truth.[65] This statement shows the superiority of the gracious dispensation that Jesus introduced over the legal dispensation that Moses inaugurated (cf. Rom. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:8). The legal age contained

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[60]See F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, p. 43; Robertson, p. 574; Morris, p. 98; Zane C. Hodges, "Grace after Grace—John 1:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):34-45.

[61]Tasker, p. 48.

[62]Carson, p. 132-34.

[63]J. C. Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:29.

[64]See Carson, p. 131.

[65]This is John's first use of the human name "Jesus," which occurs 237 times in this Gospel, more than a quarter of the total 905 times it appears in the entire New Testament. The compound "Jesus Christ," however, occurs again only in 17:3 in John. This evangelist used "Christ" 19 times, more than any of the other Gospel writers (cf. 20:31).

grace, and the gracious age contains laws.[66] John was contrasting their dominant characteristics. Law expresses God's standards, but grace provides help so we can do His will.[67]

> "What God showed Himself to be through His revelation in the Torah, so now Jesus shows Himself to be through the Incarnation. And what was the Torah? It was not handcuffs, but Yahweh's pointed finger, graciously marking out to the redeemed the path of life and fellowship with Him [cf. Deut. 6:1-3]. The point of John 1:17 is not 'Then bad, now good'; the point is rather, 'Then, wonderful! And now, better than ever!'"[68]

This verse clearly contrasts the two dispensations in view. Even non-dispensationalists acknowledge this and admit that they recognize two different economies, the Old Testament legal economy and the New Testament gracious economy. Significantly, Moses' first plague in Egypt involved turning water into blood (Exod. 7:14-15), whereas Jesus' first recorded miracle involved turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).

1:18 There are many passages of Scripture that record various individuals seeing God (e.g., Exod. 33:21-23; Isa. 6:1-5; Rev. 1:10-18). Those instances involved visions, theophanies, or anthropomorphic representations of God rather than encounters with His unveiled spiritual essence (cf. Exod. 33:20; Deut. 4:12; Ps. 97:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12). The way we know what God is like is not by viewing His essence. No one can do that and live. God has sent His unique and only Son (*monogenous*, cf. v. 14) from His own most intimate presence to reveal God to humankind.

> "*In the bosom of* is a Hebrew idiom expressing the intimate relationship of child and parent, and of friend and friend (cf. xiii. 23)."[69]

In the system that Moses inaugurated, no one could "see" God, but Jesus has revealed Him now to everyone. Note also that John called Jesus God here again.[70]

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[66]Each sacrifice that God accepted under the old economy was an expression of His grace.

[67]Surprisingly John used the great Christian word "grace" three times in his prologue (vv. 14, 16, 17) but nowhere else in his Gospel.

[68]Ronald B. Allen, "Affirming Right-of-Way on Ancient Paths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):10.

[69]Tasker, p. 49.

[70]Though some ancient manuscripts read "Son" instead of "God," the correct reading seems clearly to be "God."

Jesus "explained" (NASB) God in the sense of revealing Him. The Greek word is *exegesato* from which we get "exegete." The Son has exegeted (i.e., explained, interpreted, or narrated) the Father to humankind. The reference to Jesus being in the bosom of the Father softens and brings affection to the idea of Jesus exegeting the Father. The nature of God is in view here, not His external appearance.

> "God is invisible, not because he is unreal, but because physical eyes are incapable of detecting him. The infrared and ultraviolet rays of the light spectrum are invisible because the human eye is not sensitive enough to register them. However, photographic plates or a spectroscope can make them visible to us. Deity as a being is consequently known only through spiritual means that are able to receive its (his) communications."[71]

John ended his prologue as he began it, with a reference to Jesus' deity.[72] He began by saying the Word was with God (v. 1), and he concluded by saying that He was at the Father's side. This indicates the intimate fellowship, love, and knowledge that the Father and the Son shared. It also gives us confidence that the revelation of the Father that Jesus revealed is accurate. John's main point in this prologue was that Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God.

> ". . . John in his use of *Logos* is cutting clean across one of the fundamental Greek ideas. The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John's idea of the *Logos* conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's *Logos* does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved."[73]

Later John described himself as reclining on Jesus' bosom (cf. 13:23). His Gospel is an accurate revelation of the Word because John enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him just as Jesus was an accurate revelation of God that came from intimate relationship with Him.

II. JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY 1:19—12:50

The first part of the body of John's Gospel records Jesus' public ministry to the multitudes in Palestine who were primarily Jewish. Some writers have called this section of the Gospel "the book of signs" because it features seven miracles that signify various things about Jesus.

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[71]Tenney, "John," p. 34.
[72]For an exposition of verses 15-18, see David J. MacLeod, "The Benefits of the Incarnation of the Word," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:642 (April-June 2004):179-93.
[73]Morris, pp. 103-4.

> "Signs are miraculous works performed or mentioned to illustrate spiritual principles."[74]

Often John recorded a lengthy discourse that followed the miracle, in which Jesus explained its significance to the crowds. This section also contains two extended conversations that Jesus had with two individuals (chs. 3 and 4).

> "The opening of the narrative proper might well be understood as the account of the happenings of one momentous week. John does not stress the point, but he does give notes of time that seem to indicate this. The first day is taken up with a deputation from Jerusalem that interrogates the Baptist. 'The next day' we have John's public pointing out of Jesus (vv. 29-34). Day 3 tells of two disciples of the Baptist who followed Jesus (vv. 35-40). It seems probable that verse 41 takes us to day 4 . . . It tells of Andrew's bringing of Peter to Jesus. Day 5 is the day when Philip and Nathanael come to him (vv. 43-51). The marriage in Cana is two days after the previous incident (i.e., the sixth and seventh days, 2:1-11). If we are correct in thus seeing the happenings of one momentous week set forth at the beginning of this Gospel, we must go on to ask what significance is attached to this beginning. The parallel with the days of creation in Genesis 1 suggests itself, and is reinforced by the 'In the beginning' that opens both chapters. Just as the opening words of this chapter recall Genesis 1, so it is with the framework. Jesus is to engage in a new creation. The framework unobtrusively suggests creative activity."[75]

A. THE PRELUDE TO JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY 1:19-51

The rest of the first chapter continues the introductory spirit of the prologue. It records two events in John the Baptist's ministry and the choice of some men to follow Jesus.

1. John the Baptist's veiled testimony to Jesus 1:19-28

The writer recorded John the Baptist's witness to Jesus' identity as preparation for his narration of Jesus' public ministry. He was the first of the Apostle John's witnesses to the Incarnation.

Previously the writer had mentioned that God had sent John the Baptist to bear witness concerning the light (vv. 6-8). He also mentioned what John had said about Jesus, namely, that Jesus had a higher rank than he did (v. 15). Now the evangelist explained John the Baptist's witness in more detail.

1:19 This verse explains the context in which John the Baptist explained his own identity in relation to Jesus. As the Synoptics reveal, John's ministry

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[74]Tenney, "The Symphonic . . .," p. 119. See also idem, "Topics from the Gospel of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:526 (April-June 1975):145-60, for a discussion of the seven signs in John's Gospel.
[75]Morris, p. 114.

was so influential that the Jewish religious authorities investigated him (Matt. 3:5-6). The Sanhedrin probably sent the delegation of priests and Levites. The priests were descendants of Aaron who took the leadership in matters of theological and practical orthodoxy, including ritual purity. The Levites descended from Levi, one of Aaron's ancestors, and assisted the priests in their ministry mainly in the areas of temple music and security.[76]

"The Jews" is a term that John used 71 times, in contrast to the other evangelists who used it rarely. Usually in John it refers to Jewish people who were hostile to Jesus, though occasionally it occurs in a neutral sense (e.g., 2:6) or in a good sense (e.g., 4:22). Most often, however, it refers to the Jews of Judea, especially those in and around Jerusalem, who constituted the organized and established religious world apart from faith in Jesus. Consequently it usually carries overtones of hostility to Jesus.[77]

1:20 The writer stressed that John vigorously repudiated any suggestion that he might be the Messiah. "Christ" (Gr. *Christos*) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" or "Anointed One." John's ministry consisted of pointing the Messiah out to others so they would follow Him. Therefore it would have been counterproductive to allow anyone to confuse him with the Messiah.

1:21 The leaders asked John if he was Elijah because messianic expectation was high then due to Daniel's prediction that dated the appearance of Messiah then (Dan. 9:25). Malachi had predicted that Elijah would return to herald the day of the Lord that Messiah would inaugurate (Mal. 4:5-6). When John the Baptist denied being Elijah, he was denying being Elijah himself. His dress, diet, lifestyle, and ministry, however, were very similar to Elijah's.

The prophet whom the leaders had in mind when they asked their third question was the prophet that Moses had predicted would come (Deut. 18:15-18).[78] He would bring new revelation from God and might lead them in a new Exodus and overcome their oppressors. They incorrectly failed to identify this prophet with Messiah (cf. 7:40-41).[79] John the Baptist claimed that he was not that long-expected prophet either.

1:22-23 In response to the leaders' question, John the Baptist claimed to be a prophet who was preparing the way for the Lord's coming. He quoted

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[76]Carson, p. 142.
[77]Morris, p. 115.
[78]Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy, New Testament Faith, and the Christian Life," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 27, pointed out that of the 42 New Testament citations of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, 24 of them appear in John's Gospel.
[79]In contrast, the earliest Christian preachers contended that "the prophet" was identical with the Messiah (cf. Acts 3:22).

Isaiah 40:3, which is part of a messianic prophecy (cf. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4). In that prophecy Isaiah predicted the manifestation of God's glory when Messiah appeared (Isa. 40:5; cf. John 1:14). Significantly John did not claim to be the Word but only a voice.

1:24 The NASB translators understood this verse to be parenthetical describing the authorities who had sent the delegation that had been questioning John. The NIV translators interpreted it as identifying some of John's questioners. Probably the NIV is correct here. It would be unusual for the writer to interrupt the narrative flow with this relatively insignificant detail, but for him to identify some of John's examiners as Pharisees makes sense. The Pharisees were the strict interpreters of the Jewish laws, and John seemed close to violating these.

1:25 Their question implied that it was inappropriate for John to baptize. The Jews practiced baptism for ritual cleansing, but in all cases the baptismal candidates baptized themselves.[80] There was no precedent for John baptizing other people, and the Jews did not regard themselves as needing to repent. This was something Gentiles needed to do when they converted to Judaism.[81] Moreover since he was not one of the prophesied eschatological figures he appeared to them to lack authority to do what he did.

1:26-27 John replied by implying that his authority to baptize as he did came from an authoritative figure who was present but yet unknown. John did not identify Him then. This would have exposed Jesus to the scrutiny of Israel's leadership prematurely. John only realized that Jesus was the Messiah after he said these words (cf. v. 31). John simply referred to this One and implied that he baptized in water under divine authority. He stressed the great authority of Jesus by saying he was unworthy to do even menial service for Him. Thus John bore witness to Jesus even before he identified Him as the Messiah.

> "To get the full impact of this we must bear in mind that disciples did do many services for their teachers. Teachers in ancient Palestine were not paid (it would be a terrible thing to ask for money for teaching Scripture!). But in partial compensation disciples were in the habit of performing small services for their rabbis instead. But they had to draw the line somewhere, and menial tasks like loosing the sandal thong came under this heading. There is a rabbinic saying (in its present form dating from c. A.D. 250, but probably much older): 'Every service which a

[80]Carson, p. 145.

[81]Evidently when Gentiles converted to Judaism, the males of the family underwent circumcision and all members of the family, both sexes, were baptized. Morris, p. 123.

> slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong.' John selects the very task that the rabbinic saying stresses as too menial for any disciple, and declares himself unworthy to perform it."[82]

1:28 The site of Jesus' ministry was primarily west of the Jordan River. "Beyond the Jordan" then evidently refers to the east side of that river. The Bethany in view then would be a town different from the site of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' home (11:1), which was on the west side just east of Jerusalem. Perhaps John mentioned Bethany by name because its site was known when he wrote. It is unknown now. It may be significant that John recorded Jesus' public ministry beginning at one Bethany and almost ending at the other (12:1-11). "Bethany" means "house of depression or misery."[83]

John the Baptist fulfilled his mission of bearing witness to the Word first by publicly declaring his submission to Jesus' authority. The veiled identity of Jesus as the Word continues from the prologue into this pericope.

2. John the Baptist's open identification of Jesus 1:29-34

John the Baptist continued his witness to Jesus' identity by identifying Him publicly as the Lamb of God. This witness is a crucial part of the writer's purpose of promoting faith in Jesus.

1:29 The very next day John saw Jesus approaching him—they had been together before (vv. 26, 32-33)—and publicly identified Jesus as the Messiah. "Behold" or "Look" (Gr. *ide*) is a favorite expression of John's.[84] Probably his questioners had returned to Jerusalem by this time. The title "Lamb of God" presented Jesus as the Lamb that God would provide as a substitute sacrifice for humankind's sin (Isa. 53:7; cf. Gen. 4:4; 8:20; 22:8, 13-14; Exod. 12:3-17; Isa. 53:12; 1 Pet. 1:19).

> "It [the title "Lamb"] combines in one descriptive term the concepts of innocence, voluntary sacrifice, substitutionary atonement, effective obedience, and redemptive power like that of the Passover lamb (Exod. 12: 21-27)."[85]

> "The question in the Old Testament is, 'Where is the lamb?' (Gen. 22:7) In the four Gospels, the emphasis is 'Behold the Lamb of God!' Here He is! After you have trusted Him,

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[82]Ibid., p. 124.
[83]*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*bethania*," p. 100.
[84]Of its 29 New Testament occurrences, John used it 15 times.
[85]Tenney, "John," p. 37.

> you sing with the heavenly choir, "Worthy is the Lamb!' (Rev. 5:12)"[86]

John spoke of 'sin,' not sins (cf. 1 John 1:9), by which he meant the totality of the world's sin rather than a number of individual acts.[87] John seems to have had the common understanding of Messiah that his contemporaries did. This was that He would be a political liberator for Israel (cf. Matt. 11:2-3; Luke 7:19). However, he understood, as most of his contemporaries did not, that the scope of Jesus' ministry would be spiritual and universal. He would take away the sin of the world, not just the Jews.[88]

1:30 Probably some of those to whom John addressed these words were present and witnessed his conversation with the priests and Levites the previous day. John now identified Jesus as the person he had hinted at the day before.

1:31-33 John had not known that Jesus was the Messiah before God revealed that to him even though they were relatives (cf. Luke 1:36). John learned who Jesus really was when he baptized Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). The Apostle John did not record Jesus' baptism, which happened before the events he recorded here. John the Baptist further explained that he carried on his baptizing ministry with Messiah's public identification as a goal (cf. Mark 1:4). The symbolic descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove that remained on Jesus identified Jesus to John the Baptist as Messiah who was to baptize with the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2; Ezek. 36:25-26; Mark 1:10).

> "Two times in John the Baptist's account he made mention of the Spirit 'remaining' on Jesus (1:32-33). This is extremely important as a description of the Spirit's relationship to Jesus because permanence is implied."[89]

In the Synoptics the writers mentioned only Jesus seeing the descent of the Spirit as a dove. John is the only evangelist who recorded that John the Baptist also saw it. The purpose of the baptism of Jesus in this Gospel then is to identify Jesus as Messiah to John the Baptist so he could bear witness to Jesus' identity. Every other disciple was dependent on a human witness for divine illumination about Jesus' true identity in John's Gospel. Baptism with water was essentially negative symbolizing cleansing from something, but baptism with the Spirit was positive indicating the imparting of new life from God.

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[86]Wiersbe, 1:287.

[87]Morris, p. 130.

[88]See Christopher W. Skinner, "Another Look at 'the Lamb of God'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:641 (January-March 2004):89-104, for a review of nine views of the referent behind the "Lamb."

[89]Harris, p. 197.

1:34 John fulfilled this purpose by witnessing that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). This is a title that unambiguously claims deity. The title "Messiah" did not imply deity to many who heard it in Jesus' day. They thought only of a political deliverer. Even the Twelve struggled with this. However, John the Baptist testified that Jesus was God, though doubts arose in his mind later. Son of God does not mean any less than deity. It means full deity (v. 18). This verse is the climax of John the Baptist's testimony concerning Jesus.

The event that identified Jesus as the Son of God for John the Baptist was the fulfillment of God's promise to him that he would see the Spirit's descent and continuation on Him. This was the basis of John the Baptist's witness concerning Jesus.

3. The response to John the Baptist's witness 1:35-42

The writer now turned his attention from John the Baptist's witness to Jesus to record the reactions of some men to Jesus' witness. Two of John the Baptist's disciples left him to follow Jesus when they heard John's testimony about Jesus. One of them recruited his brother to join them. Jesus did not call these men to follow Him as His disciples now. That came later (cf. Matt. 4:18-22; 9:9; Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14; Luke 5:1-11, 27-28). The Apostle John recorded a preliminary contact that these men had with Jesus.

1:35-36 Was the writer describing what happened on the same day as what he recorded in verses 29-34 or the following day? Probably the "next day" in verse 35 is the next day after the "next day" in verse 29.[90] It happened after John had again identified Jesus as the Lamb of God (v. 29).

1:37 Two of John the Baptist's disciples started following Jesus because of John's witness. This was perfectly proper since John's ministry was to point others to Jesus. They were not abandoning the Baptist for a more popular teacher. They were simply doing what John urged his hearers to do. They began following Jesus physically to learn from Him. They also took the first steps toward genuine discipleship. This was no tentative inquiry but a giving of themselves to Him as disciples.[91]

1:38 Jesus asked these two men why they were walking behind Him. Did they want something from Him?

> "It appears that the Evangelist is writing on two levels. The question makes sense as straightforward narrative: Jesus asks the two men who are following him to articulate what is on their minds. But the Evangelist wants his readers to reflect on a deeper question: the Logos-Messiah confronts those who make any show of beginning to follow him and

[90]See my reason for this conclusion in the discussion of 2:1 below.
[91]Morris, p. 137.

> demands that they articulate what they really want in life."[92]

Jesus' question gave the men the opportunity to express their desire to become His disciples. However, they may not have been quite ready to make that commitment. They replied by asking where He was staying. This polite response may have implied that they simply wanted to have a preliminary interview with Him.[93] The fact that John interpreted the word "rabbi" for his readers is clear evidence that he wrote primarily for Gentiles.

"Staying" translates one of the writer's characteristic words (i.e., Gr. *meno*, "to abide"). Here it means to reside, but often it has theological connotations of continuing on especially in an intimate relationship. These men may have already been wondering if that type of relationship with Jesus might be possible for them. This word occurs 112 times in the New Testament, and John used it 66 of those times, 40 times in his Gospel.[94]

1:39 Jesus responded by inviting them to accompany Him, not just to see where He was staying but to visit Him. They first had to come with Him and then they would see. This statement was also highly significant spiritually. Only by coming to Jesus could they really comprehend what they were seeking spiritually. The same thing holds true today. The two men accepted Jesus' invitation and stayed with Him for the rest of that day.

Jesus apparently issued his invitation near 4:00 p.m. John was more precise in his time references than the Synoptic evangelists (cf. 4:6, 52; 19:14).[95] The Jews reckoned their days from sunset to sunset, and they divided both night and day into 12-hour periods.

1:40 The writer now identified one of the two men. Andrew was important for two reasons. He became one of the Twelve, and he provided an excellent example of testifying for Jesus by bringing his brother to Jesus (v. 41). John introduced Andrew as Simon Peter's brother because when he wrote his Gospel Peter was the better known of the two. We do not know who the unnamed man was. Some students of John's Gospel have suggested that it may have been the writer himself. This is an interesting possibility, but there is nothing in the text that enables us to prove or to disprove it. He could have been anyone.

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[92]Carson, pp. 154-55. This two-level or dual intention becomes obvious in many places as John's Gospel unfolds.

[93]Ibid., p. 155; Tenney, "John," p. 40. Morris, p. 137, and David A. Montgomery, "Directives in the New Testament: A Case Study of John 1:38," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:2 (June 2007):275-88, believed they were expressing a desire to become his disciples.

[94]William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. "*meno*," pp. 504-5.

[95]See *A Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Numbers, Hours, Years, and Dates," by W. M. Ramsay, extra volume:478.

1:41 Andrew sought to bring his own brother to Jesus and was successful in doing so. Obviously both of them wanted to discover the Messiah whom the Old Testament prophets had predicted and whom Daniel's timetable encouraged them to believe would appear soon (Dan. 9:25). We should not conclude, however, that because Andrew believed that Jesus was the Messiah he also believed that He was God. He may have believed this, but all the evidence in the Gospels points to the disciples learning of Jesus' deity after they had been with Him for some time (cf. Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). Probably Andrew thought of Jesus as a great prophet who was the messianic deliverer of Israel.

The title "Messiah" means "anointed one." The anointed one in Israel was originally any anointed priest or king who led the people. As time passed God gave prophecies of a coming Davidic king who would liberate the Israelites and establish God's rule over the whole earth (e.g., 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 2; 110). Thus the idea of a coming anointed one crystallized into the title "Messiah."

1:42 Jesus anticipated what Peter would become in the history of the church by God's grace. He may have had previous contact with him and known Peter's reputation since both men lived only a few miles apart in Galilee. Simon was a common Jewish name, probably derived from Simeon. Jesus gave him a nickname that expressed his character, which was not uncommon. It is interesting that Simon Peter originally had the same rash and impulsive character as his ancestor Simeon, the second son of Jacob. Cephas is Aramaic, the common language of Palestine, and means "Rock." Peter is the Greek translation of Cephas. As the record of Peter unfolds in the Gospels, he appears as anything but a rock; he was impulsive, volatile, and unreliable. Yet Jesus named Peter in view of what he would become by the power of God.

> "In bringing his brother Simon Peter to Christ, no man did the church a greater service than Andrew."[96]

Every time we meet Andrew in this Gospel he is bringing someone to Jesus (cf. 6:8; 12:22).

4. The witness of Philip and Andrew 1:43-51

The disciples of John were not the only men who began following Jesus. Andrew continued to bring other friends to Jesus. This incident preceded Jesus' formal appointment of the Twelve, but it shows Him preparing those who would become His disciples.

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[96]Blum, p. 275.

1:43-44 The next day appears to be the day after John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God and two of his disciples, one of whom was Andrew, started following Jesus. John was evidently baptizing in Perea and Judea around the Jordan River (cf. Matt. 3:1, 5-6; Mark 1:5).[97] Now someone—his identity is absent in the Greek text—purposed to head north into Galilee. Probably this person was Andrew rather than Jesus. There are two reasons for this conclusion. Everyone else in this chapter who came to Jesus came on the invitation of someone other than Jesus. Moreover John seems to have been stressing the importance of witnessing for Jesus.

Andrew found Philip (a Greek name meaning "lover of horses") somewhere along the way or, most likely, in Galilee. Philip was from Bethsaida Julius in the region of Galilee (12:21). Having come to Jesus on Andrew's invitation, Philip accepted Jesus' invitation to follow Him. Andrew and Peter had also lived in Bethsaida evidently before they moved to Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29). These men were all undoubtedly acquaintances if not friends before they became Jesus' followers.

1:45 Philip then brought his friend Nathanael (meaning "God has given" or "given of God," modern Theodore) to Jesus. Some commentators identify Nathanael with Bartholomew (cf. Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14). However there is no good reason to equate these two men. The witness continued to spread through the most normal lines of communication, namely, friend to friend, as it still does.

The prophecies to which Philip referred may have included Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Isaiah 53; Daniel 7:13; Micah 5:2; and Zechariah 9:9. These and others spoke of the Messiah. This suggests that the early disciples understood messiahship in the light of the Old Testament background rather than only in a political sense.[98] Philip described Jesus as Joseph's son, which is how people knew Him before they learned that He was the Son of God (v. 49).

> "In one sense it is legitimate to view Jesus' disciples in the gospel of John (with the exception of Judas Iscariot) as believers in Him from near the beginning of His public ministry. In another sense, however, it is also clear that the disciples' faith in Jesus grew and developed as they observed the progress of His public ministry. The course of this development may be traced in the gospel of John."[99]

1:46 Nazareth had an insignificant reputation, at least for Nathanael, who came from Cana, a neighboring town (21:2). Nathanael doubted that the

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[97]See the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.
[98]Harris, p. 188.
[99]Ibid., p. 215.

Messiah could come from such a lowly place as that. He did not yet understand Jesus' condescension. Philip wisely did not argue with him. He just invited him to "come and see" Jesus (cf. v. 39). John doubtless intended that the repetition of this invitation would encourage his readers to witness similarly. People just need to consider Jesus. Many who do will conclude that He is the Son of God (cf. v. 12).

"Honest inquiry is a sovereign cure for prejudice."[100]

1:47 Jesus declared that Nathanael was an Israelite in whom there was no deceit. Nathanael was the opposite of the original Israel, namely, Jacob, who was very deceitful (Gen. 27:35-36; 28:12; cf. John 1:51). Therefore Jesus virtually said that Nathanael was an Israelite in whom there was no Jacob. Jesus evidently knew about Nathanael before Philip brought him to Him as He knew the other men whom He later formally called to be His disciples.

1:48 Nathanael acted surprised that Jesus knew who he was. Evidently they had not met previously. Jesus explained that He had seen Nathanael under a fig tree where he had been before Philip had called him to come and see Jesus. Some commentators have interpreted Jesus' reference to this fig tree figuratively as an allusion to Nathanael's house. Ancient Near Easterners sometimes referred to peaceful habitation figuratively as resting under one's vine and fig tree (1 Kings 4:25; Isa. 36:16; Zech. 3:10). However there seems to be no good reason to prefer a figurative over a literal meaning here.

1:49 Jesus' simple statement elicited the most dramatic reaction from Nathanael. He concluded that the only way Jesus could have seen him when he was under the fig tree was if Jesus had supernatural knowledge. Evidently Nathanael knew that he was completely alone and that no one could see him when he was under the fig tree.

Nathanael's reaction appears extreme at first since even prophets had knowledge of things other people knew nothing about. Why did Nathanael think Jesus was the Son of God and not just a prophet? The answer seems to be that even the title "Son of God" did not mean deity to all the Jews in Jesus' day. It meant that the person in view bore certain characteristics of God (cf. Deut. 3:18; 1 Sam. 26:16; Ps. 89:22; Prov. 31:2; Matt. 5:9; John 17:12). Nathanael appears to have regarded Jesus as the Messiah who had supernatural knowledge (cf. v. 45; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:6-7; Isa. 11:1-2). However, Nathanael spoke better than he knew. Jesus was the Son of God in a fuller sense than he presently understood.

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[100]Bruce, p. 60.

> "In recording this estimate John is adding to the evidence accumulated throughout this chapter that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Nathanael expresses this truth differently from the others, but the essential meaning is the same . . . Nor should we overlook the fact that Nathanael has just been called an 'Israelite." In calling Jesus 'King of Israel' he is acknowledging Jesus to be his own King: he is submitting to him."[101]

1:50 Jesus replied that Nathanael had not seen anything yet. This demonstration of supernatural knowledge was small compared to what Nathanael would see if he continued to follow Jesus as his rabbi (v. 49). This straightforward Jew had believed that Jesus was the Messiah because of very little evidence. Jesus would give him a more solid basis for his faith in the future (cf. 20:29). John did the same for his readers by recording several of these "greater things" in the chapters that follow.

1:51 Jesus then made a very important statement that He identified as such with the phrase "Truly, truly, I say to you" or "I tell you the truth" (Gr. *amen amen lego humin*). This phrase occurs 25 times in John's Gospel, and it always introduces a specially important affirmation.

Jesus used the imagery of Jacob's dream at Bethel to describe the greater revelation that Nathanael and his fellow disciples—the "you" in the Greek text is plural—would receive. The opening of the heavens pictures the insight that people on earth receive into what God is doing in heaven (cf. Acts 10:11; Rev. 4:1; 19:11). Jesus would reveal heavenly things, a theme that John developed throughout this Gospel. The angels of God are His agents that assist humans by taking their communications up to God above and by bringing knowledge of divine things down to them (cf. Heb. 1). The role of the Son of Man, Jesus' favorite title of Himself that He used over 80 times (Dan. 7:13), was to make this contact possible.[102] Similarly a staircase makes travel and communication between two physical levels possible. Jesus was promising Nathanael that He would prove to be the key to access to God and communication with God (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). God had revealed Himself to Israel, the man and the nation, in a dream at Bethel previously (Gen. 28:10-22). Now God would reveal Himself to a true Israelite, Nathanael, to all Israel, and to the world, directly through Jesus.

This first sub-section in the body of the fourth Gospel (vv. 19-51) contains the prelude to Jesus' public ministry. John stressed John the Baptist's witness to Jesus' identity, first in a

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[101]Morris, p. 147.

[102]For a good summary of the meaning of the "Son of Man" title, see Carson, p. 164, or Morris, pp. 150-52. "In this Gospel the term is always associated either with Christ's heavenly glory or with the salvation he came to bring." Ibid., p. 151.

veiled manner and then openly. Then he recorded the response of some of John's disciples, which was to follow Jesus. Philip's witness resulted in Nathanael's declaration of faith in Jesus, limited as it was, and Jesus' claim to be the revealer of God and the way to God. The "greater things than these" that Jesus promised (v. 50) follow providing an even more solid foundation for faith in Him (cf. 20:31).

At least 16 different names and titles of Jesus appear in chapter one: the Word (vv. 1, 14), the light (vv. 7-9), the only begotten of the Father (v. 14), Jesus Christ (v. 17), the only begotten God (v. 18), the Lord (v. 23), the Lamb of God (vv. 29, 36), a man (v. 30), the Son of God (v. 34), Rabbi (Teacher, vv. 38, 49), Messiah (v. 41), Jesus of Nazareth (v. 45), the son of Joseph (v. 45), the Son of God (v. 49), the King of Israel (v. 49), and the Son of Man (v. 51).

B. THE EARLY GALILEAN MINISTRY 2:1-12

John's account of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry highlights the fact that Jesus replaced what was old with something new (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). New wine replaced old water. Later a clean temple replaced a dirty one, a new birth replaced an old birth, living (flowing) water replaced well water, and new worship replaced old worship.[103] The larger underlying theme continues to be the revelation of Jesus' identity.

1. Jesus' first sign: changing water to wine 2:1-11

The first miracle that Jesus performed, in His public ministry and in John's Gospel, was semi-public. Apparently only Jesus' disciples, the servants present, and Jesus' mother understood what had happened.

2:1 The third day evidently refers to the third day after the day Nathanael met Jesus. John's references to succeeding days (1:29, 35, 43; 2:1) at least reflect his precise knowledge of these events. Perhaps this is also a symbolic reference to God's actions coming to a culmination with this miracle (cf. the Resurrection on the third day).

John's specific reference to days in chapter 1 and here is unusual for him. On the first day, John the Baptist gave his veiled witness to Jesus (1:19-28). The second day he gave his open witness to Jesus (1:29-34). The third day John's two disciples followed Jesus (1:35-42). The fourth day Philip and Nathanael met Jesus (1:43-51). On the third day after that, the seventh day, Jesus did His miracle at Cana. The Jews regarded periods of seven days as reflecting God's creative activity. Perhaps John wanted his readers to associate this beginning of Jesus' ministry with the beginning of the cosmos (Gen. 1) that also happened in seven days. If so, this would be another witness to Jesus' deity.

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[103]C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 297.

Cana was about nine miles north of Nazareth in Galilee.[104] John never mentioned Mary the mother of Jesus by name, perhaps to avoid confusing her with other Marys in his story.[105]

2:2 The facts that Jesus received an invitation to a wedding and accepted it show that He was not a recluse. He participated in the normal affairs of human life. This included occasions of rejoicing. The Gospels consistently present this picture of Him. Godliness does not require separation from human society, though John the Baptist did not mix with people as much as Jesus did. A Christ-like person is a socially active person.

In a small village such as Cana—probably modern Khirbet Kana—a wedding would have been a community celebration. Perhaps the hosts included Jesus because Nathanael was from Cana (21:2), and Nathanael had recently become a follower of Jesus. Yet probably they knew Jesus and invited Him as a friend since His mother was also there and took some responsibility for the catering. This event evidently transpired very early in Jesus' ministry before He called the Twelve. Consequently the only disciples present may have been the five to which John referred in chapter 1.

> "Wise is that couple who invite Jesus to their wedding!"[106]

2:3 Weddings in the ancient East typically lasted several days and often a whole week.[107]

> "To fail to provide adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. In the closely knit communities of Jesus' day, such an error would never be forgotten and would haunt the newly married couple all their lives."[108]

The loss would not only have been social disgrace, however, but also financial since grooms had a legal responsibility in that culture to provide a suitable feast for their guests.

> "Our bridegroom stood to lose financially—say, up to about half the value of the presents Jesus and his party ought to have brought."[109]

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[104]See the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

[105]See James M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:649 (January-March 2006):65-69.

[106]Wiersbe, 1:290.

[107]See Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):241-52.

[108]Tenney, "John," p. 42.

[109]J. D. M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, p. 238.

Mary undoubtedly told Jesus about the situation because she knew that He would do whatever He could to solve the problem. As a compassionate person He would try to help the groom, who was responsible for the food and drink (v. 9), to avoid unnecessary embarrassment. Clearly Mary expected Jesus to do something (v. 5). Evidently Jesus had done no miracles before this incident (v. 11). Consequently it seems far-fetched to suppose that she expected Him to perform a miracle. Mary knew that Jesus was the Messiah, and she apparently wanted Him to do something that would show who He was to everyone present. The wine normally drunk in Palestine at this time was fermented grape juice diluted with water.[110]

2:4 Westerners would consider anyone addressing his mother as "woman" to be disrespectful, but this was an acceptable word to use in Jesus' culture (Gr. *gunai*, cf. 19:26; 20:15). It did not have negative connotations.[111]

> "That Jesus calls Mary 'Woman' and not 'Mother' probably indicates that there is a new relationship between them as he enters his public ministry."[112]

Similarly the words "What do I have to do with you?" (NASB) sound arrogant, but they were only a gentle rebuke. They constituted an idiom that is hard to translate (cf. Judg. 11:12; 2 Sam. 16:10; Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28). "What do we have in common?" meaning "Your concern and mine are not the same"[113] or "Madam, that concerns you, not me"[114] captures the spirit of the question. Jesus was not dishonoring His mother. He was explaining to her that He would handle the situation, but in His own time and way. Jesus' obedience to His heavenly Father was more important than His obedience to His earthly mother.

Jesus elsewhere always spoke of His "hour" (Gr. *hora*) as the time of His passion and its consequences (cf. 5:28-29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

> "It refers to the special time in Jesus' earthly life when He was to leave this world and return to the Father (13:1), the hour when the Son of man was to be glorified (17:1). This was accomplished through His suffering, death,

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[110]See Robert Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* 19:19 (June 20, 1975):9-11; Norman Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:553 (January-March 1982):46-56.
[111]Derrett, pp. 89-90.
[112]Morris, p. 158.
[113]Tasker, p. 60.
[114]*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1125.

> resurrection (and ascension, though this was not emphasized by John)."[115]

When Jesus' hour finally did come, He met the need of the entire human race by dying on the cross. Mary was requesting that He meet a need immediately. Perhaps Jesus referred to His hour not yet being present to help Mary realize that the meeting of needs was something He needed to control. Just as it was not yet time for Him to die, so it was not yet time for Him to meet this pressing need for wine. Probably He meant, The time for me to meet this need has not yet arrived. Throughout this Gospel, John made it clear that Jesus was on a divine schedule that His Father controlled.

2:5 Mary accepted Jesus' statement humbly and did not nag Him. She did, however, urge the servants to cooperate with Him if He would act soon. She did not understand what He would do or when, but she had confidence in His compassion and ability. She demonstrated admirable submission and faith toward Jesus. She allowed Jesus to take charge and solve the problem, and she pointed others to Jesus, not to herself. Previously she had approached Jesus as His mother and had received a mild rebuke. Now she approached Him as her Lord and shortly received satisfaction (cf. Matt. 15:21-28). In this she provides an excellent example for us.

2:6 The Jews washed before eating to cleanse themselves from the defilement of contact with Gentiles and other ritually defiling things more than from germs. They needed much water since they washed often (cf. Matt. 15:1-2; Mark 7:3-4). Each pot held two or three measures (Gr. *metretes*), namely, between 20 and 30 gallons. Their combined capacity would have been between 120 and 180 gallons of liquid. Stone pots did not absorb moisture and uncleanness as earthenware vessels did, so they were better containers for water used in ceremonial washings.

2:7-8 "Them" (NASB) is the servants to whom Mary had previously spoken (v. 5). Their obedience is admirable and accounts in part for the full provision of the need. Normally people did not drink the water in those pots, but the headwaiter or toastmaster did not know that what the servant handed him came from there. Probably the pots were outside the house and he was inside.

Most commentators assumed that when the servants had filled the pots to the brim the water in them became wine. The servants then drew the wine out of the pots and served it to the headwaiter. A few writers noted that the verb "draw" (Gr. *antleo*, v. 8) usually describes drawing water from a well.[116] This led some of them to conclude a different scenario. Perhaps

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[115]Harris, p. 196.

[116]E.g., B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, 1:84; Carson, p. 174.

the servants filled the pots from a well and then continued drawing water out of the well that they served to the headwaiter. This explanation seems unnatural to me.

Most commentators saw the significance of what they understood to have happened as follows. Jesus' disciples as well as the servants, and presumably Mary, knew that water had gone into the pots but that wine had come out. The only thing that accounted for the change was Jesus' instructions. They realized that Jesus had the supernatural power to change water into wine. This miracle thus fortified their faith in Him (v. 11).

Advocates of the view that the water the servants presented to the headwaiter came from the well see the same significance and more.

> "Up to this time the servants had drawn water to fill the vessels used for ceremonial washing; *now* they are to draw for the feast that symbolizes the messianic banquet. Filling jars with such large capacity *to the brim* then indicates that the time for ceremonial purification is completely fulfilled; the new order, symbolized by the wine, could not be drawn from jars so intimately connected with merely ceremonial purification."[117]

I believe it is somewhat tenuous to build this interpretation on the usual meaning of *antleo*. Its essential meaning is "to draw" even though this word usually refers to drawing water from a well or spring (Gen. 24:13, 20; Exod. 2:16, 19; Isa. 12:3; John 4:7, 15). In classical Greek it describes drawing water out of a ship's bilge.[118] Furthermore the symbolic interpretation that accompanies this view is questionable. There is nothing in the text that indicates that John intended his readers to see this miracle as teaching the termination of the old Mosaic order and the commencement of a new order. Jesus' ministry certainly accomplished that, but there is no other evidence that this was a lesson that John was communicating to his readers here. Perhaps Jesus ordered the pots filled to the brim simply so there would be enough wine for everyone.

2:9-10 John's point in recording the headwaiter's comments as he did seems to have been to stress the superior quality of the wine that Jesus produced for the guests. Jesus as the Creator produced the best, as He always does whenever He creates.[119] "Drunk freely" (NASB) and "had too much to drink" (NIV) translate the Greek word *methysko* that refers to inebriation. The fact that Jesus created something that people could abuse should not

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[117]Ibid. See also Tasker, pp. 55-57.

[118]*A Greek-English . . .*, s.v. *antleo*, pp. 51-52.

[119]Jesus' immediate creation of wine, which normally takes time to ferment, may parallel God's creation of the universe with the appearance of age. Bailey, p. 162.

surprise us. Humans have consistently abused God's good gifts. Fortunately that does not keep God from giving them.

Is there a deeper meaning to this story? Many students of this passage have identified the wine as symbolic of the joy that Messiah brings. This harmonizes with the metaphorical use of wine throughout Scripture. Some have seen it as typical of Christianity as contrasted with Judaism (the water).[120] These parallels lack Scriptural support. Perhaps there is some validity to seeing this banquet as a preview of the messianic banquet since Jesus' provision of joy is common to them both. However, Jesus may not have been the host at this banquet, but He will be the host at the messianic banquet.

2:11 In conclusion, John mentioned that this miracle was a sign. It was a miracle that had significance.[121] Its significance appears to be that it showed that Jesus had the same power to create that God demonstrated in the Creation. Thus it pointed to Jesus being the Creator God who could transform things from one condition into another (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). This demonstration of His power glorified Jesus in the eyes of those who witnessed and heard about it. Moses had turned water into blood destructively (Exod. 7:14-24), but Jesus turned water into wine for the blessing and benefit of others (cf. 1:17). This miracle also resulted in these disciples believing in Him (cf. 1:50), not for the first time but in a deeper way than they had believed previously (cf. 20:30-31). John's concluding references to the time and place establish the historicity of this event and reduce the possibility of reading it as an allegory or a legend.

"There is significance in the miracle first for Israel, especially the Israel of Christ's day. The wedding feast with its new wine portrays the coming of the kingdom. By this sign the Lord declares He is the Messiah of Israel who is capable of bringing the predicted kingdom into its glorious existence. . . .

"The miracle shows the old order had run its course; now was the time for a new one.

"The significance of this miracle is not for Jews only; it is obviously for the church as well. The basic truth for Christians is found in the joy of salvation. . . .

"This miracle portrays not only the joy Christ brings into a person's life but also the *abundance* of joy. . . .

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[120]E.g., Blum, p. 278.

[121]See Mark R. Saucy, "Miracles and Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):281-307.

> "Finally, for the Christian there is a new life in Christ. The old is passed away and there is a whole new life and perspective in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)."[122]

2. Jesus' initial stay in Capernaum 2:12

Sometime after the miracle just narrated, Jesus went down topographically from Cana to Capernaum. Cana was on a higher elevation than Capernaum, though Capernaum was about 13 miles northeast of Cana. Some family members (cf. Matt. 12:46; Mark 6:3) and Jesus' disciples accompanied Him.[123] Evidently this was only for a short stay since John wrote that they stayed a few days. Jesus adopted Capernaum as His ministry base in Galilee and moved there from Nazareth (Matt. 4:13; Mark 1:21; 2:1). That may have happened now, or it may have taken place after this event. The purpose of this verse in John's narrative is transitional.

C. Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem 2:13—3:36

John is the only evangelist who recorded this trip to Jerusalem and the things that happened then.

> "In distinction from the Synoptics, John's record focuses mostly on events in Jesus' life that took place in Jerusalem, and especially at the Passover feasts."[124]

1. The first cleansing of the temple 2:13-22

The Synoptics record Jesus' cleansing of the temple after His triumphal entry (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-16; Luke 19:45-46). Only John noted this cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The differences between the two cleansing incidents and their placement in the chronology of Jesus' ministry argue for two cleansings rather than one.[125]

2:13 John alone recorded that Jesus went up to Jerusalem, topographically again, for three separate Passover celebrations.[126] This one was evidently the Passover of April 7, A.D. 30, the first one after Jesus began His public ministry.[127] He did that because He was a Jew who obeyed the Mosaic Law (Deut. 16:1-8), and He used the opportunity to minister. John's description of the Passover as "the Passover of the Jews" supports the

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[122]Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Significance of the First Sign in John's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:533 (January-March 1977):50, 51.

[123]The idea of Mary's perpetual virginity first appeared in the second century.

[124]Bailey, p. 164.

[125]See W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 1:120; Morris, pp. 166-69.

[126]John referred to a second Passover in 6:4 and to a third one in 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; and 19:14. Some interpreters believe that he mentioned a fourth Passover in 5:1, but this seems unlikely.

[127]Herold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, pp. 55-60, 143.

view that he wrote his Gospel late in the first century for a general audience that was mainly Gentile.

2:14-16 Jesus witnessed the buying and selling going on in the temple courtyard (Gr. *hieron*). This was undoubtedly the outer Court of the Gentiles, not the temple building (Gr. *naos*).[128] Probably the custom of selling sacrificial animals and exchanging various types of money for temple coinage began as a convenience for pilgrims. The priests accepted only Tyrian coins because of the purity of their silver. By Jesus' day this practice had escalated into a major business for the priests and had replaced spiritual worship in the courtyard during the Passover season. The priests transformed this area from a place of quiet prayer into a noisy oriental bazaar. It was virtually impossible for Gentiles to worship there, the only courtyard accessible to them, with all the business going on. The priests set up tables for the moneychangers only for about three weeks leading up to Passover.[129]

Jesus responded to this situation actively and verbally. He claimed that God was His Father and that He acted for God in what He did. John's vivid description has inspired many painters who have drawn what they believed this action-packed scene must have looked like. John gave the reason for Jesus' deeds as His concern for the misuse of the temple. He did not mention the corruption that may have been going on as the priests bought and sold and changed money. Jesus' action constituted a major threat to the financial arrangements for the sacrificial system.[130]

By claiming God as His Father, Jesus was citing authority for His action, not claiming equality with the Father, which He did another time (5:18). To those present, the issue was clearly Jesus' authority, not His identity (v. 18).

Though Jesus' action was violent, it evidently did not constitute a threat to the peace in the temple area. Roman soldiers from the adjoining Antonia Fortress would have intervened quickly if it had. Jesus was forceful but not cruel. There is no indication that He injured anyone with His fairly harmless scourge of cords (Gr. *phragellion ek schoinion*).[131]

> "It is clear that it was not so much the physical force as the moral power he employed that emptied the courts."[132]

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[128]See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

[129]Mishnah *Shekalim* 1:1, 3.

[130]Richard Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple," in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*, pp. 72-89.

[131]The Greek masculine plural *pantas* ("all") argues for Jesus driving the traders out, not just the animals, which the neuter plural *panta* would identify. *Schoinion* ("cords") elsewhere describes the ropes on a ship (Acts 27:32).

[132]Morris, p. 171.

The Old Testament predicted that Messiah would come and purify the Levites (Mal. 3:1-3; cf. Zech. 14:21). Jesus' action perhaps recalled these prophecies to the godly in Israel who may have wondered if Jesus was the Messiah. His actions did not fulfill these prophecies, however, which appear in millennial contexts. Jesus will yet return to the temple that will be standing in Jerusalem when He returns at His second coming and purify the Levites serving there then. This will be preparation for His messianic reign that will follow.[133]

2:17 The outstanding impression that Jesus' acts presented to His disciples was one of zeal for the proper use of the temple and ultimately for God's glory. They may have recalled Psalm 69:9 then, or they may have thought of it later. John's description does not make this clear. This is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms in the New Testament (cf. 7:3-5; 15:25; Matt. 27:34, 48; Rom. 11:9-10; 15:3).[134] In Psalm 69:9 David meant that zeal for the building of the temple had dominated his thoughts and actions, and he implied that others had criticized him for it. John changed the quotation from the past to the future tense implying that it was a prophecy concerning David's great Son. He undoubtedly saw it as such. However, was he not misquoting the verse?

The Hebrew language does not have past, present, and future tenses as English does. It has a perfect tense indicating complete action and an imperfect tense indicating incomplete action. In Psalm 69:9 the tense of the Hebrew verb is perfect. One can translate a Hebrew perfect tense with an English past, present, or future tense depending on the context. Here an English past tense was appropriate for David's statement about himself, but the Hebrew also permits an English future tense that is appropriate for Messiah, the so-called prophetic perfect tense.

> "We should not miss the way this incident fits in with John's aim of showing Jesus to be the Messiah. All his actions imply a special relationship with God. They proceed from his messianic vocation. The citation from Scripture is important from another point of view, for it accords with another habit of this Evangelist. While John does not quote the Old Testament as frequently as do some other New Testament writers, it is still the case, as Richard Morgan says, that 'the *Old Testament is present at every crucial moment in the Gospel*.' It is one of John's great themes that in Jesus God is working his purposes out. Every critical moment sees the fulfillment of Scripture in which those purposes are set forth."[135]

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[133]Bailey, p. 164, believed Jesus' first coming to the temple did fulfill Malachi's prophecy.
[134]Cf. Bernard, 1:91.
[135]Morris, p. 172.

> "When Jesus cleansed the temple, He 'declared war' on the hypocritical religious leaders (Matt. 23), and this ultimately led to His death. Indeed, His zeal for God's house *did* eat Him up!"[136]

2:18 The spokesmen for the Jews present in the courtyard wanted Jesus to perform some miraculous sign (Gr. *semeion*, cf. 2:11). They wanted Him to indicate that He possessed divine authority to do what He did (cf. Exod. 4:1-9; Matt. 12:38; 16:1; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; 1 Cor. 1:22). The sin of these Jewish leaders is apparent in that they did not deal with the question of the justice of Jesus' criticism. They only inquired about His authority to act as He did.

2:19 Jesus gave them a sign but not the kind they wanted. They wanted some immediate demonstration of prophetic authority. Instead Jesus announced a miracle that would vindicate His authority after He died.

Why was Jesus not more cooperative? First, He controlled when as well as how He would act under the Father's authority, and the time was not yet right for a dramatic sign (cf. v. 4). Second, these Jews had already demonstrated that they had no real interest in justice, only in discrediting Jesus (v. 18). They did not sincerely want a sign. They would not have acknowledged Jesus' authority even if He had performed a miracle for them.

The Jews thought that Jesus was offering to rebuild Herod's temple within three days if they would knock it down. His ability to do so would have been a miraculous enough sign for any of them. Furthermore it would have demonstrated His authority to regulate temple service. However they were unwilling to fulfill their part of the sign. By suggesting this action Jesus was also implying that the old temple and its service had served its purpose. He had come to establish a new temple and a new way of worship.

Why did Jesus answer enigmatically rather than clearly? Why did He not say, Destroy my body, and I will raise it up in three days? Jesus was replying to unbelief the way He often did, in parabolic language. He wanted to hide revelation from the unbelieving but to reveal it to believers.

The Sanhedrin used Jesus' words about destroying the temple as a capital charge against Him at His trial (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; cf. Matt. 27:40; Mark 15:29). This was unfair, however, because Jesus had said, "You destroy the temple," not, "I will destroy the temple." Furthermore Jesus was speaking of His body primarily, not the temple.

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[136]Wiersbe, 1:292-93.

2:20-22 Verse 20 provides an important chronological marker in the life of Jesus. It enables us to date His visit to the temple here as happening in A.D. 30.[137] Work on Herod's Temple had been proceeding for 46 years. It was not completed until A.D. 63.

Jesus' critics assumed that He was speaking of Herod's temple, but John interpreted His true meaning for his readers. Even Jesus' disciples did not understand what He meant until after His resurrection. The Scripture they then believed was Old Testament prophecy concerning Messiah's resurrection (e.g., Ps. 16:10).

Jesus' body was a temple in a unique sense. It was the body in which the Word had become flesh (1:14). The Father indwelt it, as did the Son (14:10-11) and the Spirit (1:32-33). It therefore uniquely manifested the Father. It was also the site where God manifested Himself on earth as He had done previously, though to a lesser extent, in the tabernacle and temple. Moreover it was the center of true worship following the Incarnation (cf. 4:20-24). In it the ultimate sacrifice would take place.[138] Jesus spoke of the temple as a type (i.e., a divinely intended illustration) of Himself. Later Christ's body became a figure for the church (cf. Eph. 1:23; 4:16; Col. 1:18), but that use probably began after the founding of the church at Pentecost. It seems clear that Jesus was referring to his physical body here rather than to the church. Yet there may be an intentional allusion to the ultimate abolition of the Jewish temple and temple sacrifices.[139] Such double references are common in this Gospel.

> "The misunderstandings seem to function to highlight the two levels of understanding that take place in the Gospel. On the one hand is the spiritual or heavenly level that Jesus came bringing, to teach the true way to eternal life. On the other hand is the temporal or earthly level that most people operate at, including most of Christ's professed disciples, which leads to darkness and loss of eternal life. John wants to show that one must cross over from the earthly to the heavenly, from darkness into light, from death into life. By his careful construction of the narratives, John leads his readers to see and understand what the original participants could or did not, and thus to believe the claims of Jesus and avoid the ignorance displayed by the original characters in the drama."[140]

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[137]See Hoehner, pp. 38-43.
[138]Carson, p. 182.
[139]Morris, p. 178.
[140]Edwin E. Reynolds, "The Role of Misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9:1-2 (1998):158-59.

2. Initial response to Jesus in Jerusalem 2:23-25

John included another summary of Jesus' activities (cf. v. 12). It enables the reader to gain a more balanced picture of popular reaction to Jesus than the preceding incident might suggest.

2:23 Jesus did many signs (significant miracles) while He was in Jerusalem this time. These were probably healings and perhaps exorcisms. The Synoptics record that Jesus ministered this way virtually wherever He went. Consequently many people believed on Him. As we have seen in the Synoptics, this does not mean that they placed saving faith in Him as the Son of God, however. Often the people who observed His miracles concluded that He was a prophet, but they were not always willing to acknowledge Him as deity.

John usually used the dative case when he described faith in a thing (e.g., "they believed the Scripture," v. 22; cf. 4:50; 5:47; 10:38). When he described faith in a person, he did the same or used the verb "believe" (Gr. *pisteuo*) plus the preposition "into" or "in" (Gr. *eis*) and the accusative (e.g., "believed in His name," v. 23; cf. 8:30-31). These are synonymous expressions in John. Some interpreters have incorrectly argued that the former case indicates spurious faith and the latter genuine faith. The context must determine this in every case.[141]

2:24-25 Jesus' response to people, in contrast, was not to put His trust (Gr. *pisteuo*) in them. He knew people to be essentially untrustworthy. He knew that the initial enthusiasm and faith based on miracles that some people manifested would evaporate.[142] Some who initially believed on Him turned against Him later (6:15, 60, 66). He did not place His destiny in the hands of any others, though some of the Jews in Jerusalem were willing to place their lives in His hands (cf. 10:14-15). Moreover He did not commit Himself to anyone, in the sense that Jesus was not dependent on human approval.[143]

John may have meant that Jesus knew the nature of human beings (cf. 1 Sam 16:7; Ps. 139; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24), not that He knew the thoughts of every person He encountered. The Great Physician could read people better than any human doctor can diagnose symptoms.[144] On the other hand, he could have meant that Jesus, as only God can, knew the hearts of all people (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39). The following two chapters particularly illustrate the truth of both of these statements.

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[141]Carson, p. 183.

[142]Zane C. Hodges, "Untrustworthy Believers—John 2:23-25," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):139-52, argued that these were genuine believers who "were not ready for fuller disclosures from the One they had just trusted" (p. 148).

[143]Morris, p. 181.

[144]Tenney, "John," p. 46.

3. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus 3:1-21

John now presented evidence that Jesus knew people as no others did and that many believed in His name (2:23). This constitutes further witness that He is the Son of God. John summarized several conversations that Jesus had with various individuals in the next few chapters. They were remarkably different types of people yet they all responded positively to Jesus. The first man was a representative of Pharisaic Judaism.

3:1 John introduced Nicodemus (lit. conqueror of or victor over the people) as a Pharisee who was a ruler of the Jews, namely, a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. 7:50-51). As a Pharisee, Nicodemus had respect for the Jewish Scriptures and was nationalistic politically. He would have stressed the careful observance of Israel's laws and the traditions of the elders. This was the way of salvation for Pharisees.

> "In its own way this chapter does away with 'works of the law' every bit as thoroughly as anything in Paul.
>
> "The Pharisees had no vested interest in the Temple (which was rather the domain of the Sadducees). A Pharisee would, accordingly, not have been unduly perturbed by the action of Jesus in cleansing the Temple courts. Indeed, he may possibly have approved it, partly on the general principle that anything that put the Sadducees down a peg or two was laudable and partly in the interests of true religion."[145]

The Sadducees, in contrast, were more liberal in their theology and were more politically accommodating.[146] Later Jesus mentioned that Nicodemus was a prominent teacher in Israel (v. 10). John also recorded that he was fair-minded (7:50-51).

3:2 John probably would not have mentioned that Nicodemus called on Jesus at night if that fact was insignificant. Probably the prominent Pharisee made his call at night to keep his visit private and uninterrupted (cf. 19:39). The Pharisees generally were antagonistic toward Jesus, and he apparently wanted to avoid unnecessary conflict with his brethren. Nighttime probably promised a greater chance for uninterrupted conversation as well. Whenever else John referred to night in his Gospel the word has moral and spiritual connotations of darkness (cf. 9:4; 11:10;

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[145]Morris, p. 186.

[146]In one sense the Sadducees were more liberal, in that they denied the existence of angels and the resurrection. But in another sense they were more conservative, in that they accepted as authoritative only the Old Testament and rejected much of the tradition that the Pharisees regarded as more authoritative than the Old Testament.

13:30). Nicodemus was in spiritual and intellectual darkness as well as natural darkness when he came to Jesus (cf. v. 10).[147]

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as "Rabbi," a respectful title that recognized Him as a teacher. One rabbi was coming to another for discussion. However, this title also indicated the extent of this man's faith. He did not address Jesus as the Messiah or the Son of God or his Lord. Moreover he expressed belief that Jesus had come from God, in contrast to Satan (cf. 8:48, 52), in view of the miracles that He was performing (cf. 2:23; 20:30; 21:24-25). This suggests that Nicodemus may have wanted to determine if Jesus was a prophet as well as a teacher.

"We" could be a way of saying himself (cf. v. 11). Alternatively Nicodemus could have been representing others on the Sanhedrin beside himself such as Joseph of Arimathea (cf. 19:38). Note Nicodemus' courtesy and lack of hostility. These qualities mark him as a non-typical Pharisee.

3:3 Jesus' abrupt dogmatic statement cut to the heart of the matter. He affirmed strongly that one cannot see the kingdom of God without a second birth from above (Gr. *anothen*, cf. v. 31). *Anothen* means both "again" (v. 4; cf. Gal. 4:9) and "from above" (v. 31; 19:11, 23).

> "Although Nicodemus understood it to mean 'again,' leading him to conclude that Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth, Jesus' reply in verses 6-8 shows that He referred to the need for a spiritual birth, a birth 'from above.'"[148]

The term "kingdom of God" as Jesus used it consistently refers to the earthly messianic kingdom that will be the earthly phase of God's eternal heavenly kingdom. To enter the kingdom of God means to obtain eternal life (cf. Mark 9:43, 45, 47). John used "kingdom" language rarely (vv. 3, 5; 18:36).[149] He used "life" language instead (cf. 1:12-13). This is understandable since he wrote late in the first century when it was clear that God had postponed the kingdom. His readers needed to prepare for the future immediately by obtaining eternal life.

The implication of Jesus' illustration of new birth is that life with God in the future will require completely new equipment. Nicodemus had claimed to see something of who Jesus was by His signs. Jesus replied that no one can see God's kingdom, the end in view, without new birth.

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[147]E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1:157-58; R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary*, p. 116.
[148]Harris, p. 220.
[149]This is the only passage in John that mentions the kingdom of God, though Jesus spoke of "my kingdom" in 18:36.

> "If the kingdom does not dawn until the end of the age [and it will], then of course one cannot enter it before it comes. Predominant religious thought in Jesus' day affirmed that all Jews would be admitted to that kingdom apart from those guilty of deliberate apostasy or extraordinary wickedness (*e.g.*, Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1). But here was Jesus telling Nicodemus, a respected and conscientious member not only of Israel but of the Sanhedrin, that he cannot enter the kingdom unless he is *born again*. . . . The coming of the kingdom at the end can be described as the 'regeneration' of the world (Mt. 19:28, NIV 'renewal'), but here what is required is the regeneration of the individual *before* the end of the world and *in order to enter* the kingdom."[150]

> "By the term *born again* He means not the amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature. Hence it follows that there is nothing in us that is not defective."[151]

3:4 Nicodemus asked Jesus to clarify what He meant by being born again. His question implied that he was an older man. He was quite sure that Jesus was not referring to reincarnation or a second physical birth. His crassly literal question may reflect some disdain for Jesus' affirmation, or Nicodemus may have been speaking wistfully.

> "The situation is no different today. When you talk with people about being born again, they often begin to discuss their family's religious heritage, their church membership, religious ceremonies, and so on."[152]

3:5 Again Jesus prefaced a further affirmation with the statement that guaranteed its certainty. Entering the kingdom and seeing the kingdom (v. 3) seem to be synonymous terms, though the former may be a bit clearer. There are several views of the meaning of being born of water and the Spirit. The verse and its context contribute much to our understanding of this difficult phrase.

Whatever its meaning, "born of water and the Spirit" must equal being born "again" or "from above" (v. 3) since Jesus used this phrase to clarify the new birth for Nicodemus. Second, the definite article translated "the" before "Spirit" is absent in the Greek text. The English translators have inserted it to clarify their interpretation of "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) as the Holy Spirit. A more literal translation would be simply "born of water and

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[150]Carson, pp. 188-89.
[151]John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:63.
[152]Wiersbe, 1:295.

spirit." Third, the construction of the phrase in the Greek text indicates that the preposition "of" governs both "water" and "Spirit." This means that Jesus was clarifying regeneration by using two terms that both describe the new birth. He was not saying that two separate things have to be present for regeneration to happen. It has but one source. Fourth, Jesus' criticism of Nicodemus for not understanding these things (v. 10) indicates that what He taught about the source of regeneration was clear in the Old Testament.

The only view that seems to be consistent with all four of these criteria is as follows. The Old Testament often used water metaphorically to symbolize spiritual cleansing and renewal (Num. 19:17-19; Isa. 55:1-3; cf. Ps. 51:10; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Zech. 14:8). God's spirit (or Spirit) in the Old Testament represents God's life (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; 6:3; Job 34:14). God promised that He would pour out His spirit on people as water (Isa. 32:15-16; Joel 2:28-29). The result of that outpouring would be a new heart for those on whom the spirit came (Jer. 31:31-34). Thus the revelation that God would bring cleansing and renewal as water by His Spirit was clear in the Old Testament. Jesus evidently meant that unless a person has experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal from God's spirit (or Spirit) he or she cannot enter the kingdom. This is what He meant by being born from above or again (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).[153]

Another view proposed by many scholars is that "water" is an allusion to the amniotic fluid in which a fetus develops in its mother's womb. Other scholars see it as a euphemistic reference to the semen without which natural birth is impossible. In either case "water" refers to physical or natural birth while "spirit" refers to spiritual or supernatural birth.[154] They claim that Jesus was saying that natural birth is not enough. One must also experience supernatural birth to enter the kingdom. However this use of "water" is unique in Scripture. Moreover it assumes that two births are in view whereas the construction of the Greek phrase favors one birth rather than two. If two were in view, there would normally be a repetition of the preposition before the second noun.

Another popular view is that "water" refers to the written Word of God and "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit. This figurative use of "water" does exist in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:26), but it is uncommon in the Old Testament. It is unlikely that Nicodemus would have associated water with the Word of God, and it would have been unfair for Jesus to rebuke him for not having done so. This view, as the former one, also specifies two separate entities whereas the Greek text implies only one as the source of regeneration.

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[153]Carson, pp. 191-96; cf. Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 50; Morris, pp. 191-93.
[154]E.g., Wiersbe, 1:295.

Some commentators take the "water" as an allusion to water baptism and the "spirit" as referring to the Holy Spirit.[155] According to this view spiritual birth happens only when a person undergoes water baptism and experiences regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Some advocates of this view see support for it in the previous reference to water baptism (1:26 and 33). However, Scripture is very clear that water baptism is a testimony to salvation, not a prerequisite for it (cf. 3:16, 36; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). In addition, this meaning would have had no significance for Nicodemus. He knew nothing of Christian baptism. Furthermore Jesus never mentioned water baptism again in clarifying the new birth to Nicodemus.

Others have suggested that the "water" could be a reference to the repentance present in those who underwent John's water baptism and the "spirit" an allusion to the Holy Spirit.[156] In this case, repentance as a change of mind is necessary as a prerequisite for salvation. According to advocates of this view Jesus was urging Nicodemus to submit to John's baptism as a sign of his repentance or at least to repent. The weakness of this view is that the connection between water and repentance is distant enough to cause misunderstanding. Nicodemus' response (v. 9) expressed lack of understanding. If the connection between water and John's baptism were that clear, he would not have responded this way. It would have been simpler for Jesus just to say "repentance" if that is what He meant. Repentance in the sense of the fruit of a mental change is not necessary for salvation since by that definition repentance is a work.

Some scholars believe that "water" refers to the ritual washings of Judaism and "spirit" to the Holy Spirit. They think Jesus was saying that Spirit birth rather than just water purification was necessary for regeneration. However, Jesus was not contrasting water and spirit but linking them.

Finally at least one writer understood that when Jesus said "spirit" He meant it in the sense of wind (Gr. *pneuma*) and used it as a symbol of God's life-giving work.[157] This view holds that the wind is parallel to the water that also symbolizes God's supernatural work of regeneration. However this is an unusual though legitimate meaning of *pneuma*. In the immediate context (v. 6) *pneuma* seems to mean spirit rather than wind. This fact has led almost all translators to render *pneuma* as "spirit" rather than as "wind" in verse 5 even though it means "wind" in verse 8.

3:6 Here, not in verse 5, Jesus clarified that there are two types of birth, one physical and one spiritual. "Flesh" again refers to human nature (cf. 1:14).

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[155]E.g., R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2:139-141.

[156]F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, with a Critical Introduction*, 2:49-52; Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, 1:713; Westcott, 1:108-9; Blum, p. 281; Tenney, "John," p. 47.

[157]Zane C. Hodges, "Water and Spirit—John 3:5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):206-20.

The Holy Spirit gives people spiritual life. We are spiritually dead in sin until the Spirit gives us spiritual life. Jesus had been speaking of a spiritual birth, not a physical one. Nicodemus should not have marveled at the idea that there is a spiritual birth as well as a physical birth since the Old Testament spoke of it (cf. Ps. 87:5-6; Ezek. 36:25-28). It revealed that entrance into the kingdom is a spiritual matter, not a matter of physical descent or merit. This was a revelation that most of the Jews in Jesus' day, including Nicodemus, missed.

3:7 Nicodemus needed spiritual life. He needed to experience the new birth. He had evidently viewed acceptance by God as so many of his Jewish contemporaries did. He thought that his heritage (ancestry, position, works, all that made him what he was) was adequate to get him into the kingdom and make him acceptable to God. He had to realize that he needed spiritual cleansing and renewal that only God could provide by His Spirit. Likewise today most people are relying on themselves, who they are and what they have done, for acceptance with God. They, too, need to know that they need spiritual cleansing and life that only God can provide. They *must* be born again or there is no hope of their entering God's kingdom.

> "There is no evolution from flesh to Spirit."[158]

The second "you" in verse 7 is plural in the Greek text. It continues the general reference to "anyone" in verses 3 and 5.

> "The fact that Nicodemus used the plural pronoun 'we,' [v. 2] and Jesus responded with the plural 'ye' . . . may indicate that Nicodemus was representing the religious leaders."[159]

3:8 Jesus used the wind to illustrate how the Spirit regenerates. He made a play on words to present an even closer comparison. The Greek word *pneuma* can mean either "spirit" or "wind," though it usually means "spirit." Jesus said the *pneuma* (Spirit) operates as the *pneuma* (wind).

There are three similarities. First, both the Spirit and the wind operate sovereignly. Man does not and cannot control either one. Second, we perceive the presence of both by their effects. Third, we cannot explain their actions since they arise from unseen and unknowable factors.

The person born of the Spirit is similar to both the Spirit and the wind in that it is impossible for unregenerate people to understand or control him or her. They do not understand his or her origin or final destiny. Nicodemus should have understood this too since the Old Testament revealed the Spirit's sovereign and incomprehensible working (e.g., Ezek. 37).

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[158]E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 204.
[159]Wiersbe, 1:295.

3:9-10 Nicodemus betrayed his ignorance of Old Testament revelation with his question (cf. 1 Sam. 10:6; Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:25-28; Jer. 31:33; Joel 2:28-29). Jesus' answer shows that Nicodemus' question implied that he did not believe what Jesus had said (cf. vv. 11-12). He had undoubtedly taught many Jews about getting right with God, but what Jesus now suggested was something new to him. Jesus responded with a question that expressed dismay that Nicodemus did not understand this biblical revelation. His deficiency was the more serious because Nicodemus was the leading teacher in Israel. At least that was his reputation. His study of the Scriptures should have made him aware that no one can come to God in his or her own strength or righteousness without the necessity of God's spiritual cleansing.

3:11 For the third time in this conversation Jesus affirmed a solemn truth (cf. vv. 3, 5). Nicodemus had begun the conversation by humbly referring to himself as one of many who believed that Jesus had come from God (v. 2). Now Jesus described Himself as one of several who was speaking the truth. Evidently He was referring to the Godhead. Nicodemus probably thought He was referring to Himself humbly or possibly to Himself as one of several teachers or prophets.

Jesus claimed to be speaking the truth as an eyewitness, but Nicodemus was rejecting that witness. The Apostle John later made a similar claim. He said he wrote his first epistle that his readers might enter into the joy of fellowship with God that the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry enjoyed (1 John 1:1-4). John's purpose in this Gospel was also that readers would accept his witness that Jesus was the Christ (20:30-31). Nicodemus had rejected the witness, and Jesus saw him as representing many others who also did (plural "you"). Nicodemus had failed to understand (v. 9), but his more serious error was his failure to believe Jesus' testimony about the new birth. It reflected failure to acknowledge who Jesus really was, which His signs and insight into Scripture indicated.

3:12 The "earthly things" that Jesus had told Nicodemus involved the new birth. The new birth is earthly in that it occurs on the earth. This teaching had been elementary. However, Nicodemus had not believed it. Therefore he could not begin to believe things that Jesus might have told him about "heavenly things." These things might have included such revelations as life beyond the grave, life in the kingdom, and the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17).

If Jesus responded to everyone as He did to Nicodemus, it would mean that when a person rejects revelation he or she thereby limits the revelation that comes to that one from then on. This is really what usually happens.

3:13 Jesus explained why He could speak authoritatively about heavenly things. No teacher had ascended into heaven and returned to teach about heavenly

things. Evidently Jesus was referring to being personally present in heaven since, obviously, many prophets had received visions of heaven (e.g., Isa. 6; cf. 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Rev. 1:10-20). However the Son of Man descended from heaven so He could teach about heavenly things. The NIV translation implies that Jesus had already ascended into heaven, but that is not what the Greek text says. The Greek words *ei me*, translated "but" or "except," contrast a human who might have ascended into heaven and the God-man who really did descend from heaven. Jesus here claimed to be the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14) who had come from heaven to reveal God to humankind (cf. 1:51).

> "Throughout this Gospel John insists on Jesus' heavenly origin. This is one way in which he brings out his point that Jesus is the Christ. Here his heavenly origin marks Jesus off from the rest of humanity."[160]

3:14 In another sense Jesus would rise up to heaven. The Ascension is not in view here. Jesus' enemies lifting Him up toward heaven as Moses lifted the serpent on the pole toward heaven is in view (cf. Num. 21:4-9). In the wilderness God promised the Israelites that whoever looked on the bronze serpent would receive physical life and not die.

This is Jesus' earliest recorded prediction of His death. It is an allusion to death by crucifixion (cf. 8:28; 12:32, 34). Wherever the Greek word *hypsoo* ("lifted up") occurs in John's Gospel, and it only occurs in these four verses, it combines the ideas of crucifixion and exaltation (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12).[161] The Synoptic evangelists viewed Jesus' exaltation as separate from His crucifixion, but John thought of the crucifixion as the beginning of His exaltation.

God had graciously provided continuing physical life to the persistently sinning Israelites. It should not, therefore, have been hard for Nicodemus to believe that He would graciously provide new spiritual life for sinful humanity.

Verse 13 pictures Jesus as the revealer of God who came down from heaven. Verse 14 pictures Him as the suffering exalted Savior. It was in His suffering that Jesus revealed God most clearly. These themes cluster around the title "Son of Man" in the fourth Gospel.

3:15 The purpose of Jesus' uplifting, as was the purpose of the uplifting of the bronze serpent in the wilderness, was the salvation (deliverance) of those who believed. By comparing Himself to that serpent Jesus was teaching that whoever trusted in Him and His death would receive eternal life.

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[160]Morris, p. 197.
[161]Carson, p. 201.

This is the first reference to eternal life in this Gospel. Eternal life refers to the life of the age to come, namely, the kingdom age and forever after. It is life that one experiences normally after resurrection that fits him or her for the kingdom. However, John presented that life as something that people can experience in measure before the kingdom begins. The eternal life that people receive at new birth is the life of the eternal Word (1:4). It comes to them by believing in the person and saving work of Jesus.

> "The life Christians possess is not in any sense independent of Christ. It is a life that is 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). . . . The Jews divided time into the present age and the age to come, but the adjective [eternal] was used of life in the coming age, not that of the present age. 'Eternal life' thus means 'the life proper to the age to come.' It is an eschatological concept (cf. 6:40, 54). But as the age to come is thought of as never coming to an end the adjective came to mean 'everlasting,' 'eternal.' The notion of time is there. Eternal life will never cease. But there is something else there, too, and something more significant. The important thing about eternal life is not its quantity but its quality. . . . Eternal life is life in Christ, that life which removes a person from the merely earthly."[162]

Some authorities believe that verses 16-21 are the Apostle John's comments rather than a continuation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus.[163] Most believe Jesus' words continue through verse 21.[164] I prefer the majority opinion on this issue. Unfortunately the Greek text does not contain quotation marks, or any punctuation for that matter, so it does not identify quotations for the reader. This section of the text is the heart of John's record of Jesus' early ministry (chs. 2—4).

3:16 This best-known verse in the whole Bible expresses the gospel message more clearly and winsomely than any other. Almost every word in it is significant.

Jesus' mission in the Incarnation (vv. 13, 17) and the Cross (vv. 14-15) resulted from God's love for human beings. The construction of the Greek sentence stresses the intensity of God's love. He gave His best, His unique and loved Son. The Jews believed that God loved the children of Israel,

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[162]Morris, p. 201.

[163]E.g., Tenney, "John," pp. 49-50; Carson, p. 203; Everett F. Harrison, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1079; Morris, p. 202; Westcott, p. 54.

[164]E.g., Barrett, p. 169; Tasker, p. 66; J. P. Lange, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12 vols., vol. 9: *The Gospel According to John*, by J. P. Lange, p. 134; Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, p. 258; Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 1:120; G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 59-60; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 1:128; Wiersbe, 1:298; John G. Mitchell, *An Everlasting Love: A Devotional Study of the Gospel of John*, p. 57.

but John affirmed that God loved all people regardless of race.[165] There is nothing in this verse or in the context that would limit "the world" to the world of the elect. This love of God is amazing not so much because the world is so big as because it is so bad (cf. 1:9). The Father loves the world with the selfless love that provided the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.[166]

> "The Greek construction puts some emphasis on the actuality of the gift: it is not 'God loved enough to give,' but 'God loved so that he gave.' His love is not a vague, sentimental feeling, but a love that costs. God gave what was most dear to him."[167]

Christians should not love the world with the selfish love that seeks to profit from it personally (1 John 2:15-17).

The world stands under the threat of divine judgment because of the Fall and sin (3:36; Rom. 1:18). God in His gracious love has reached out and chosen some people from out of the world for salvation (15:19; Rom. 6:23). He does not take pleasure in pouring His wrath out on the lost, but He rejoices when people turn from their wicked ways to Him (Ezek. 18:23). The fact that God allows sinners to perish does not contradict His love. He has provided a way by which they need not perish because He loves mankind. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those who believe in His Son.

The consequences of belief are new birth (vv. 3, 5), eternal life (vv. 15-16), and salvation (v. 17). The alternative is perishing (v. 16, cf. 10:28), losing one's life (12:25), and destruction (17:12). To perish (Gr. *apoletai*) does not mean to experience annihilation but ruin, failure to realize God's purpose, and exclusion from His fellowship. The only alternatives are life or perishing; there is no other final state.

Cessation of belief does not result in the loss of salvation.

> "We might say, 'Whoever believes that Rockefeller is a philanthropist will receive a million dollars.' At the point in time a person believes this, He is a millionaire. However, if he ceases to believe this ten years later, he is still in possession of the million dollars. Similarly, if a man has believed in Christ, he is regenerate and in possession of eternal life, even if he ceases to believe in God in the future."[168]

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[165]According to Odeberg, p. 116, no Jewish writer specifically asserted that God loved His world.
[166]Galatians 2:20 reveals that the Cross shows the Son's love.
[167]Morris, pp. 203-4.
[168]Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 200.

3:17 John further clarified God's purpose in sending His Son by explaining what it was not. It was not to judge or condemn (Gr. *krino*) humankind. Judging as John spoke of it here is the opposite of saving (cf. v. 18: 5:24). God could have condemned human beings without the Incarnation. Jesus will judge everyone, but that was not God's purpose in the Incarnation. Rather it was to provide salvation for everyone through His death on the cross.

How can we reconcile this verse with 9:39 where Jesus said that He came into the world for judgment (cf. 5:27)? Judging was a secondary duty involved in saving, which was Jesus' primary purpose (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). Jesus came into an already condemned world to save some. He did not enter a neutral world to save some and condemn others. Anyone who brings light casts a shadow, but the bringing of shadow is only an attendant circumstance that is inevitable when one brings light.

3:18 The person who believes in Jesus escapes condemnation (cf. 5:24; Rom. 8:1). However the person who does not believe in Jesus stands condemned already with no way of escape (cf. 3:36). The reason for his or her condemnation then becomes his or her failure to believe on the One whom God lovingly and graciously has provided for salvation. Faith is the instrumental means by which we obtain salvation. Failure to exercise faith in Jesus will result in spiritual death just as failure to believe in the brazen serpent resulted in physical death for the Israelites (Num. 21:4-9). The difference between belief and unbelief is clear from here on in this Gospel.

3:19 John explained the process of mankind's judgment (Gr. *krisis*, separating or distinguishing, not *krima*, the sentence of judgment). Even though light entered the world, people chose darkness over light. The light in view is the revelation that Jesus as the Light of the World brought from the Father, particularly the light of the gospel. The reason people choose darkness over light is their deeds are evil. They prefer their darkness to God's light because of what the darkness hides, namely, their sin.

3:20 Not only do evildoers love darkness (v. 19), they also hate the light. The Greek word translated "evil" is *phaula*, meaning "worthless." Evildoers avoid the light that Jesus brings, and Jesus Himself (cf. 1:9-11), because it exposes the vanity of their lives. It shows that they have no meaning, worthy goal, or hope for the future. They know that coming to the light would convict them. Immorality lies behind much unbelief.

3:21 People who adhere to the truth, on the other hand, come to the light and its source, Jesus. They do not try to cover up worthless deeds, but they are willing to expose them to the searching light of God's revelation (cf. 1 John 1:8-9). They also humbly acknowledge that the good works that they do are really God's production. They do all this, of course, because God

draws them to Himself. One fundamental difference between believers and unbelievers is their attitude toward the light. It is not their guilt before God. Both are guilty before Him.[169]

Verses 19-21 point out the ultimate danger that each reader of this Gospel faces. If one tends to do as Nicodemus did and reject Jesus, it is because he or she does not want to come to the light for moral reasons. People essentially turn from Jesus because the light that He brings exposes things about themselves that they want to remain hidden. Openness to the light is very important. God's gracious love encourages guilty sinners to open up to the light.

> "This [3:19-21] is one of the most important sections in the gospel of John for understanding the light/darkness polarization in Johannine theology and also for understanding John's gospel itself."[170]

Much of modern man's problem with the gospel is anthropological. It arises from a faulty view of himself. Fallen man generally views human beings as neutral if not good. Therefore the fact that God sent Jesus and Jesus came to save sinners seems only interesting at best. If man is good and not in need of salvation, we can applaud God's love as admirable. If man is neutral, we can take salvation or leave it. If we leave it, God appears unfair for condemning us. However man is not good or neutral but bad. He already stands condemned and destined to experience God's wrath. Therefore faith in Jesus becomes a necessary way of escape from that dreadful destiny. The Incarnation is a manifestation of divine grace, not just divine love.

4. John the Baptist's reaction to Jesus' ministry 3:22-30

The writer next noted the parallel ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus in Judea. John the Baptist readily confessed Jesus' superiority to him even though they were both doing the same things. This was further testimony to Jesus' identity. This section constitutes the very core of the Apostle John's testimony to Jesus' identity in Jesus' early ministry (chs. 2—4).

3:22 Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus evidently happened in Jerusalem (2:23). Jerusalem was within Judea. After that conversation, Jesus went out into the Judean countryside. Jesus had not yet commissioned the Twelve. That commissioning happened after John the Baptist's imprisonment (Mark 1:14). The disciples who accompanied Jesus may not have been the Twelve, but they were His followers and they could have included all or some of the Twelve. This is the only record in the Gospels

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[169]Zane C. Hodges, "Coming to the Light—John 3:20-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):314-22, believed Jesus was distinguishing believers who acknowledged Christ openly, like John the Baptist, and secret believers, such as Nicodemus, rather than believers and unbelievers.

[170]Harris, pp. 203-4.

that Jesus engaged in a baptizing ministry similar to John the Baptist's. It was undoubtedly baptism expressing repentance rather than "Christian baptism." The writer later explained that Jesus did not do the baptizing Himself, but His disciples did (4:2). Jesus was also spending time with these disciples undoubtedly to help them understand and appreciate who He really was.

3:23 The exact location of Aenon (lit. springs) near Salim is unknown today. The best evidence seems to point to a site just south of Scythopolis (Old Testament Beth-shan).[171] The other possible site was a few miles east of Sychar (near Old Testament Shechem). The first site is about 15 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. The second is approximately midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Both are only a few miles west of the Jordan River. John evidently chose the site for its abundant water that came from nearby springs. Many people were coming to him to express their repentance by undergoing water baptism.

3:24 Obviously John continued preaching and baptizing after Jesus began ministering, and he did so until Herod Antipas imprisoned him. The Synoptic writers began their narratives of Jesus' public ministry with His ministry in Galilee. They viewed the beginning of Jesus' ministry as starting with John the Baptist's imprisonment (Mark 1:14). The Apostle John began his narrative of Jesus' ministry with His earlier Judean ministry. From him alone we learn that between Jesus' temptation and John the Baptist's arrest John and Jesus worked side by side for a time. His reference to John the Baptist's imprisonment is important because it helps the reader see that John's account does not contradict the Synoptics. Yet his primary concern was John the Baptist's witness to Jesus.

3:25 Evidently the discussion in view centered on the relation of John's baptism to other ceremonial washings that various other Jewish authorities espoused. These other washings probably included the practices prescribed in the Old Testament and more modern rites of purification that some Jewish leaders advocated. This verse provides the background from which John's disciples approached him in the next verse.

3:26 One of the contemporary baptisms was the one Jesus and His disciples were conducting. John's disciples mentioned it to John implying that they wanted him to comment on it. They had particular concern that so many people were going to Jesus for baptism. John's reply (vv. 27-30) suggests that they felt jealous of Jesus' popularity. They had failed to grasp the purpose of John's ministry.

> "It is interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition:

[171]See Tenney, "John," p. 52, and the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

> Moses (Num. 11:26-30), John the Baptist (John 3:26-30), Jesus (Luke 9:46-50), and Paul (Phil. 1:15-18). A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!"[172]

3:27 John replied to the implied question with an aphorism, a general maxim. He meant that no one can receive anything unless God in His sovereignty permits it (cf. 6:65; 19:11; 1 Cor. 4:7). Regarding Jesus this statement expressed belief that God had permitted Jesus to enjoy the popularity that He was experiencing. It also expressed John's satisfaction with that state of affairs. John demonstrated an exemplary attitude. He recognized that God had assigned different ministries to Jesus and himself and that it was wrong for him and his disciples to wish things were otherwise (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-9; 4:1-7; 12:12-31).

3:28 John proceeded to remind his disciples that he never claimed to be the Messiah but only Messiah's forerunner (1:15, 20, 23, 26-34).

3:29 John's illustration showed that his attitude and behavior were consistent with normal conduct. In the illustration Jesus is the bridegroom and John is the bridegroom's friend.

> "The assistant acted on behalf of the bridegroom and made the preliminary arrangements for the ceremony."[173]

The bride is probably a reference to Israel (cf. Isa. 54:5; 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:16-20). John was therefore implying that he played a supporting role in Messiah's union with Israel. This was a testimony to Jesus' identity as Messiah whom John said he rejoiced to hear.

When John the Baptist spoke these words the church was an unknown entity in God's plan, so it is unlikely that it was in his mind. However the original readers of this Gospel were probably familiar with the Apostle Paul's revelations concerning the church being the bride of Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27, 32). Israel had spurned her bridegroom when He came for her, and consequently He had taken a different bride for Himself. John's joy was complete or full (Gr. *pleroun*) because he knew that he was fulfilling his role faithfully. Jesus' increasing popularity filled John's disciples with resentment, but it filled John with joy.

3:30 This classic expression of humility arose out of John's perception of and acceptance of His God-given role as Messiah's forerunner. Far from discouraging people from following Jesus, as his disciples implied he

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[172]Wiersbe, 1:297.
[173]Blum, p. 283.

should, John would continue to promote Him. He viewed this as God's will and therefore said it "must" be so. Would that all of us who are God's servants would view Jesus' position and our own similarly. Submission to God's will and the exaltation of Jesus, not prominence in His service, should bring joy to His servants.

Unfortunately some of John's disciples continued to follow him rather than taking their rabbi's advice to follow Jesus (cf. Acts 18:24-26; 19:1-7).

5. The explanation of Jesus' preeminence 3:31-36

This pericope explains why Jesus must become greater. It also unites several themes that appear through chapter 3. John the Apostle or John the Baptist may be the speaker. This is not entirely clear.

3:31-32 The incarnate Son of God has come to earth from above (cf. v. 13). John sought to fulfill his purpose of proving that Jesus is the Christ (20:31) partially by stressing that Jesus' origin was "from above." Birth from above (v. 3), the new birth, can only come by faith in Him who is from above. His place of origin illustrates His superiority over all earthly people that humanity binds to the "earth" (Gr. *ge*, this planet) including John the Baptist. Finite humans can only reveal things that they experience on the earth, but Jesus could reveal things about heaven. John could call people to repentance, but he could not reveal divine counsels, as Jesus could, nor could he provide new life from above. Jesus had previously said that people do not typically receive His witness (v. 11), and the writer repeated that fact here.[174]

3:33-34 However some people do receive His witness. Those who do thereby assert their belief that the Father, not just the Son, is truthful. Seals indicated a personal guarantee as well as denoting ownership. Jesus so exactly revealed God's words that to believe Jesus is to believe God and to disbelieve Jesus is to disbelieve God (cf. 1 John 5:10).

All of God's former messengers received a limited measure of God's Spirit. The Spirit came on the Old Testament prophets only for limited times and purposes. However, God gave His Spirit to Jesus without limit. This guaranteed the truth of Jesus' words. The Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism and remained on Him (1:32-33; cf. Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). God gave His Spirit without measure only to Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

> "Thirty-nine times the Gospel of John refers to Jesus being sent from God (vv. 17, 34; 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 28-29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-45, 49; 13:16, 20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3,

[174]The Greek word *martyria*, "witness" or "testimony," appears some 47 times in this Gospel.

> 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). This affirms Jesus' deity and heavenly origin, as well as God's sovereignty and love in initiating the Son's Incarnation (cf. Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10, 14)."[175]

3:35 God not only gave Jesus His Spirit without measure, but He has placed everything in His hands. The Father has been gracious to the Son because He loves Him even as He has been gracious to human beings in providing salvation because He loves us. Everything that the Father has done, revelation and redemption, flows from His love for people through the Son. This statement also points out the dependence of the human Jesus on the Father, one of John's major themes.

3:36 In conclusion, John placed the alternatives side by side. Belief in the Son of God results in eternal life (1:12; 3:3, 5, 15, 16), life fitted for eternity with God and enjoyed to a limited extent now. Unbelief results in God's wrath remaining on the unbeliever and his or her not obtaining eternal life. John spoke of unbelief as disobedience (rejection, NIV) because when God offers salvation unbelief becomes disobedience.[176]

God's wrath is His personal response to unbelief, not some impersonal principle of retribution.

> "It is the divine allergy to moral evil, the reaction of righteousness to unrighteousness. God is neither easily angered nor vindictive. But by his very nature he is unalterably committed to opposing and judging all disobedience."[177]

Unbelievers will experience God's wrath primarily in the future (cf. 5:28-29). This is the only reference to God's wrath in John's Gospel or his epistles, though it appears six times in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rom. 1:18—3:26).

> "'The wrath of God' is a concept that is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of Scripture and without detracting from God's moral character. Concerning the first of these points, . . . there are literally hundreds of passages in the Bible referring to God's wrath, and the rejection of them all

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[175]Blum, p. 283.
[176]See Brad McCoy, "Obedience Is Necessary to Receive Eternal Life," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:5 (September-October 1994):1, 3.
[177]Tenney, "John," pp. 52-53.

> leaves us with a badly mutilated Bible. And with reference to the second, if we abandon the idea of the wrath of God we are left with a God who is not ready to act against moral evil. . . . We should not expect it [God's wrath] to fade away with the passage of time. Anyone who continues in unbelief and disobedience can look for nothing other than the persisting wrath of God. That is basic to our understanding of the gospel. Unless we are saved from real peril there is no meaning in salvation"[178]

This verse brings the whole third chapter to a climax.

In this pericope the Apostle John explained that Jesus came from heaven with greater authority than any former prophet. What He revealed came from His own observations in heaven. His words accurately and fully represented God. Moreover He came because the Father fully endowed Him with divine authority and assistance out of love. Furthermore He is to be the object of people's faith. Therefore He was superior to John the Baptist as well as every other divine representative.

The events in John's narrative of Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem (2:13—3:36) set the tone for Jesus' ministry, particularly His later occasions of ministry in Jerusalem (ch. 5; 7:10—10:42; 12:12-50). The conflict between belief and unbelief begins to surface here.

D. JESUS' MINISTRY IN SAMARIA 4:1-42

1. The interview with the Samaritan woman 4:1-26

There are several connections between this section and the preceding ones that provide continuity. One is the continuation of water as a symbol (cf. 2:6; 3:5; 4:10-15). Another is the continuation of conversation in which Jesus reveals Himself as the fulfillment of what the Old Testament anticipated.

> "Nicodemus was an eminent representative of orthodox Judaism. Now John records an interview Jesus had with one who stood for a class that was wholeheartedly despised by orthodox Judaism. From the point of view of the orthodox Jew there were three strikes against her: she was a Samaritan, a woman, and a sexual sinner."[179]

The present section begins with another reference to something that resulted from Jesus' rising popularity (cf. 3:22-26; 4:1-3). This section as a whole is also a model of evangelistic ministry.

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[178]Morris, p. 220.
[179]Ibid., p. 225.

"The Samaritan woman is a timeless figure—not only a typical Samaritan but a typical human being."[180]

4:1-3 This sentence provides the background for what follows. Jesus returned to Galilee from Judea, where He had been baptizing with His disciples, because the Pharisees were becoming increasingly aware of His broadening influence among the Jews. He wanted to avoid unnecessary premature conflict with them.

This is the first time the writer described Jesus as "the Lord." This was appropriate in view of the superiority of Jesus that both Johns had just established (3:28-30, 31-36).

4:4 The most direct and most popular route from Judea to Galilee went through Samaria.[181] Even though the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along, most Jews chose to travel through Samaria rather than taking the longer route east of the Jordan River.[182] Therefore John's statement that Jesus "had to" pass through Samaria does not necessarily mean that divine compulsion alone moved Him to choose that route. However most students of this passage have believed that one of the reasons Jesus took this route was to minister to the Samaritans.

Politically Samaria was part of the Roman province of Judea in Jesus' day. Nevertheless culturally there were ancient barriers that divided the residents of Samaria from the Jews who lived in Galilee and Judea. Wicked King Omri had purchased the hill on which he built Samaria as the new capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 16:24). The name Samaria eventually came to describe the district in which the city stood and even the whole Northern Kingdom. After the Assyrians captured the city and terminated the kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., they deported the substantial citizens and imported foreigners who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. Most of these foreigners continued to worship their pagan gods (2 Kings 17—18). The Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Exile regarded the residents of Samaria as racial half-breeds and religious compromisers. The Samaritans resisted Nehemiah's attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:1-2). They built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim opposite Shechem about 400 B.C., which they dedicated to Zeus Xenios. John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler of Judea, destroyed it and Shechem about 128 B.C. These actions all resulted in continued hostility between the two groups. The Samaritans continued to worship on Mt. Gerizim and accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical. A small group of Israelis who claim to be able to trace their ancestry back to the Samaritans survives to the present day.

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[180]Tasker, p. 75.

[181]See the map "Two Routes between Judea and Galilee" at the end of these notes.

[182]Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:6:1.

4:5 The site of Sychar is fairly certain because of unbroken tradition and the presence of a water source (v. 6). It was very near Old Testament Shechem, Joseph's burial site, near the base of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (cf. Gen. 33:19; 48:22; Josh. 24:32). Today the modern town of Nablus stands nearby.

4:6 The Greek words that John used to describe this well were *pege* (here), meaning a spring, and *phrear* (vv. 11, 12), meaning a cistern. Evidently Jacob's well was both. It was a hole that someone had dug in the ground that a spring fed. The site is still a popular tourist attraction, and the deep spring still flows.

The sixth hour when Jesus arrived would have been noon. Even though Jesus was the eternal Word, He became fully man and shared the fatigue and thirst that all travelers experience (cf. Heb. 4:15-16).

4:7-8 It was unusual for a woman to come to draw water alone and to come in the heat of the day. Perhaps this woman's morality led her to shun the company of other women and to seek solitude at the expense of comfort (cf. v. 18). Normally Jesus' disciples would have drawn the water. Jesus evidently asked the woman for a drink because she was drawing water and to initiate conversation with her. Strict Jews would not have purchased food from Samaritans as Jesus' disciples were attempting to do. Their willingness to do so may reflect Jesus' looser views on ceremonial defilement.

4:9 The Jews typically regarded the Samaritans as unclean apostates. Shortly after this incident the Jews made a law stating that "the daughters of the Samaritans are menstruants from their cradle" and therefore perpetually unclean.[183] The Pharisees prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection.[184] When Jesus' enemies wanted to insult Him, they called Him a Samaritan (8:48).

> "The normal prejudices of the day prohibited public conversation between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, and especially between strangers. A Jewish Rabbi would rather go thirsty than violate these proprieties."[185]

This accounts for the woman's shock at Jesus' request. At this point she viewed Him as just a Jew. Ironically later some Jews would call Him a Samaritan (8:48).

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[183]Mishnah *Niddah* 4:1.
[184]Wiersbe, 1:299.
[185]Blum, p. 285.

> "There was a trace of sarcasm in the woman's reply, as if she meant, 'We Samaritans are the dirt under your feet until you want something; then we are good enough!'"[186]

John explained for his readers who were unfamiliar with Palestinian prejudices that the Jews did not use (Gr. *synchrontai*) the same objects as the Samaritans.[187] This was so they could remain ceremonially clean.

4:10 Jesus ignored the woman's implied insult. She had drawn attention to the gift of water that Jesus was requesting and to the identity of Jesus as a Jew. Jesus picked up both subjects and used them to whet the woman's curiosity. He implied that God had a greater gift (Gr. *dorea*) for her and that Jesus had the authority to give it to her.[188] Here was another person who did not perceive Jesus' true glory or identity (cf. 1:14).

Most interpreters understand Jesus' reference to God's gift as a reference to eternal life, though some believe he was alluding to the Torah.[189] If the latter interpretation is correct, Jesus meant that if the woman knew her Torah and who He was she would have asked Jesus for something (cf. 3:10; 5:39-40). This interpretation seems unlikely to me because her knowledge of the Torah would not have enabled her to ask Jesus for living water. She did not yet recognize Him as the Messiah.

The living water that Jesus promised has two meanings. Literally it refers to flowing water in contrast to stagnant water. Metaphorically it refers to the cleansing and refreshing grace that the Holy Spirit brings as a result of proper relationship with God (7:38-39; cf. Isa. 1:16-18; Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 14:8; John 3:5). The Old Testament used water to symbolize teaching or doctrine and living water as a metaphor for God (cf. Ps. 36:9; Isa. 55:1; Jer. 2:13; 17:13).[190]

Jesus' evangelistic method on this occasion was to start where the woman was with something material that they both had in common, namely, the desire for water. He then captured her curiosity by implying that He was not just whom He appeared to be and that He could give her something very valuable though free. She would have wondered, Who is this, what is this gift of God, and what is this living water?

> "Whenever He witnessed to people, Jesus did not use a 'sales talk' that He adapted to meet every situation. To

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[186]Tenney, "John," p. 54.
[187]D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, pp. 373-82.
[188]The word that Jesus used for "gift" occurs only here in the Gospels. It stressed the freeness of God's gift.
[189]E.g., Odeberg, p. 150.
[190]See ibid., pp. 149-69.

> Nicodemus, He spoke about new birth; but to this woman, He spoke about living water."[191]

4:11-12 The woman responded by trying to find out how Jesus could give her living water and who He was. She said "living water" probably to avoid the embarrassment of asking what "living water" was. Obviously she thought Jesus was a cheap charlatan. Her question expected a negative answer. She could not see how he could be greater than the patriarch Jacob.

Even today this is one of the deepest wells in Palestine being over 75 feet deep, as local guides delight to point out.[192] Her reference to "our father Jacob" was probably another barb designed to remind this Jew that Jacob was the Samaritans' ancestor as well as the Jews'.

4:13-14 Jesus explained that He was not really speaking about literal water but a spiritual source of refreshment and fulfillment that satisfied completely. To provide such water Jesus would indeed have to be greater than Jacob. Jesus described this water as welling up within the individual. Clearly He was referring to the Holy Spirit who provides eternal life (cf. 7:38-39). As in His conversation with Nicodemus (3:5), Jesus again alluded to the Old Testament passages that promised salvation as satisfying water (e.g., Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; 55:1-7; Jer. 31:29-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32). The water that Jesus promised provided satisfaction without hard work in contrast to the literal water that the woman had to draw out of the well.

4:15 The woman did not pretend to understand what Jesus was talking about, but she did want to avoid the work involved in drawing water from Jacob's well. Since Jesus had offered it, she asked Him to give her whatever it was that He had (cf. 3:4; 6:34).

4:16 So far the woman thought only of her physical need for water and rest. Jesus now took the conversation in a different direction to help her realize that she had greater needs than these that He could meet (cf. 2:24-25). Jesus' instruction that she call her husband was proper because if He was really going to give her something valuable her husband should have been present. This was necessary to avoid misunderstanding about the reason for the gift and especially in view of Samaritan Jewish tensions.

4:17-18 The woman wanted Jesus' gift, so she admitted that she had no husband. She probably hoped that He would then give it to her. However, Jesus gave her a shocking revelation instead. He knew about her marital relations intimately, but he related what He knew tastefully. He commended her for telling the truth about her present marital status twice, but He also unmasked her past.

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[191]Wiersbe, 1:300.

[192]*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Jacob's Well," by R. L. Alden, 3:388.

We do not know how her previous marriages had ended, by death or divorce. However it would have been very unusual for five former husbands all to have died. The implication is that some divorce had torn her marriages apart. This implication is more probable in view of the woman's present live-in arrangement with a sixth man. She was not living by the moral code of her religion. Perhaps this explains her coming to draw water alone at such an unlikely hour (v. 6).

4:19 Many women would have simply turned and walked away at such a revelation of their private lives and sins. This woman continued talking with Jesus. Probably she had become used to dealing with people who knew about her sinful life, so she coolly observed that Jesus must be a prophet. She believed He could not have known these things without special insight (cf. v. 29; Luke 7:39).

> "The word 'prophet' was used to refer to a wide range of 'gifted' people, and at this point may not, in the woman's mind, denote a full-orbed Old Testament prophet, let alone a messianic figure."[193]

> "The Samaritans acknowledged no prophet after Moses other than the one spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:18, and him they regarded as the Messiah . . . For her to speak of Jesus as a prophet was thus to move into the area of messianic speculation."[194]

4:20 Being a woman of the world she had probably learned that many "religious people" enjoy discussing controversial theological issues. She took the opportunity to divert the conversation, which was becoming uncomfortably convicting, hoping that Jesus would follow her new subject. She must have thought that surely he could not resist the temptation to argue Jewish supremacy in the age-old Samaritan Jewish debate. Moreover since Jesus appeared to have supernatural insight perhaps she could get the true answer to this ancient dilemma from Him.

> "There are some people who cannot engage in a religious conversation with a person of a different persuasion without bringing up the points on which they differ."[195]

Perhaps this woman was such a person.

Part of the old controversy involved the proper place of worship. In Deuteronomy 12:5 God had said that His people were to seek the place

[193]Carson, p. 221.
[194]Morris, p. 236.
[195]Bruce, p. 108.

that He would choose among their tribes where He would dwell among them. The Jews, accepting all the Old Testament as authoritative, saw God doing this later when He commanded David to build the temple in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 11:13; 14:21; 2 Chron. 6:6; 12:13). The Samaritans, who acknowledged only the authority of the Pentateuch, believed that Mount Gerizim near Shechem was the place that God had appointed. They based this belief on the fact that God had told the Israelites to worship Him on Mt. Gerizim after they entered the Promised Land (Deut. 11:29-30; 27:2-7, 12). Shechem had long associations as a place where God had met with His people. It was where God first revealed Himself to Abraham and where Abraham first built an altar after entering the Promised Land (Gen. 12:6-7). It was also where Jacob had chosen to live and had buried his idols after returning from Paddan-aram (Gen. 33:18-20; 35:4).[196]

> "They [the Samaritans] had a tradition that Abraham's offering of Isaac took place on this mountain and they held that it was here that Abraham met Melchizedek. In fact, most of the blessed events in the time of the patriarchs seem to have been linked with Gerizim!"[197]

4:21 Jesus avoided the temptation to abandon discussion of living water. He told the woman that the real issue was not *where* God's people had worshipped Him in the past but *how* they would worship Him in the future. This was the more important issue since Messiah had come and would terminate worship as both the Jews and the Samaritans knew it. Jesus urged her to believe Him because she had already acknowledged him as a prophet. This command was an added guarantee that what He said was true. The hour (Gr. *hora*) or time that Jesus referred to was the time of His passion.[198] The "Father" was a term for God that Jesus employed frequently (cf. 2:16; 11:41; 12:27-28; 17:1).

4:22 By "you" Jesus meant the Samaritans (plural "you" in Gr.). They worshipped a God whom they did not really know. The reason for this was their rejection of most of His revelation in the Old Testament. Moreover the Samaritans had added pagan concepts to their faith that had come from their Gentile forefathers. If the woman truly believed that Jesus was a prophet, as she claimed, she would have had to accept His statement. There was more and truer information about God that she and her fellow Samaritans needed to learn than they presently knew. Jesus was providing that correction and that new revelation.

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[196]For more information on Samaritan thought, see R. J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered*; and J. Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*.
[197]Morris, p. 237.
[198]See my comments on 2:4.

In contrast, the Jews accepted all of God's revelation in the Old Testament and therefore knew the God whom they worshipped. Additionally they were the people through whom that revelation had come. Jesus here summarized all Old Testament revelation as being essentially soteriological. God intended His revelation to result in salvation for humankind (cf. 3:17). In that sense salvation had come through the Jews (cf. Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5). Salvation also came from the Jews in that Messiah came from Judah's tribe (Gen. 49:10) whereas the Samaritans traced their ancestry through Joseph.[199]

Jesus did not take sides on the question of the place of worship, but He did clarify the proper basis of authority as being the whole Old Testament.

4:23 The hour coming was the hour of Jesus' passion when the old way of worship would end. That hour was already present in the sense that since Messiah had come His followers could begin to worship according to the new way. This figure of speech (oxymoron) means that what will characterize the future is even now present.[200] The time of unique privilege for the Jews was ending temporarily. It hinged on their acceptance of Messiah (cf. 2:19-20).

True worshippers are not those who will worship in the future in contrast to those who have worshipped in the past. The distinction is not between Jews and Samaritans either. True worshippers are those from either time or group that worship God in spirit and truth.

What does it mean to worship in spirit and truth? The Greek text has one preposition ("in") that governs both nouns ("spirit," "truth") linked by the conjunction ("and," cf. 3:5; 4:24). This means that Jesus was describing one characteristic with two nouns, not two separate characteristics of worship. We could translate the phrase "truly spiritual." This is a hendiadys, a figure of speech in which the speaker expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive. Though the idea is one, it has two components.

What is "truly spiritual" worship? It is, first, worship that is spiritual in every respect: in its source, mediator, object, subject, basis, and method. It rises from the spirit of the worshipper, not just his or her mouth; it is heartfelt. Moreover it proceeds from a person who has spiritual life because of the new birth that the Holy Spirit has affected. It passes from believers to God through a spiritual mediator, namely, Jesus Christ. Its object is spiritual, namely, God who is spirit. Its subject is spiritual matters. This worship can include physical matters, such as singing and

[199]Josephus, 11:8:6.

[200]An oxymoron involves the joining of contradictory or incongruous terms to make a point.

studying, but it comprehends the spiritual realm as well as the physical. Its basis is the spiritual work that Jesus Christ did in His incarnation and atonement. Its method is spiritual as contrasted with physical; it does not consist of merely physical actions but involves the interaction of the human spirit with the divine spirit.

For example, many people today associate worship primarily with going to church, as the Jews did with going to Jerusalem. Jesus clarified that true worship transcends any particular time or place. We can and should worship God 24 hours a day as we set aside (sanctify) every activity as an expression of our love and service of the Lord.[201] That is truly spiritual worship.

"Truth" in this context contrasts with the hypocrisy that characterized so much of Jewish and Samaritan worship, which is still present in worship today. It is sincere, God-centered worship rather than just going through motions or worshipping for what we can get out of it instead of as an offering to the Lord. True worship is all about Him, not about us.[202]

> "The combination 'spirit and truth' points to the need for complete sincerity and complete reality in our approach to God."[203]

Another view of "in spirit and truth" is that "spirit" refers to the realm in which people must worship God and "truth" refers to Jesus who is the Truth of God (14:6).[204] However in this context Jesus was apparently contrasting integrity and reality in worship with the externalism and hypocrisy that marked so much worship in His day.

A third view is that "spirit" refers to the heart and "truth" refers to the Scriptures. The meaning then is that worshippers must be sincere and worship God in harmony with His self-revelation in Scripture. This is good advice, but again the context suggests a slightly different meaning of "truth" here.

4:24 The AV has Jesus saying, "God is a spirit." One could infer that He is one spirit among many. The NASB and NIV have, "God is spirit." The Greek text has no indefinite article ("a"), but it is legitimate to supply one as is often true in similar anarthrous (without the article) constructions. However the absence of the article often deliberately stresses the character

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[201]See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, pp. 77-84.

[202]Matt Redman's song, "Heart of Worship," expresses this well: "I'll bring You more than a song, because the song itself is not what You've required. You search much deeper within than the way things appear. You're looking into my heart."

[203]Morris, p. 239.

[204]Blum, p. 286.

to the noun (cf. 1 John 1:5; 4:8). That seems to have been Jesus' intention here.

The sense of the passage is that God is spirit as opposed to flesh. He is invisible, divine, and essentially unknowable. Nevertheless He has chosen to reveal Himself (1:1-18). Since He is a spiritual rather than a corporeal being, those who worship Him must do so in a spiritual rather than a material way. A spiritual birth (3:5) is prerequisite for spiritual worship.

The essential reason worship of God must be spiritual is that God is a spiritual being, not a physical idol. Worship of a spiritual God requires spiritual worship, not just going through certain acts of worship at special places of worship. Furthermore, people cannot worship God in any manner that may seem attractive to them. They must worship Him as He by the Spirit has revealed we should.

4:25 Jesus' explanation would have made sense to this woman who lived life on a very physical level. Nevertheless she did not pretend to comprehend all this spiritual talk. One thing she understood clearly, and she believed Jesus would agree with here about this. Messiah was coming, and when He arrived He would reveal divine mysteries and clarify all these matters. The Samaritans anticipated Messiah's arrival, as the Jews did, but they viewed Him primarily as a teacher (Deut. 18:15-19). They usually referred to Him as the Taheb (probably meaning "the Restorer" or possibly "he who returns").[205] The writer translated the meaning of "Messiah" for his readers (cf. 1:38, 41).

4:26 Jesus then identified Himself to the woman as the Messiah whom she hoped for. Jesus did not reveal Himself to the Jews as the Messiah because of their identification of Messiah with a military deliverer almost exclusively. If He had done so, He may well have ignited a revolution. However, He did not hesitate to identify Himself as Messiah to this woman because as a Samaritan she did not hold the common Jewish view of Messiah. The writer used Jesus' own clear testimony here as another witness to His identity so his readers would believe in Him. Jesus' self-revelation here climaxes John's account of this conversation. This is the only time that Jesus clearly identified Himself as the Messiah before His trial.[206] His self-identification here constituted an invitation for the woman to come to Him for salvation.

Nicodemus contrasts with the Samaritan woman in many ways. As John used them in His narrative, they seem to typify Jews and non-Jews as well as the normal reactions of those groups to Jesus.

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[205]Carson, p. 226.

[206]However, Mark 9:41 records that He used the term of Himself on another occasion indirectly.

Contrasts between Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman[207]		
	Nicodemus	**The Samaritan Woman**
Sex	Male	Female
Race	Pure Jewish	Mixed Gentile
Social status	Highly respected, ruler, teacher	Not respected, servant, learner
Place	Jewish territory	Samaritan territory
Time	At night	About noon
Condition	Darkness	Light
Setting	Indoors	Outdoors
Occasion	Pre-planned	Spontaneous
Subject	New birth	Living water
Initiator	Nicodemus	Jesus
Conversation	Faded out	Continued strong
Result	Unbelief	Belief
Consequence	No witness to others	Witness to others

2. Jesus' explanation of evangelistic ministry 4:27-38

Jesus had modeled evangelistic effectiveness for His disciples, though ironically they were absent for most of the lesson. Now he explained the rewards, urgency, and partnership of evangelism.

4:27 When Jesus' disciples returned from their shopping trip (v. 8), they were amazed to see Jesus talking with the woman. Their reaction reflects the typical Jewish prejudices against Samaritans and women. It was uncommon for rabbis to speak with women.[208] However they refrained from questioning her and Him probably to avoid becoming involved in this unusual conversation.

4:28 The fact that the woman left her water pot at the well suggests that she felt such excitement at having apparently discovered the Messiah that all but telling others left her mind. The Apostle John may have included this detail because her act had symbolic significance. Some commentators suggested that in her excitement she abandoned the old water pot (ceremonial structure) that was no longer necessary (cf. v. 23). I doubt this interpretation and tend to view this detail as simply evidence of her

[207]Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 284.
[208]For one of their sayings prohibiting conversation with females, see Morris, p. 242.

excitement. There is plenty of symbolism in this story already that Jesus explained.

It would have been natural for the woman to report her discovery to the men in Sychar since they would have had to determine if Jesus really was the Messiah.

4:29 Her hyperbole is understandable. Her example as a witness was a good one for John's readers. What made her think that Jesus could be the Messiah was not only His claim but His ability to know her past, His words and His works. She wisely framed her thinking about Jesus in the form of a question to elicit investigation rather than as a dogmatic assertion that others would probably have rejected out of hand (cf. v. 12).

4:30 The men, probably the community leaders, proceeded out to the well to investigate Jesus' identity. Some of them may have wanted the secrets of this woman's past, perhaps secrets involving themselves, to remain buried.

4:31-32 Jesus showed little interest in eating even though He was probably hungry (v. 6). He used the disciples' urging to teach them something about His priorities. Something was more satisfying to Him than food. They showed interest in physical need primarily, but He had more concern for spiritual need.

4:33-34 The disciples continued to think only on the level of physical food as the woman had thought only of physical water (v. 15). They were all unspiritual in their thinking. Jesus responded that what satisfied Him more than physical food was the spiritual nourishment that came from doing the Father's will and advancing His work (cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; John 5:36; 6:38). That mission involved bringing eternal life to people (cf. 20:21).

> "The creative will of God, realized in obedience, sustains life."[209]

4:35 Jesus continued to speak of spiritual matters in physical terms. The whitened fields represent humankind in its condition of being ripe for divine judgment. Perhaps as Jesus spoke these words the disciples observed the customarily white-clothed men of Sychar wending their way through the fields toward them as so much living grain.

Jesus' reference to four months was probably proverbial. It was the approximate time between sowing and reaping. His point was that between the spiritual task of sowing the gospel and reaping belief the intervening time may be very brief.

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[209]Barrett, p. 241.

The disciples needed spiritual vision. They could obtain it by lifting their eyes and looking on the fields of lost people rather than being completely absorbed in their physical needs. As with physical grain, the opportunity for harvesting spiritually is relatively brief. If left unreached, people die in their sins.

4:36 The reaper in view was Jesus, and potentially His disciples could become reapers. The wages that reapers receive are the reward for their labor. For Jesus this was the exaltation that the Father gave Him and will give Him for carrying out His will faithfully. For the disciples it is rewards that they and we can receive at the judgment seat of Christ for faithful service. Some of this reward comes immediately in the form of satisfaction and perhaps other blessings. The fruit is probably a reference to the people as grain that will obtain eternal life. The one who sows is anyone who proclaims the gospel, but ultimately Jesus (cf. Matt. 13:37).

4:37 The "Thus" in the NIV is misleading. It implies that this verse explains the previous one. However the Greek term, *en touto* (lit. in this) can look forward as well as backward. In this case it looks forward. Verse 37, which contains a proverb, summarizes verse 38. It means that both sowers and reapers are necessary to get a good harvest. Sowers must not think that their work is secondary to reaping, and reapers must remember the important contribution of those who sow. Today some Christians do more sowing than reaping and others experience more fruitful ministries as harvesters. Both are essential in God's plan (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6).

> "The reaping of people for the granary of God is not the task of any one group, nor is it confined to one era. Each reaps the benefit of its forerunners, and succeeding generations in turn gain from the accomplishments of their predecessors."[210]

4:38 The proverb was true in the situation of Jesus and His disciples. The purpose of the disciples' calling was reaping believers in Jesus. The Apostle John did not record Jesus' commissioning them for that purpose earlier, but that was His purpose (cf. v. 2). The Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist had sowed, but now Jesus and His disciples were reaping (cf. Acts 2).

3. The response to Jesus in Samaria 4:39-42

The response of the Samaritans to Jesus was considerably more positive than the response of the Jews had been (1:11; 2:23-25). This would prove true as Jesus' ministry continued.

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[210]Tenney, "John," p. 58.

4:39 Harvesting followed the arrival of the Samaritans who had come out from Sychar to see Jesus. Many of them believed initially on Jesus because of the woman's verbal witness. She had brought them to Jesus. This verse should encourage every believing reader. God uses the witness of all types of people concerning Jesus' identity to bring others to faith in Him.

4:40-42 The openness of these Samaritans contrasts with the hostility of so many of Jesus' Jewish hearers (cf. 1:11). It required considerable humility for these Samaritans to invite a Jewish rabbi to stay with them (v. 9). During the following two days many more Samaritans than just those who visited Jesus by Jacob's well became believers in Him. They did so because of Jesus' words that confirmed what the woman had said about Him. They produced certain knowledge in the Samaritans ("we know," v. 42). Their faith received a firmer foundation than just the witness of another believer. It rested on personal contact with Jesus. The joint testimony of believers and the word of God is a powerful evangelistic combination. These simple Samaritans understood what sophisticated Nicodemus could not (cf. Matt. 11:25).

The title "Savior of the world" is unique to John occurring only here and in 1 John 4:14 (cf. 1:29, 34; 3:17). John's original readers would have been familiar with the title because the Greeks and Romans gave it to several of their gods and emperors.[211] Nevertheless Jesus was the true Savior of the world whom these Samaritans recognized as such. The Old Testament spoke of God in this role (e.g., Ps. 35:9; Jon. 2:9). Jesus was God in action saving the world. This does not mean that everyone will experience eternal salvation, the doctrine of universalism, but that Jesus has made everyone savable, and those who believe on Him obtain salvation.

> "It is interesting to trace our Lord's movements that brought Him to Samaria. He was in Jerusalem (John 2:23) and then came into Judea (John 3:22). From Judea He went into Samaria (John 4:4), and the Samaritans declared Him to be 'the Savior of the world.' This is a perfect parallel to Acts 1:8—'And ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' Our Lord has set the example. If we follow, He will give us the harvest."[212]

This was the first instance of cross-cultural evangelism that the Gospel evangelists recorded in Jesus' ministry. Jesus later charged the church to continue cross-cultural evangelism (Acts 1:8). Still later Philip evangelized in Samaria with great success, perhaps in this very region (Acts 8:4-8). Jesus' ministry here was not only reaping but sowing. Philip reaped what Jesus had sowed.

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[211]Carson, p. 232.
[212]Wiersbe, 1:302.

E. JESUS' RESUMPTION OF HIS GALILEAN MINISTRY 4:43-54

1. Jesus' return to Galilee 4:43-45

John again bridged the gap between important events in his narrative with a transitional explanation of how Jesus moved from one site to another (cf. 2:12; 4:1-3). John typically focused on clusters of events in Jesus' ministry (cf. 1:19, 29, 35, 43; 2:1). However this move completed a cycle in Jesus' movements and almost completed one in John's narrative.

4:43 The two days in view are those that Jesus spent ministering to the Samaritans (v. 40). He now resumed the trip that John referred to in verse 3.

4:44-45 These verses seem incongruous. If a prophet has no honor in his own country, why did the Galileans welcome Jesus, since Galilee was His homeland? The Greek word *patris* translated "country" can mean either homeland or hometown. The Synoptics always used it to describe Nazareth (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24).

One explanation is that John viewed Judea as Jesus' homeland or possibly Jerusalem as His hometown.[213] Perhaps John regarded Judea and Jerusalem as Jesus' spiritual homeland and hometown as David's spiritual heir. The "Jews" is a term that John used particularly of the Jews in Judea (cf. 1:19; 7:1). However, John referred to Nazareth as Jesus' physical home frequently (1:45-46; 7:41, 52; 19:19). Moreover Jesus did not choose where He ministered because of the popular acceptance He received. He did seek to avoid premature conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, but the implication of verses 44 and 45 is that Jesus' honor was the determining factor. Furthermore the reception that Jesus received in Galilee was not entirely positive.

A second explanation is that *patris* refers to heaven.[214] However this view does not explain why John included the proverb as an explanation for Jesus' going into Galilee from Judea.

Probably *patris* refers to Galilee in contrast to Samaria rather than in contrast to Judea.[215] Jesus' own country was Jewish turf rather than Samaritan territory. On Jewish turf Jesus had not experienced the honor that He had among the Samaritans (cf. 2:18, 20, 22, 23-25; 3:10; 4:1-3).

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[213]Westcott, 1:77-78; Hoskyns, pp. 287-88; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 200-201.

[214]Lightfoot, p. 35.

[215]Brown, 1:187; Carson, pp. 235-36; John W. Pryor, "John 4:44 and the *Patris* of Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987):254-63. For several other less probable solutions, see D. A. Carson, "Current Source Criticism of the Fourth Gospel: Some Methodological Questions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978):424, n. 50.

> The "so" or "therefore" that begins verse 45 does not explain why Jesus went back into Jewish territory. He did not go there because the Jews typically rejected Him. The "so" or "therefore" introduces the reason for the Galileans' reception of Him that follows. The people from the Prophet's own country received Him because they had seen the miracles that He had done at Passover in Jerusalem, not because they honored Him as a prophet (cf. v. 48). Thus John was contrasting the unbelief of the Jews with the belief of the Samaritans.

2. The second sign: healing the official's son 4:46-54

This incident completes a cycle in John's Gospel. Jesus performed His first sign in Cana (2:1), and now He returned and did another miracle there (v. 46). There is even a second reference to Capernaum (2:12; 4:46). John's account of Jesus' first miracle in Cana (2:11) ended with a reference to the weak faith of the Jews that rested only on miracles (2:23-25). His account of Jesus' second miracle in Cana (4:54) opens with a similar reference (4:45, 48). In short, this section seems to be an *inclusio* framed by two miracles in Cana with two conversations occurring between them. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is typical of the reception that the Jews gave Him, but His conversation with the Samaritan woman shows the reception that non-Jews more typically gave Him. We see these two attitudes toward Jesus not only in the Gospel accounts of His ministry but also in Acts. The center section that the structure highlights is essentially an exposition of Jesus' mission (3:16-36).

A Jesus' first sign in Cana 2:1-11
- **B** A reference to Capernaum, Jesus' headquarters 2:12
  - **C** Hostility toward Jesus in Jerusalem 2:13-25
    - **D** Nicodemus' response to Jesus 3:1-15
      - **E** The importance of Jesus' mission 3:16-36
    - **D'** The Samaritan woman's response to Jesus 4:1-38
  - **C'** Acceptance of Jesus in Samaria 4:39-42
- **B'** A reference to Galilee, Jesus' major ministry arena 4:43-45

A' Jesus' second sign in Cana 4:46-54

This pericope (4:46-54) constitutes the closing incident in John's account of Jesus' early public ministry (chs. 2—4). It shows Him returning to Cana where He performed another significant miracle. John evidently included it to show that Jesus' demonstration of His authority resulted in some Jews believing on Him.

> "Both the miracles performed at Cana . . . are thus shown to have been prompted by trust. Mary trusted her Son to do something to relieve the embarrassment of their host at the wedding. The father of the sick boy was equally confident that he could rely on Jesus' help. Both miracles are also shown to have resulted in a personal surrender to Jesus which is full Christian faith. His disciples *believed on him* after the water had been turned into wine; the father and the rest of his household *believed* as the

result of the healing of the boy: and in both cases the verb in the original is an inceptive aorist 'they put their faith in Him'."[216]

4:46 John's reference to Cana and the first miracle seems intended to remind the reader of that event and to suggest the completion of a cycle. John did not reveal the reason Jesus returned there. The royal official (Gr. *basilikos*) was by his title a man who served a king. This was probably Herod Antipas in view of where he lived. Antipas was not an official king, but the people popularly regarded him as one (cf. Mark 6:14). The official was probably Jewish (v. 48). Jesus also healed the servant of a Gentile centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10), but that was a different individual and a different incident. An important feature of this sign was the distance between Jesus' location, in Cana, and where the official's son lay ill, in Capernaum.

4:47 The official appealed to Jesus to make the approximately 13-mile trip from Cana to Capernaum to heal his son. He obviously believed that Jesus could heal people, but there is no indication that initially he believed that Jesus was more than a healer. He must have felt desperate to seek Jesus from such a distance. Jesus' first sign came in response to a mother's request (2:1-5), but this second one came in response to a father's request.

> "The nobleman believed that Jesus could heal his son, but he made two mistakes in his thinking: that Jesus had to go to Capernaum to save the lad, and that if the boy died meanwhile, it was too late."[217]

4:48 The official was responding as most of the Galileans did. Jesus used the plural "you" indicating that this man's unbelief was typical of most of his countrymen. Jesus' mention of "signs" (Gr. *semeia*) pointed to the significance of His miracles. This is the only place in John's Gospel where "wonders" occurs. This word (Gr. *terata*) stresses the wonder or awe that miracles produce in those who witness them. Jesus' use of the word suggests that the people wanted to see miracles just so they could marvel at them.

Jesus implied that the man did not believe in Him. He did, of course, believe that Jesus could heal His son, but he had not yet come to believe in Him as His Savior. Jesus viewed that second level of belief as the significant one. The official may well have thought, What do you mean I do not believe on you? The man probably felt rebuked by Jesus' comment, but Jesus' aim was to bring him to deeper faith in Himself.

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[216]Tasker, pp. 82-83.
[217]Wiersbe, 1:303.

4:49 The officer showed little interest in the reasons people did or did not believe in Jesus since his little boy (Gr. *paidion*) lay at death's door. He desperately appealed again for Jesus to come to Capernaum quickly.

4:50 Jesus did not do what the father asked, but He gave him a promise instead: his son would live. The official seized the promise and departed for home alone demonstrating that he did not just want to see a miracle. If he had refused to go home without Jesus, he would have been disbelieving Jesus' word. He chose not to insist on receiving evidence and exercised faith without tangible proof. Thus he believed in Jesus in a deeper sense than he had at first.

> "The official became a model of what it means to believe apart from signs."[218]

4:51-53 His servants met him on his way back to Capernaum with good news. Jesus had made His promise about 1:00 p.m. the day before the official met his servants. When he met them, he learned that his son's condition had improved significantly, not just begun to improve as he had expected, when Jesus gave His promise. His recovery was no accident. This resulted in his believing in Jesus to an even deeper level, though he may not have understood that He was the Son of God. The members of his household believed in Jesus too (cf. 2:11; Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; 18:8). He learned that Jesus' word is powerful to save even at a distance. His faith grew from "crisis faith" (v. 47), to "confident faith" (v. 50), to "confirmed faith" (v. 53), to "contagious faith" (v. 53).[219]

4:54 John interestingly identified this miracle as the second sign that Jesus did even though He did other miracles in both Galilee and Judea after He changed the water to wine (cf. 2:23; 3:2). Moreover this is the second of several miracles that John labeled in his Gospel as signs, but he numbered only the first two. All this evidence points to his regarding the first and second signs as similar and related to each other. The structure of this part of John's narrative, as I have sought to explain it above, accounts for his view of this second sign.

John explained further that Jesus performed this sign after He had come out of Judea into Galilee. This appears to be another geographical notice designed to help the reader follow Jesus' movements. It also suggests a contrast between the unbelief that marked Judea and the faith that was more prominent in Galilee.

This miracle, as the first one that John described, had a limited audience. Only the family and household servants of the official knew of it at first. This was typical of Jesus'

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[218]Howard, p. 70.
[219]Wiersbe, 1:303.

ministry. While Jesus performed many public miracles, and huge crowds followed Him because they witnessed them, they had the desired impact on relatively few individuals (cf. 1:11-12).

John recorded many witnesses to Jesus' identity in his record of Jesus' early ministry (chs. 2—4). The first sign testified to His creative power to change the quality of things.[220] His cleansing of the temple showed His authority over the institutions of Judaism. Nicodemus testified to Jesus having come from God and His role as an authoritative teacher. John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus' identity as the Messiah. The Samaritan woman implied that Jesus was omniscient. Many other Samaritans acknowledged Jesus as the Savior of the world. The official whose son Jesus healed from afar came to recognize Him as the healer whose word can overcome the problem of distance as well as disease.[221] The first sign in John's Gospel shows Jesus' power over time, and the second sign shows His power over space. John the Apostle also called Him the Son of God, the giver of eternal life, and the One from heaven. This section of the book, therefore, makes an important contribution to the advance of John's argument and the fulfillment of his purpose (20:30-31).

F. JESUS' SECOND VISIT TO JERUSALEM CH. 5

> "In chapters 1—4 the subject is described from the standpoint of a spectator, *ab extra*, and we are thus enabled to see something of the impression created on others by our Lord as He deals with individuals in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Galilee. When, however, we turn to chapters 5—10, we cannot but be conscious of a change of standpoint, for we see Christ as it were from within, from His own point of view, in all the glory of His self-conscious personal revelation. In each chapter He is seen to concentrate attention on Himself in various aspects, and men are enabled to see something of what He claims to be in relation to God and man."[222]

Until now John presented Jesus dealing with individuals almost exclusively. This continues, but now he tells the reader that conflict arose with the Pharisees. John thus introduced another theme beside faith, namely, unbelief and opposition by Israel's religious leaders. The first two signs that John recorded were done privately, but the next two were public. Furthermore, Jesus did the miracle recorded in chapter 5 on the Sabbath day, which drew the attention and opposition of the Pharisees. Reactions to Jesus among the Jews moved from reservation (e.g., 3:1-15) to outright hostility. Chapters 5—10 trace the development of this antagonism. However the main emphasis in the section is what Jesus revealed about Himself through His actions and His words.

> "Chapters v and vi should probably be grouped together as a single section. They are connected by a common theme, which may be described as the nature and causes of Israel's lack of faith in Jesus. Chapter v is

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[220]Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, p. 312.
[221]Ibid.
[222]W. H. Griffith Thomas, "The Plan of the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:500 (October-December 1968):319.

> concerned with the form which this unbelief took among the Jews at Jerusalem, and chapter vi with the expression of it by the peasants in Galilee."[223]

In chapter 5 opposition to Jesus began with objection to His healing on the Sabbath. This led to Jesus explaining His relationship to the Father.

1. The third sign: healing the paralytic 5:1-9

This third sign in John's Gospel signaled Jesus' identity and created controversy that followed. Particularly it testified to Jesus' authority over time.[224]

5:1 Some time later Jesus returned to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish feasts and to use that occasion to minister. John did not specify which feast it was. Elsewhere in his Gospel when John identified the feast in view he did so because the events and teaching that followed had relevance to that particular feast (cf. 2:13; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 11:55). Here they did not. Consequently the identity of the feast is unimportant for the interpretation of the text.[225] John probably just mentioned it to explain Jesus' return to and presence in Jerusalem.

5:2 John frequently used the "historic (dramatic) present" tense to describe past events. Therefore this verse does not prove that he wrote his Gospel before the fall of Jerusalem.[226]

The Sheep Gate was evidently a gate in the north part of Jerusalem's wall just west of its northeast corner (cf. Neh. 3:1, 32; 12:39). Various Greek manuscripts refer to this pool as Bethesda, Bethsaida, Bethzatha, and Belzetha, but the first name is probably the correct one. It means "house of outpouring" or perhaps "house of mercy."[227] Evidently there were two pools with a covered colonnade or portico on all four sides of the complex and a fifth colonnade that separated the two pools.[228]

5:3a Many disabled people used to lie in these porticoes because of the healing properties in the water.

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[223]Tasker, p. 84.
[224]Tenney, *John: The Gospel. . .*, p. 312.
[225]Hoehner, pp. 58-59, favored one of the three pilgrim feasts that the Mosaic Law required Jewish males to attend: Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. He preferred the last of these though conceded that certain identification is probably impossible.
[226]Wallace, p. 531, is one scholar who believed that it does prove this. He pointed out that the equative verb *estin*, used here, nowhere else in the New Testament is clearly a historical present. Perhaps this is the one place where it is.
[227]See the map "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes. The modern name is St. Anne's pool.
[228]J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem as Jesus knew it: Archaeology as Evidence*, pp. 95-104.

5:3b-4 This section of the text has doubtful authenticity. No Greek manuscript before A.D. 400 contains these words.[229] Evidently scribes added these statements later to explain the troubling of the waters that occurred periodically (v. 7).[230] However their explanations seem superstitious. These explanations appear to have been common in Jesus' day. A more probable explanation for the troubling of the water is the presence of springs that occasionally gushed water into the pools below the surface of the water.[231] Probably the (warm?) water had a high mineral content that had medicinal benefits for people suffering from muscle and joint ailments.

5:5 This man's sickness appears to have been paralysis resulting in inability to walk at least (v. 7) that seems to have been a result of sin (v. 14). Perhaps a severe arthritic condition complicated his ailment. John's reference to the length of his illness seems to be just to document its seriousness and the man's hopeless condition. Some commentators tried to find symbolic significance in the 38 years, but that seems unwarranted to me.[232]

5:6 Jesus could have learned about the man's condition from others, or John may have written what he did to impress his readers with Jesus' supernatural knowledge. In Capernaum Jesus healed another paralytic lowered through the roof in front of him (Mark 2:1-12), but at Bethesda He reached out to the man as one among many invalids. Jesus' question may have probed the man to discover if he had a desire for healing. Some people are perfectly content to remain in their miserable condition (cf. 3:19-20). Jesus only delivered people who wanted His help. Evidently this is the only person He healed this day even though there were many more whom He could have healed (v. 3; cf. Acts 3:2). He only saves people who want salvation and whom He sovereignly chooses to save (cf. 6:37).

5:7 Obviously the paralytic believed that only the first person to enter the water after its stirring would experience healing. This was probably the popular idea that arose from superstition. The man's statement that he had no one to help him appears to have been a veiled request that Jesus would volunteer to be that helper. The invalid had the desire for healing but not the means to obtain it.

> "We must feel that, while faith was commonly the prerequisite of healing, it was not absolutely necessary.

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[229]Blum, p. 289; Tenney, "John," p. 62.

[230]For defense of the authenticity of verse 4, see Zane C. Hodges, "The Angel at Bethesda—John 5:4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:541 (January-March 1979):25-39.

[231]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 242.

[232]Thirty-eight years recalls the period during which the Israelites wandered in the wilderness following their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea before they entered the Promised Land.

> Jesus is not limited by human frailty as he works the works of God."[233]

5:8 Jesus' words healed the man (cf. vv. 25, 28-29; 11:43). They also instructed him (cf. Mark 2:11). Obviously Jesus had given him enough strength, as well as health, to carry his light mat.

5:9 The invalid experienced healing immediately. Jesus did instantly what God normally does slowly. When the man walked away carrying his mat, he testified to his healing. Normally we cannot immediately use muscles that we have not used for a long time because they atrophy, but this man had the full use of his muscles instantaneously. The prophets had predicted that when Messiah came He would heal the lame (Isa. 35:1-7). Here was proof for all Jerusalem to see that Messiah had appeared. He had healed a man whom sickness had bound for 38 years.

By carrying his pallet on the Sabbath the man triggered a controversy. By commanding him to do so Jesus was responsible for the situation that followed. Indeed He deliberately created it.

2. The antagonism of the Jewish authorities 5:10-18

More than once Jesus used His Sabbath activities to make the Jews consider who He was (cf. Matt. 12:1-14; Mark 2:23—3:6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6). Here He wanted them to realize that He had the right to work on the Sabbath as His Father did. This is the first open hostility to Jesus that John recorded.

5:10 According to the prevailing Jewish interpretation of the law it was not legitimate to carry anything from one place to another on the Sabbath (cf. Neh. 13:15; Jer. 17:21-27). Doing so constituted a capital offense that could result in stoning. The rabbis allowed for exceptional cases such as moving a lame person for compassionate reasons.[234] God's intent in the fourth commandment was to free people from having to work to earn a living for one day out of seven (Exod. 20:9-11; Deut. 5:12-15). Therefore this healed paralytic was not breaking the intent of the law, but he was violating the rabbinic interpretation of it.

5:11-13 The healed man passed the responsibility for his disobeying the rabbis' rule off by blaming Jesus. This was no way to express gratitude for what Jesus had done for him (cf. v. 15). He probably feared for his life. The Jewish leaders wanted to know who had dared to contradict the accepted meaning of the fourth commandment. In their eyes He was a worse offender than the man who had carried his pallet.

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[233]Morris, p. 269.
[234]Mishnah *Sabbath* 7:2; 10:5.

Notice that they did not show any interest in the man's well condition. It should have identified the Messiah to them, but they saw the Healer as simply an offender.

The man did not know who Jesus was. This indicates that it was not his faith that had elicited the healing as much as God's grace reaching out to a needy person. Jesus had slipped away probably to avoid premature confrontation (cf. 6:15; 8:59; 10:39; 12:36).

It is not at all clear whether this man believed on Jesus. We do not know either if he sought a closer relationship with Jesus following his healing. Many people accept God's gifts but ignore the giver. Some experience miracles but do not go to heaven. Apparently it was not the reaction of this man that John wanted to emphasize but the lesson on the importance of believing in Him that Jesus used the occasion of this healing to teach.

5:14 Sometime shortly after that Jesus found the man in the temple precincts that stood south of the Bethesda Pool in Jerusalem. Evidently Jesus had been looking for him. He warned the man not to use his healing as an opportunity to participate in sin or worse consequences than his former ailment would befall him (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). He may have had eternal damnation as well as immediate consequences in mind since the man showed no evidence of possessing eternal life. Certainly not everyone whom Jesus healed experienced regeneration. Jesus' point was that the man should regard his new health as an opportunity to make a new break with sin (cf. Gal. 5:13).

5:15 The man did not seem to have wanted to glorify Jesus by telling the authorities about Him. He knew that they wanted to find Jesus because they considered Him a lawbreaker. Clearly the ungrateful man wanted to save his own skin by implicating Jesus. He did not appreciate Jesus' warning (v. 14). It is possible that the man was simply stupid. However the evidence seems to point more convincingly to a hard heart rather than to a hard head.

"The lame man is an example of someone who responded inappropriately to Jesus' signs. . . . Thus he 'represents those whom even the signs cannot lead to authentic faith.'"[235]

5:16 "These things" seem to refer to Jesus' acts of healing the man and commanding him to take up his mat and walk. Rather than worshipping Him, or at least considering His claims, the Jewish authorities persecuted Jesus for doing what they considered to be work on the Sabbath. Their persecution initially took the form of verbal opposition, as the following verses clarify.

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[235]Howard, p. 72. His quotation is from R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Four Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, p. 138.

5:17 Jesus defended Himself by stating that He was doing God's work. The rabbis regarded God as working on the Sabbath by simply maintaining the universe and continuing to impart life. They did not accuse Him of violating the Sabbath.[236] Jesus, too, viewed God as constantly at work. Jesus claimed to be doing what God did. God did not suspend His activities on the Sabbath and neither did Jesus.

This was a virtual claim to deity. Jesus was claiming that His relationship to the law was the same as God's, not the same as man's. Moreover by speaking of God as "My Father" Jesus was claiming a relationship with Him that was unique from that of the Jews corporately. The work that Jesus had done was the same kind as the Father's work. He provided deliverance and a new life for the paralyzed man as the Father provides salvation for those whom sin has bound. Obviously Jesus was arguing differently here than in the instances of Sabbath controversy that the Synoptics record.

> "The most notable feature about Jesus in the Fourth Gospel . . . is the control He displayed over all persons and situations."[237]

5:18 The Jewish leaders did not miss the force of what Jesus was claiming, namely, equality with the Father.[238] John here noted that these Jews had already been trying to do away with Him. These claims increased their efforts.

To the modern western mind the idea of "son" connotes a different person, but the ancient oriental mind thought of a "son" as the extension of his father. The word connoted identification with rather than difference from. The ancients considered a good son as one who followed in his father's footsteps exactly.

Jesus was equal with God in His essence. Both the Father and the Son are deity. However Jesus was not equal with the Father in His subsistence. The Son was subordinate to the Father in this respect. This distinction is one that the Jewish leaders struggled with and that Jesus proceeded to clarify partially.

The emphasis in this section of the text is on Jesus being an extension of His Father and the legitimacy of His continuing His Father's work even on the Sabbath.

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[236]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 247.
[237]Tom Thatcher, "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):448.
[238]Liberal interpreters who say that Jesus never claimed to be God have a difficult time with this passage.

3. The Son's equality with the Father 5:19-29

The preceding controversy resulted in Jesus clarifying His relationship to His Father further. Jesus proceeded to reply to His enemies' charge that He was not equal with God the Father. This is the most thoroughgoing statement of Jesus' unity with the Father, divine commission, authority, and proof of Messiahship in the Gospels. Jesus moved from clarifying His relationship to the Father to explaining His function as the judge of humanity to citing the witnesses that established His claims.

5:19 Jesus introduced his reply with another solemn affirmation. He began by assuring the Jewish leaders that He was not claiming independence from the Father. He was definitely subordinate to Him, and He followed the Father's lead (cf. 4:34; 5:30; 8:28; 12:50; 15:10; Luke 5:17). Jesus described His relationship to the Father as similar to that of a son growing up in a household who learns a trade from his father while remaining submissive to him. The Son of God receives authority from the Father, obeys Him, and executes His will. Jesus would have to be God to do this perfectly. It was also impossible for the Son to act independently or to set Himself against the Father as against another God.

> "Equality of nature, identity of objective, and subordination of will are interrelated in Christ. John presents him as the Son, not as the slave, of God, yet as the perfect agent of the divine purpose and the complete revelation of the divine nature."[239]

> "Some have mistakenly said that Jesus was here disclaiming equality with the Father. On the contrary, the whole context argues the opposite (vv. 18, . . . 23, 26). Our Lord is simply saying that He and the Father work together (cp. v. 17)."[240]

5:20 Jesus next clarified how He could do whatever the Father does. He could do so because the Father loves the Son (cf. 3:36). Moreover the Father shows the Son whatever the Father does. Continuous disclosure indicates love. The greater works than "these" (i.e., the healing of a paralytic and commanding him to carry his mat on the Sabbath) include giving life to the dead (v. 21) and pronouncing final judgment (v. 22). Part of the purpose of these greater works was to face His critics with His divine authority so they would consider His claims.

5:21 The fact that the Father discloses all He does to the Son and the Son does whatever the Father does is clear from the Son's giving life to the dead. The Jews acknowledged that only God could raise the dead (2 Kings 5:7;

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[239]Tenney, "John," p. 64.
[240]*The New Scofield* . . ., p. 1130.

Ezek. 37:13). This involves overcoming the forces of sin and death. Jesus claimed that authority now, and He demonstrated it later (11:41-44). His healings were a lesser demonstration of the same power. The Son's will is so identical to the Father's that His choices reflect the Father's will. Eternal spiritual life and resurrected physical life are both in view.

5:22 This verse probably explains the former one rather than being parallel to it, which the NIV translation implies. The roles of the Father and the Son are parallel in verse 21, but there is a distinction between them in this verse. The Father and the Son both give life, but the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (cf. Acts 17:31).

> "This was something new to Jews. They held that the Father was the Judge of all people [cf. Gen. 18:25], and they expected to stand before him at the last day."[241]

The Son's giving life is in preparation for His judging. Judgment here probably includes discriminating as well as announcing final condemnation. This verse clarifies the roles of the Father and the Son whereas 3:17 deals with the primary purpose of the Son's incarnation.

5:23 The reason for this delegation is that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. Subordination usually results in less honor. The Father has guaranteed that the Son will receive equal honor with Himself by committing the role of judging entirely to Him. Therefore failure to honor the Son reflects failure to honor the Father. Conversely honoring the Son honors the Father (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). God will not share His honor with another (Isa. 42:8, 10-12). Consequently for Him to share His honor with the Son must mean that the Son and the Father are one in essence.

> "The 'religious' people who say that they worship God, but who deny the deity of Christ, have neither the Father nor the Son!"[242]

5:24 Jesus proceeded to develop one idea from the preceding argument more fully. He introduced it with a solemn affirmation. Jesus said that He gave life to whomever He pleased (v. 21). He now described these people as those who hear His word and believe the Father. They will not experience condemnation (cf. 3:18; Rom. 6:14; 8:1) but begin already to experience eternal life (cf. 3:36; Eph. 2:1, 5).[243] They pass from one realm to another the moment they believe (cf. 1 John 3:14)

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[241]Morris, p. 279.
[242]Wiersbe, 1:306. These people include Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarian Universalists.
[243]See Harris, pp. 235-37, for a discussion of realized eschatology in John's Gospel.

Jesus' word had brought new life to the paralytic (v. 8). His word will also bring eternal life or eternal death to everyone. His word is the same as the Father's word since the Son only says what the Father gives Him to say (v. 19). Jesus specified the Father as the object of faith because He had just explained that the Son mediates everything from the Father, not because Jesus is an inappropriate object of faith (cf. 3:16; 14:1). The Son represents the Father to humankind, so when we place faith in the Son we are placing it in the Father as well.

Therefore the believer's basis of eternal security and his or her assurance of eternal life both rest on the promise of the Son.

> "To have eternal life now is to be secure throughout eternity.
>
> "The words of this verse should not be taken simply as a statement of fact. They are that. Anyone who hears and believes has eternal life. But the words also constitute an invitation, a challenge. They are a call to hear Christ and to take the step of faith."[244]

5:25 Jesus continued to describe what believers will experience in the future fully that they already experience now in measure (cf. 4:23), namely, resurrection life. We will experience it in the future physically, but we experience it now spiritually. Jesus' word gives believers spiritual life now, and it will raise the dead in the future (cf. vv. 28-29; 11:43).

5:26 This verse explains how Jesus can do these things. He can do them because He has life resident within Himself. He is self-existent whereas humans receive their life from Him, the source of life. This quality of the Son is another that came to Him by the Father's good pleasure before Creation (cf. v. 22; 1:4).

5:27 Similarly God has given the Son authority to judge (vv. 21-22). Jesus revealed an additional reason for this here. It is because Jesus is "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13-14). He is the Anointed One whom God has sent, but He is also fully human. Jesus can judge humanity because He belongs to it and understands it (cf. Heb. 2:17). The absence of a definite article before the title stresses the quality of Jesus as "Son of Man" (cf. Heb. 1:2).[245]

5:28-29 Jesus urged His hearers not to marvel that it would be His voice that would summon the dead eventually (cf. 11:43). All the dead will hear the Son of Man's voice in the future calling them forth to judgment. Believers are those who do good, which involves believing on the Son (6:29; cf.

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[244]Morris, p. 280.

[245]H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 149.

3:21). Theirs will be a resurrection resulting in eternal life. Those who do evil by not believing on the Son (3:36; cf. 3:19) will experience eternal condemnation following their resurrection.[246] As always, judgment is on the basis of works.

Another view is that only unbelievers are in view in both descriptions.[247] However believers and unbelievers have both been prominent throughout the foregoing discussion.[248]

4. The Father's witness to the Son 5:30-47

Jesus now returned to develop a theme that He had introduced previously, namely, the Father's testimony to the Son (vv. 19-20). Jesus proceeded to cite five witnesses to His identity, all of which came from the Father, since the Jews had questioned His authority.

5:30 This verse is transitional. It concludes Jesus' explanation of the Son's equality with the Father (vv. 19-29), and it introduces His clarification of the Father's testimony about the Son (vv. 31-47). Some translations consider it the conclusion of the preceding pericope (e.g., NIV), and others take it as the beginning of the next one (e.g., NASB).

Jesus' point was that He could not do anything independent of the Father because of His submission to Him. His judgment is the result of listening to His Father. His judgment is just because the desire for self-glory does not taint it. The Son's will is totally to advance the Father's will.

5:31-32 Jesus had said that the Son can do nothing independently of the Father (vv. 19, 30). That includes even bearing witness. Jesus did not mean that if He said anything about Himself it must be false, though apparently some of the Jews thought He meant that (cf. 8:13). He meant that the truthfulness of His claims about Himself did not rest on His own testimony exclusively. Jesus had said that He only said and did what the Father said and did. Therefore Jesus' witness about Himself must reflect the Father's witness about Him. The "another" that bore witness about Jesus was the Father. Jesus was not speaking of the Father's witness as essentially different from His own witness. He viewed His own witness as simply an extension of the Father's witness since He always faithfully represented the Father's will.[249]

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[246]Jesus spoke of three different resurrections in this passage: the dead in sin who rise to new life spiritually (vv. 24-25), the physical resurrection of believers (vv. 25, 28-29), and the physical resurrection of unbelievers (vv. 28-29).

[247]Barrett, p. 263.

[248]See also Zane C. Hodges, "Those Who Have Done Good—John 5:28-29," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:542 (April-June 1979):158-66.

[249]See Tenney, "Topics from . . .," pp. 229-41, "The Meaning of 'Witness' in John."

Some students of John's Gospel have thought that Jesus contradicted what He said here in 8:14, but there He was speaking about His personal knowledge as the basis for His testimony about Himself. Here He was speaking about the Father's witness to His identity.

> "The witness of the Father may not be acceptable to the Jews; it may not even be recognized by them. But it is enough for Jesus. He knows that this witness is 'true.' . . . It is the witness of the Father and nothing else that brings conviction to him."[250]

5:33 Jesus knew that His critics would not accept the Father's witness to His identity even though Jesus claimed that His words accurately represented the Father's will. He could not prove this claim to their satisfaction. Therefore He cited another human witness who testified about Jesus' identity, namely, John the Baptist. John came into the world to bear witness to the light (1:7). Moreover he had borne witness about Jesus to the Jews who had come from Jerusalem to ask who He was (1:19-28). Furthermore he had identified Jesus publicly as the Lamb of God (1:29-34). John had truly testified that Jesus was the divine Messiah (cf. 1:40-41).

5:34 However, Jesus did not need and did not accept human testimony to establish His identity in His own mind. All the witness He needed was the Father's. He only mentioned John the Baptist's witness to establish His identity in His hearers' minds that they might believe on Him and obtain salvation.

5:35 Jesus again gave a brief evaluation of John the Baptist's ministry. Evidently John's public ministry had ended by this time since Jesus spoke of his witness as past. John was not the true light (Gr. *phos*, 1:8-9), but he was a lamp (Gr. *lychnos*) that bore witness (cf. Ps. 132:17; 2 Cor. 4:6-7). John's ministry had caused considerable messianic excitement. Unfortunately most of John's hearers only chose to follow his teaching temporarily (2:23-25). When Jesus appeared, they did not follow Him. Thus John's witness to Jesus' identity was true, but it had little continuing impact.

5:36 Jesus had weightier evidence of His identity than John's witness. It came from His Father and took several forms. The first of these forms was the works (Gr. *erga*, not "work," NIV) that Jesus performed (cf. 10:25; 14:11). These works included all of Jesus' activities, including His miracles, His life of perfect obedience, and His work of redemption on the cross. Miracles alone did not prove Jesus' deity since Moses, Elijah, and Elisha had done miracles too. All that Jesus did was simply an extension of the

[250]Morris, p. 288.

Father's work (vv. 19-30). Once we understand the Father Son relationship we can see that all that Jesus said and did was what the Father said and did.

5:37-38 Another witness to Jesus' identity was the Father's witness apart from Jesus' works. The form that this witness took as Jesus thought of it is not clear. Perhaps He meant the witness that the Father had given at His baptism. However, John did not narrate that event in this Gospel, though he recorded John the Baptist's witness of it (cf. 1:32-34). Probably Jesus meant the Father's total witness to Jesus including Old Testament prophecies, prophetic events and institutions, including His witness at Jesus' baptism. He probably meant all of God's anticipatory revelation about Jesus (cf. Heb. 1:1).[251] Jesus probably did not mean the Father's witness through the Old Testament exclusively since He mentioned that later (v. 39). Another improbable meaning is the internal witness of the Spirit (6:45; 1 John 5:9-12). That idea seems too far removed from the present context.

In spite of the Father's witness Jesus' hearers had not heard it because of their unbelief. Unlike Moses and Jacob they had neither heard God's voice nor seen Him (Exod. 33:11; Gen. 32:30-31) even though Jesus' words were the Father's words and those who saw Jesus had virtually seen God (3:34; 14:9-10; 17:8). Furthermore God's word did not abide in them, as it had in Joshua and the psalmist (cf. Josh. 1:8-9; Ps. 119:11). Jesus was the living Word of God, and these Jews had little time for Him. The Jewish authorities had not grasped the significance of God's previous testimony concerning the Son, which Jesus summarized here as threefold evidence. Jesus may have been implying that His critics were not true Israelites. They had not done what their forefather had done even though Jesus was a clearer revelation of God than the patriarchs had.

5:39-40 Even though the Jews diligently sought God in the pages of their Scriptures they failed to recognize Jesus for who He was. The Greek verb translated "search" could be an imperative (AV) or an indicative (NASB, NIV). The context favors the indicative mood. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were serious students of the Old Testament, but they studied it for the wrong reason, namely, to earn eternal life through their effort (cf. Rom. 7:10; Gal. 3:21).

> "After the destruction of the temple of Solomon in 586 B.C., the Jewish scholars of the Exile substituted the study of the Law for the observance of the temple ritual and sacrifices. They pored over the OT, endeavoring to extract

[251]Lightfoot, pp. 146-47.

> the fullest possible meaning from its words, because they believed that the very study itself would bring them life."[252]

The study of Scripture had become an end in itself rather than a way of getting to know God better. Their failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah testified to their lack of perceiving the true message of Scripture (cf. 1:45; 2:22; 3:10; 5:45-46; 20:9; 2 Cor. 3:15). Life comes through Jesus, not through Bible study (vv. 21, 26; cf. 1:4; Rom. 10:4). As John the Baptist, the Old Testament pointed away from itself to Jesus.

5:41-42 Jesus did not appeal to the testimony of humans to determine His own identity (v. 35) nor did he receive the praise (Gr. *doxa*) of people for this purpose. Jesus' criticisms of His hearers did not arise from wounded pride. He said what He did to win the Father's praise, not man's. Jesus' critics, in contrast, behaved to receive praise from one another (cf. v. 44). Jesus knew them well, but they did not know Him. Love for God did not motivate them as it did Him.

> "The Jews worked out their pattern of religion and tried to fit God into it. They did not seek first the way of God and then try to model their religious practices on it. They succumbed to the perennial temptation of religious people."[253]

5:43 These critics failed to come to Jesus for life (v. 40) also because they refused to acknowledge that He had come from the Father. In rejecting Jesus they had rejected the Father's ambassador who had come in His name and, therefore, the Father Himself. If they had known and loved the Father, they would have recognized Jesus' similarity to the Father. Having rejected the true Messiah the religious leaders would follow false messiahs. Rejection of what is true always makes one susceptible to counterfeits (cf. Luke 23:18-23).

5:44 Jesus' critics could not believe on Him because they preferred the praise of men to the praise of God. They consistently chose what was popular over what was true. In contrast, Jesus lived solely for God's glory and did not pander to the praise of people (cf. Rom. 2:29).

5:45-46 These critics' most severe indictment would not come from Jesus but from Moses whom they so strongly professed to follow but did not. Moses never taught that the Law was an end in itself. He pointed the people to the coming Prophet and urged them to listen to Him (Deut. 18:15-19). They had refused to do this. Moreover these Jews had broken the law that Moses had urged them to follow. Furthermore Jesus' primary function was

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[252]Tenney, "John," p. 68.
[253]Morris, p. 294.

to save, not to judge (3:17). The Jews typically hoped that they could earn salvation by keeping the Law and believed that their relationship to it as Jews gave them a special advantage with God. They had set their hope on Moses in that respect. They foolishly hoped in Moses rather than in the One to whom Moses pointed. If they had paid attention to Moses, they would have felt conviction for their sin and would have been eager to receive the Savior. If they had really believed Moses, they would also have believed Jesus.

5:47 Jesus' critics did not believe Moses' writings or they would have accepted Jesus. Since they rejected Moses' writings it was natural that they would reject Jesus' words. Both men spoke the words of God who was their authority. The Jews rejection of Moses' writings was essentially a rejection of God's Word.[254]

This discourse constituted a condemnation of Jesus' critics and an invitation to believe on Him. Jesus cited much testimony that God the Father had given that identified Jesus as the divine Messiah. These witnesses were, beside God the Father, John the Baptist, all of Jesus' works, all that the Father had previously revealed that pointed to Jesus, the Old Testament, and specifically the witness of Moses in the Torah (Pentateuch).

John omitted many events in the life of Jesus that the Synoptic evangelists recorded as happening between John 5:47 and 6:1. These include the resumption of Jesus' Galilean ministry (Matt. 5—7; 8:5-13, 18, 23-34; 9:18-35; 10:1—13:53; 14:1-12; Mark 2:23—6:30; Luke 6:1—9:10a).

G. JESUS' LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY 6:1—7:9

This section of the text records the high point of Jesus' popularity. His following continued to build, and antagonism continued to increase. This is the only section in John that narrates Jesus' later Galilean ministry, which occupies so much of the Synoptic Gospels.

1. The fourth sign: feeding the 5,000 6:1-15 (cf. Matt. 14:13-23; Mark 6:30-46; Luke 9:10-17)

The importance of this sign is clear in that all four Gospels contain an account of it. Apparently John was familiar with the other evangelists' versions of this miracle as well as being an eyewitness of the event. His story compliments the others (cf. vv. 5, 15). This miracle demonstrated Jesus' authority over quantity.[255] It constitutes further proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

6:1 After an undesignated lapse of time (cf. 5:1), Jesus traveled to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. That was the more sparsely populated side where

[254]Note Jesus' belief that Moses wrote the Torah (Pentateuch), something many critical scholars deny.
[255]Tenney, *John: The Gospel* . . ., p. 312.

fewer Jews and more Gentiles lived. It was particularly to the northeast coast that He went (cf. Matt. 14:13; Mark 6:32; Luke 9:10). Evidently John's readers knew this lake as the Sea of Tiberias. Tiberias was the chief city on its western coast. Herod Antipas had founded it in A.D. 20 and had named it in honor of the current Roman emperor who ruled from A.D. 15 to 35.

6:2-3 Multitudes followed Jesus because they wanted to profit from His miraculous powers as well as hear Him teach (cf. 2:23-25).

> "Like the vast majority of men and women, they [these Galileans] supposed that their needs as human beings were limited to their physical requirements. They were, in consequence, very ready to accept Jesus as a political Christ, who would be a purveyor of cheap food and establish an economic Utopia, for that would render the task of satisfying these physical needs less laborious."[256]

Jesus went up on the mountainside to be alone with His disciples who had just returned from their mission throughout the towns of Galilee (Mark 6:30-32; Luke 9:10). He had just heard that Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist (Matt. 14:12-13). The crowd soon found Him, and He healed many of the people and taught them (Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:33-34; Luke 9:11). Only John mentioned that this happened on a mountainside. Perhaps he did this so his readers would see a parallel with what happened on Mt. Sinai (vv. 31-32; cf. Exod. 16:21). Possibly it is just a detail that he as an eyewitness observed.

6:4 Evidently John identified the nearness of the Passover because of Jesus' later references to Himself as the Bread of Life (vv. 33, 35, 51), the fulfillment of what the Passover bread typified.

> "The people were thinking in terms of blood, flesh, lambs, and unleavened bread. They longed for a new Moses who would deliver them from Roman bondage."[257]

This was John's second reference to a Passover feast during Jesus' ministry (cf. 2:13, 23; 11:55; 13:1). Evidently this event happened two years after Jesus' first cleansing of the temple and one year before He died on the cross. It would have taken place in April of A.D. 32.[258]

> "The movement from the miracle to the discourse, from Moses to Jesus (*vv*. 32-5, *cf*. i. 17), and, above all, from

[256]Tasker, pp. 92-93.
[257]Blum, p. 293.
[258]See Hoehner, pp. 55-59, 61, 143.

> *bread* to *flesh*, is almost unintelligible unless the reference in *v*. 4 to the Passover picks up i. 29, 36, anticipates xix. 36 (Exod. xii. 46; Num. ix. 12), and governs the whole narrative."[259]

The Passover was an intensely nationalistic celebration in Israel. This accounts for the extreme zeal that many of the Jews demonstrated when they sought to draft Jesus as their political deliverer (v. 15).

6:5-6 John telescoped the events of the day. He omitted mention of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry (Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11) as well as the disciples' concern for food (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:35-36; Luke 9:12). Instead he focused on the miracle. His account also shows Jesus' initiative in solving the food problem. Only John recorded that Jesus approached Philip about the need. This would have been normal since Philip was from Bethsaida, the nearest sizable town (1:44). John also explained that Jesus' question was a test in Philip's discipleship training, not an indication that Jesus wondered what to do initially.

6:7 Philip, too, as Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, was thinking only on the physical level. Two hundred denarii represented about eight month's wages for a workingman. Such a large sum might be the minimum they could scrape by with, but it would not provide enough bread to satisfy the people. Philip, as an accountant, put his mental calculator to work and concluded that the situation was hopeless.

6:8-9 Andrew had discovered a young lad (Gr. *paidarion*, a double diminutive) who had five small barley biscuits and two small fish (Gr. *opsaria*). Probably the fish would have served as a relish to eat with the bread.[260] Barley bread was the food of the poor. One writer called the boy's food mere "hors d'oeuvres."[261] Andrew seems to have felt embarrassed that he had even suggested such an inadequate solution to the problem.

John may have intended his unique inclusion of the details of this boy and his lunch to remind his readers of Elisha's similar miracle (2 Kings 4:42-44). The same Greek word for "boy" occurs in the Septuagint translation of that story (2 Kings 4:38, 41). The main point, however, was the lack of adequate food and Jesus' ability to feed a multitude with such meager resources.

6:10 When the disciples had confessed their own inadequacy Jesus proceeded to demonstrate His adequacy. He instructed the disciples to seat the multitude on the comfortable grass. Perhaps we should view Jesus as the

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[259]Hoskyns, p. 281.
[260]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 270.
[261]Tenney, "John," p. 72.

Good Shepherd making His sheep lie down in green pastures (cf. Ps. 23:2). Perhaps Jesus did this also to discourage the people from rushing madly for the food once they realized what was happening. All four evangelists recorded the size of the crowd in terms of the males present. This was customary since these people lived in a predominantly paternalistic culture. The scene also recalls Moses feeding the Israelites in the wilderness with bread from heaven.

6:11 Jesus first thanked God for the food in prayer, as pious Jews normally did (cf. v. 23). In this He set a good example. We should give thanks for what we have, and God will make it go farther. Jesus multiplied the food evidently as he broke it apart and distributed it to the people. John stressed the lavishness of Jesus' supply. The Son of God has always been the perfectly sufficient provider of people's needs.

John probably did not intend that we make connections with the Lord's Supper. He omitted references that would have obviously connected the two meals such as the breaking of the bread and the distribution of the pieces. John omitted referring to the disciples' role in assisting Jesus by serving the people probably to keep Jesus central in the narrative. Obviously there is nothing in the text to support the popular liberal interpretation that the miracle consisted of Jesus making the people willing to share their food.

6:12-13 Everyone had enough to eat. Jesus satisfied everyone's appetite. There was even quite a bit of food left over that Jesus instructed His disciples to collect to avoid waste. All four evangelists noted that there were 12 large Jewish baskets (Gr. *kophinos*) of bread fragments left over. Commentators have suggested that they represent food for the disciples or food for Israel's 12 tribes. At least this detail proves the abundance of Jesus' provision for the people who were present. Each of the Twelve had his own evidence of Jesus' supernatural power and His adequacy.

6:14 The Jews who enjoyed Jesus' provision concluded that He must be the prophet whom Moses had predicted (Deut. 18:15-19; cf. John 1:21; 7:40, 52). Jesus had fed the Israelites in a wilderness area (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:35) as Moses had with bread that came from heaven.

6:15 Moses had also provided military leadership for the Israelites and had liberated them from the oppression of the Egyptians. These Jews concluded that Jesus could do the same for them and sought to secure His political leadership forcefully. This decision marks the apogee of Jesus' popularity. Jesus realized their intention and withdrew from the crowd by ascending the mountainside farther by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46). The time was not right for Him to establish His kingdom on earth.

This sign demonstrated Jesus' identity as the Son of God, and it prepared for Jesus' revelation of Himself as the Bread of Life (vv. 22-59).[262]

Notice that this sign illustrates three solutions to problems that people typically try. First, Philip suggested that *money* was the solution to the problem (v. 7). Second, Andrew looked to *people* for the solution (v. 9). Third, *Jesus* proved to be the true solution (v. 11).[263] In satisfying the need of the people, Jesus used what someone made available to Him. In this case, as in most others, He used a very insignificant person, in the sight of other people, with very insignificant resources. Jesus did not create food out of thin air.

> "The practical lesson is clear: whenever there is a need, give all that you have to Jesus and let Him do the rest. Begin with what you have, but be sure you give it all to Him."[264]

2. The fifth sign: walking on the water 6:16-21 (cf. Matt. 14:24-33; Mark 6:47-52)

John probably included this incident for a number of reasons. It accounts for the return of Jesus and His disciples to the western shore of Galilee where Jesus gave the discourse on the Bread of Life. Perhaps he did so to continue the Exodus theme (cf. vv. 14-15). It is primarily further proof that Jesus was the Son of God as He claimed. The disciples went from the thrill of great success to the agony of great danger. The feeding of the 5,000 was a lesson, and Jesus' walking on the water was the test following the lesson.

6:16 "Evening" could refer to anytime in the late afternoon before sunset. The feeding of the 5,000 evidently happened on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee south of Bethsaida Julius. This town stood immediately east of the place where the Jordan River empties into the lake on its northern coast. Some of the town may have been on the western side of the Jordan.[265] Evidently Jesus sent His disciples to this town by boat (Mark 6:45).

6:17-18 The disciples' ultimate destination was Capernaum. They evidently reached Bethsaida Julius and waited there for Jesus to join them. When He did not appear by nightfall, they decided to travel on to Capernaum without Him.

In John's Gospel darkness often has symbolic significance implying a bad situation (cf. 3:2; 13:30). Jesus' absence cast another foreboding cloud over the disciples. To make the occasion even worse a strong wind came up and created a storm on the lake. The wind normally came from the

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[262]See Stephen S. Kim, "The Christological and Eschatological Significance of Jesus' Passover Signs in John 6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):307-22.

[263]A fourth solution appears in the other Gospel accounts of the miracle (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:36; Luke 9:12): get rid of the problem. The disciples told Jesus to send the people away, to let them fend for themselves (cf. Matt. 15:23).

[264]Wiersbe, 1:309.

[265]D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*, p. 164.

west, the direction in which the disciples headed. Mark described the disciples as straining at the oars (Mark 6:48).

6:19 The distance the disciples had rowed in the Greek text is 25 or 30 stadia, which is between two and three quarters miles and three and a half miles. Matthew and Mark wrote that the disciples were in the middle of the lake probably meaning that they were well out into it (Matt. 14:24; Mark 6:47). Some scholars wishing to depreciate this miracle have translated the Greek preposition *epi* as "by" rather than "on."[266] However, the context and the Synoptics clearly present Jesus as walking on the water, not on the shore beside the water.

Mark reported that the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost (Mark 6:49). John simply described them as frightened. This emphasis has the effect of stressing Jesus' alleviation of their fear. The fear of the disciples and Jesus' ability to calm their fear is the point of John's record of this miracle. Jesus met the disciples between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48).

> "Sometimes we are caught in a storm because we have disobeyed the Lord. Jonah is a good example. But sometimes the storm comes because we have *obeyed* the Lord. When that happens, we can be sure that our Saviour will pray for us, come to us, and deliver us. . . . Jesus had led His people into the green pastures (John 6:10), and now He brought them into the still waters (Ps. 23:2). What a wonderful Shepherd He is!"[267]

6:20 Jesus identified Himself by saying literally "I am" (Gr. *ego eimi*). This is sometimes a way Jesus described Himself as God as John recorded Jesus' words (e.g., 8:24). However the clause does not always mean that since it is the normal way of identifying oneself (cf. 9:9). In those instances the translation, "It is I," gives the intended meaning. Here Jesus was just identifying Himself to the disciples though obviously someone who could walk on water was more than a mere man.

6:21 When the disciples realized that it was Jesus, they willingly received Him into the boat. Perhaps Jesus met the disciples fairly close to their destination and so it did not take them long to arrive there. Perhaps with Jesus in the boat the remaining trip appeared to them to be a short one, or with the wind subdued it did not take them long to reach land. Any of these explanations could account for John's description. Many commentators believed that John referred to a second miracle and that the boat supernaturally reached Capernaum swiftly. There seems little point to such a miracle, however, and there is nothing in the text that explains it.

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[266]E.g., Bernard, 1:186.
[267]Wiersbe, 1:310.

The feeding of the 5,000 presents Jesus as the provider of people's needs. His walking on the water pictures Him as the protector of those who trust and obey Him. The second of these two signs taught the disciples that Jesus had authority over nature (cf. Job 38:8-11; Ps. 29:3-4, 10-11; 65:5-7; 89:9; 107:29).[268] John undoubtedly recorded the incident to teach his readers the same lesson. Both miracles demonstrated Jesus' equality with the Father, whom Old Testament writers described as doing these things.

3. The bread of life discourse 6:22-59

Jesus proceeded to clarify His identity by teaching the crowds and His disciples. He did so by developing the figure of the Bread of Life, which He claimed to be. Jesus used the feeding of the 5,000 as a basis for explaining His identity to the multitudes. He compared Himself to bread.

> "Again, it was a ministry of 'grace and truth' (John 1:17). In grace, our Lord fed the hungry people; but in truth, He gave them the Word of God."[269]

The people's search for Jesus 6:22-25

The multitude on the "other side" must have been near the northeast shore where Jesus had fed the 5,000 south of Bethsaida. They were across the lake from the northwestern shore where Jesus and the disciples now were, in Capernaum. They could not figure out where Jesus could have gone. The disciples had left in one boat without Jesus. There was only one other boat still there. Jesus had not used it to leave the area. While they waited for Jesus to appear, other boats with people from Tiberias, on the western shore, arrived. Eventually the crowd realized that Jesus was not in that region, so they boarded the boats that had come from Tiberias and set out for Capernaum. They probably thought they could find Jesus there because Capernaum was His headquarters. When they did find Him, they wanted to discover how He got there.

Why did John bother to relate this seemingly unimportant information? Apparently he did so to document the fact that Jesus really had crossed the lake by walking on the water. Another reason could be that his description supports Jesus' statement that the people sought Him (v. 26). In view of what these people proceeded to demand of Jesus (vv. 30-31) it was important that John show that they were the very people who had witnessed the sign of the miraculous feeding.

Jesus' creating desire for the bread 6:26-34

This section of the text contains Jesus' enigmatic and attractive description of the Bread of Life. Jesus was whetting His hearers' appetites for it (cf. 4:10). The pericope ends with them asking Him to give them the Bread (v. 34).

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[268]Tenney, *John: The Gospel* . . ., p. 132.
[269]Wiersbe, 1:310.

6:26 Jesus' introductory words identified another very important statement (cf. vv. 32, 47, 53). He did not answer their question (v. 25) and tell them that He had walked across the surface of the lake. He did not want them to follow Him primarily because He could do miracles. He understood that their interest in Him was mainly because of His ability to provide for them physically. They were not interested in Him because they identified Him as the God-man but because Jesus could fill their stomachs. Many people today are only interested in Jesus because of the benefits He may give them. Jesus proceeded to explain what the miracle they had witnessed signified.

6:27 Jesus had previously spoken to the Samaritan woman about living water (4:10, 14), and now He spoke to these Galileans about food that endures. He was, as previously, contrasting physical and spiritual nourishment. Consequently the descriptions that follow contain a mixture of literal and metaphorical language. Jesus wanted His hearers to view the spiritual aspects of His mission as more important than its physical aspects.

The people apparently understood His reference to bread that endures to eternal life as meaning physical bread that does not become stale and moldy. As the Son of Man, Jesus claimed to be able to give this food because God the Father had set His seal of approval on Jesus. The Father had authorized the Son to act for Him (cf. 5:32-47). This was one of the functions of a seal in Jesus' culture. Jesus was speaking of Himself as the food (vv. 35, 53). The Son would give this food and eternal life, but the people had a responsibility to work for it too.

6:28 The works of God are the works that God requires to obtain the food that remains, even eternal life. The people were still thinking on the physical level. They thought Jesus was talking about some physical work that would yield eternal life. Moreover they assumed that they could do it and that by doing it they could earn eternal life. They ignored Jesus' statement that He would give them eternal life (cf. Rom. 10:2-4). There is something within the fallen nature of human beings that makes working for eternal life more attractive than receiving it as a gift.

6:29 The only work that God requires of people for salvation is faith in His Son (cf. 3:11-17). The work that Jesus specified was not something physical at all. It was what God requires, namely, trust in Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:28). Jesus' reply was a flat contradiction of the idea that people can earn salvation with their good deeds. This is another of the many great evangelistic verses in John's Gospel (1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; et al.).

6:30-31 Jesus had told the people what work they needed to do to obtain eternal life. Now they asked Him what work He would do to prove that He was God's authorized representative as He claimed to be (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). They suggested that producing bread *from heaven* as Moses did might

convince them. Their unwillingness to believe the sign that Jesus had given them the previous day shows the hardness of their hearts. No matter what Jesus did the unbelievers always demanded more.

Probably Jesus' provision of bread for thousands of people the previous day led them to ask for this greater miracle. Some of them had concluded that Jesus might be the Prophet that Moses had predicted (v. 14). If He was, He ought to be able to do greater miracles than Moses did. The manna that Moses produced spoiled if left uneaten overnight, but Jesus seemed to be promising bread that would not spoil.

The source of the people's loose quotation is probably Psalm 78:24. However there are also similarities to Nehemiah 9:15; Exodus 16:4 and 15; and Psalm 105:40.

> "This section of the discourse is to be understood against the background of a Jewish expectation that, when the Messiah came, he would renew the miracle of the manna."[270]

6:32-33 The people were viewing Moses as the source of their blessing in the past. Jesus pointed them beyond Moses to the true source, namely, God. He wanted them to look to God for their needs, not to a human channel of God's blessing.

Jesus also turned the conversation away from the request for a physical sign back to the subject of the bread that satisfies. God had given manna in the past, but He was giving a new type of bread now. Jesus described it as coming down from heaven and providing life for the entire world, not just Israel. With this response Jesus effectively took Moses and his sign, which the people had put in a superior place over Himself, and placed them in an inferior position under Himself. The true (Gr. *alethinos*, genuine or original, cf. 1:9) bread is the bread that satisfies ultimately. In this discourse Jesus mentioned seven times that He had come down out of heaven, stressing the fact that He was God's divine gift (vv. 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58).

6:34 Jesus had glorified the new bread sufficiently now for the people to request it of Him, as he had glorified the living water for the Samaritan woman. He had set them up for the revelation that He was that bread. If they were sincere in their desire for it, they would accept Him. Yet the people did not realize what they were requesting, as the woman at the well did not (cf. 4:15). They were still thinking of physical bread. They wanted this new type of physical bread from then on.

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[270]Morris, p. 320.

Jesus' identification of the bread 6:35-40

6:35 Jesus now identified Himself as the bread about which He had been speaking (cf. v. 47; Isa. 55:1-2). He did not say He *had* the bread of life but that He *was* that bread. He claimed to be able to satisfy completely as bread and water satisfy physically. His hearers did not need to return to Him repeatedly as they had assumed (v. 34) since He would also satisfy permanently (cf. 13:9-10). The "nevers" are emphatic in the Greek text. Coming to Jesus and believing are synonymous concepts just as bread and water together represent total human need. Jesus did not mean that continual dependence on Him was unimportant (cf. 15:4-5). He meant that believing on Him would satisfy the basic human need and desire for life. Again Jesus linked life with Himself. He is what sustains and nourishes spiritual life. It is by feeding on Him that we obtain life initially and continue to flourish spiritually.

Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Life, three times in this discourse (vv. 35, 48, 51), is the first of seven such claims that John recorded Jesus making in his Gospel. Jesus used the same expression (Gr. *ego eimi*, "I am," plus a predicate) in each case.[271] Each one expresses Jesus' relationship to humankind's basic spiritual needs metaphorically.

JESUS' "I AM" CLAIMS		
Title	**Meaning**	**Reference**
The Bread of Life	Satisfier and sustainer of life	6:35, 48
The Light of the World	Dispeller of sin's darkness	8:12
The Gate	Entrance into security and fellowship	10:7, 9
The Good Shepherd	Protector and guide in life	10:11, 14
The Resurrection and the Life	Hope in death	11:25
The Way, the Truth, and the Life	Certainty in perplexity	14:6
The True Vine	Source of vitality and productivity	15:1, 5

> "Jesus is the one who bears the divine name (cf. Ex. 3:14). For John, this story takes on the character of a theophany, not unlike the Transfiguration recorded by the Synoptics."[272]

[271]Two other instances of *ego eimi* and a predicate occur (8:18, 23), but they are slightly different in meaning. *Ego eimi* without the predicate appears in 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; and 18:6.
[272]Harris, p. 177.

6:36 Jesus charged these Galileans with unbelief as He had formerly charged the Judean residents of Jerusalem with it (5:36-38). They had seen Him physically, and on the physical level they had concluded that He might be the predicted Prophet. However, they had not seen who He was spiritually. They did not believe that He was the divine Messiah. Physical sight and spiritual insight are two different things.

6:37 These people's lack of faith did not indicate that Jesus or God's plan had failed, however. The ability to believe on Jesus requires divine enablement. It is only those whom the Father enables to believe that come to Jesus in faith. These are the people whom the Father has given to the Son as gifts. Jesus viewed the ultimate cause of faith as God's electing grace, not man's choice.

Jesus promised not to turn away anyone who came to Him in faith. He used a figure of speech (litotes) to stress strongly the positive fact that all who believe in Him find acceptance and security.[273] In the first part of this verse Jesus spoke of the elect as a group, and in the second part He referred to every individual in the group. Jesus had confidence in the Father drawing the elect to Him, and the believer may have confidence too in the Son receiving and retaining him or her. How can a person know if he or she is one of the elect? Let him or her come to Jesus in faith.

6:38-40 Jesus next explained why He would accept all who come to Him and will preserve them. The purpose of the Incarnation was that the Son would fulfill the Father's will. The Father's will was that the Son should lose no individual of all whom the Father gave Him. Preserving them includes raising them from the dead to eternal life. The distant purpose of the Father is the eternal life of those whom He gives to the Son, namely, those who believe on the Son. Jesus Himself will raise believers. This is an added proof of our security.

> "This thought is of the greatest comfort to believers. Their assurance is based not on their feeble hold on Christ, but on his sure grip on them (cf. 10:28f.)."[274]

Beholding the Son equals believing in Him here. Jesus meant beholding with the eyes of faith. The last day is the day of the resurrection of believers whenever it may occur. It is last in the sense that it will be the last day that we experience mortality.

"John 6:37-40 contains Jesus' explanation of the process of personal salvation. These are among the most profound words He ever spoke, and

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[273]In litotes the speaker or writer affirms a positive truth by negating its opposite. For example, "This is no small matter," is a litotes meaning, "This is a very significant matter."
[274]Morris, p. 326.

> we cannot hope to plumb their depths completely. He explained that salvation involves both divine sovereignty and human responsibility."[275]

The fact of divine election did not embarrass Jesus or John. Even though God has chosen the elect for salvation, they must believe on Jesus. Jesus balanced these truths beautifully in this discourse (cf. 17:1, 6, 9, 24). He likewise affirmed the eternal security of the believer (cf. 17:11-12). If one believer failed to reach heaven, it would be a disgrace for the Son since it would indicate His inability or unwillingness to fulfill the Father's will. Judas Iscariot may appear at first to be an exception, but God did not choose Him for salvation (vv. 70-71; 17:12) even though Jesus chose him as one of the Twelve.

Jesus' identity as the Bread of Life 6:41-51

Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Life that had come down from heaven was something His hearers found hard to accept. Consequently Jesus clarified what He meant further.

6:41-42 Some of Jesus' hearers had known Him all His life. More of them had known Him and His family since they had moved to Capernaum where Jesus gave this discourse (v. 59). His claim to have come down from heaven seemed to them to contradict what they knew about His human origins. Again they were thinking only in physical terms. It is interesting that the Israelites in the wilderness who received the manna from heaven also grumbled (Exod. 15:24; 17:3; Num. 11:4-6). Mankind's dissatisfaction with God's good gifts shows the perversity of the human heart. It was Jesus' claim to a heavenly origin that offended these people, as it had offended the people of Jerusalem (5:18).

In his Gospel John often used the term "the Jews" to represent the Jews who opposed Jesus during His ministry (cf. 2:18, 20; 5:16). It became something of a technical term as he used it. It often means more than just a racial group in this Gospel.

The New Testament reveals nothing about Joseph after Jesus' childhood. He passed off the scene then, but statements such as this one suggest that he had lived in Nazareth as Jesus was growing up. Probably Joseph died sometime before Jesus began His public ministry.

6:43-44 Jesus did not allow the people's confusion about His origin to distress Him. He rebuked their grumbling dissatisfaction with what God had given them. However, He explained that those whom the Father had chosen for salvation among them would believe in Him regardless of their inability to reconcile His earthly and heavenly origins. The important thing for them to do was believe Him, not first harmonize all the apparent contradictions they observed.

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[275]Wiersbe, 1:312.

> "The thought of the divine initiative in salvation is one of the great doctrines of this Gospel, and indeed of the Christian faith."[276]

Jesus clarified also that the Father's drawing (Gr. *helkyo*) is selective (cf. v. 37). He does not just draw everyone in the general sense of extending the gospel invitation to them. He selects some from the mass of humanity and brings them to Himself. It is that minority that Jesus will raise up to eternal life on the last day (cf. v. 40). This truth does not contradict 12:32 where Jesus said that He would draw (Gr. *helkyo*) all men to Himself. There He was speaking of all people without distinction, not just Jews but also Gentiles. He did not mean all people without exception.

6:45 Jesus clarified what God's drawing involves. He cited recognized authority for His statement that all whom the Father had chosen would come to Him. Old Testament prophets had revealed that God would teach His people (Isa. 54:13; cf. Jer. 31:34). Those whom God enlightened about Jesus' identity would believe in Him. That enlightenment comes primarily through the Scriptures, God's principle tool.

> "When he compels belief, it is not by the savage constraint of a rapist, but by the wonderful wooing of a lover."[277]

6:46 Jesus further clarified how God draws people to Himself by explaining how He does not do it. It is not by giving a mystical revelation of Himself in His unveiled splendor to people. Jesus is the only One who has seen God fully (cf. 1:18). He is the only mediator of that knowledge of God without which no one can know God. God teaches people about Himself through Jesus. Listening to Jesus then becomes essential for learning from God. God draws the elect to Himself by revealing Himself through Jesus. The Scriptures bear witness to that revelation.

6:47-48 Jesus introduced His repetition and summary of the essential truth He was teaching with another strong affirmation. This summary continues through verse 51. He repeated what He had told Nicodemus more concisely (3:15). In spite of the truth of the Father's drawing the elect to Himself it is still imperative that they believe in Jesus. This is the human responsibility. However belief in Jesus is not anything meritorious. It is simply the proper response to God's working. The result is eternal or everlasting life that the believer begins to enjoy the moment he or she believes in Jesus. All of this is part of what Jesus meant when He claimed to be the Bread of Life. Eternal life was at stake, not just physical life.

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[276]Morris, p. 328.
[277]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 293.

6:49-50 Jesus had been speaking of everlasting life and had claimed that He as the Bread of Life could provide it. Now he clarified the distinction between the physical bread that God provided in the wilderness and the spiritual Bread that He provided in Jesus. The result of eating the manna was temporary satisfaction but ultimately death, but the result of believing in Jesus was permanent satisfaction and no death.

> "When God gave the manna, He gave only a gift; but when Jesus came, He gave Himself. There was no cost to God in sending the manna each day, but He gave His Son at great cost. The Jews had to eat the manna every day, but the sinner who trusts Christ *once* is given eternal life.
>
> "It is not difficult to see in the manna a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. The manna was a mysterious thing to the Jews; in fact, the word *manna* means 'What is it?' (see Ex. 16:15) Jesus was a mystery to those who saw Him. The manna came at night from heaven, and Jesus came to this earth when sinners were in moral and spiritual darkness. The manna was small (His humility), round (His eternality), and white (His purity). It was sweet to the taste (Ps. 34:8) and it met the needs of the people adequately."[278]

6:51 This verse contains a final summary of the main ideas in this section. Jesus is living Bread, not manna, but He came down from God as it did. Those who believe on Him will experience eternal life. The terms coming to Jesus (v. 35), listening to Him (v. 45), and seeing Him (v. 40) all mean believing on Him (v. 35). Jesus would give His body as bread so the world could live spiritually. He referred to His coming sacrificial death. Not only had the Father given the Bread, but the Bread would now give Himself.

The meaning of believing 6:52-59

Jesus introduced a new metaphor for believing on Him, namely, eating His flesh. The following pericope is highly metaphorical.

6:52 As Jesus' hearers had objected to what He had said about His identity (vv. 41-42), so they now expressed confusion about what He meant by eating flesh. An intense argument (Gr. *emachonto*) erupted among them. They were struggling to understand His meaning. In what sense would Jesus give His flesh as food?

6:53-54 This is the fourth and last of Jesus' strong prefaces in this discourse (cf. vv. 26, 32, 47). It should be obvious to any readers of this discourse by now that Jesus was speaking metaphorically and not literally. By referring

[278]Wiersbe, 1:313.

to His flesh and blood He was figuratively referring to His whole person. This is a figure of speech called synecdoche in which one part stands for the whole. Jesus was illustrating belief, what it means to appropriate Him by faith (v. 40). He expressed the same truth negatively (v. 53) and then positively (v. 54a). He referred again to resurrection because it is the inauguration of immortal eternal life (cf. vv. 39, 40, 44).

Jesus was again stressing His identity as the revealer of God with the title "Son of Man." Blood in the Old Testament represented violent death primarily. Thus Jesus was hinting that He would die violently. He connected the importance of belief in Him with His atoning death. The idea of eating blood was repulsive to the Jews (cf. Lev. 3:17; 17:10-14). Jesus' hearers should have understood that He was speaking metaphorically, but this reference offended many of them (vv. 60-61).

Many interpreters of these verses have seen allusions to the Lord's Supper in what Jesus said. Sacramentalists among them find support here for their belief that participation in the Eucharist is essential for salvation. However, Jesus had not yet said anything about the Christian communion service. Moreover He was clearly speaking of belief metaphorically, not the communion elements. Most important, the New Testament presents the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of Jesus' death, not a vehicle for obtaining eternal life. Nevertheless these verses help us appreciate the symbolism of the Eucharist.

> "In short, John 6 does not directly speak of the eucharist; it does expose the true meaning of the Lord's supper as clearly as any passage in Scripture."[279]

6:55 This verse explains why Jesus' statements in verses 53 and 54 are true. Jesus' person is what truly satisfies and sustains life. This is the true function of food and drink.

6:56 Because Jesus' person is what truly satisfies and sustains life those who believe in Him remain (Gr. *meno*, abide) in Him. This is a new term in the discussion, but it is synonymous with having eternal life. Jesus was saying that believers continue to possess eternal life; they will never lose it. Believers remain in Christ, and He remains in them. Jesus was not speaking here to His disciples about the importance of believers abiding in fellowship with God as He did in chapter 15. Here He was speaking to unbelievers about entering into a saving relationship with God.

6:57 Jesus traced the eternal life that the believer receives when he or she trusts in Jesus back through the Son to the living God (cf. 5:21, 24-27). This helps us see that eternal life is essentially God's life that He imparts to

[279]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 298.

believers. It also clarifies Jesus' central role as the mediator of eternal life from the Father to humankind.

6:58 In conclusion, Jesus returned to His initial claim that He had come from the Father (v. 29). The Jews often substituted the term "heaven" for "God" out of respect for God's name, and Jesus did that here.[280] The Israelites who ate the physical bread that came down from God died in the wilderness (vv. 30-31), but those who believe in the spiritual Bread that came down from Him will live forever.

6:59 John now identified the historical context in which Jesus gave this teaching. Jesus gave this discourse in the synagogue in the town that He had adopted as the headquarters of His ministry (cf. 2:12). This verse evidently marks the conclusion of the discussion that took place within the synagogue. What followed probably happened outside the building or at least after Jesus had concluded His discourse.

Archaeologists have uncovered what they believe may be the foundations of this synagogue. Visitors to the town may now view a reconstructed edifice that dates from three or four hundred years later.

The Apostle Paul went to the Jewish synagogues in the towns that he evangelized because they were the places where pious Jews normally congregated to listen to God's Word. We should probably view Jesus' teaching ministry here as similar to Paul's later practice. Both men announced God's revelations to lost religious Jews and appealed to them to believe the gospel.

4. The responses to the bread of life discourse 6:60—7:9

Considerable discussion followed Jesus presentation of Himself as the Bread of Life. John noted the responses of many people who were following Jesus around, then the response of the Twelve, and finally the response of most of the Jews.

The response of many disciples 6:60-65

6:60 Not only "the Jews" (v. 52) but many of Jesus' followers found His teaching about the Bread of Life offensive (Gr. *skleros*, difficult or hard). The term "disciple" is not synonymous with "believer," as should be patently clear in the Gospels. In verse 64 Jesus said that some of these "disciples" did not believe. Some of Jesus' disciples were believers, but many of them were following Him to learn from Him and to decide if He was the Messiah or not. This teaching persuaded many in this seeker category to abandon their Rabbi. Some of them undoubtedly wanted the physical benefits of Jesus' messianism but had little interest in spiritual

[280]This is a figure of speech called metonymy in which the speaker or writer uses the name of one thing for that of another associated with or suggested by it.

matters (cf. vv. 14-15, 26, 30-31). Others could not see beyond Jesus' humanity to His true identity (vv. 41-46). Others probably could not accept Jesus' claim to be greater than Moses (vv. 32-33, 58). Still others may have found Jesus' language offensive, particularly His references to eating flesh and drinking blood (vv. 53-54).

6:61-62 Evidently Jesus spoke these words to a large group of His followers that included the Twelve. He suggested that He would yet reveal things to them that would be harder for them to accept than what they had heard so far. He had told them that He had come down from heaven (v. 38), and this had scandalized (Gr. *skandalizei*) them. What would they think if they saw Him ascend into heaven?

Jesus may have been referring to His bodily ascension, but perhaps He was speaking of His crucifixion (cf. 3:14). This explanation is in harmony with Jesus' metaphorical language that He had been using throughout the previous discourse. Jesus' crucifixion was in a sense the first step in His ascending back to the Father since it permitted Him to do so. Certainly Jesus' crucifixion was the most humanly offensive aspect of His entire ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23 where the same Greek word occurs).

6:63 Some of Jesus' disciples turned from Him because they preferred the material realm to the spiritual realm, for which Jesus had an obvious preference. He warned them that the Spirit gives real life (cf. Gen. 1:2; Ezek. 37:14; John 3:6) whereas the flesh provides nothing of comparable importance. The words that Jesus had spoken to them dealt with spiritual realities and resulted in spiritual life. Furthermore they were words that came from God's Spirit. Therefore they were extremely important.

6:64 In spite of the importance of spiritual life, Jesus said He recognized that some of His disciples did not believe on Him. This was a tragic irony. They had followed Jesus and had listened to Him, but they did not believe Him.

John added that Jesus knew who did not believe on Him, even who of His disciples would betray Him (vv. 70-71), to show that human unbelief did not take Jesus by surprise.

> "Jesus had given ample opportunity for faith to all those who followed him; yet from the beginning his spiritual discernment made him aware of those whose faith was genuine and those whose attachment was only superficial."[281]

[281]Tenney, "John," p. 79.

"The beginning" many be a reference to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but it is probably another reference to Jesus' preincarnate existence (cf. 1:1).

6:65 Again Jesus expressed His belief that the human decision to believe or not believe rested ultimately in God's elective purpose (vv. 37, 44). Thus He did not view the unbelief of His disciples as an indication that He had failed. Notwithstanding, He did not present the importance of belief on Himself as something His hearers could take or leave either. It meant the difference between life and death to them, and He urged them to believe.

The response of the Twelve 6:66-71

6:66 Jesus lost many of His followers because of the Bread of Life discourse (cf. v. 60). His explanation to them following the discourse did not change their minds. He had made no concessions. They had understood Him correctly the first time. The Greek phrase *ek toutou* can mean "from this time" or "for this reason." Both meanings fit here.

In this passage we see four responses to Jesus: seeking (vv. 22-40), murmuring (vv. 41-51), striving (vv. 52-59), and departing (vv. 60-71).[282]

6:67 Jesus' question assumed a negative answer, as is clear from the Greek construction. He undoubtedly asked it not because He had questions about the Twelve's perseverance (v. 64) but because they needed to reaffirm their commitment. It would have been easy for them to agree with the crowd. The question also implied that very many of His disciples had abandoned Jesus, perhaps the majority.

6:68-69 Typically, Peter spoke for the Twelve. "Lord" (Gr. *kurios*) can mean simply "sir," but here it probably has a deeper meaning. These disciples were reaffirming their allegiance to the One whom Peter now identified as the Holy One of God (cf. Ps. 16:10; Isa. 41:14; 43:3; 47:4; 48:17; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). Peter probably did not mean that they viewed Jesus as their last resort but that Jesus was their only hope. They believed that Jesus' teachings resulted in eternal life for those who believed (v. 63), and they had believed in Him as the holy Messiah whom God had sent.

Peter's confession of faith here is not the same as the one He made later at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). The content is different as is the chronology. Probably Peter's confession of Jesus' full deity occurred first at Caesarea Philippi. Here he evidently meant that the Twelve believed that Jesus was who He had claimed to be in the preceding discourse, namely, the Messiah who had come with divine revelation from God. Peter referred to Jesus as the Holy One later in his preaching, but that

[282]Wiersbe, p. 311.

was after receiving much more insight, particularly from Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:27; 3:14).

6:70 It might appear that the Twelve had chosen Jesus as their rabbi, but really the choice had been His (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16). He had chosen them and they had then believed on Him even as the Father chose the elect who then believed on Jesus. Reflecting His knowledge of those who believed in Him and those who did not (v. 64), Jesus revealed that even among the Twelve there was one unbeliever. Jesus had chosen him to be one of the Twelve, but God had not chosen Him for salvation.

The Greek word translated "devil" (Gr. *diabolos*) does not have an article with it in many reliable ancient Greek manuscripts. This usually indicates an emphasis on the quality of the noun. Here it probably means that one of the Twelve was devil-like (cf. Mark 8:33). The Greek word is the equivalent of the Hebrew *satan*, meaning adversary or accuser. It means slanderer or false accuser, but when it occurs as a substantive it means Satan (e.g., 8:44; 13:2; cf. 13:27). Jesus probably meant that one of the Twelve was going to behave as Satan because Satan would direct him.

6:71 John, not Jesus, identified the devil among the Twelve as Judas. His devilish act was to be the betrayal of Jesus into His enemies' hands. "Iscariot" is probably a transliteration of the Hebrew *is qeriyot*, meaning "man of Kerioth," a village in southern Judah (Josh. 15:25).

The response of the Jews 7:1-9

> "John 7 has three time divisions: before the feast (vv. 1-10), in the midst of the feast (vv. 11-36), and on the last day of the feast (vv. 37-52). The responses during each of those periods can be characterized by three words: disbelief, debate, and division."[283]

This section relates the reaction of another significant group of people to Jesus. They were the Jews generally, including Jesus' brothers. The section also prepares the reader for the following presentation of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem that happened at the feast of Tabernacles.

> "In this Gospel Jerusalem is the storm-centre of the Messiah's ministry, where He vindicates His claims before consummating His work by suffering outside its walls."[284]

7:1 Opposition to Jesus had by now become so strong, particularly in Judea, that He chose to stay and minister around Galilee. This is a brief reference to Jesus' later Galilean ministry that the Synoptics describe more fully. The Jewish leaders were continuing to lay plans for Jesus' execution (cf.

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[283]Ibid., p. 314.
[284]Tasker, p. 101.

5:18). John noted their increasing hostility here and in the following chapters (cf. vv. 19, 30, 32, 44; 8:59; 10:39; 11:8, 53).

7:2 The feast of Tabernacles occurred six months after Passover (6:4). That year it fell on September 10-17, A.D. 32.[285] It was a fall grape and olive harvest festival (Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Deut. 16:13-15). In Jesus' day it was the most popular of the three required Jewish feasts.[286] It commemorated the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness. Many devout Jews built temporary shelters out of branches and lived in them for the week to simulate the wilderness conditions in which their forefathers had lived.

7:3-5 Jesus' half-brothers advised Him to go to the feast so His remaining disciples would continue to believe on Him and so more people would become His disciples. They evidently supposed that Jesus wanted as large a following as possible. They believed that He could perform miracles, but they did not believe that He was who He claimed to be. They encouraged Him to promote Himself perhaps because they saw some advantage for themselves in His doing so. Satan had tempted Jesus similarly (Matt. 4:1-10). God's plan for Jesus' exaltation was different from theirs and involved the Cross. It is difficult to tell if these brothers spoke sincerely or sarcastically. Perhaps some were sincere and others were sarcastic.

Familiarity with Jesus did not and does not guarantee faith in Him (cf. Ps. 69:8). The way unbelievers plan to obtain glory for themselves is frequently contrary to God's way of doing things (cf. Phil. 2:3-11). Two of these half-brothers were James and Jude who later became believers and wrote the New Testament books that bear their names (cf. Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7).

7:6 Jesus replied that it was not the right time (Gr. *kairos*) for Him to go to Jerusalem, the Father's time (cf. 2:4). However, they could go to the feast at any time (Gr. *kairos*). They were not on a mission and timetable from God as He was.

> "John's picture of Jesus is of one steadily moving on to meet his divinely appointed destiny."[287]

Another interpretation is that Jesus meant that the time of His death was not yet at hand. However the Greek word that Jesus used when referring to His death and its consequences in John's Gospel is always *hora* elsewhere, not *kairos* (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

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[285]Hoehner, p. 143.
[286]Josephus, 8:4:1.
[287]Morris, p. 352.

7:7 Jesus alluded to the opposition that awaited Him in Jerusalem. His brothers had no particular reason to be careful about when they went to the feast, but Jesus would be in danger when He went. They were part of the world, but Jesus did not belong to it (1:10; cf. 15:18-21; 17:14, 16). The reason for the Jews' antagonism was also Jesus' convicting preaching that called for repentance as well as faith in Him. This verse contains the explanation for Jesus' statement in the preceding verse.

7:8-9 Having offered His explanation, Jesus encouraged his brothers to go on to the feast without Him. Again He intimated that the Father was setting His agenda and He needed to follow it rather then their suggestion (cf. 2:4). God's immediate will for Him was to stay in Galilee.

The NIV "yet" has weak textual support, though it represents a valid interpretation. Many old Greek manuscripts do not contain it. Probably copyists added it to explain what Jesus meant since He did go to Jerusalem shortly after He spoke these words (v. 10).

H. JESUS' THIRD VISIT TO JERUSALEM 7:10—10:42

This section of the text describes Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem during the feast of Tabernacles and the feast of Dedication. John evidently included it in His narrative because it contains important revelations of Jesus' identity and explains the mounting opposition to Jesus that culminated in His crucifixion.

1. The controversy surrounding Jesus 7:10-13

7:10 Jesus proceeded to Jerusalem shortly after his half-brothers did because the Father led Him to go then. He did not herald His arrival with great publicity, as His brothers had recommended, but went without fanfare. If He had gone sooner, the authorities would have had more opportunities to arrest Him (v. 1).

7:11 Since John usually used the phrase "the Jews" to describe the Jewish authorities who were hostile to Jesus (cf. 1:19; 7:13; et al.), that is probably who was trying to find Him here. Their intentions seem pernicious.

7:12-13 Jesus was a controversial subject of conversation at the feast. He provoked considerable "grumbling" (Gr. *goggusmos*, cf. 6:41, 61). Many of the common people from Judea and pilgrims from elsewhere debated His ministry in private, however, suspecting that their leaders opposed Him. According to the Talmud, deceiving the people was a crime punishable by stoning.[288] "The Jews" here clearly refers to Israel's leaders.

This pericope provides background for Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem that follows. It helps the reader sense the atmosphere of public opinion in which Jesus then worked.

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[288]Blum, p. 299.

2. Jesus' ministry at the feast of Tabernacles 7:14-44

Jesus' authority 7:14-24

7:14 Toward the middle of the week Jesus began teaching publicly in the temple. This verse sets the scene for what follows immediately.

7:15 It was quite common for Jewish males to read and write. The people do not appear to have expressed amazement at Jesus' ability to do that. The Judean Jews (cf. 1:19) marveled at Jesus' understanding of religious matters (cf. Matt. 7:28-29; Mark 1:22). They knew He had not had a formal theological education under the rabbis (cf. Acts 4:13).

7:16 Jesus responded by explaining that His knowledge had come from the One who had sent Him, namely, God the Father (cf. 5:19-30). It had not come from Himself. He meant that His was not knowledge that He had dreamed up or arrived at through independent study. Jewish rabbis normally cited other rabbis as the sources of their information. Jesus avoided giving the impression that He was an inventive upstart, but He also implied that His teaching was not simply the continuation of rabbinic tradition. His teaching did not come from the rabbis or from self-study but directly from God.

> "It is characteristic of many of the outstanding men of the Bible that they are convinced that they must do what they are doing, and say what they are saying, because they have received a divine commission."[289]

7:17 Jesus further claimed that the key to validating His claim that His teaching came from God was a determination to do God's will. The normal way that the rabbis settled such debates was through discussion. However, Jesus taught that the key factor was moral rather than intellectual. If anyone was willing to *do* God's *will*, not just to *know* God's *truth*, God would enable that one to believe that Jesus' teaching came from above (cf. 6:44). The most important thing then is a commitment to follow God's will. Once a person makes that commitment God begins to convince him or her what is true. Faith must precede reason, not the other way around.

> "His hearers had raised the question of his competence as a teacher. He raises the question of their competence as hearers."[290]

Jesus was not saying that the accuracy of our understanding is in direct proportion to our submission to God. Some very godly people have held

[289]Tasker, p. 104.
[290]Morris, p. 360.

some very erroneous views. There are other factors that also determine how accurate our understanding may be. He was not saying that if a person happens to do God's will he or she will automatically understand the origin of Jesus' teaching either. His point was that submission to God rather than intellectual analysis is the foundation for understanding truth, particularly the truth of Jesus' teachings.

> "Spiritual understanding is not produced solely by learning facts or procedures, but rather it depends on obedience to known truth. Obedience to God's known will develops discernment between falsehood and truth."[291]

7:18 The person who advances his or her original ideas will glorify self. That may not be his or her underlying motive, though it often is, but that will be the result. Conversely the one who advances the ideas of another ends up glorifying that person rather than himself or herself. Jesus claimed to do the latter and to desire the glory of the One who sent Him. That desire indicated His righteousness and made it unthinkable that He would be deceiving the people (v. 12).

7:19 Jesus had claimed that God had given Him His teaching and that He proclaimed it faithfully as a righteous man. Now He contrasted His critics with Himself. They claimed that Moses had given them his teaching, but they did not carry it out faithfully as righteous men. Therefore it was incongruous that they sought to kill Jesus (cf. vv. 44-45). They accused Him of unrighteousness, but really they were the unrighteous ones. They sought to kill him even though Moses had taught that God's will was to refrain from murder (Exod. 20:13). Obviously they had not submitted to God's will that came through Moses. It is no wonder that they failed to understand Jesus' teaching.

7:20 Many of Jesus' hearers did not realize the depth of the animosity of Israel's leaders toward Him. They naively thought He was crazy to think that someone was trying to kill Him. The Jews of Jesus' day commonly thought of mental illness, in this case paranoia, as being demon-induced. This explains their reference to Jesus having a demon (cf. 10:20). These people were not charging Jesus with getting His power from Satan, as others had (Matt. 9:34; 10:25; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15; cf. Matt. 11:18).[292]

7:21 The one deed (lit. work, Gr. *ergon*, i.e., a miraculous work) that He had done to which Jesus referred was evidently the healing of the paralytic at the Bethesda pool (v. 23; 5:1-9). It had caused all who heard of it to marvel (5:10-18). It had begun the controversy about Jesus in Jerusalem.

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[291]Tenney, "John," p. 84.

[292]There are several cases of demon possession in the Synoptics, but there are none in John.

7:22 The antecedent of "On account of this" or "Yet" (Gr. *dia touto*) is unclear. It could refer to what precedes. This interpretation would yield a translation such as "you all marvel because of this."[293] However, John consistently placed this phrase first when he used it in other clauses.[294] Probably Jesus was referring to His healing of the paralytic (v. 21) as representing God's desire for physical wholeness.

Moses prescribed circumcision for the physical wellbeing of the Israelites as well as for other reasons (Lev. 12:3). The Jews recognized this and consequently circumcised male infants on the eighth day following their births even if that day was a Sabbath. Normally observant Jews did no work on the Sabbath.

Jesus' parenthetic reference to the fact that the circumcision legislation really began with the patriarchs and not Moses was probably a sleight depreciation of Moses. Jesus' critics claimed to follow Moses faithfully, but in keeping the circumcision law they were not truly honoring him but Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). Technically Moses only incorporated the circumcision law in the Mosaic Code, as he did many other older laws.

7:23 Jesus' critics permitted an act on the Sabbath that resulted in the health of part of a person, and an infant at that, on the Sabbath. They should not, therefore, object to His healing a whole adult then. Moreover they performed circumcisions regularly on the Sabbath, but Jesus had only healed one man on one Sabbath. Circumcision was an operation designed to insure good health. The circumcised child was not even ill. Jesus on the other hand had healed a man who had suffered with a serious handicap for 38 years. Moreover circumcision was only a purification rite, but healing a paralytic involved deliverance from enslavement. Therefore it was unfair for Jesus' critics to be angry with Him for what He had done.

The Jews had established a hierarchy of activities by which they judged the legitimacy of performing any work on the Sabbath (cf. Matt. 12:9-10). They based this hierarchy on necessary need, urgency. Jesus also operated from a hierarchical viewpoint, but He based His hierarchy on what was best for people (Mark 2:27).

> "Had his opponents understood the implications of the Mosaic provision for circumcision on the Sabbath they would have seen that deeds of mercy such as he has just done were not merely permissible but obligatory. Moses quite understood that some things should be done even on

[293]Bruce, p. 177; J. N. Sanders, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, p. 207.
[294]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 314.

> the Sabbath. The Jews had his words but not his meaning."[295]

7:24 Jesus concluded by warning His hearers against judging superficially (cf. Deut. 16:18-19; Isa. 11:3-4; Zech. 7:9). Their superficial judgment about what was legitimate activity for the Sabbath had resulted in superficial judgment about Jesus' work and person. He told them to stop doing that. They needed to judge on the basis of righteous criteria, what was truly right.

Jesus' origin and destiny 7:25-36

7:25-26 Though many of the Jewish pilgrims in the temple courtyard did not realize how antagonistic the religious leaders were to Jesus (v. 20), some of the locals did. They marveled that Jesus was speaking out publicly and the authorities were not opposing Him. They expected that if Jesus was a deceiver they would lock Him up, but if He was the Messiah they would acknowledge Him as such. The authorities acted as they did because they feared the people. The situation led some of the locals to suspect that the leaders might really believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

7:27 The people of Jerusalem felt inclined to disbelieve that Jesus was the Messiah because they believed that their human Messiah's origins would be unknown. This belief was a tradition.[296] It was certainly not scriptural since the Old Testament clearly predicted that Messiah's birthplace would be Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). The common understanding of Jesus' origin was that He grew up and had evidently been born in Nazareth. Not only did they fail to perceive His heavenly origin, but they were also wrong about His earthly origin. Indeed they did not know Him very well at all.

7:28-29 Whenever John described Jesus as crying out, an important public pronouncement followed (cf. 1:15; 7:37; 12:44). Jesus said that His hearers did know Him. Probably He meant that they knew who He was superficially (cf. v. 24) and knew that He had an earthly origin (6:42), but they knew less than they thought. Jesus was speaking ironically. They did not know the One who had sent Him, though Jesus did because He had come from that One.

The One who had sent Jesus was true (Gr. *alethinos*, real). Jesus meant that God really had sent Him regardless of what others might think about His origins. Unfortunately they did not know the One who had sent Him even though they prided themselves on knowing the true God (cf. Rom. 2:17-19). They did not know God because they did not know their Scriptures (cf. 5:46). They did not know Jesus because they did not know

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[295]Morris, p. 362.

[296]Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8:7.

the Father who had sent Him. In verse 16 Jesus disclaimed originality for his teaching, and here he disclaimed responsibility for his mission.[297]

> "He was once again claiming to be God! He was not simply *born* into this world like any other human; He was *sent* to earth by the Father. This means that He existed before He was born on the earth."[298]

7:30-31 Evidently those Jews who tried to seize (Gr. *piazo*) Jesus did so to restrain Him (cf. vv. 32, 44; 8:20; 10:39). However they could not because His hour (Gr. *hora*), the time for His crucifixion and its consequences, had not yet arrived. God prevented Jesus' premature arrest. Even though some of the Jews tried to arrest Jesus, many from the multitude believed on Him. Jesus' presence provoked a division among His hearers (cf. 1:11-12; 3:18-21).

Some believed because of the signs that He had performed. This was not a strong basis for faith (cf. 2:11, 23; 4:48). They concluded that He was the Messiah, but the common understanding of Messiah was that He would be a powerful human deliverer. Probably few if any of these Jews believed that Jesus was also God incarnate.

> "But throughout this Gospel it is better to believe on the basis of miracles than not to believe at all, so there is no condemnation of this faith as inadequate."[299]

7:32 The Pharisees heard some of the Jews present voicing their belief that Jesus must be the Messiah. These comments moved them to act immediately to arrest Jesus. When the common people turned to Jesus, they turned away from the Pharisees and their teachings. Together with the chief priests, who were mainly Sadducees and not friendly to the Pharisees, they ordered the temple soldiers to seize Jesus. This attempt illustrates the seriousness of the situation as the authorities viewed it. Probably the arrest warrant came from the Sanhedrin. The temple police were Levites responsible to the Sanhedrin.

7:33-34 Jesus again said that His hour had not yet come, only in different words. When His hour came, He would return to the Father. The Jews would search for Him but be unable to find Him. He was going where they could not come, namely, to heaven. Death was not the end. They could not come where He was going in their present condition. That required regeneration and translation (cf. 8:21; 13:33).

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[297]Morris, p. 366.
[298]Wiersbe, 1:317.
[299]Morris, pp. 367-68.

Time was running out both for Jesus to finish His work and for the Jews to believe on Him. The Jews had only a little longer to place their faith in Him before He would leave them and depart to heaven. After that, many Jews would seek their Messiah but not find Him. That is what has been happening since Jesus ascended, and it will happen until He returns to the earth at His second coming (Zech. 12:10-13; Rev. 1:7). Jesus was, of course, referring enigmatically to His death.

7:35-36 Again Jesus' hearers thought that He was speaking of physical matters and earthly places. The Dispersion was the term that described the Jews who had scattered from Palestine and were living elsewhere in the world. They thought Jesus was referring to ministering to Jews or perhaps Gentile proselytes who were living outside Palestine. In the New Testament the word "Greek" is synonymous with Gentiles (cf. Col. 3:11). This seemed too fantastic to be a messianic activity.

> "Here, as more than once in this Gospel, the Jews are unconsciously prophesying. The departure of Jesus in death would indeed be beneficial, but not because it would remove from the earth a false Messiah, as they supposed, but because, as a result of the proclamation of the gospel which would follow His death and resurrection, Gentiles would be brought into the people of God."[300]

These Jews did not understand where Jesus was going any more than they understood where He had come from (v. 27). They were so exclusive in their thinking that they thought it very improbable that Jesus would leave Palestine. Ironically the Christian apostles did go to those very areas and people to preach the Christ whom the Jews rejected.

The promise of the Spirit 7:37-44

Having announced His departure, Jesus proceeded to offer the Holy Spirit for those who believed on Him (cf. chs. 14—16).

7:37 The feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days (cf. Deut. 16:13). However the day following the feast was a day of convocation that the people popularly regarded as part of the feast (cf. Lev. 23:36). Probably John meant the eighth day when he referred to the last, great day since that was the very last day of the festival.

Jesus used the occasion to make another important public proclamation (cf. v. 28). Perhaps Jesus laid low until this day to avoid arrest and then presented Himself again publicly. He invited anyone who was thirsty

[300]Tasker, p. 106.

spiritually to come to Him and take what would satisfy and sustain him or her (cf. 4:10, 14).

Early each of the seven mornings of the feast the high priest would lead a procession from the Pool of Siloam to the temple. Another priest would first fill a golden ewer with water from the pool. He would then carry it through the Water Gate on the south side of the temple and into the temple courtyard. There he would ceremoniously pour the water into a silver basin on the west side of the brazen altar from which it would flow through a tube to the base of the altar. Many Jews would accompany these priests. Some of them would drink from the pool while others would chant Isaiah 55:1 and 12:3: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." This was such a happy occasion that the Mishnah stated, "He that never has seen the joy of the Water-drawing has never in his life seen joy."[301]

The priest would then pour water into the basin at the time of the morning sacrifice. Another priest would also pour the daily drink offering of wine into another basin at the same time. Then they would pour the water and the wine out before the Lord. The pouring out of water represented God's provision of water in the wilderness in the past and His provision of refreshment and cleansing in the messianic age. The pouring out of wine symbolized God's bestowal of His Spirit in the last days. Every male present would simultaneously shake his little bundle of willow and myrtle twigs (his *lulab*) with his right hand and hold a piece of citrus fruit aloft with his left hand. The twigs represented stages of the wilderness journey marked by different kinds of vegetation, and the citrus fruit symbolized the fruit of the Promised Land.[302] Everyone would also cry, "Give thanks to the Lord!" three times. Worshippers in the temple courtyard would then sing the Hallel (Ps. 113—118).[303]

This "water rite" had become a part of the Israelites' traditional celebration of the feast of Tabernacles. Essentially it symbolized the fertility and fruitfulness that the rain brought. In the Old Testament, God likened His blessings in the messianic kingdom to the falling of rain (Ezek. 47:1-7; Zech. 13:1). The Jews regarded God's provision of water in the wilderness and rain in the land as harbingers of His great blessings on the nation under Messiah's reign. Thus the water rite in the feast of Tabernacles had strong messianic connotations.

Jesus stood to announce His invitation. Normally rabbis sat when they taught. Therefore His standing position as well as His words stressed the

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[301]Mishnah *Sukkoth* 5:1.

[302]Morris, p. 372.

[303]J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v., *lithos*, 4:277-78; J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 348; A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:157-60.

importance of what He said. Jesus' claim was even more impressive because on the eighth day no water was poured out. When Jesus called out His invitation, He was claiming to be the fulfillment of all that the feast of Tabernacles anticipated. He announced that He was the One who could provide messianic blessing, that He was the Messiah. His words compared Himself to the rock in the wilderness that supplied the needs of the Israelites.

7:38 Some commentators believed that the end of Jesus' statement did not occur at the end of this verse but after "Me."[304] They saw Jesus saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me, and drink he who believes in Me." This view results in the antecedent of "his innermost being" or "him" being Jesus rather than the believer. This view makes Jesus the source of the living water, which is biblical. However the punctuation in the NASB and NIV probably represents the better translation.[305]

The antecedent of "his innermost being" or "him" is probably the believer rather than Jesus. This does not mean that Jesus was saying that the believer was the source of the living water. The living water is a reference to the Holy Spirit elsewhere in John, and it is Jesus who pours out the Spirit as living water (4:14). Jesus spoke elsewhere of the living water welling up within the believer (4:14). The idea is not that the Spirit will flow out of the believer to other believers. We are not the source of the Spirit for others. It is rather that the Spirit from Jesus wells up within each believer and gives him or her satisfying spiritual refreshment. Water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness, and similarly the Spirit satisfies the inner person and enables us to bear fruit. The Greek expression is *ek tes koilias autou* (lit. from within his belly). The belly here pictures the center of the believer's personality. It may imply the womb, the sphere of generation.[306]

There is no specific passage in the Old Testament that contains the same words that Jesus mentioned here. Consequently He must have been summarizing the teaching of the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 16:4; 17; Num. 20; Neh. 8:5-18; Ps. 78:15-16; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-32; Zech. 14:8).[307] There the ideas of the Spirit and the law sustaining God's people as manna and water converge. Jesus claimed that He alone could provide the satisfying Spirit. This was an offer of salvation.

7:39 John helped his readers understand that Jesus was referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that happened after Jesus' death,

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[304]E.g., Brown, 1:321.

[305]See Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 323-25.

[306]Tasker, p. 109.

[307]Zane C. Hodges, "Rivers of Living Water—John 7:37-39," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):239-48, believed Ezekiel 47:1-11 was in view.

resurrection, and ascension, on the day of Pentecost (cf. 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:5, 8; 2). That outpouring was something that God had not done before. It was similar to what Joel predicted He would do in the last days (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:16-21). "Those who believed in Him" includes subsequent believers as well as believers on the day of Pentecost (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus announced that the Holy Spirit would come on believers in a new way, namely, to baptize, seal, and indwell them. John frequently spoke of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation as all part of His glorification (11:4; 12:16, 23; 13:31; cf. Phil. 2:8-9).[308]

7:40-42 Jesus' spectacular offer led some people to conclude that He was the promised Prophet (Deut. 18:15, 18; cf. Acts 3:22) or possibly the Messiah (Christ). Evidently it was His claim to provide living water as Moses provided physical water that led to their associating Jesus with one of those predicted individuals. Formerly Jesus had provided bread as Moses had provided manna (6:14). Apparently these Jews did not equate the Prophet with Messiah. They apparently looked for two separate individuals to come as they seem to have anticipated a suffering servant and a triumphant Messiah in two different people. Others doubted that Jesus was the Messiah because of His apparent Galilean origins. One indication that the Jews expected Messiah to appear soon is the fact that these people could refer to messianic predictions spontaneously.

> "Perhaps this is another illustration of Johannine irony, for Jesus *was* born in Bethlehem. The very passage that convinced his critics that he could not be the Messiah was one of the strongest to prove that he was."[309]

7:43-44 These opinions divided the people then as they still do today. Some of them wanted to arrest Jesus (cf. vv. 30, 32; 8:20; 10:39), but no one did, undoubtedly because such action was contrary to the Father's sovereign will.

This concludes John's account of Jesus' teaching on this occasion.

3. The unbelief of the Jewish leaders 7:45-52

7:45-46 When the officers of the temple guard returned to the Sanhedrin without Jesus, the Sanhedrin members asked why they had not arrested Him (cf. v. 32). The officers replied that no man (Gr. *anthropos*, emphatic in the Greek text) had ever spoken as Jesus did (cf. v. 15). They, too, spoke more truly than they knew. Jesus was more than a man. Jesus' authority and wisdom obviously impressed them as well as the other people. They had gone to arrest Jesus with their weapons, but Jesus had arrested them with His words.

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[308]See Harris, p. 194.
[309]Tenney, "John," p. 87.

It may seem unusual that these officers would so weakly admit that they had failed in their mission, but they were not hardened Roman soldiers who carried out their orders as automatons. They were Levites whose interests were mainly religious. Their statement is another witness to the true identity of Jesus.

7:47-48 The Pharisaic leaders implied that the officers were ignorant, that none of the real thinkers and leaders in the nation had accepted Jesus. The rulers were the Sanhedrin members, and the Pharisees were the official teachers. They implied that all the leaders without exception believed that Jesus was a deceiver, but that was not true. Already Nicodemus had privately voiced his belief that Jesus was a teacher who had come from God (3:2), and many others of the leaders believed in Jesus (cf. 12:42). This was a clear case of intimidation. Again John's irony is apparent. The proudly wise were clearly the fools (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

7:49 The rulers claimed knowledge of the law that was superior to that of the common people (Gr. *ochlos*, crowd or mob) who accepted Jesus. They condescendingly judged the officers' opinion of Jesus as worthy only of the uneducated. If more of these leaders had taken the time to listen to Jesus, as Nicodemus did, they may have formed a different opinion of how well He fulfilled the law. Pride in one's knowledge often results in spiritual blindness. The mob was supposedly under God's curse since they did not obey it (Deut. 28:15). Really it was the leaders who were under His curse for not believing in Jesus (3:36).

7:50-51 All this blind prejudice became more than Nicodemus could bear. Finally he questioned condemning Jesus out of hand without first listening to Him (cf. Acts 5:34-39). He did not defend Jesus. That may have been too threatening. He did raise an objection to his colleagues' procedure on the grounds of fair play (cf. Deut. 1:16-17). Nicodemus' word of caution does not necessarily indicate that he had become a believer in Jesus, though he may have been (cf. 19:38-39). The most we can say is that he was willing to defend Jesus' rights.

7:52 Nicodemus' colleagues did not reply rationally but emotionally. They had already decided Jesus' case without hearing Him. They did not want to listen to any information that might prove that He was who He claimed to be. They replied to Nicodemus' challenge with contempt and accused him of being a despised Galilean himself since he sought to defend a Galilean. Unable to refute the logic of Nicodemus' argument they attacked his person, an old debating tactic designed to win an argument but not necessarily to arrive at the truth.

It is unclear if they meant that no prophet ever came from Galilee or that the Prophet (Deut. 18:15) would not come from there. Obviously Jonah and Nahum had come from Galilee, so it seems unlikely that they meant

> that. Moses did not predict where the Prophet would come from. As mentioned above, the Jews of Jesus' day seem to have regarded the Prophet and Messiah as two different individuals. The messianic Son of David would come from Bethlehem, but where would the Prophet come from? If the Sanhedrin had taken the trouble to investigate Jesus' origins thoroughly, they would have discovered than He had not come from Galilee originally.

People still let prejudice (prejudging) and superficial evaluation blind them to the truth.

4. The woman caught in adultery 7:53—8:11

The textual authenticity of this pericope is highly questionable. Most ancient Greek manuscripts dating before the sixth century do not contain it. However, over 900 ancient manuscripts do contain it including the important early so-called Western text (uncial D).[310] None of the church fathers or early commentators referred to it in their comments on this Gospel. Instead they passed from 7:52 right on to 8:12. Several later manuscripts identify it as special by using an asterisk or obelus at its beginning and ending.[311] Some old copies have it after 7:36 or 7:44 or 21:25 or Luke 21:38. Its expressions and constructions are more similar to Luke's writings than they are to John's.[312]

> "This entire section, 7:53—8:11, traditionally known as the *pericope adulterae*, is not contained in the earliest and best MSS [manuscripts] and was almost certainly not an original part of the Gospel of John. Among modern commentators and textual critics, it is a foregone conclusion that the section is not original but represents a later addition to the text of the Gospel."[313]

The event described here may have occurred, though the passage may represent a conflation of two different accounts (cf. 21:25).[314] Perhaps it was a piece of oral tradition that later scribes inserted here to illustrate the sinfulness of the Jewish leaders (cf. 7:24; 8:15, 46).

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[310]We have about 24,000 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament or parts of it. This number, by the way, contrasts strongly with the number of early copies of the writings of other ancient writers. For example, we have about 643 copies of the writings of Homer, 8 of Herodotus, 9 of Euripides, 8 of Thucydides, 7 of Plato, 49 of Aristotle, and 20 of Tacitus. Furthermore, the earliest copy of the New Testament that we have dates about 125 years after its composition whereas the earliest copy of one of the extrabiblical writings referred to above dates about 400 years after its composition.

[311]An obelus is a straight horizontal stroke either simple or with a dot above and another below it. Writers of ancient manuscripts used obeli to mark a spurious, corrupt, doubtful, or superfluous word or passage.

[312]For a discussion of the evidence, see Hoskyns, pp. 563-64; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 219-22. For an alternative view, see Zane C. Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53—8:11): The Text," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:544 (October-December 1979):318-32.

[313]The Net Bible note on 7:53.

[314]See Bart D. Ehrman, "Jesus and the Adulteress," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988):24-44.

> "It may be accepted as historical truth; but based on the information we now have, it was probably not a part of the original text."[315]

Then did the Holy Spirit inspire it? Probably He did not. It is similar to some of the apocryphal stories, which some Christian traditions accept as inspired but which others do not. How should the modern Christian use this story? Some expositors do not preach or teach the passage publicly because they believe it is uninspired. However other Christians disagree and accept it as equally authoritative as the rest of Scripture.[316] If I do not believe it was part of the inspired text of John's Gospel, why have I bothered to expound it below? I have done so because most English Bibles contain this pericope, and many Christians have questions about it.

7:53 This verse suggests that the story that follows was originally the continuation of another narrative. "Everyone" apparently refers to people at a gathering in Jerusalem. This could refer to the Sanhedrin and the officers mentioned in 7:45-52. However it could also refer to other people on a different occasion.

8:1 The introductory "But" (Gr. *de*) is only mild and contrasts Jesus' action with that of most people in the temple courtyard. Some scholars have noted that Jesus spent His nights somewhere on the Mount of Olives during His final Passover celebration (Luke 21:37), but there is no evidence that He did so at other times.[317] However silence is never a strong argument. Jesus may have stayed there on His other visits to Jerusalem without the evangelists noting it.

8:2 This verse also sounds similar to the Synoptic Gospels' accounts of Jesus' activities during His final few days before His crucifixion (cf. Luke 21:37-38). Yet we know that Jesus taught in the temple courtyard at other times as well (5:19-47; 7:14-52).

8:3-4 This is the only place in John's Gospel where the writer mentioned the scribes and Pharisees together, though their association in the Synoptics is common. This is one reason many scholars doubt that John wrote this passage. Jesus' critics brought a woman whom they claimed to have caught in the act of committing adultery and placed her in the center of the group that Jesus was teaching. They addressed Him respectfully though hypocritically as "teacher." We can only speculate about what had happened to her partner in sin. Perhaps he had escaped, or perhaps the authorities had released him since their main interest seems to have been the woman. The Mosaic Law required that both parties involved in adultery suffer stoning (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus did not challenge the scribes and Pharisees' charge or try to prove it unjust.

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[315]Tenney, "John," p. 89.

[316]Roman Catholics accept it because it was in Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation (late fourth century A.D.), which they regard as authoritative.

[317]E.g., Tenney, "John," pp. 89-90; Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 334.

8:5-6a Jesus' critics were correct in their interpretation of the Mosaic Law (cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). However the Jews of Jesus' day apparently did not enforce this law often, especially in urban areas.[318] The writer said the authorities wanted to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against Him (cf. Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26). They appear to have wanted Jesus' execution more than the woman's.

If Jesus advocated not executing the woman, the lawyers and Pharisees could charge Him with teaching the people to violate the law. If He recommended executing her, He would contradict His own reputation for being gracious and forgiving (cf. Luke 5:20; 7:47). Moreover He would alienate Himself from the Jews. That decision might have gotten Him in trouble with the Roman authorities too (cf. 18:31).

8:6b There have been several suggestions about what Jesus may have written in the dust, all of which are guesses. Perhaps He wrote the words of Jeremiah 17:13b: "Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the Lord." Perhaps He wrote Exodus 23:1b: "Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness."[319] Perhaps he wrote the sins of the woman's accusers. Jesus may have written the same words that He proceeded to speak giving a visual as well as an audible decision. Incidentally, this is the only record of Jesus writing that we have in the Bible.

If the account of this incident is complete, the writer must have felt that what Jesus wrote was secondary to His act of writing since he did not identify what He wrote. Perhaps Jesus was reminding the scribes and Pharisees that God had originally written the Ten Commandments with His finger (Exod. 31:18). Jesus' act reminds the reader of this and so suggests that Jesus is God. As God gave the Old Covenant by writing with His finger, so God (Jesus) was giving the New Covenant by writing with His finger. Perhaps Jesus also wrote on the ground to delay answering His critics. This would have had the double effect of heightening their anticipation of His reply and giving them time to repent. The mention of this act here anticipates His doing the same thing again later (v. 8).

8:7 When Jesus finally answered His critics, He cited passages in the Mosaic Law. Jesus lived under this Law and respected it. These verses required that in cases of stoning at least two witnesses of the sin, who had not participated in it, should be the first to throw the stones (Lev. 24:14; Deut. 13:9; 17:7). Jesus did not mean that the accusers needed to be sinless. The law did not require that but that they be innocent of the particular sin of the accused. Jesus meant that they needed to be free from the sin of adultery or at least free of complicity in prearranging this woman's

[318]Ibid., p. 335.
[319]Derrett, p. 187.

adultery. They had asked Him to pass judgment, and now He was exercising His rightful function as the judge of humankind. Instead of passing judgment on the woman He was passing judgment on her judges.

Jesus' reply put the dilemma back on His accusers' shoulders. If they proceeded to stone the woman, they were claiming that they had not sinned. If they did not stone her, they would be admitting that they had sinned. Jesus now took the place of the woman's defense attorney as well as her judge (cf. 1 John 2:1).

8:8 This is another enigmatic reference. It had the result of freeing Jesus' critics from His convicting gaze. Perhaps the writer mentioned it to show that it was God who would produce conviction through Jesus' authoritative words rather than through His physical eye contact (cf. Matt. 7:28-29; John 7:46). By writing on the ground again Jesus graciously gave the scribes and Pharisees another opportunity to rethink their decision and repent.

8:9 The scribes and Pharisees' actions confessed their guilt. Evidently the older ones among them had the most tender consciences. They had plotted to kill the woman, but her crime only involved committing adultery. Adultery is no insignificant sin, but next to murder it has less severe consequences. Time and accumulated wisdom frequently increase one's sense of personal guilt unless a person hardens his or her heart completely. Probably we should understand the text as implying that all the critics departed, which would have left Jesus, the woman, and perhaps other onlookers. This left the woman and Jesus with no accusers.

The action of the woman's accusers was remarkable. Jesus' words brought deep conviction to inveterate opponents remarkably soon. Moreover they ended up making a public declaration of their own guilt and dropping their charge against the woman even though she was evidently guilty of adultery.

8:10-11 Jesus' addressed the woman respectfully (cf. 2:4; 4:21; 19:26; 20:13). He asked if no one who was condemning her remained. He did not ask her if she was guilty. Evidently she was. As the judge in her case, He showed more interest in her prosecutors than in her guilt. Without prosecutors Jesus dismissed the case. This was His prerogative as her judge. He only issued her a warning. She would have to stand before Him again in the future, but this was not the time that He wanted to pass judgment on her (cf. 3:17). He gave her mercy and time to change her ways (cf. 1:14). Thus He was not "easy on sin." The ultimate reason He could exempt her from condemnation is that He would take her condemnation on Himself and die in her place (cf. Rom. 8:1).

> "Law and grace do not compete with each other; they complement each other. Nobody was ever saved by keeping the Law, but nobody was ever saved by grace who

> was not *first* indicted by the Law. There must be conviction before there can be conversion."[320]

This incident is further proof that Jesus was more righteous and much wiser than the Jewish religious leaders who sought to kill Him. It is also another demonstration of His patience and grace with sinners.

> "Reviewing the case, Jesus brought forth the judgment, 'Stone her.' Unfortunately for the Pharisees, He had required, as the Law had stated, that the witnesses be qualified.
>
> "The Pharisees who were accusing the woman, not for the good of Israel but to trap Jesus, were struck. They knew they were malicious. Thus they had to step down or else incur the punishment required of malicious witnesses—the very stoning they desired for the accused!
>
> "Jesus pronounced the final decree. Since He was the only witness left, and the Mosaic Law required two, she was free. But the Prophet instructed her to avoid all guilt under the Law, since Deuteronomy 18:15 said the people were to listen to the Prophet. John 7:53—8:11 shows in numerous ways that Jesus is indeed the Prophet of whom Moses wrote."[321]

Jesus' role as the judge of human beings is quite clear in this incident, but His role as the coming Prophet may need clarification. Moses, the prophet through whom God gave the Old Covenant, had announced that God's will for His people was that they stone adulterers and adulteresses. Jesus, the prophet through whom God gave the New Covenant, now announced a change. God's people were no longer to stone these sinners but to show them mercy and leave the judging to God.

What if Jesus' enemies had brought a murderer before Him? Would Jesus have said the same thing? I think not. God had made His will concerning the punishment of murderers clear in Genesis 9:5b-6, the Noahic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant continued the same policy, as does the New Covenant. The way God has told society to deal with adultery has changed. That is why we do not execute adulterers in the church age. But the way He has told us to deal with murderers has not changed; we are still to put them to death.

5. The light of the world discourse 8:12-59

Following Jesus' claim to be the water of life (7:37-38), official opposition against Him intensified considerably. The following sections of this Gospel trace this rising opposition. While some believed on Jesus, most of His own people rejected Him (cf. 1:11-12). This section of the text deals with Jesus' claim to be the Light of the World and the controversy it generated.

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[320]Wiersbe, 1:320.

[321]Charles P. Baylis, "The Woman Caught in Adultery: A Test of Jesus as the Greater Prophet," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):184.

Jesus' testimony about Himself 8:12-20

8:12 The context of the events in this paragraph continues to be the temple during the feast of Tabernacles (v. 20, cf. 7:14). Jesus was speaking to the Jews who had assembled there, some of whom were residents of Jerusalem and others pilgrims from other parts of Palestine and the world.

Jesus here made the second of His "I am" claims (cf. 6:35). This time He professed to be the Light of the World (cf. 1:4). The water of life and the bread of life figures represent what satisfies and sustains life. The light of life figure stands for what dispels the darkness of ignorance and death. Jesus was claiming that whoever believes in Him will enjoy the light that comes from God's presence and produces life.

The light metaphor was ancient in Israel's history. The Jews associated light with God's presence. He had created light on the first day and lights on the fourth day of Creation (Gen. 1:3, 14-19). He had revealed Himself in a flame to Moses on the Midianite desert (Exod. 3). He had also protectively led the Israelites through the wilderness in a cloudy pillar of fire (Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19-25; Num. 9:15-23), and He had appeared to them on Mt. Sinai in fire. These are only a few instances in which God had associated His presence with fire and light (cf. Ps. 27:1; 36:9; 119:105; Prov. 6:23). Symbolically the light represented various characteristics of God, particularly His revelation, holiness, and salvation (cf. Ezek. 1:4, 13, 26-28; Hab. 3:3-4).

Isaiah had predicted that the Servant of the Lord would be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). God Himself would illuminate His people in the messianic age (Isa. 60:19-22; Zech. 14:5b-7; cf. Rev. 21:23-24). However in Jesus' day the light of righteousness was in mortal conflict with the darkness of sin (1:4, 9; 3:19-21). Many religions contain the light and darkness symbolism, but John presented Jesus as the true Light. It is particularly the aspect of light as revelation that constituted the focus of the controversy surrounding Jesus' claim. The Jews considered the Old Testament and their traditions as authoritative revelation, the true light. Now Jesus challenged that authority by claiming to be the true (final and full, cf. 1:9) revelation from God (cf. Heb. 1:1-3).

> "More important to the immediate context, the theme of light is not unrelated to the question of truthfulness and witness in the following verses, for light cannot but attest to its own presence; otherwise put, it bears witness to itself, and its source is entirely supportive of that witness."[322]

[322]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 338-39.

Part of the feast of Tabernacles was the lamp-lighting ceremony. Every evening during the festival a priest would light the three huge torches on the menorah (lampstand) in the women's court (or treasury) of the temple. These lights would illuminate the entire temple compound throughout the night. People would bring smaller torches into the temple precincts, light them, and sing and dance sometimes all through the night. It was one of the happiest occasions of the entire Jewish year.[323]

> "Now the brilliant candelabra were lit only at the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles; there is dispute as to the number of nights on which the illumination took place, but none as to the fact that at the close of the feast it did not. In the absence of the lights Jesus' claim to the Light would stand out the more impressively."[324]

8:13 On another occasion Jesus had said that if He alone bore witness to His own identity His witness would not be admissible under the Mosaic Law (5:31). The Mosaic Law required at least two witnesses to guard against only one witness giving biased testimony (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15). The Pharisees now quoted Jesus' statement back to Him. However they implied that because Jesus was bearing witness about Himself, without a second corroborating witness, His witness could not be true.

8:14 Jesus corrected His critics' false conclusion. Even if Jesus was the only witness to His own identity, His witness would still be true. Frequently only one person knows the facts. Jesus' witness was not false because it stood alone even though it was insufficient under Mosaic Law. The Pharisees had misunderstood Him. Consequently He proceeded to review His former teaching in somewhat different terms (cf. 5:19-30, 36-37).

Jesus claimed to offer true (Gr. *alethes*, cf. 5:31) testimony because He knew His own origin and destiny (cf. 7:29, 33-34). His critics knew neither of these things.

8:15 The Pharisees were evaluating Jesus only by using the external facts about Him that they knew. They were going about the evaluation process in a typically human way (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16). Jesus used "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*) here in a metaphorical sense meaning human nature. His critics should have considered the spiritual teaching about Jesus' identity that the Father was providing through the witness of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, and Jesus' miracles too. Jesus did not judge (Gr. *krino*) anyone superficially, and they should not either.

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[323]Shepard, p. 352; Edersheim, 2:165-66.

[324]Morris, p. 388. Note that in chapters 6, 7, and 8 Jesus claimed that He fulfilled wilderness types of God: manna, water, and light.

Another interpretation is that Jesus meant that He did not come to condemn anyone but to save them (cf. 3:17).[325] However that view only involves Jesus playing with words to make a pun. He seems to have been contrasting His judging with the Pharisees' judging. Another unlikely view is that Jesus meant that when He did judge people it would not be He that was really judging. Rather He would only be executing the Father's will (cf. 5:27, 45).[326] The problem with this view is that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (5:27-29), and Jesus will judge eventually.

8:16 Jesus was not judging anyone then. That aspect of His ministry lies in the future. However even if He did judge then His judgment would prove right (Gr. *alethine*, valid) because in that activity also He would be acting under and with the Father (cf. 5:30). As Jesus represented the Father faithfully by revealing Him, so He will represent the Father's will faithfully by judging. He did everything and will do everything with divine authority.

8:17-18 Therefore Jesus was not really testifying alone. There was a second witness that the law demanded, namely, the Father.

Jesus' reference to "your law" is unusual since in one sense it was His law. However, Jesus was in the process of setting aside the Law of Moses. The revelation that He brought superseded it, so in another sense it belonged to the Pharisees but not to Him (cf. 7:19, 51).

> "No human witness can authenticate a divine relationship. Jesus therefore appeals to the Father and Himself, and there is no other to whom He can appeal."[327]

8:19 Perhaps the Pharisees misunderstood Jesus. They were perhaps continuing to think on the physical level while He was speaking of spiritual realities. If so, we should not criticize them too much because Jesus' teaching that God was His Father was new (cf. 5:18). However their request was probably an intentional insult (cf. v. 41).

> "In the East, to question a man's paternity is a definite slur on his legitimacy."[328]

The Pharisees virtually admitted that they did not know Jesus' origins, which they had claimed they knew earlier (7:27). Their inability to recognize Jesus as the Son of God showed that they really did not know

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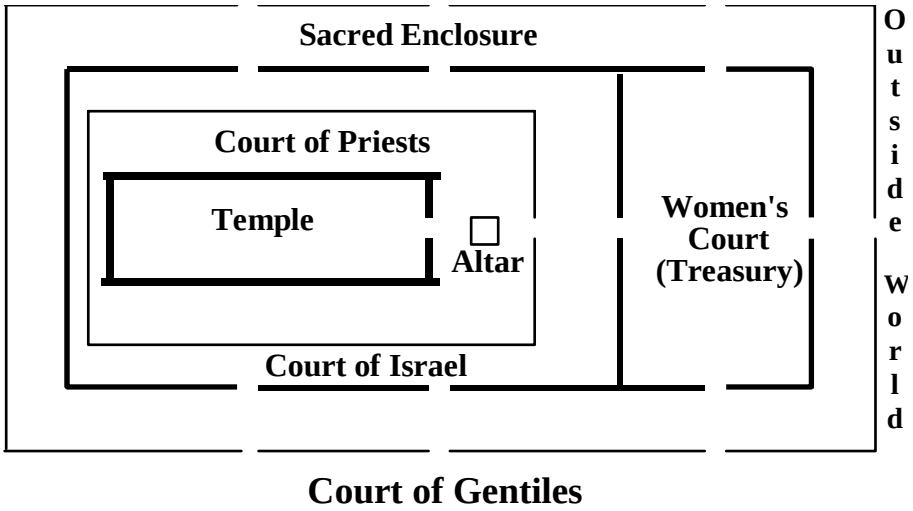
[325]Bruce, p. 189.
[326]Blum, p. 303.
[327]Morris, p. 393.
[328]Tenney, "John," p. 93.

God. If they had, they would have recognized Jesus as His Son. The rest of chapter 8 deals with the theme of fatherhood.

8:20 John concluded his narrative of this encounter by identifying its setting (cf. 6:59). The Jews apparently also called the court of the women the treasury because it contained 13 shophar (ram's horn) shaped receptacles for the Jews' monetary offerings (cf. Mark 12:41-42).[329] Each one bore an inscription showing how the priests would use the gifts deposited therein.



The last part of verse 20 makes the point that if they could these leaders would have arrested and executed Jesus immediately. However it was not yet God's time for His Son to die (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 30). Thus John stressed the Father's sovereign control over the events that shaped Jesus' ministry.

The main point of this section is the increasing animosity that the Jewish leaders felt toward Jesus.

Jesus' claims about His origin 8:21-30

Jesus began to contrast Himself and His critics.

8:21 Evidently what follows continues Jesus' teaching in the temple when He spoke the words that John recorded in the preceding verses. The Greek word *palin* ("again" or "once more") indicates a pause but not a significant break in the narrative (cf. v. 12). The content of His teaching in this verse recalls 7:33-34.

When Jesus said He was going away He was speaking of His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The Jewish leaders would not seek Jesus personally, but they would continue to seek the Messiah. They would die in their sin (singular) of unbelief because they rejected Jesus.

[329]Mishnah *Shekalim* 2:1; 6:1, 5.

Jesus was going to His Father in heaven. These Jews could not come there because they had rejected Jesus.

8:22 Jesus' hearers wondered if He was speaking about taking His own life. In 7:34-35 they wondered if He was talking about going on a mission to the Gentile world. In both cases they did not grasp that Jesus was speaking of spiritual rather than physical spheres of reality. However these people again spoke better than they realized. Jesus' departure would involve His death, not as a suicide but as a sacrifice for sin. Consequently their words here are an ironic prophecy of Jesus' death (cf. 11:49-50).[330]

8:23 Jesus explained their reason for misunderstanding Him as being traceable to their origin. Jesus was from God above while they came from His fallen and rebellious creation below. The second contrast in this verse clarifies the first. To understand Jesus' meaning His hearers needed new birth (3:3, 5) and the Father's illumination (6:45).

8:24 Jesus' hearers would die in their sins (plural) unless they believed in Him. Only belief in Him could rescue them from this fate. Here Jesus viewed their manifold sins (plural) as the consequences of their sin (singular, v. 21) of unbelief.

> "The attitude of unbelief is not simply unwillingness to accept a statement of fact; it is resistance to the revelation of God in Christ."[331]

They needed to believe that Jesus was "I am." In this context this phrase has heavy theological connotations (cf. vv. 28, 58; 13:19). It appeared enigmatic at first, but later Jesus' hearers realized that He was claiming to be God (cf. v. 59). The NIV "the one I claim to be" is an interpretation of Jesus' meaning that is perhaps more misleading than helpful. Jesus was alluding to the title that God gave Himself in the Old Testament (Exod. 3:14; Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12). Essentially "I am" means the eternally self-existent being.[332] Unless a person believes that Jesus is God, in contrast with less than God, he or she will die in his or her sins.

8:25 Jesus' hearers did not understand what He meant at first. He responded that He was saying nothing different from what He had been saying about His identity since the beginning of His ministry. This was a new title, but it represented revelation that was consistent with what He had always claimed about Himself.

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[330]Hoskyns, p. 334.
[331]Tenney, "John," p. 93.
[332]See Charles Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:565 (January-March 1985):38-51.

8:26 Jesus also claimed to have much more to reveal to His hearers. Part of that would involve judgment for their unbelief. However all of what He would say would be true because it would come from God. It would not be simply His own words spoken independent of the Father (cf. 3:34; 5:19-30; 8:15-16).

8:27 John clarified for his readers that Jesus had been speaking about His Father when He mentioned the One who sent Him. John did not want his readers to suffer from the same confusion as those who originally listened to Jesus. Jesus had explained earlier that it was God the Father who had sent Him (5:16-30).

8:28-29 Lifting up (Gr. *hypsoo*) the Son of Man refers to His crucifixion, which John viewed as His exaltation (cf. 3:14; 12:23). The title "Son of Man" is messianic (Dan. 7:13-14) with emphasis on His perfect humanity. Jesus' enemies would lift Him up. When they did, they would realize that Jesus was the self-existent God. Jesus did not mean that His crucifixion would convince all His critics of His true identity but that that exaltation would be the key to many of them believing on Him (cf. 12:32). The Crucifixion would convince many unbelievers of Jesus' true identity (cf. Acts 2).

> "This concept of the death on the cross of one who was one with the Father is the great central thought of this Gospel."[333]

Jesus again affirmed that everything He said came from and with the authority of His Father (cf. vv. 16, 18, 26). All that He said and did was the Father's will including the Cross. Jesus continually expressed His dependence on the Father and gloried in the Father's presence with Him (cf. 3:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:16; et al.). Even though His own rejected Jesus and crucified Him, the Father never abandoned Him. Jesus' ultimate purpose was to please His Father.

8:30 John noted that, in spite of the confusion of many that resulted from Jesus' teaching, others believed on Him because of these words (cf. 7:31). God opened their understanding with His illuminating and life-giving words. However in view of the following verses, the faith of some of them seems to have been quite shallow.

The challenge to professing believers 8:31-47

Jesus next addressed those in His audience who had expressed some faith in Him (v. 30).

8:31 The mark of a true disciple is continuation in the instructions of his or her teacher. A disciple is by definition a learner, not necessarily a believer in

[333]Morris, p. 398.

the born again sense. A disciple remains a disciple as long as he or she continues to follow the instruction of his or her teacher. When that one stops following faithfully, he or she ceases to be a disciple. He or she does not lose his or her salvation, which comes as a gift from God. Genuine believers can continue to be disciples of Jesus or they can cease to be His disciples temporarily or permanently. God never forces believers to continue following Him.

The disciples in this context appear to have believed that Jesus was a prophet or the Messiah as the Jews popularly regarded Messiah. They apparently did not believe that He was God (cf. 7:39-41). They appear to have been unsaved in view of what Jesus proceeded to say about them. This then is another of the many passages in the Gospels in which Jesus taught the conditions of discipleship.

Some interpreters have sought to differentiate two types of believers in verses 30 and 31. The first, they say, were genuine believers, which the Greek phrase *pisteuo eis* plus the accusative ("believe in Him" or "put their faith in Him") identifies. The second group was only professors, which the Greek phrase *pisteuo* plus the dative ("believed Him") in verse 31 identifies. This linguistic distinction does not hold up, however. The first construction allegedly describing genuine faith describes spurious faith in 2:23, and the second construction that supposedly always describes superficial faith describes genuine faith in 5:24.

Other interpreters see verse 31 as introducing Judaizing Christians, Jewish believers who genuinely believed in Jesus as their Savior but also believed that Christians need to obey the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). However there is nothing in the context to support this view. It deals primarily with Jesus' identity, not the place of the Mosaic Law in the believer's life.

Still others believe that Jesus was teaching that perseverance is the mark of true faith, that genuine believers will inevitably continue to follow Jesus as His disciples.[334] This view contradicts the teaching of other Scriptures that view true believers as capable of not following Jesus faithfully. Many Scriptural injunctions urge believers to follow the Lord faithfully rather than turning aside and dropping out of the Christian race (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 4; 6:11-21; 2 Tim. 1:6, 13; 2:3-7, 12-13, 15-26; 3:14-17; 4:1-8; Titus 3:8). This verse is talking about discipleship, not salvation, and rewards, not regeneration.

This last view misunderstands the teaching of Scripture regarding perseverance. The Bible consistently teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who perseveres within the believer keeping him or her securely saved. It does not teach that believers inevitably persevere in the faith but that believers

[334]E.g., John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, p. 152.

can defect from the faith while remaining saved (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10, 16). It is the Savior who perseveres with the saints, not necessarily the saints who persevere with the Savior (2 Tim. 2:13).[335]

This view also incorrectly reads "believer" for "disciple" in the text. These are two different terms describing two different groups of people in relation to Jesus. Disciples may or may not be genuine believers, and believers may or may not be genuine disciples. Today we sometimes describe a believer who is also a disciple as a growing Christian and a believer who is not a disciple as a backslidden Christian.

8:32 Disciples who continue to abide (Gr. *meno*) in Jesus' word (v. 31) come to know the truth. Jesus' words are truth because He is the incarnation of truth (1:14; 14:6). This truth, Jesus' words, sets people free when they understand His teaching. It liberates them spiritually from ignorance, sin, and spiritual death.

Many people misapply this verse. It occurs as a motto in numerous public libraries, for example, with the implication that any true information has a liberating effect. That is only true to a degree. In the context Jesus was speaking about spiritual truth that He revealed.[336] It is that truth that is in view here. Jesus was speaking particularly of the gospel.

8:33 Jesus assumed that His hearers were slaves, but they emphatically denied being such. They could not have meant that they had never been physical slaves since the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Syrians, and most recently the Romans had all enslaved them. Probably they meant that they had never been spiritual slaves. They viewed themselves as spiritually right with God because of their descent from Abraham with whom God had made a special covenant (cf. Matt. 8:12; Mark 2:17; John 9:40). They denied that they had any significant spiritual need for liberation. Here were superficial believers in Jesus, believers in His messiahship only perhaps, who were resisting His teaching. They were not abiding in His word and being true disciples of His (v. 31).

8:34 Jesus proceeded to clarify what He meant. He prefaced His declaration with a strong affirmation of its truth (cf. vv. 51, 58). Everyone who commits acts of sin becomes sin's slave. The Greek present participle *poion* ("who commits sin" or "who sins") implies continual sinning rather than an occasional lapse. This is a general truth that applies to both believers and unbelievers. People who continually commit sin become the slaves of sin. Sin tends to become habit-forming and addictive. This type of slavery is more fundamental and personal than mere political slavery.

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[335]See Dillow, pp. 7-23.

[336]Thus people in our day have the same problem with Jesus' words as people in Jesus' day. Many take them as referring to physical rather than spiritual things.

How does this revelation harmonize with Paul's teaching about the believer's relationship to sin that he wrote in Romans 6? In Romans 6, Paul explained that at regeneration God broke the chain that makes the believer the slave of sin. Sin does not have the power to enslave us that it did before we believed in Jesus. However believers can become sin's slaves by practicing sin. We do not need to be its slaves any longer since God has broken its enslaving power over us. We are no longer its slaves, but we can still choose to live as its slaves by submitting to temptation. Sin gains power over us when we yield to temptation.

Similarly a heroin addict cannot break his or her addiction without radical treatment. The treatment can result in total rehabilitation, but the former addict can choose to become a slave again by returning to his or her habit. However he or she does not need to return since liberation has taken place. Another illustration is Israel in the Old Testament. Having experienced liberation from the Egyptians the Israelites chose to return to slavery under the Assyrians and Babylonians though they did not need to do that. By continually sinning they set themselves up for these strong enemies to take them captive.

8:35 These Jews thought of themselves as occupying a privileged and secure position as sons within God's household because they were Abraham's descendants. Jesus now informed them that they were not sons but slaves. The implication was that they did not enjoy a secure position but could lose it. This is really what happened because the Jews refused to receive Jesus (cf. Rom. 9—11). They lost their privileged position in the world temporarily. Jesus was not speaking in this context about the loss of personal salvation but of the loss of Israel's national privilege.

The son in Jesus' explanation stands for Himself (v. 36). The Greek word for "son" here is *huios*, which John consistently used to describe Jesus. He referred to believers as God's "children" (Gr. *tekna*).

8:36 The Son of God also has the authority to liberate spiritual slaves from their bondage to sin and its consequences. Real freedom consists of liberty from sin's enslavement to do what we should do. It does not mean that we may do just anything we please. We are now free to do what pleases God, which we could not do formerly. When we do what pleases God, we discover that it also pleases us. Hope for real freedom, therefore, does not rest on Abrahamic ancestry but Jesus' action.

8:37 Jesus acknowledged that the Jews listening to Him were Abraham's descendants but only on the physical level (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6, 8; Gal. 3:29). Their desire to kill Him because they rejected His teaching did not reveal true spiritual kinship with Abraham. Abraham had welcomed God's

representatives who visited him with revelations from above (Gen. 18:1-22). Jesus' hearers had not done that.

8:38 Jesus claimed to be God's Son as the Jews claimed to be Abraham's children. As their conduct showed, they were not Abraham's true children, so Jesus' words proved that He was God's true Son. Jesus' point was that conduct reveals paternity. He was hinting that their father was not God since they opposed Him.

8:39-41a The Jews stubbornly insisted that they revealed their ancestry to Abraham by doing as he did. By claiming Abraham as their father at this stage in the discussion they were saying that they were as good as Abraham. Jesus proceeded to repeat the difference between them and Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:16-29). He also implied again that someone other than Abraham was their spiritual father.

8:41b The Jews rejected Jesus' claim that they were not genuine children of Abraham. Their reference to fornication may have been a slur on Jesus' physical paternity. Who was He with His questionable pedigree to deny their ancestry? They then claimed that on the spiritual level God was their father (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-2). They apparently believed that Jesus surely could not deny that, though He disputed their connection to Abraham.

8:42 However, Jesus was not even willing to grant them that they were God's children in the spiritual sense. How could they respond to Him as they did and still claim to be behaving as God? If they were God's true children, they would love Jesus rather than try to kill Him. They would acknowledge that God had sent Him.

8:43 These Jews were having difficulty believing what Jesus was saying, specifically about Himself. Jesus identified the source of this difficulty as within them, not in His ability to communicate clearly. It lay in their inability to accept the truth that He spoke because of their presuppositions, prejudice, and parentage (v. 44). Hearing here does not mean mere understanding but responding positively.

8:44 Finally Jesus identified the father of these Jews to whom He had been alluding (vv. 38, 41). Their attitudes and actions pointed to the devil as their father for two reasons. They wanted to kill Jesus, and Satan was a murderer from the beginning of his career as a fallen angel. He indirectly murdered Adam and then Abel. Second, they had abandoned the truth for lies, and the devil had consistently done the same thing throughout history (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:17).[337]

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[337]See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Work as a Deceiver," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):190-202.

In one sense every human being is a child of the devil since we all do the things that He does out of a sinful human nature. We usually think of this sinful behavior as identifying fallen Adam as our father, but Satan was behind the Fall. However the believer is also a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently we are always either manifesting the traits of one of our spiritual fathers or the other. This is the result of walking either by the flesh or by the Spirit.

8:45 Liars not only speak untruth, but they also reject the truth. These Jews rejected Jesus partially because He spoke the truth. The only way children of the devil can believe and welcome the truth is if God draws them and teaches them the truth (6:44-45).

8:46-47 Obviously many of Jesus' critics thought He was guilty of committing sin (cf. 5:18). Jesus asked if any of them could prove Him guilty (cf. 18:23). This was one of Jesus' clearest claims to being God. Not one of His critics could prove Him guilty because He was not guilty. No mere mortal could risk making such an offer.

> "The *perfect* holiness of Christ is in this passage demonstrated, not by the silence of the Jews, who might have ignored the sins of their questioner, but by the assurance with which His direct consciousness of the purity of His whole life is in this question affirmed."[338]

Jesus again claimed that His hearers did not accept His words because they did not belong to God.

The violent response of Jesus' critics 8:48-59

8:48 Since the Jews could not refute Jesus' challenge they resorted to verbal abuse (cf. 7:52). Perhaps they called Him a Samaritan because He had questioned their ties to Abraham. This may have been a Samaritan attack against the Jews as well.[339] Perhaps they also said this because He took a lax view of the tenets of Judaism as they understood them. This is the only record of this charge in the Gospels. However, there are several other instances of the Jews' claiming that Jesus was demon possessed (cf. 7:20; 8:52; 10:20). Perhaps these superficial believers concluded that only a demon possessed heretic would accuse them as Jesus did. Jesus had claimed that their father was the devil, and now they accused Him of being the devil's agent. This charge came after Jesus' repeated statements that He had come from God, and it illustrates the unbelief of these believing Jews (v. 31).

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[338]Godet, 2:350.

[339]Bruce, p. 199; J. Bowman, "Samaritan Studies," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 40:2 (March 1958):306-8.

8:49 Jesus soberly denied their charge. His claims resulted from His faithfulness to His Father, not from demonic influence. Jesus' aim was to honor His Father by faithfully carrying out His will. The Jews' goal was to disgrace Jesus. They tried to do this by rejecting the testimony that the Father sent through Him.

8:50 Jesus did not try to justify Himself. He sought the Father's glory, not His own. What others thought of Him was relatively immaterial. God's approval was all that mattered to Him because God, not man, was His judge (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2-5).

8:51 The central purpose of Jesus' mission was not glory for Himself but glory for His Father through salvation for humankind. Jesus' introduction of this strong statement shows its vital importance. Keeping Jesus' word is synonymous with believing on Him (cf. 5:24; 8:24). The death in view is eternal death (cf. 11:25).

> "The assurance relates to life which physical death cannot extinguish, and so to the death of the spirit; the believer receives eternal life, i.e., the life of the kingdom of God, over which death has no power and which is destined for resurrection."[340]

8:52 The Jews interpreted Jesus' statements as referring to physical death. They judged that only a demoniac would claim that His words were more powerful than the revelations that Abraham and the prophets had received and passed on. Tasting death means experiencing death (cf. Heb. 2:9).

8:53 If Jesus' words had the power to prevent death, then Jesus must have been claiming to be greater than anyone who had died. The Jews' question in the Greek text expects a negative answer. Certainly Jesus could not mean that He was greater than these men, could He? Ironically He was. They asked who Jesus was proudly claiming to be (cf. 5:18; 10:33; 19:7).[341] They missed the point that He had been stressing throughout this discourse and throughout His ministry, namely, that He did not exalt Himself at all. He simply did the deeds and said the words that His Father had given Him (vv. 28, 38, 42, 50).

Jesus rarely asserted His deity. He did not promote Himself. Instead He chose to live a godly life before people and let them draw their own conclusions as God gave them understanding (cf. Matt. 16:13-17).

8:54 Jesus then refuted His critics' accusation that He was glorifying Himself. Any glory apart from glory that God bestows amounts to nothing (cf. Heb.

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[340]G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 137.
[341]Morris, p. 416-17.

5:5). Rather Jesus said that it was the Father who was glorifying Him. Ironically His critics, who claimed to know God, failed to perceive that this was what God was doing.

> "Their relation to God was formal; his was familial."[342]

8:55 Jesus next identified these superficial believers as unbelievers. They had not yet come to believe that He was God even though some of them thought that He was a crazy prophet. For Jesus to deny knowing God would be as much a lie as His critic's claim to know God was. The proof that Jesus really did know God was His obedience to Him.

Jesus knew (Gr. *oida*) God inherently and intuitively, but His critics did not know (Gr. *ginosko*) God by experience or observation. We should not put too much emphasis on the differences between these two Greek words though, since John often used synonyms without much distinction.[343]

8:56 Jesus was, of course, referring to Abraham as the physical ancestor of His hearers, not their spiritual father. The occasion of Abraham's rejoicing, to which Jesus referred, is unclear. The commentators have suggested various incidents in his life that Moses recorded (i.e., Gen. 12:2-3; 15:17-21; 17:17; 21:6; 22:5-14). I think the most likely possibility is Genesis 12:3, the prediction that God would bless the whole world through Abraham. In any case Jesus said that Abraham anticipated His day. Jesus was claiming that He fulfilled what Abraham looked forward to. We need to be careful not to read back into Abraham's understanding of the future what we know from revelation that God gave after Abraham died. Clearly Abraham did know that his seed would become the channel of God's blessing to the entire world.[344]

8:57 The Jews did not understand Jesus' meaning because they disregarded the possibility of His deity. To them it seemed ludicrous that Abraham could have seen Jesus' day in any sense since millennia separated the two men. Evidently they chose 50 years old as a round number symbolic of the end of an active life (cf. Num. 4:3). Jesus was obviously not that old since He began His public ministry when He was about 30 (Luke 3:23), and it only lasted about three and a half years.[345]

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[342]Tenney, "John," p. 98.

[343]Ibid.

[344]The Hebrew and Greek words translated "seed" (Heb. *zera*, Gr. *sperma*) are collective singulars, as is the English word. It is not clear from the word whether one or more seeds are in view. The Bible uses the phrase "seed of Abraham" to refer to four entities: Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), Abraham's spiritual children (believers, Gal. 4:6-9, 29), his physical descendents (the Jews, Gen. 12:1-3, 7; et al.), and his physical and spiritual posterity (saved Jews, Rom. 9:6, 8; Gal. 6:16).

[345]According to Hoehner's chronology, p. 143, Jesus would have been in His mid-thirties at this time.

8:58 This was the third and last of Jesus' solemn pronouncements in this discourse (cf. vv. 34, 51). If Jesus had only wanted to claim that He existed before Abraham, He could have said, "I was." By saying, "I am," He was not just claiming preexistence but deity (cf. vv. 24, 28; 5:18; Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:13).[346]

> "It is eternity of being and not simply being that has lasted through several centuries that the expression indicates."[347]

Jesus existed before Abraham came into being (Gr. *genesthai*).

8:59 The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. They began to stone Him for making what they considered a blasphemous claim (5:18; Lev. 24:16). However, Jesus hid Himself because His hour had not yet come (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30, 44; 8:20; 18:6). Then He departed from the temple. He did not protest or retaliate, another indication of His submission to the Father.

This concludes Jesus' light of the world discourse (vv. 12-59). The Light of the World now symbolically abandoned the Jews by leaving the temple and went out to humanity in general, which the man born blind represents.

6. The sixth sign: healing a man born blind ch. 9

This chapter continues the theme of Jesus as the Light of the World (8:12; 9:5). When the Light shone, some received spiritual sight, as this blind man received physical and spiritual sight. However the Light blinded others (vv. 39-41). The chapter shows the continuing polarization of opinion that marked Jesus' ministry as the differences between those who believed on Him and those who disbelieved became more apparent.

> "There are more miracles of the giving of sight to the blind recorded of Jesus than healings in any other category (see Matt. 9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:30-31; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21-22). In the Old Testament the giving of sight to the blind is associated with God himself (Exod. 4:11; Ps. 146:8). It is also a messianic activity (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7), and this may be its significance in the New Testament. It is a divine function, a function for God's own Messiah, that Jesus fulfills when he gives sight to the blind."[348]

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[346]See John A. Witmer, "Did Jesus Claim to Be God?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):147-56.
[347]Morris, p. 420.
[348]Ibid., p. 422.

The healing of the man 9:1-12

The exact time of this miracle and Jesus' resultant discourse is unclear. Evidently these events transpired sometime between the feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 10; September 10-17, A.D. 32.) and the feast of Dedication (10:22-39; December 18, A.D. 32.).[349] This sixth of John's seven select signs shows Jesus' power over misfortune.[350]

9:1 Probably Jesus healed this man in Jerusalem (8:59). John apparently noted that the man had been blind from birth to prove his helpless condition and to compare him with those who were spiritually blind from birth (cf. vv. 39-41; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3). While the Synoptics record several instances in which blind people received their sight, this is the only case of this happening to a man who was born blind. The miracle also illustrates the origin and development of faith.

9:2 The disciples' question reflected popular Jewish opinion of their day. Clearly the Old Testament taught that sin brings divine punishment (e.g., Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Ezek. 18:4). This cause and effect relationship led many of the Jews, as well as many modern people, to conclude that every bad effect had an identifiable sinful cause. That conclusion goes farther than the Bible does (cf. Job; 2 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 4:13). Sin does lie behind all the suffering and evil in the world, but the connection between sin and suffering is not always immediate or observable.

The disciples assumed that either one or both of the blind man's parents had sinned or he had and that this sin was the cause of his blindness.

> "It is not absolutely certain they were thinking of the possibility of the man having sinned in a pre-natal condition. As R. A. Knox points out, they may not have known that the man was born blind, and the Greek might be understood to mean, 'Did this man sin? or did his parents commit some sin with the result that he was *born* blind?'"[351]

> "The disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy but rather as a subject for a theological discussion. It is much easier to discuss an abstract subject like 'sin' than it is to minister to a concrete need in the life of a person."[352]

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[349]Hoehner, p. 143; cf. Brown, 1:388-90.
[350]Tenney, *John: The Gospel* . . ., p. 312.
[351]Tasker, p. 126. The source mentioned is Ronald A. Knox, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ newly translated from the Vulgate Latin* . . ., 1945 ed.
[352]Wiersbe, 1:324.

9:3 Neither of the disciples' options was the reason for this man's blindness. Rather God had permitted it so He might display His work in this man's life. It is wrong to conclude that every instance of suffering springs immediately from a particular act of sin. It is also wrong to conclude that God permits every instance of suffering because He intends to relieve it miraculously. Jesus was talking about that particular man's case. He did not reveal all the reasons for the man's condition either.

> "Only God knows why babies are born with handicaps, and only God can turn those handicaps into something that will bring good to the people and glory to His name."[353]

Notice the positive viewpoint of Jesus. The disciples viewed the man's condition as an indication of divine displeasure, but Jesus saw it as an opportunity for divine grace.

There is no punctuation in the Greek text, so it may help to understand Jesus' meaning to omit the period at the end of verse 3 and to read verses 3 and 4 as follows. "But that the works of God might be displayed in him, we must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day."

9:4-5 Jesus' "we" probably refers to Himself alone, though He could have meant Himself and the disciples. Jesus later spoke of His disciples continuing His work (14:12; cf. 20:21). The day in view is probably a reference to the daylight made such by the Light of the World's presence on the earth. Darkness would descend when He departed the earth and returned to heaven (cf. 12:35). The nighttime when no man can work may refer to the spiritual darkness that will yet engulf the world. I doubt that this is a reference to the Tribulation.

9:6 The healing of the blind man that followed shows the Light of the World dispelling darkness while it was still day. Perhaps Jesus spat on the ground so the blind man would hear what He was doing. Jesus applied His saliva directly when He healed the deaf man with the speech impediment in the Decapolis (Mark 7:33) and the blind man near Bethsaida (Mark 8:23). Here He mixed His saliva with clay. Applying the clay to the blind man's eyes would have let him feel that Jesus was working for Him. Jesus may have intended these sensory aids to strengthen the man's faith. Jesus may have varied His methods of healing so people would not think that the method was more important than the man doing the healing.

Perhaps Jesus also used saliva and clay to associate this act of healing with divine creation (Gen. 2:7).[354] Another suggestion is that by covering the man's eyes with mud Jesus was making his blindness even more intense to

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[353]Ibid.

[354]Lindars, p. 343; Blum, p. 307.

magnify the cure (cf. 1 Kings 18:33-35).[355] Some students of this passage have suggested that Jesus was using something unclean to affect a cure to show His power to overcome evil with good.[356] Another view is that Jesus introduced an irritant so the man would want to irrigate his eyes.[357]

> "The blind man, introduced as the theme of a theological debate, becomes the object of divine mercy and a place of revelation."[358]

9:7 Jesus then instructed the blind man to go to the pool of Siloam in southeast Jerusalem and wash the mud off his eyes.[359] He obeyed Jesus, received his sight, and departed from the pool seeing. His obedience evidenced faith that something good would come of obeying Jesus.

It is probably significant that Jesus sent the man to that particular source of water. John interpreted the meaning of "Siloam" as "sent" for his readers. Jesus had sent the man, he obeyed, and he received sight. Likewise all who obeyed Jesus' command to believe on Him received spiritual sight.

9:8-9 John's record of the conversation of the blind man's neighbors is interesting. It shows that the change in him was so remarkable that even some people who knew him well could not believe that he was the same man. The former beggar's personal testimony settled the debate. No one could argue with that.

> "The change wrought by regeneration in the converted Christian is so great that other people often find it difficult to believe he is the same person; so it was with the physical change effected by Jesus in the blind beggar."[360]

Evidently this man had been a beggar out of necessity rather than choice. He later demonstrated a sense of humor, a knowledge of history and Scripture, the ability to withstand intimidation, and facility in arguing logically (cf. vv. 27, 30-32). These traits show that he was far from mentally incompetent.

9:10-12 Jesus had not accompanied the man to the pool so he could identify Him to the crowd as his healer. Here is further evidence that Jesus was not

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[355]Calvin, 1:241.

[356]D. Smith, "Jesus and the Pharisees in Socio-Anthropological Perspective," *Trinity Journal* 6NS:2 (Autumn 1985):151-56; cf. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*.

[357]Wiersbe, 1:324. Compare the Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction that leads to obedience.

[358]Barrett, p. 358.

[359]See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

[360]Tasker, p. 124.

promoting Himself to gain glory but was simply doing the work that God had given Him to do.

When questioned about the miracle, the former blind man could only report the facts of his case and the name of Jesus whom he had not yet seen. The crowd obviously wanted to find Jesus. The man's description of Jesus gives no indication that he was a true believer. Jesus did not perform this healing because the man believed that He was God's Son or even the Messiah. It was simply an expression of God's grace that became an opportunity for teaching.

The Pharisees' first interrogation 9:13-23

> "John evidently wants us to see that the activity of Jesus as the Light of the world inevitably results in judgment on those whose natural habitat is darkness. They oppose the Light and they bring down condemnation on themselves accordingly."[361]

9:13 The man's neighbors probably brought him to their religious leaders to hear their opinion of what had happened to him.

9:14 John now introduced the fact that Jesus had healed the man on a Sabbath because it became the basis for much of the discussion that followed. Most of the Pharisees would have regarded Jesus' action as inappropriate work that violated Sabbath ordinances (cf. 5:9, 16; 7:21-24). He had healed a man, made clay, and anointed the man's eyes.

9:15 When the Pharisees asked the man how he had received his sight, he explained the method that Jesus had used.

9:16 Jesus' produced a division among the people again (cf. 7:40-43). Some of them, impressed with Jesus' violation of traditional Sabbath laws, concluded that He could not represent God who had given the Sabbath laws. Their argument was *a priori*, beginning with the law and working forward to Jesus' action. Others found the evidence of a supernatural cure more impressive and decided that Jesus must not be a common sinner but someone special who could do divine acts. Their argument was *a posteriori*, beginning with the facts and working back to Jesus' action. Ironically the second group had the weaker argument since miracles do not necessarily prove that the miracle-worker is from God. Still their conclusion was true whereas the conclusion of the first group with the stronger argument was false. At least some of the Pharisees considered the possibility that Jesus had come from God (cf. 3:2).

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[361]Morris, p. 429.

9:17 Faced with having to decide if Jesus was from God or not, the healed man concluded that He was a prophet similar to other miracle-working Old Testament prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 2:19-22; 4:18-44; 5:1-14). This was an advance over his previous description of Jesus as simply "the man called Jesus" (v. 11). His faith was growing.

9:18-19 The Jews in view are the Pharisees (v. 13). Evidently they chose to interview the healed man's parents because they could not unite on a decision about Jesus. They wanted more information from people closer to him than just his neighbors (v. 8). Only his parents could affirm that he had been truly blind from birth. If he had not been, the Pharisees could dispute Jesus' miracle.

9:20-21 The man's parents confirmed that he was indeed their son and that he had been blind from birth, so they testified that a genuine miracle had happened. Yet they were unwilling to give their opinion about how their son became able to see or to identify Jesus as his healer. They probably knew the answers to these questions since John proceeded to explain that they had other reasons for hedging (vv. 22-23). They suggested that the investigators question their son on these points since he was capable of giving legal testimony himself. Jewish boys became responsible adults at the age of 13. The age of this man is unknown, but in view of his confident responses to the Pharisees that follow he appears to have been at least in his twenties.

9:22-23 The reason for the parents' silence was their fear of excommunication from their local synagogue for affirming that Jesus was the Messiah.

> "For a Jew to be put out of the synagogue meant that he was ostracized by everyone."[362]

We now learn that the official position about Jesus was that He was not the Messiah, and anyone who affirmed that He was suffered religious persecution (cf. 7:13).[363]

> "'Already the Jews had decided' does not necessarily indicate a formal decree of the Sanhedrin. It might well mean that some of the leading men had agreed among themselves to take action against the supporters of Jesus, perhaps to exclude them from the synagogues, perhaps to initiate proceedings in the Sanhedrin."[364]

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[362]*The New Scofield* …, p. 1139.

[363]Some scholars (e.g., Barrett, and J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*) argued that such a test of heresy was impossible this early in Jewish Christian relations. However, other scholars have rebutted these objections effectively (e.g., Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 369-72).

[364]Morris, p. 435.

Interestingly the Apostle John considered confession of Jesus as the Messiah to be a litmus test that identifies genuine Christians (1 John 5:1). In 1 John 5:1 the title "Christ" (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah") comprehends all the biblical revelation about Messiah, specifically that He was divine as well as human. During Jesus' ministry, however, confessing Jesus as the Messiah did not necessarily involve believing in His deity (cf. 1:41; Matt. 16:16). It meant at least believing that He was the promised messianic deliverer of Israel, the popular conception of Messiah.

The Pharisees' second interrogation 9:24-34

The Pharisees, who considered themselves enlightened, now tried to badger the formerly blind man into denying that he saw the light.

9:24 The Pharisees now questioned the healed man again. They had already decided that Jesus was not the Messiah, but they had to admit that He had done a remarkable miracle. Having failed to prove Jesus a sinner they now hoped the healed man would cave in to pressure from the authorities and testify that Jesus was a sinner. Moreover they suggested that the man would be glorifying God if he agreed with their verdict and admitted his guilt in glorifying Jesus (cf. v. 15). Another evidence of Johannine irony appears. The Pharisees assumed that glorifying God and glorifying Jesus were mutually exclusive whereas to glorify the Son is really to glorify the Father.

Their disdain for Jesus comes through in their calling Him simply "this man." A sinner in the Pharisees' eyes was someone who broke the oral traditions as well as the Mosaic Law. They hoped the restored man would identify some instance of disobedience that would confirm their conclusion. Notice that these judges prejudiced everyone against Jesus from the start by saying that they had already determined that He was a sinner.

9:25 The healed man refused to speculate on Jesus' sinfulness. He left that to the theological heavyweights. However, he refused to back down and deny that Jesus had given him sight. Here is another of many instances in the fourth Gospel of personal testimony, which John consistently presented as important and effective. Regardless of a believer's understanding of Christology, he or she can always testify to the change that Jesus Christ has affected in that person's life.

9:26 The Pharisees hoped that as the man repeated his story he would contradict himself or in some other way discredit his own testimony. This is the fourth time that the Pharisees asked how the miracle had happened (vv. 10, 15, 19, 26). People are often more curious about the mechanics of

miracles than they are about the man who performs them. Likewise people are often more concerned to identify whom to blame than they are in really helping people.

9:27 The restored blind man refused to review the obvious facts. He now knew that the Pharisees did not want the truth but information they could use against Jesus. They had not listened to him in the sense of believing him the first time (cf. 5:25). Sarcastically he suggested that perhaps they wanted to hear about Jesus one more time because they wanted to follow Him as disciples. This response indicates that the man felt no intimidation from his accusers. He knew that he stood on solid ground with his testimony, so much so that he could jibe his examiners with a bit of humor.

9:28-29 The Pharisees saw nothing funny in the man's reply, however. They were deadly serious in their attempt to execute Jesus. They undoubtedly realized that this former beggar had seen through their veiled attempt to condemn Jesus unjustly. They met his good-natured prod with insult. They turned his charge back on himself and presented following Jesus as irreconcilable with following Moses. Of course, the Pharisees were not the disciples of Moses that they claimed to be. Ironically Jesus was. Failure to know where Jesus came from amounted to failing to know where He received His authority. Moses had come from God, but Jesus' critics claimed not to know whether He came from God or from Satan (v. 16). Most of them suspected the latter.

> "The Pharisees were cautious men who would consider themselves conservatives, when in reality they were 'preservatives.' . . . A 'preservative' simply embalms the past and preserves it. He is against change and resists the new things that God is doing."[365]

We see here an essential difference between Judaism and Christianity (cf. 1:17). The Jews continue to profess allegiance to Moses as the Pharisees did here while Christians claim to follow Jesus, which is what they charged the restored man with doing. Following Jesus involves accepting Moses' revelation as authoritative since Jesus authenticated Moses' writings.

Earlier Jesus' enemies said they knew where He came from, namely, Galilee (7:27). They were wrong in their assessment of Jesus' earthly origin as they were wrong about His heavenly origin. Here they were speaking of His authoritative origin, specifically who had sent Him.

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[365]Wiersbe, 1:326.

9:30-31 The healed man not only possessed a sense of humor but also common sense. It seemed remarkable to him that the Pharisees could not see that Jesus had come from God. Their unbelief in view of the evidence was incredible to him. The proof that Jesus had come from God was His ability to perform such a powerful and constructive miracle as giving sight to the blind. A fundamental biblical revelation is that God responds positively to the godly, but He does not hear (in the sense of granting the requests of) those who sin (Job 27:9; 35:13; Ps. 34:15-16; 66:18; 145:19; Prov. 15:29; 28:9; Isa. 1:15). Obviously not all miracle-workers had come from God (cf. Exod. 7:22; 8:7), but these had been exceptions to the rule. The former blind man showed considerable spiritual insight.

> "It is always risky to identify spiritual power with divine power. But such theological niceties do not trouble the healed man. His spiritual instincts are good, even if his theological argumentation is not entirely convincing."[366]

9:32-33 The man was correct in that Scripture recorded no former healing of a man born blind. Evidently Jesus had not healed anyone in this condition previously either. At least this restored man had not heard of any such cases. He concluded that Jesus must have come from God. He did not qualify as the sinner that the Pharisees where making Him out to be.

9:34 Scorn has often served as a final resort when evidence fails, and it served the Pharisees this way here. They implied that this man's congenital blindness was the result of a sinful condition that rendered him incapable of intellectual insight (cf. v. 2). By saying this they unintentionally admitted that Jesus had cured a man blind from birth.

> "How could anybody be steeped in sin at birth? Everybody is born with a sinful nature (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12), but a baby can hardly commit numerous acts of sin moments after it is born!"[367]

The Pharisees did not argue the exceptions to the rule that the man cited nor did they offer any other possible explanations. No one seems to have remembered that when Messiah would appear He would open the eyes of the blind (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7).

This poor man lost his privilege of participating in synagogue worship for taking his stand supporting Jesus (cf. v. 22). Many other Jewish believers followed him in this fate in the years that have unfolded since this incident happened. This is the first persecution of Jesus' followers that John recorded.

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[366]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 375.
[367]Blum, p. 308.

Spiritual sight and blindness 9:35-41

"John is interested in the way the coming of Jesus divides people."[368]

9:35 The healed man had responded positively and courageously to the light that he had so far, but he did not have much light. Therefore Jesus took the initiative and sought him out with further revelation designed to bring him to full faith. When Jesus found him, He asked if he placed his trust in the Son of Man.[369] This personal response to God's grace is essential for salvation. "You" is emphatic in the Greek text. Jesus probably chose this title for Himself because it expressed the fact that He was the Man who had come from God (Dan. 7:13-14; cf. John 1:51; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28). Furthermore it connotes Jesus' role as Judge, which He proceeded to explain (v. 39).

Jesus was asking the man if he believed in the God-man, though Jesus did not identify Himself as that Man. The blind man had never before seen Jesus so he did not know who He was.

9:36 The man replied by asking Jesus to point the Son of Man out to him. He seemed ready to believe in Him and evidently thought that Jesus would identify his healer. "Lord" (Gr. *kyrie*) means "Sir" in this context. Again someone spoke better than he knew since the man's questioner was Lord in a larger sense than he first realized (cf. v. 38).

9:37-38 Jesus then identified Himself as the Son of Man (cf. 4:26). Perhaps He said that the man had seen Him to connect the miracle with the miracle-worker. The man may have suspected that Jesus was his healer because of the sound of His voice, but seeing made the identification certain. The man had seen Him with the eyes of faith previously, but now he also saw Him physically. Similarly modern believers see Him by faith, but in the future faith will give way to sight.

Jesus removed all possibility of misunderstanding by also identifying Himself as the One who then spoke to the man. The beggar confessed His faith in Jesus and appropriately proceeded to prostrate himself (Gr. *proskyneo*) in worship before Him. This is the only place in this Gospel where we read that anyone worshipped Jesus. Now the respectful address "Lord" took on deeper meaning for him (v. 36). However the man still had much to learn about the full identity of Jesus and its implications, as all new believers do. This man was no longer welcome in his synagogue, but he took a new place of worship at Jesus' feet. Worship means acknowledging and ascribing worthiness to someone or something.

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[368]Morris, p. 439.

[369]Some early manuscripts and modern translations have "Son of God," but "Son of Man" has the better support.

This blind man's pilgrimage from darkness to light is clear from the terms he used to describe Jesus. First, he called Him "the man called Jesus" (v. 11). Second, he referred to Jesus as a prophet (v. 17). Third, he came to believe that Jesus was a prophet who had come from God (v. 33). Finally, he acknowledged Jesus as Lord (v. 38). This man's progress from dark unbelief to the light of faith is very significant in view of John's stated purpose to bring his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ (20:31). It shows that this process sometimes, indeed usually, involves stages of illumination. It is also interesting that the problems that this man had with the Pharisees were what God used to open his eyes to who Jesus really was. It is often through difficulties that God teaches us more about Himself.

9:39 Jesus concluded His comments to the man by explaining something of His purpose in the Incarnation.

> "The last three verses of chapter ix make it clear that this incident has been recorded primarily because it is an acted parable of faith and unbelief, and therefore of judgment, a theme that is never absent for long from this Gospel."[370]

Jesus' primary purpose was to save some, but in doing so He had to pass judgment (Gr. *krima*, cf. 3:17-21, 36; 12:47). Judging was the *result* of His coming, not the *reason* for it. The last part of the verse consists of two purpose clauses. Jesus was evidently alluding to Isaiah 6:10 and 42:19. His coming inevitably involved exposing the spiritual blindness of some so they might recognize their blindness, turn to Jesus in faith, and see (cf. vv. 25, 36). Conversely His coming also involved confirming the spiritual blindness of those who professed to see spiritually but really did not because of their unbelief (cf. vv. 16, 22, 24, 29, 34). Jesus is the pivot on which all human destiny turns.[371] Jesus explained that what had happened to this man and the Pharisees was an example of what His whole ministry was about.

> ". . . a certain poverty of spirit (*cf*. Mt. 5:3), an abasement of personal pride (especially over one's religious opinions), and a candid acknowledgment of spiritual blindness are indispensable characteristics of the person who receives spiritual sight, true revelation, at the hands of Jesus . . ."[372]

9:40-41 Some Pharisees had been listening in on Jesus' conversation with the restored man. They suspected that Jesus might be referring to them when He spoke of the spiritually blind (v. 39). They wanted to make sure that

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[370]Tasker, p. 126.
[371]Tenney, "John," p. 105.
[372]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 378.

Jesus was not accusing them of spiritual blindness since they considered themselves the most enlightened among the Jews.

Jesus replied to them in irony. He said that if they were blind spiritually and realized their need for enlightenment they would not be guilty of sin, specifically unbelief, because they would accept Jesus' teaching. However, they did not sense their need and felt quite satisfied that they understood God's revelations correctly. Consequently they did not receive the light that Jesus offered. They were wise in their own eyes, but really they were fools (Prov. 26:12). Their sin of unbelief remained with them, and they remained in their sin and under God's condemning wrath (3:36). Light causes some eyes to see, but it blinds other eyes. Jesus' revelations had the same effects.

> "By contrast [with the increasing perception of the man born blind] the Pharisees, starting with the view that Jesus is not from God (v. 16), question the miracle (v. 18), speak of Jesus as a sinner (v. 24), are shown to be ignorant (v. 29), and finally are pronounced blind and sinners (v. 41)."[373]

> "If the Pharisees had been really blind, if they had had no understanding of spiritual things at all, they would not have sinned in acting as they did (cf. Rom. 5:13). They could not be blamed for acting in ignorance [cf. 1 Tim. 1:13]. They would then not have been acting in rebellion against their best insights. But they claim to see. They claim spiritual knowledge. They know the law. And it is sin for people who have spiritual knowledge to act as they do."[374]

The deceitfulness of sin often makes those who are in the greatest need of divine revelation and illumination think that they are the most enlightened of human beings. Only the Spirit of God using the Word of God can break through that dense darkness to bring conviction of spiritual blindness and to create openness to the truth (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16).

> ". . . it is precisely when men say that they see, and *because* they say that they see, that their *sin remaineth*. They continue to be guilty men, however unconscious of their guilt."[375]

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[373]Morris, p. 432.
[374]Ibid., p. 442.
[375]Tasker, p. 126.

This chapter advances the revelation of Jesus' true identity that was one of John's primary objectives in this Gospel. It also shows that as the light of this revelation became clearer, so did the darkness because some people prefer the darkness to the light (3:19).

> "This miracle is a sign that Jesus can open the eyes of the spiritually blind so that they can receive the complete sight which constitutes perfect faith. Faith means passing from darkness to light; and to bring men this faith, to give them the opportunity of responding when the divine Spirit draws them to Himself, is the primary purpose for which Jesus has been sent into the world."[376]

7. The Good Shepherd discourse 10:1-21

Evidently this teaching followed what John recorded in chapter 9 (v. 21), but exactly when between the feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 14, 37) and the feast of Dedication (v. 22) it happened is unclear. The place where Jesus gave it appears to have been Jerusalem (v. 21). Probably this teaching followed the preceding one immediately. The thematic as well as the linguistic connections are strong. The blind beggar had just been put out of the fold of his synagogue (9:34), so Jesus spoke of His fold, which the beggar had now entered (cf. 9:35-38).

Jesus' presentation of the figure 10:1-6

This teaching is quite similar to what the Synoptic evangelists recorded Jesus giving in His parables, but there is a significant difference. John called this teaching a figure of speech (Gr. *paroimian*) rather than a parable (Gr. *parabole*). Parables generally stress one point of comparison, but the sustained metaphors that follow develop many similarities. John did not include any Synoptic-style parables in his narrative.

Jesus evidently chose the figure of a good shepherd to contrast Himself with the bad shepherds who were misleading God's sheep. Many Old Testament passages castigated Israel's shepherds who failed in their duty (cf. Isa. 56:9-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:32-38; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11). God was Israel's Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:10-11). The shepherd metaphor also was a good one to picture Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice for His people.

> "The shepherd was an autocrat over his flock, and passages are not lacking where the shepherd imagery is used to emphasize the thought of sovereignty. Jesus is thus set forth in this allegory as the true Ruler of his people in contrast to all false shepherds."[377]

10:1 Jesus again stressed the importance of this teaching with a strong introductory preface to it. He then proceeded to point out several things about first-century shepherding that illustrated His ministry. John's original readers would have understood these similarities easily since shepherding was widespread.

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[376]Ibid., pp. 122-23. See also Howard, pp. 73-75.
[377]Morris, pp. 443-44. Cf. Rev. 2:27.

Jesus described a flock of sheep in a fold or pen that had solid walls and only one door (gate). Evidently the fold in view was a large enclosure some distance from any human dwelling place. Customarily several families who owned sheep that fed close together hired a watchman to guard the gate to such an exposed enclosure. He would admit authorized individuals but would exclude the unauthorized who might want to steal or kill some of the sheep. The words "thief" (Gr. *kleptes*, stressing trickery) and "robber" (Gr. *lestes*, stressing violence) are quite close in meaning.

God frequently compared His relationship to Israel to that of a shepherd and his sheep in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:10-16; cf. Ps. 23:1). He also called Israel's unfaithful leaders wicked shepherds of His people (e.g., Isa. 56:9-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:32-38; Ezek. 34:4; Zech. 11). Moreover He predicted that one day a descendant of David would shepherd the nation properly (Ezek. 34:23-25; 37:24-28). Thus these figures all had meaning to the Jews to whom Jesus first addressed this teaching.

In verse 1 the thieves and robbers clearly refer to the religious leaders who were unfaithful to God and were seeking to harm His sheep for personal gain (cf. 9:41). Their rejection of Jesus as the Shepherd whom God had sent marked them as what they were.

10:2 In contrast to these plunderers, an approved shepherd would enter the pen through its gate rather than over its wall. Jesus was implying that He came to Israel as God's authorized representative, the Messiah. The religious leaders on the other hand did not have divine sanction for their dealings with Israel that were essentially destructive as well as selfish.

10:3 The doorkeeper was the person hired to protect the sheep from their enemies. In the case of Jesus' ministry this person corresponded to John the Baptist. Normally there were sheep from several different flocks belonging to several different owners that stayed together in these large pens. The pen then symbolized Israel or Judaism. Upon entering the pen a shepherd would call his own sheep to come out from the others, and he would lead them out to pasture. Normally shepherds did this with a distinctive call or whistle. This shepherd, however, called each sheep by its own name, which evidently was not uncommon in Jesus' day.[378] The scene pictures Jesus' calling every individual whom the Father had given Him to follow Him out from the other non-elect Jews (cf. Num. 27:15-18; John 14:9; 20:16, 29; 21:16). Jesus' sheep listen to His voice and follow Him (cf. 5:24).

> "The Pharisees *threw* the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus *led* him out of Judaism and into the flock of God!"[379]

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[378]E.g., Blum, p. 309; Tenney, "John," p. 108.
[379]Wiersbe, 1:329.

10:4-5 Many shepherds drove their sheep before them and some of them used sheep dogs to help them. However this shepherd, as many others did, went before his sheep and led them where he wanted to take them. This description reflects the style of Jesus' leadership. He led His disciples who followed Him (cf. Gal. 5:18).

His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. They recognize Him for who He is, namely, their Shepherd. Conversely they will not follow false shepherds because their voice or teaching is strange to them. Jesus was describing what is typical behavior in such relationships, not that every individual sheep always behaves this way in every instance, as experience testifies.

Some people appeal to these verses to prove that true Christians will inevitably follow Christ and will never apostatize. This seems wrong for at least three reasons. First, Jesus said that His sheep follow Him, not a stranger, because they know the Good Shepherd's voice (what he says, his teaching). Sheep normally do follow their shepherd because they know his voice, but there are exceptions among sheep and among Christians. Second, if following false teachers were impossible for Christians, why are there so many warnings against doing precisely that in the New Testament? Third, John identified this saying of Jesus as a figure of speech (or compressed thought, v. 6). Illustrations typically make one main point, so we should not expect this illustration to correspond to reality in every detail, much less to teach doctrine in all its parts.

The point of these verses is how God forms His flock. People come to Jesus because He calls them, and they follow Him because they belong to Him. Many of the Jews who heard Jesus' voice disregarded Him because they considered Abraham or Moses as their shepherd.

10:6 Many of the Jews who heard these words did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They did not respond to the Shepherd's voice. They could hardly have failed to understand the relationship between shepherds and sheep that was so common in their culture. Nevertheless they did not grasp Jesus' analogy of Himself as Israel's true Shepherd.

The Greek word *paroimia* ("figure of speech") occurs elsewhere in John's Gospel (16:25, 29) but never in the Synoptics.

> "It suggests the notion of a mysterious saying full of compressed thought, rather than that of a simple comparison."[380]

[380]B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorised Version with Introduction and Notes*, p. 152.

A similar word, *parabole* ("parable"), appears often in the Synoptics but never in the fourth Gospel. Both words, however, have quite a wide range of meanings encompassing many kinds of figurative language.

Jesus' expansion of the figure 10:7-18

The difference between this teaching and Jesus' parables in the Synoptics now becomes clearer. Jesus proceeded to compare Himself to the pen gate as well as to the Shepherd. He also described Himself leading His sheep into the fold as well as out of it. Obviously Jesus was using the illustration to teach more than one lesson.

10:7-8 Jesus introduced another of His "I am" claims. He professed to be the door or gate of the sheepfold (cf. 1:51; 14:6). Some commentators have pointed out that some ancient Near Eastern shepherds slept in the gateways of their sheepfolds and so served as human gates.[381] This may seem to alleviate the incongruity of Jesus being both the Shepherd and the gate. However the other differences in the two pictures of the fold presented in verses 1-5 and 7-18 argue for separate though similar illustrations rather than one harmonious illustration. This pericope does not simply explain the previous illustration, but it develops certain metaphors in that illustration.

Jesus contrasted Himself as the gate with the thieves and robbers who preceded Him. He provided protection and security for His sheep whereas the others sought to exploit them. The thieves and robbers in this context refer to the religious leaders of Jesus' day (cf. v. 1). They are obviously not a reference to Israel's faithful former leaders such as Abraham, Moses, and other true prophets.

10:9 Jesus described Himself as a passageway (cf. 14:6). His sheep could enter and leave the sheepfold through Him. Obviously the sheepfold here does not refer to Israel as it did previously (vv. 1-5). People could not go in and out of Judaism at will through Jesus. It probably represents the security that God provides, and the pasture outside stands for what sustains their spiritual health and growth. Jesus provides for His people's security needs and for all of their daily needs 24 hours a day.

10:10 Impostors' aims are ultimately selfish and destructive, but Jesus came to give life, not take it.

> "The world still seeks its humanistic, political saviours—its Hitlers, its Stalins, its Maos, its Pol Pots—and only too late does it learn that they blatantly confiscate personal property (they come 'only to steal'), ruthlessly trample human life under foot (they come 'only . . . to kill'), and

[381]E.g., Beasley-Murray, p. 169.

> contemptuously savage all that is valuable (they come 'only . . . to destroy')."[382]

Jesus on the other hand not only came to bring spiritual life to people, but He came to bring the best quality of life to them. The eternal life that Jesus imparts is not just long, but it is also rich. He did not just come to gain sheep but to enable His sheep to flourish and to enjoy contentment and every other legitimately good thing possible.

10:11 Verses 7-10 expand the idea of the gate from verses 1-5. Verses 11-18 develop the idea of the Shepherd from those verses.

Here is another "I am" claim. Jesus is the Good Shepherd in contrast to the bad shepherds just described (vv. 8, 10a). Rather than killing the sheep so He might live, as the bad shepherds did, Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life (Gr. *psyche*, the total self) so the sheep might live. It is this extreme commitment to the welfare of the sheep that qualified Jesus as the Good Shepherd.[383] Good shepherding involves protecting, providing, and self-sacrifice.

"Good" (Gr. *kalos*) connotes nobility and worth, not merely gentleness. It contrasts Jesus with the unworthy and ignoble shepherds that He proceeded to describe (vv. 12-13). Laying down His life is a uniquely Johannine expression that describes a voluntary sacrificial death (cf. vv. 17, 18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). Likewise the preposition *hyper* ("for") usually connotes sacrifice (cf. 13:37; 15:13; Luke 22:19; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:3). Most shepherds do not intend to die for their sheep but to live for them; they only die for their sheep accidentally. Yet Jesus came to die for His sheep. Of course, Jesus also came to die for the whole world (6:51; 11:50-52).

10:12-13 Thieves and robbers are wicked, but hired hands are typically just selfish. They take care of sheep for what they can get out of it, not for the sake of the job itself. While a good shepherd may be willing to sacrifice himself for the safety and welfare of his sheep, a hireling will save himself when danger arises (cf. Jer. 10:21-22; 12:10; Zech. 11:4-17). This is understandable since the shepherd who owns his sheep has a vested interest in them whereas a hired hand does not. Israel's leaders acted as hirelings when they tried to preserve their own positions and willingly sacrificed Jesus. Christian leaders behave as hired hands when we put our own needs ahead of those we serve (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Attitude is the crucial difference between a true shepherd and a hireling.

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[382]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 385.

[383]The titles "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20-21) and "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4) stress different aspects of Jesus' character as a shepherd.

10:14-15 The mutual knowledge of the shepherd and the sheep is very important. Therefore Jesus stressed His identity as the Good Shepherd again. The sheep must know their Shepherd, and they can know Him as the Son knows the Father. The Son must know the Father to follow His will, and the sheep must know the Shepherd to follow Him faithfully. Jesus implied that the relationship the sheep enjoy with Himself is unique, as His relationship with His Father is unique. Yet each person maintains his own identity. Man does not become God, as the New Age movement, for example, teaches. The repetition of the Shepherd's sacrificial death in this verse also stresses that knowing the Shepherd involves appreciating the extent of His love.

> "'Know' (*ginosko*) in this Gospel connotes more than the cognizance of mere facts; it implies a relationship of trust and intimacy."[384]

10:16 The other sheep in view refer to Gentiles outside the fold of Israel who would believe in Jesus (cf. vv. 3-4). This is one of the few intimations in the Gospels that a new body would replace Israel as the people of God in the present age (cf. 17:20; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). These sheep, with those from Israel, would compose one fold, namely, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). This rules out the possibility of a Jewish church and a Gentile church. That fold would have one shepherd, namely, Jesus, who would become, to change the figure, the Head of the church. Jesus knew these sheep (vv. 14-15) as well as those who would believe on Him in Israel, "this fold" (cf. Ps. 100:3).

10:17 Having declared the intimate knowledge that the Father and the Son share, Jesus now explained why the Father loved Him as He did. Jesus did not mean that the Father's love resulted from the Son's performance. It would still have existed if Jesus had failed to obey Him completely. The Father loved the Son unconditionally from the beginning. However the Son's full obedience to the Father's will resulted in the Father having a special love for the Son that obedience under testing produced. Similarly God loves all believers unconditionally, but when we obey Him we enjoy an intimacy with Him that only obedience produces (cf. 15:14).

Jesus died sacrificially with His resurrection and glorification in view. He did not die thinking that He would remain dead. His death was an event in a larger chain of events that was always in view as Jesus anticipated the Cross.

10:18 Superficially observers could have concluded that Jesus died because of the Jews' conspiracy against Him. However, Jesus revealed that behind

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[384]Tenney, "John," p. 109. See also Wiersbe, 1:330. John also used the word this way in 1 John (4:7, 8, 16; 5:20) where he expounded the importance of not just believing in but abiding in Jesus Christ.

that instrumental cause was the efficient cause of God's purpose (cf. Acts 4:27-28). God had given Jesus the authority to offer Himself as a sacrifice for humankind's sins and to rise from the dead. Nevertheless the Son remained submissive to the Father in the triune hierarchy. Jesus willingly offered Himself; no human took His life from Him. However, He offered Himself in obedience to the Father's will. Anyone can lay his or her life down in death sacrificially, but only Jesus could lay it down and then take it again in resurrection.

The division among Jesus' hearers 10:19-21

Again Jesus' claims resulted in some of His hearers believing Him and others disbelieving (cf. 7:12, 43; 9:16). Here the expression "the Jews" refers to the Jewish people generally, not specifically to the religious leaders as it usually does in this Gospel. Evidently it was the apparent contradiction between Jesus' claim to be the coming Shepherd of Israel and His claim to die for the sheep that caused the cleavage. Some even concluded that He was demon possessed and therefore mad (cf. 7:20; 8:48). Others concluded that He was sane and sober because of His gracious revelations and His ability to cure the man born blind (9:1-12). John continued to stress the two opposite conclusions that people continued to draw even though Jesus' witness to His deity was consistent and clear. This should be an encouragement to all of us who testify for Him. Not even Jesus Himself convinced everyone that He was God's Son.

8. The confrontation at the feast of Dedication 10:22-42

The present section of the fourth Gospel is strongly Christological and focuses on Jesus' identity. In this subdivision of the text Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah (vv. 22-30) and as the Son of God (vv. 31-39). This resulted in the climax of hostility against Him.

> "It becomes clear that people must either recognize that Jesus stands in such a relation to the Father as no one else ever did, or else reject him entirely."[385]

The final few verses are transitional and describe Jesus' withdrawal from Jerusalem and the fact that many people believed on Him (vv. 40-42).

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah 10:22-30

10:22-23 "At that time" (NASB) is a general reference to the proximity of the feast of Dedication and the events narrated in the previous pericope. It does not mean that the events in the preceding section occurred exactly before that feast. The NIV "Then came" gives the sense better.

[385]Morris, p. 458.

The eight-day feast of Dedication, now called Chanukah (or Hanukkah), the feast of Lights, was not one of the feasts prescribed in the Mosaic Law. The Jews instituted it during the inter-testamental period (cf. 1 Macc. 4:36-59; 2 Macc. 1:9, 18; 10:1-8).

> "Christ's testimony at Hanukkah, and its place in the Gospel of John, which stresses the theme of light, is a testimony to Christians that Hanukkah emphasizes His great work of providing salvation to a spiritually blind world."[386]

It commemorated the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus ("Judas the Hammer") on the twenty-fifth of Chislev (modern late December and early January), 164 B.C. The Syrian invader Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) had profaned the temple three years earlier by replacing the brazen altar with a pagan one on which he offered a pig as a sacrifice to Jupiter. Antiochus attempted to Hellenize Judea, but the Jewish patriot Judas Maccabeus was able to lead a guerilla revolt that has borne his name ever since. After three years he defeated the Syrians and liberated the Jews.

> "It was the last great deliverance that the Jews had known, and therefore it must have been in people's minds a symbol of their hope that God would again deliver his people."[387]

In warmer weather Jesus would have taught in one of the open-air courtyards of the temple. Because it was winter He taught what follows in Solomon's colonnade on the temple courtyard's eastern side. Perhaps John mentioned this detail because it was in Solomon's colonnade that the first Christians gathered regularly (Acts 3:11; 5:12).

10:24 Jesus had often hinted at being the Messiah when He spoke publicly to the Jews. Still He had not plainly claimed to be the Messiah as He had when conversing with the Samaritan woman (4:26). The reason the Jews wanted Jesus to make His claim clear here appears to have been so they could accuse and eventually kill Him. This motivation is more apparent when we notice how Jesus responded to their request than it is when we examine what they said. Jesus did not give them the unambiguous answer that they requested. Jesus had made clear claims about His identity, and many of the Jews had believed on Him. It was His critics' determined unbelief that made His claims obscure to them, not His inability or unwillingness to reveal Himself. Furthermore for Jesus to have claimed to be the Jews'

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[386]Jerry R. Lancaster and R. Larry Overstreet, "Jesus' Celebration of Hanukkah in John 10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):332-33.
[387]Morris, p. 459.

Messiah publicly would have encouraged a political movement that He did not want to stimulate.

10:25-26 Jesus did not mean that He had claimed publicly to be the Messiah. He had not. He meant that He had told the Jews that He was the Messiah by His works (cf. 5:16-47; 6:32-59; 7:14-30). His miracles proved who He was, namely, God's Son sent to fulfill the Father's prophesied will, but the Jews generally rejected that testimony because they wanted a different type of Messiah. The ultimate reason they did not understand Jesus was that they were not of the sheep the Father had given to the Son (cf. vv. 1-18; 6:37). This condition did not excuse their unbelief, but it explained it.

> "From the human standpoint, we become His sheep by believing; but from the divine standpoint, we believe because we are His sheep. . . .
>
> "In the Bible, divine election and human responsibility are perfectly balanced; and what God has joined together, we must not put asunder."[388]

10:27-28 Verse 27 repeats revelation Jesus had previously given (vv. 3-5, 14). The eternal life that Jesus gives is His own life. Consequently it is impossible for His sheep ever to perish. Their ultimate security rests with the Good Shepherd who promised here that no one would be able to snatch them out of His hand—no thief (v. 10), no robber (v. 8), no wolf (v. 12), no one (cf. Rom. 8:35-39). The construction of the Greek clause "they shall never perish" (*ou me apolontai eis ton aiona*) stresses the impossibility strongly (cf. 3:16). Jesus had previously said that part of the task that the Father had given Him to do was to preserve all those whom the Father gave Him (6:37-40). Thus we can see that it is impossible even for one of the sheep to wriggle out of the Good Shepherd's grasp.

> "We should notice that the teaching of this verse is not that believers will be saved from all earthly disaster, but that they will be saved, no matter what earthly disaster may befall them."[389]

This is one of the clearest promises of the eternal security of the believer that God has given us in His Word. It is also a clear statement of the fact that eternal life comes to us as a gift, not as wages we earn (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

10:29 Jesus heightened this promise of security. He reminded His hearers that because what He did was simply execute the Father's will it was the Father

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[388]Wiersbe, 1:332. See also C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 52-53.
[389]Morris, p. 463.

as well as Himself that would keep His sheep secure (cf. 17:12). No one can steal from God. No one has superior strength or wisdom to overpower or outwit Him (cf. Col. 3:3). No one *will* snatch them from God (v. 28), and no one *can* do so either.

10:30 Jesus did not mean that He and the Father were the same person of the Godhead. If He had meant that, He would have used the masculine form of the word translated "one" (Gr. *heis*). Instead He used the neuter form of the word (Gr. *hen*). He meant that He and the Father were one in their action. This explanation also harmonized with the context since Jesus had said that He would keep His sheep safe (v. 28) and His Father would keep them safe (v. 29).

This verse has been at the center of serious discussions about Jesus' nature that have taken place over the centuries. Those who believe that Jesus was fully God and fully man (the orthodox) and those who believe that Jesus was not fully God (Arians) have appealed to it to support their positions. Therefore we need to look at it carefully.

First, Jesus' claim to oneness does not in itself prove the Son's unity in essence with the Father. In 17:22, Jesus prayed that His disciples might be one as He and the Father were one, namely, in their purpose and beliefs. Second, other passages in the Gospel declare that the Father and the Son are one in more than just their purpose and beliefs (cf. 1, 18; 8:58; 12:41; 20:28). Third, the context of this verse also implies that Jesus did *everything* His Father did (cf. 5:19) and that Jesus and the Father united in fulfilling a *divine* will and a *divine* task. Fourth, this Gospel has consistently presented Jesus as a *unique* Son of God, not one of many sons. Fifth, 17:55 uses the Father Son unity as the basis for the disciple disciple unity in the analogy, not the other way around, implying that the former is the more fundamental unity.[390]

In short, this verse does not say that Jesus was claiming to be of the same essence as God. Here He claimed to function in union with the Father. However the context and other statements in this Gospel show that His unity with the Father extended beyond a functional unity and did involve essential metaphysical unity.

The Jews had asked Jesus for a plain statement about His messiahship. Jesus gave them far more, a claim that He fully and completely carried out the Father's will that strongly hinted at Jesus' deity. This statement is the climax of the preceding discussion (vv. 22-29; cf. 5:18; 8:59).

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[390]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 394-95.

Jesus' claim to be God's Son 10:31-39

10:31-33 Clearly the Jews understood Jesus to be claiming more than simple agreement with God in thought and purpose but equality with the Father as deity. They prepared to stone Him for blasphemy.[391] They believed Jesus was blaspheming because He was claiming to be God (cf. 5:18; 8:59). Before they could act Jesus asked them for which of His many noble, beautiful works (Gr. *erga kala*) they were stoning Him. This question confronted them with the incongruity of executing a man for restoring people who had suffered from handicaps. Jesus' miracles testified that He was doing divine work. However the Jews did not think this through but responded that it was not for His works but for His words that they were going to kill Him. The reader should realize by now that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be, one with the Father and more than a mere mortal. A man was not making Himself out to be God, but God had made Himself a man (1:1, 14, 18).

If Jesus did not really claim to be God, He could easily have corrected the Jews' misunderstanding here. The fact that He did not is further proof that the Jews correctly understood that He was claiming to be God.

10:34 Jesus proceeded to point out that the Jews' authoritative revelation, the Old Testament, proved His claim. He cited Psalm 82:6 to show that the Old Testament used the word "god" (Heb. *elohim*) to refer to persons other than God Himself. If God spoke of people as "gods," why should the Jews object if Jesus implied that He was a god?

The identity of the people whom God addressed as gods in Psalm 82:6 is debatable. The most popular and probable view is that they were Israel's judges who were functioning as God's representatives and so were in that sense little gods (Ps. 82:1-4; cf. Exod. 21:6; 22:8).[392] Another view is that these gods were angels.[393] This seems unlikely since the contrast in view in the psalm is between God and mere man, not angels. A third view is that God was addressing the whole nation of Israel when He gave them the Law. He spoke to the people as His sons and in this sense meant that they were gods.[394] However the contrast between God as the true Judge (Ps. 82:1, 8) and the people whom He rebuked for judging falsely (Ps. 82:2-7) seems to favor the first view.

10:35-36 The clause "the Scripture cannot be broken" means that man cannot annul it, set it aside, or prove it false.

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[391]This is the first explicit charge of blasphemy (though cf. 8:59).
[392]Blum, p. 312.
[393]J. A. Emerton, "Some New Testament Notes," *Journal of Theological Studies* 11NS (1960):329-36.
[394]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 398-99.

> "It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous."[395]

Jesus' statement affirms the unity, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture. Jesus held a very high view of Scripture. His point was that it was inconsistent for the Jews to claim the Old Testament as their authority (v. 34) and then to disregard something that it said because they did not agree with it. It was inconsistent for them specifically to stone Jesus for claiming to be God and the Son of God when the Old Testament spoke of humans as gods and as God's sons.

> "In the singular *he graphe* usually means a single passage of Scripture, and the verb translated *broken* (*luo*) is used in v. 18 of disregarding the letter of the law. The meaning here is 'this passage of Scripture cannot be set aside as irrelevant to the matter under discussion'."[396]

Jesus did not use this argument to claim that He was God. He used it to stall His critics. He wanted them to see that the divine terms that He was using to describe Himself were terms that the Old Testament itself also used of human beings. They could not logically accuse Him of blasphemy because the Father had set Him aside and sent Him into the world with a special mission. He was a legitimate Son of God for this reason.

As the Jews had sanctified their temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanies, so God had sanctified His Son. The Jews celebrated the sanctification of their physical temple with the feast of Dedication, but they were unwilling to accept the spiritual temple that replaced it, namely, Jesus.

10:37-38 Jesus next identified the evidence that His critics should consider, namely, His works, including His miracles (cf. v. 25). He acknowledged that verbal claims were not sufficient in themselves. The Jews should learn from them and continue to learn from them that He was doing the same kinds of good works that God did. Jesus manifested divine compassion and divine power in His works. These traits also marked God's works.

10:39 Jesus' critics correctly understood His latest words (v. 38) as a claim to equality with the Father. Therefore they again tried to seize Him. Jesus eluded them again because it was not yet time for His passion (cf. 7:30; 8:20). This act was the climax of official antagonism during this period of Jesus' ministry so far.

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[395]Morris, p. 468.
[396]Tasker, p. 136.

Jesus' withdrawal from Jerusalem 10:40-42

10:40 John presented Jesus' departure from Jerusalem as the result of official rejection of Him. The event had symbolic significance that the evangelist probably intended. Jesus withdrew the opportunity for salvation from the people there because they refused to accept His gracious offer of salvation. Evidently Jesus went from Jerusalem back to Bethany in Perea on the east side of the Jordan River where the Jewish rulers had no authority to pursue Him (cf. 1:28).

10:41-42 John the Baptist was by this time dead. However many people from Perea recognized that Jesus fulfilled what John the Baptist had predicted of Messiah. Their attitude contrasts with the hatred and unbelief of many in Jerusalem. They accepted John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus because it proved to be true so far, not because the forerunner had performed signs. He had not. The witness of John the Baptist continued to bear fruit even after his death because he pointed people to Jesus, and Jesus did not disappoint them.

John probably identified Jesus' destination as he did to imply the ending of Jesus' public ministry that John the Baptist introduced. References to John the Baptist form an *inclusio* that brackets the record of Jesus' public ministry to the multitudes in this Gospel (1:19—10:42).

I. THE CONCLUSION OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY CHS. 11—12

The major theme of the Gospel, Jesus' identity as the Son of God, continues dominant. It was just as important for Jesus' disciples to grow in their understanding of who He was and to grow in their faith in Him as it was for the general public to do so. This section of the Gospel shows Jesus withdrawing from Jerusalem (11:1—12:11) and then returning to it for His triumphal entry and His final appeal to the people to believe on Him (12:12-50). This section also takes the reader to the climax of belief and unbelief in Jesus' public ministry.

1. The seventh sign: raising Lazarus 11:1-44

Jesus had presented Himself as the Water of Life, the Bread of Life, and the Light of Life. Now He revealed Himself as the resurrection and the life. This was the seventh and last of Jesus' miraculous signs that John recorded, and it was the most powerful revelation of His true identity.[397] It shows Jesus' authority over humankind's greatest and last enemy, death.

> "The claim of Jesus to be working in complete and conscious union with His Father led the Jews to attempt unsuccessfully to stone Him [10:31]. But it was His claim to bestow upon believers the gift of eternal life by

[397]Some scholars view Jesus' resurrection as one of His signs. Others prefer to view it as in a different class from the miracles that Jesus performed while He was living on the earth. I favor the second option.

raising them from spiritual death which led, according to the Johannine narrative, to His crucifixion [11:53]."[398]

"Physical death is the divine object lesson of what sin does in the spiritual realm. As physical death ends life and separates people, so spiritual death is the separation of people from God and the loss of life which is in God (John 1:4). Jesus has come so that people may live full lives (10:10)."[399]

Lazarus' death 11:1-16

In this pericope John stressed Jesus' deliberate purpose in allowing Lazarus to die and the reality of his death.

11:1-2 "Lazarus" probably is a variant of "Eleazar" meaning "God helps."[400] The Synoptic writers did not mention him, which is probably why John described him as Mary and Martha's brother. These sisters appear in John's Gospel for the first time here, but they appear in all the Synoptics that preceded the fourth Gospel (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 10:38-42).

The Bethany in view is the one about two miles east of Jerusalem (v. 18), not the one in Perea to which the writer referred earlier (1:28). John's further description of Mary in verse 2 alludes to the event he would narrate in 12:1-8. Perhaps he believed that his original readers would have heard of this incident already (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9), or he may have just been tying his two references to Mary together.

11:3 The title "Lord" (Gr. *kyrie*) was respectful and did not necessarily imply belief in Jesus' deity. Obviously Jesus had had considerable contact with Lazarus and his two sisters, so much so that the women could appeal to Jesus' filial love (Gr. *phileis*) for their brother when they urged Him to come. They also believed that Jesus could help their brother by healing him (cf. v. 21; Ps. 50:15). They must have realized that Jesus was in danger anywhere near Jerusalem (v. 8).

11:4 Jesus meant that Lazarus would not die in the final sense, though this sickness did prove fatal. His immediate death would result in resurrection and the revelation of Jesus as God's Son (cf. 9:3). In this Gospel, God's "glory" is usually a reference to His self-revelation rather than the praise that comes to Him (cf. 1:14-18; 5:23; 12:28; 17:4).[401] Ironically this miracle displayed Jesus' identity as God's Son, but it also led to His death that was the ultimate manifestation of His identity and glory.

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[398]Tasker, p. 137.
[399]Blum, p. 312.
[400]Brown, 1:422.
[401]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 406.

11:5-6 John dispelled any doubt about Jesus' true love (Gr. *agape*) for this family. His delay did not show disinterest but divine purpose (cf. 2:4; 7:3-10).

11:7-8 Jesus' decision to return to the Jerusalem area in Judea seemed foolhardy to the disciples who reminded Him that the Jews there had recently tried to stone Him (10:31, 39). They obviously did not yet appreciate the Father's protection of His Son until His appointed hour nor the inevitability of Jesus' death.

11:9-10 The Jews and the Romans commonly regarded the daylight hours as 12 and the nighttime hours as the other 12. Literally Jesus was referring to the daylight hours. Metaphorically the daylight hours represented the Father's will. Jesus was safe as long as He did the Father's will. For the disciples, as long as they continued to follow Jesus, the Light of the World, they would not stumble. Walking in the night pictures behaving without divine illumination or authorization. Living in the realm of darkness (i.e., evil) is dangerous (cf. 1 John 1:6).

> "When there is darkness in the soul, then we will stumble indeed."[402]

11:11-13 Jesus explained further why He needed to go to Bethany. Sleep was a common Old Testament metaphor for death (e.g., someone "slept with his fathers;" cf. Mark 5:39). However the idea that people would awake from this sleep, while revealed in the Old Testament (Dan. 12:2), was not the common perception of the outcome of death. Normally people thought of those who fell asleep in death as staying asleep. Thus the disciples' confusion is understandable as is John's clarification of Jesus' meaning. The New Testament writers commonly referred to death as sleep for the Christian because our resurrection to life is a prominent revelation and is sure (cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). That Jesus was not teaching soul sleep should be clear from Luke 16:19-31.[403]

11:14-15 Apparently Jesus was glad that He had not been present when Lazarus died because the disciples would learn a strong lesson from his resurrection that would increase their faith. The sign that Lazarus' death made possible would be the clearest demonstration of Jesus' identity so far and would convince many people that He was God's Son.

11:16 This is the first reference in the Gospels to Thomas saying something. John described this member of the Twelve (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) further as the one called the twin. The name "Thomas"

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[402]Morris, p. 481.

[403]The doctrine of soul sleep is the teaching that at death the soul, specifically the immaterial part of man, becomes unconscious until the resurrection of the body. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 shows that people are conscious after death and before their resurrection.

evidently comes from the Hebrew *tom* and the Aramaic *toma* both of which mean twin. "Didymus" is the Greek equivalent of "twin." We do not know for sure who Thomas' twin brother or sister may have been. Usually Peter was the spokesman for the Twelve, but here, as later, John presented Thomas as speaking out (cf. 14:5; 20:24-29; 21:2).

> "We do not know whose twin he was, but there are times when *all of us* seem to be his twin when we consider our unbelief and depressed feelings!"[404]

Most Christians tend to think of Thomas as a doubter because of His unwillingness to believe in Jesus later (20:24-29). However here his devotion to Jesus and his courage stand out. He did not understand how safe the disciples would be going up to Bethany since they were with Jesus who was walking in obedience to His Father (vv. 9-10). He did not understand that the death that Jesus would die was a death that His disciples could not participate in with Him (cf. 1:29, 36). Nevertheless he spoke better than he knew. John probably recorded his exhortation because it was a call to disciples to take up their cross and follow Jesus (cf. 12:25; Mark 8:34; 2 Cor. 4:10).

The revelation of the resurrection and the life 11:17-29

The scene now shifts from the region near Bethany of Perea (1:28; 10:40) to the Bethany in Judea. Both towns became sites where people believed on Jesus.

11:17 There is some evidence that the later Jewish rabbis believed that the spirit of a person who had died lingered over the corpse for three days or until decomposition of the body had begun. They believed that the spirit then abandoned the body because any hope of resuscitation was gone. They apparently felt that there was still hope that the person might revive during the first three days after death. Other scholars question whether this is what the Jews believed as early as this event.[405] In either case the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four days would have left no question that Jesus had truly raised the dead. Customarily the Jews buried a corpse the same day the person died due to the warm climate and the relatively rapid rate of decay it caused (cf. Acts 5:5-6, 10).

It is impossible to reconstruct an exact timetable of events day by day, though most commentators offered their views all of which involve some speculation. We do not know exactly how long it took the messenger to reach Jesus or how long Lazarus lived after the messenger came and told Jesus that Lazarus was dying (v. 3). We do not know how long it took Jesus to reach Bethany of Judea from where He was either.

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[404]Wiersbe, 1:335.

[405]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 411.

11:18-19 Bethany was about 15 stadia (approximately one and three-quarters miles) east of Jerusalem. John implied that many family friends came from Jerusalem to console Mary and Martha. Prolonged grieving often lasting several days was customary in the ancient Near East.[406] Therefore many people from Jerusalem either witnessed or heard about Jesus' miracle.

11:20 This picture of Martha as the activist and Mary as the more passive of the two sisters harmonizes with Luke's presentation of them (Luke 10:38-42).

11:21-22 Martha addressed Jesus respectfully but probably not reverentially as "Lord." Some readers of the story have interpreted verse 21 as containing a rebuke, but Martha's words there do not necessarily imply criticism. At least they convey Martha's grief and her confidence in Jesus' power to heal people. In view of verses 24 and 39, verse 22 probably does not mean that Martha believed that Jesus could raise Lazarus back to life. More likely Martha was reaffirming her confidence in Him that her loss had not shaken. Her words in both verses expressed what many others who had faith in Jesus believed.

11:23-24 Jesus' response was also typical of Him. His words had an obvious literal meaning, but they were truer than anyone present realized at the moment. Jesus offered Martha comfort based on the Old Testament assurance that God would resurrect believers (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; cf. John 5:28-29). Martha, as the Pharisees, believed this Old Testament revelation, though the Sadducees did not (cf. Acts 23:7-8). The "last day" refers to the end of the present age as the Jews viewed history, namely, just before Messiah would inaugurate the new kingdom age (cf. 6:39-40, 44, 54; 12:48).

> "When we find ourselves confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only encouragement is the Word of God."[407]

11:25 Jesus proceeded to make another of His "I am" claims. He meant that He would personally affect resurrection and provide eternal life (cf. 5:21, 25-29). He wanted Martha to think about the Person who would do the resurrecting rather than the event. Jesus raises people to life just as He satisfies people as bread and is, therefore, the essential element in resurrection. Without Him there is no resurrection or life. This was really a double claim. Jesus meant that He was the resurrection and He was the life. This is clear because He dealt with the two concepts of resurrection and life separately in the discussion that followed.

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[406]Cf. Edersheim, 2:320-21.
[407]Wiersbe, 1:334.

Whoever believes in Jesus will live spiritually and eternally even though he or she dies physically (cf. 5:21). Jesus imparts eternal life to those who believe in Him. He is the life in the sense that He is its source and benefactor. Whereas He will affect resurrection for those who believe and die physically, He bestows eternal life and it begins for the believer before he or she dies physically.

> "When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book or a formula. When you are being sued, you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face your last enemy, death, you want the Savior and not a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal (1 Cor. 1:30)."[408]

11:26 Furthermore every living person who believes in Jesus will not experience eternal spiritual death. This is another promise of salvation but also of eternal security.

Jesus then asked Martha to affirm her faith in Him as the One who will raise the dead and who now gives eternal life. He was questioning her faith in Him, not her faith in doctrines. She had already expressed her faith in the doctrine of the resurrection (v. 24).

11:27 Martha confessed that she did indeed believe that Jesus was the resurrection and the life. Her answer focused on His person, not just on the teachings of Judaism (cf. 20:28, 30-31). That she truly understood and believed what Jesus revealed about Himself is clear from her reply. She correctly concluded that if Jesus was the One who would raise the dead and impart spiritual life He must be the Messiah. She clarified that what she meant by "Messiah" was not the popular idea of a revolutionary leader but the biblical revelation of a God-man whom God promised to send from heaven (cf. 1:9, 49; 6:14). This saving faith rested on facts about Jesus that were true but went on to place personal trust in Him to fulfill His claims.

Martha's confession of faith is a high point in the fourth Gospel, as Peter's was in the first Gospel (cf. Matt. 16:16). This is the clearest expression of saving faith thus far in this book. Doubtless John recorded it because it advances his major purpose of convincing his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so they might obtain eternal life by believing in Him (20:31).

11:28 Martha's reaction is another good model. Having come to faith in Jesus herself she proceeded to bring others to Him knowing that He could help them too (cf. 1:40-45; 4:28-29). As Andrew had done (1:41-42), Martha

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[408]Ibid., 1:336.

brought her sibling to the Savior. She described Jesus to her sister as they both had known Him best. She did it secretly to enable Mary to meet with Jesus privately. Jesus had expressed interest in Mary coming to Him, and Martha became the agent who brought her to Him. Rabbis did not normally initiate contact with women, but Jesus was no ordinary rabbi.

11:29 Mary responded to Jesus' invitation to come to Him. This does not mean she became a believer in Him then. Nevertheless it seems clear that she did trust in Him at some time, as Martha did (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9).

The revelation of Jesus' compassion 11:30-37

The emphasis in this pericope is on Jesus' compassion in the face of sin's consequences.

11:30-32 Mary's physical response to Jesus was more emotional than Martha's had been, perhaps reflecting her temperament. Again we find Mary at Jesus' feet (cf. Luke 10:39). Her words were identical to Martha's (v. 21). She met Jesus in a public place whereas Martha had talked with Him privately. This probably accounts in part for Jesus' different responses to the two women.

> "Mary is found three times in the Gospel record, and each time she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3). She sat at His feet and listened to His word; she fell at His feet and poured out her sorrow; and she came to His feet to given Him her praise and worship. Mary's only recorded words in the Gospels are given in John 11:32, and they echo what Martha had already said (John 11:21)."[409]

11:33 The phrase "deeply moved" translates the Greek word *enebrimesato*. It invariably describes an angry, outraged, and indignant attitude (cf. v. 38; Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43; 14:5). These emotions mingled in Jesus' spirit as He contemplated the situation before Him. John also described Jesus as "troubled" (Gr. *etaraxen*). This is another strong verb that describes emotional turmoil (cf. 5:7; 12:27; 13:21; 14:1, 27). Jesus was angry, but at what? The context provides some help in identifying the cause of His anger.

Evidently as Jesus viewed the misery that death inflicts on humans and the loved ones of those who die He thought of its cause, sin. Many of the Jews present had come from Jerusalem where Jesus had encountered stubborn unbelief. The sin of unbelief resulted in spiritual death, the source of eternal grief and mourning. Probably Jesus felt angry because He was face to face with the consequences of sin and particularly unbelief.

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[409]Ibid.

Other explanations for Jesus' anger are that Jesus resented being forced to do a miracle.[410] However, Jesus had waited to go to Bethany so He could perform a miracle (v. 11). Another idea is that Jesus believed the Jews' mourning was hypocritical, but there is nothing in the text that indicates that the mourners were insincere. Others believe that John meant that Jesus was profoundly moved by these events, particularly the attitude of the mourners who failed to understand His person.[411]

11:34-35 Jesus wept (Gr. *dakryo*, lit. shed tears; cf. Isa. 53:3). His weeping doubtless expressed outwardly the sorrow that contemplation of sin and its consequences produced in His heart. Jesus' tears are proof of His compassion for fallen humanity (cf. Luke 19:41). He could not have been weeping over the loss of His friend Lazarus since He was about to restore him to life. Likewise it is unlikely that He was just weeping compassionately with Martha and Mary since He was about to turn their grief into rejoicing. Nevertheless empathy undoubtedly played some part in Jesus' weeping.

Martha had just testified to Jesus' deity (v. 27), and now Jesus' tears witnessed to His humanity.

11:36-37 The Jewish onlookers interpreted Jesus' angry tears in two ways. They took them as evidence of Jesus' great love for Lazarus. They did reflect that, but not as the Jews thought. Jesus was not weeping because death had separated Him from His friend. The Jews also concluded that Jesus' tears reflected the grief He felt over His apparent inability to prevent Lazarus from dying. This deduction revealed unbelief as well as ignorance of Jesus' person. Jesus' healing of the man born blind had occurred several months earlier, but it had obviously made a strong impression on the people living in Jerusalem.

Lazarus' resurrection 11:38-44

Jesus proceeded to vindicate His claim that He was the One who would raise the dead and provide life (v. 25).

11:38 Jesus again felt the same angry emotion as He approached Lazarus' tomb (cf. v. 33). Tombs cut into the limestone hillsides of that area were common. Today many similar caves are visible to tourists. Normally a large round stone sealed the entrance against animals and curious individuals.

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[410]Barrett, p. 399.
[411]Morris, p. 494.

11:39 Even though Martha had confessed her belief that Jesus would raise the dead she did not understand that Jesus planned to raise her brother immediately. Jesus had given her no reason to hope that He would. The Jews customarily wrapped the bodies of their dead in cloth and added spices to counteract the odors that decomposition produced. They did not embalm them as thoroughly as the Egyptians did.[412]

Interestingly Martha did not appeal to Jesus on the basis of the ritual uncleanness that contact with a dead body would create for the Jews. Perhaps she had learned that ritual uncleanness was not something that bothered Jesus. Her concern was a practical one in harmony with her personality as the Gospel writers presented it.

11:40-41a Jesus' reply summarized what He had said to Martha earlier (vv. 23-26). He viewed raising someone to life as an act that glorified God by revealing His Son. Martha's willingness to allow the removal of the stone testified to her confidence in Jesus. When the stone was away from the tomb's entrance, every eye must have been on Jesus to see what He would do.

11:41b-42 Jesus addressed God in prayer characteristically as His Father. He spoke as though the raising of Lazarus was something that the Father had already decreed, which was true (cf. v. 11). His prayer was not a request for Lazarus' resurrection. Such a prayer would have glorified the Father. It was rather a prayer of thanksgiving for what the Father would shortly do. It had the effect of focusing attention on the Son as God's agent in performing the miracle. Jesus' prayer had the effect also of drawing the onlookers into His intimate relationship with the Father and proving that He really did do nothing independently of the Father (cf. 5:19-47).

Jesus' public prayer here is a good reminder that all leaders in public prayer should take those present into account when they pray. We should do so not by "playing to the gallery" (cf. Matt. 6:5) but by voicing prayers that are appropriate in view of who is present.

11:43-44 The dead heard the voice of the Son of God and lived, as Jesus had predicted (5:25, 28-29). If Jesus had not specified Lazarus by name, every dead person might have arisen at His command. Jesus probably cried out loudly to make clear that this resurrection was not an act of magic. Wizards typically muttered their incantations and spells quietly (cf. Isa. 8:19).[413]

The Jews did not wrap their dead so tightly in their grave clothes that Lazarus would have had difficulty doing what John wrote that he did.

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[412]Sanders, p. 274, n. 1.
[413]Morris, p. 498.

> "The corpse was customarily laid on a sheet of linen, wide enough to envelop the body completely and more than twice the length of the corpse. The body was so placed on the sheet that the feet were at one end, and then the sheet was drawn over the head and back down to the feet. The feet were bound at the ankles, and the arms were tied to the body with linen strips. The face was bound with another cloth . . . Jesus' body was apparently prepared for burial in the same way (cf. 19:40; 20:5, 7). A person so bound could hop and shuffle, but scarcely walk."[414]

While there are similarities between Lazarus and Jesus' resurrections, we must also remember their significant differences. Lazarus came to life only to die again later as a mortal whereas Jesus arose never to die again, as immortal. Lazarus arose with the same physical body that went into his tomb, but Jesus arose with a spiritual body that could pass through solid objects (1 Cor. 15). Thus Lazarus' resurrection was only a pale anticipation of the resurrection of Jesus that was to come. Nevertheless it was the greatest of Jesus' signs.

> "If Jesus Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing [cf. 1 Cor. 15:19]."[415]

This miracle illustrated Jesus' ability to empower people with new life (cf. 14:6). He had previously raised the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:15) and Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9:25; Mark 5:42; Luke 8:55) back to life, but Lazarus had been dead four days. There could now be no doubt about Jesus' ability to raise the dead. Physically He will do this for everyone at the resurrections yet future. He will raise Christians at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16), Old Testament and Tribulation saints at the Second Coming (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4, 6), and unbelievers at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:5). Spiritually Jesus gives life to all who believe on Him the moment they trust in Him (5:24).

> "In some respects the story of Martha and Mary prepares the reader for the challenge to believe in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. His intentional delay also reveals that God often uses suffering as an opportunity for divine intervention, even though it is difficult in such situations to believe."[416]

> "Just as the preincarnate Word gave physical life and light to humankind in creation (1:2), so Jesus as the Word Incarnate gives spiritual life and light to people who believe in Him."[417]

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[414]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 418-19.
[415]Wiersbe, 1:334.
[416]Howard, p. 77.
[417]Harris, p. 178.

There are many questions that John's account of this miracle leaves unanswered that tantalize our imaginations, such as what Lazarus reported to his friends. These things the evangelist deliberately avoided to focus the reader's attention on Jesus.

2. The responses to the raising of Lazarus 11:45-57

Again Jesus' words and works divided the Jews (cf. 6:14-15; 7:10-13, 45-52; 10:19-21).

The popular response 11:45-46

Even this most powerful miracle failed to convince many that Jesus was God's Son. Many who had come to console Mary believed on Him, but the depth of their faith undoubtedly varied. A faith based on miracles is not the highest faith, but John viewed it as better than no faith at all (cf. 2:23).[418] John's reference to Mary rather than to Martha and Mary may imply that these people had greater affection for Mary. Alternatively they may have viewed her as needing more emotional support than her sister (cf. v. 19). Other observers of this miracle went to the Pharisees. The contrast suggests that they disbelieved and went to inform the Pharisees so these leaders would take action against Jesus.

The official response 11:47-53

The raising of Lazarus convinced Israel's leaders that they had to take more drastic action against Jesus. John recorded this decision as the high point of Israel's official rejection of God's Son so far. This decision led directly to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

11:47-48 John's "Therefore" or "Then" ties this paragraph directly to what precedes in a cause and effect relationship. The chief priests, who were mostly Sadducees, and the Pharisees, who were mostly scribes, assembled for an official meeting. The chief priests dominated the Sanhedrin, but the Pharisees were a powerful minority. The third and smallest group in the Sanhedrin was the elders who were landed aristocrats who had mixed theological views.

The Sanhedrin members felt that they had to take some decisive action against Jesus because the more miracles He performed the greater His popular following grew. Ever more of the Jews were concluding that Jesus was the Messiah. Their present tactics against Jesus needed adjusting or He might destroy them.

It is interesting that they admitted privately that Jesus had performed many signs, though publicly they had earlier asked Him to produce some to prove His claims (2:18; 6:30). Someone in the Sanhedrin, perhaps

[418]Morris, p. 500.

Nicodemus, must have reported this confession of their selfish reasons for killing Jesus to the disciples later.

> "It has always been the case that those whose minds are made up to oppose what Christ stands for will not be convinced by any amount of evidence."[419]

The reference to "our place" was probably to the position of authority they occupied. A popular uprising resulting from the Jews' belief that Israel's political deliverer had appeared might bring the Romans down hard on Israel's leaders and strip them of their power. These rulers viewed Israel as their nation rather than God's nation, and they did not want to lose control of it or their prestige as its leaders. No one mentioned the welfare of the people in such an event (cf. 10:8).

> "The rich man in hades had argued, 'If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent' (Luke 16:30. Lazarus came back from the dead, and the officials wanted to kill him!"[420]

11:49 Caiaphas' remarks reflect the frenzy that characterized this meeting. He addressed his colleagues rather unflatteringly as ignoramuses. Caiaphas had received his office of high priest from the Romans in A.D. 18. His father-in-law Annas had preceded him in the office, and Annas continued to exercise considerable influence. However it was Caiaphas who had the official power at this time.

John's reference to "that year" (v. 49) was probably with the year of Jesus' death in mind (cf. v. 51; 18:13). Another possibility is that John may have been hinting at the tenuous nature of the high priestly office in those days when Rome arbitrarily deposed and appointed leaders with little warning.[421] Caiaphas' insulting statement to his fellow Sanhedrin members, "You know nothing at all!" presents him as a rude boor.

11:50 Caiaphas solution to the problem that Jesus posed was to get rid of Him—permanently. He seems to have felt impatient with His fellow rulers for hesitating to take this brutal step. He viewed Jesus' death as a sacrifice that was necessary for the welfare of the nation, by which he meant its leaders. Jesus' sacrificial death was precisely God's intention though for a different reason. Caiaphas viewed Jesus as a scapegoat whose sacrifice would guarantee the life of Israel's leaders. God viewed Jesus as a lamb who would die to guarantee the life of believers. Ironically Jesus' death would condemn these unbelieving leaders, not save them. Moreover it did not

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[419]Ibid., p. 502.
[420]Wiersbe, 1:338.
[421]J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, pp. 28-29.

save them from losing their power to the Romans who dismantled the Sanhedrin when they destroyed the city in the war of A.D. 66-70.

11:51-52 John interpreted Caiaphas' words for his readers. He viewed Caiaphas' statement as a prophecy. He spoke God's will as the high priest even though he did not realize he was doing so. Caiaphas' motive was, of course, completely contrary to God's will, but God overruled to accomplish His will through the high priest's selfish advice.

Caiaphas unconsciously prophesied that Jesus would die as a substitute for the Israelite nation (cf. Isa. 53:8). The outcome of His death would be the uniting of God's children scattered abroad, non-members of Israel as well as Jews, into one body, namely, the church (cf. 4:42; 10:16; Eph. 2:14-18; 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). Ultimately it would unite Jewish and Gentile believers in the messianic kingdom (cf. Isa. 43:5; Ezek. 34:12).

11:53 The result of this apparently formal meeting was the Sanhedrin's official decision to kill Jesus. This decision constituted another climax in the ongoing opposition against Jesus that John traced in this Gospel (cf. Matt. 26:3-4). Obviously the trials of Jesus before the high priests and the Sanhedrin were simply formalities designed to give the appearance of justice. The leaders had already tried Jesus and sentenced Him to die (cf. Mark 14:1-2). All that remained was to decide when and how to execute His sentence.[422]

Jesus' reaction 11:54-57

This pericope summarizes the situation at this stage of Jesus' ministry. The leaders had determined to kill Him, and Jesus withdrew to the town of Ephraim.

11:54 Jesus may have learned of the Sanhedrin's decision from a sympathetic member such as Nicodemus. He withdrew to a private place and no longer ministered publicly. The town of Ephraim was probably Old Testament Ephron about four miles northeast of Bethel and twelve miles from Jerusalem (2 Chron. 13:19).

11:55 This is the third Passover that John mentioned in his Gospel (cf. 2:13; 6:4) and probably the fourth one during Jesus' public ministry. John mentioned the first, third, and fourth of these.[423] The Mosaic Law required that the Jews who had become ritually unclean had to purify themselves for one week before participating in this feast (Num. 9:6-14). Therefore many of them went to Jerusalem at least one week before the feast began to undergo purification.

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[422]John did not record Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, as the Synoptic writers did. This may have been the meeting of the Sanhedrin that he viewed as the real trial of Jesus.
[423]Hoehner, p. 143.

11:56 These pilgrims wondered if Jesus would attend that Passover since official antagonism against Him was common knowledge (v. 57; cf. 7:11). He habitually attended the required feasts and taught in the temple while He was in Jerusalem. However, there had been unsuccessful attempts to stone Him there, so whether He would appear at this feast was an open question.

11:57 There was a warrant out for Jesus' arrest. The reader can hardly miss the point that Israel's leaders had deliberately rejected their Messiah.

3. Mary's anointing of Jesus 12:1-8 (cf. Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)

In contrast to the hatred that the religious leaders manifested stands the love that Mary demonstrated toward the One she had come to believe in. Her act of sacrificial devotion is a model for all true disciples. This is the climax of belief in this section of the Gospel that records Jesus' public ministry (1:19—12:50). Chapter 12 records Jesus' last teaching before the general public.

12:1 The day when Jesus arrived in Bethany was evidently Saturday.[424] As we have noted before, John frequently grouped the events he recorded around the Jewish feasts and related them to those feasts. At this Passover the Lamb of God would die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. John's reference to Lazarus helps the reader identify which of the two Bethanys that John mentioned is in view here. It also shows that Lazarus was still alive, another testimony to the reality of the resurrection miracle that Jesus had performed.

12:2 The dinner (Gr. *deipnon*) was evidently the evening meal on Saturday. Those who hosted it must have included Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and Simon, the former leper in whose house the meal took place (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3). John's reference to Lazarus implies that he was of special interest, undoubtedly because of his recent resurrection. Lazarus had become something of a celebrity (v. 9). He appears to have retreated from the public spotlight following his resurrection but made this uncommon appearance to honor Jesus (cf. v. 9).[425]

12:3 Mary anointed Jesus with a *litre* of ointment. The Greek *litre* equaled about 11 ounces and was a lavish amount to pour out on someone. Its quantity indicates Mary's great love and high regard for Jesus. The ointment was nard or spikenard, an Indian oil that came from the roots (i.e., spikes, therefore "spikenard") of the nard plant.[426] It was pure ointment and therefore of a high quality as well as imported and consequently very expensive (cf. v. 5). Matthew and Mark noted that the

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[424]Ibid., p. 91.
[425]Tenney, "John," p. 124.
[426]*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Spikenard," by W. E. Shewell-Cooper, 5:502.

liquid was in an alabaster flask the neck of which Mary broke to pour it out on Jesus (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3).

John wrote that Mary proceeded to anoint Jesus' feet with the ointment. The Synoptic accounts say that she anointed His head (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). Probably she did both. There was enough ointment to anoint not only Jesus' head and feet but also other parts of His body as well (cf. Matt. 26:12; Mark 14:8). Perhaps Matthew and Mark mentioned Jesus' head to present this act as one that honored Jesus. John could have mentioned Jesus' feet to stress Mary's humility in contrast to the Sanhedrin's pride and the disciples' pride (cf. 13:1-17).[427]

Only John noted that Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, another act of humility. Normally Jewish women never unbound their hair in public since loose hair was a sign of loose morals. Evidently Mary's love for Jesus overrode her sense of propriety. She probably wiped the ointment in and the excess off with her hair. It would have been easy for Mary to anoint Jesus' feet. The guests undoubtedly reclined on mats on the floor with their heads and hands close to the table and their feet extending out in the opposite direction.

The fact that the fragrance of the perfume filled the house shows again how lavish Mary's display of love was. In that culture when the male head of a household died and left only female survivors, the women usually had great difficulty making ends meet and often became destitute. If this was the situation that Lazarus' death created for Mary and Martha, we can appreciate how grateful they must have been to Jesus for restoring their brother to them. Even if they were rich, and the cost of Mary's ointment suggests that they may have been, the restoration of a loved brother was reason enough for great gratitude and festivity.

12:4-5 Judas, as well as some other disciples who were present (Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4), objected to what seemed to be an extravagant waste. Three hundred denarii was a full year's wages for a working man in that culture. Mary would not give to the Lord what cost her nothing (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24). Real worship always costs the worshipper; it always involves a sacrifice.

> "When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary took the place of a slave. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet (see 1 Cor. 11:15). Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord."[428]

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[427]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 427, 428.
[428]Wiersbe, 1:339.

12:6 John knew Judas' real motive for objecting (cf. 10:13). Judas' selfish materialism helps us understand why He was willing to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

> "His remonstrance over the gift of the ointment revealed that he had a sharp sense of financial values and no appreciation of human values."[429]

Evidently the other disciples learned of their treasurer's larcenous behavior after He betrayed Jesus.

12:7 Probably Jesus meant that the disciples should permit Mary to keep the custom of anointing for burial since Jesus' burial was not far away. There is no indication that Mary realized that Jesus would die soon any more than the other disciples did. However she was anointing Jesus out of love, as mourners anointed the bodies of loved ones who had died. It was not uncommon to do this at lavish expense. Jesus viewed her act as a pre-anointing for His death, though Mary may not have viewed it as such (cf. 11:51).[430]

It is a good idea to express our love for people we appreciate to them before they die. Flowers at a funeral are nice, but flowers before the funeral are even better.

12:8 Unless Jesus was the Son of God who was due the same honor as His Father (5:23) this statement would have manifested supreme arrogance. Jesus was not encouraging the disciples to regard poverty as inevitable and, therefore, to avoid doing anything to help those in need. He was comparing the unique opportunity that His impending death presented with the continual need that the poverty of some will always present (cf. Mark 14:7).

John's Gospel has been contrasting the growing belief of some people and the growing unbelief of others. This incident contrasts the great love of one disciple with the great apathy of another disciple.

> "Mary of Bethany is in fact another of the timeless, representative figures so wonderfully portrayed in this Gospel. She is a type of the true Christian worshipper, even as the sinful woman in the very different anointing story in Luke vii. 36-50 is a type of the true Christian penitent."[431]

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[429]Tenney, "John," p. 125.
[430]If she did, perhaps this is why she did not go to Jesus' tomb with the other women to anoint His body.
[431]Tasker, p. 144.

4. The official antagonism toward Lazarus 12:9-11

To make the contrast between belief and unbelief even more striking, John returned from Mary's love to the chief priests' hatred (cf. 11:47-57).

12:9 Jesus had disappeared after Lazarus' resurrection and had not yet showed Himself in Jerusalem for Passover (11:54-57), but now the news was that He was in Bethany. The appearance of the resurrected Lazarus intensified the curiosity of many Jerusalem residents and pilgrims who traveled to Bethany hoping to see both men. They were the subjects of much controversy.

Martha had worked for the Lord by serving the supper (v. 2), Mary had worshipped Him (v. 3), and Lazarus witnessed for Him (v. 9). They are model disciples.

12:10-11 The huge numbers of people that were heading for Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus made the Sanhedrin members conclude that they would have to terminate Lazarus as well as Jesus. Many of the Jews believed on Jesus when they heard about Lazarus' resurrection and or saw him. The man born blind whom Jesus had healed had also become a problem for the Sanhedrin earlier. They had dealt with him differently because Jesus' popularity was not as great earlier (9:34).

The hatred of the Sanhedrin contrasts with Mary's love for Jesus. The intensity of both feelings, shared by many other people, pointed to the inevitability of a major conflict soon.

5. Jesus' triumphal entry 12:12-19 (cf. Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40)

The importance of this incident in Jesus' ministry is evident from the fact that all four Gospel evangelists recorded it. Matthew and Mark placed this event before Mary's anointing of Jesus in Simon's house (vv. 1-8). However, John's order is probably the chronological one in view of his time references and the fact that Matthew and Mark frequently altered the chronological sequence for thematic purposes.

The scene now shifts from a quiet dinner with a few close friends in the small town of Bethany. We see next a noisy public parade through the streets of Jerusalem. This was the only public demonstration that Jesus allowed during His earthly ministry.

12:12 The next day would have been Sunday (cf. v. 1). The great multitude that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover undoubtedly included many pilgrims from Galilee, where Jesus had His greatest following. The crowd evidently surrounded Jesus since Matthew and Mark wrote that there were

many people in front of Jesus and many behind Him (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9).

12:13 The waving of date palm fronds (i.e., branches) had become a common practice at national celebrations in Israel (Lev. 23:40). Palm fronds had become a national symbol (cf. 1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7). They appear on the coins that the Jewish nationalists produced during the war with the Romans in A.D. 66-70.[432] Used on this occasion they probably signaled popular belief that Israel's Messiah had appeared (cf. Rev. 7:9).

"Hosanna" is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase that means "give salvation now." The Jews commonly used this word in their praise at the feasts of Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover. It was part of the Hallel (Ps. 113—118) that the temple choir sang at these feasts (Ps. 118:25).[433] "Blessed is He . . ." is the very next statement in Psalm 118 (Ps. 118:26). The Jews of Jesus' day regarded the phrase "He who comes in the name of the Lord" as referring to Messiah (cf. 11:27). Originally it referred to pilgrims who went to Jerusalem for the feasts and perhaps in the first instance to the Davidic king whose coronation the psalmist wrote the psalm to honor. "Even the King of Israel" is not in Psalm 118. It was the people's identification of Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Luke 19:38; John 1:49; 18:37; 19:19).

> "I imagine that some of the Roman soldiers must have smiled at the 'Triumphal Entry,' because it was nothing like their own 'Roman triumph' celebrations in the city of Rome.
>
> "Whenever a Roman general was victorious on foreign soil, killing at least 5,000 of the enemy, and gaining new territory, he was given a 'Roman triumph' when he returned to the city. It was the Roman equivalent of the American 'ticker-tape parade,' only with much more splendor. The victor would be permitted to display the trophies he had won and the enemy leaders he had captured. The parade ended at the arena where some of the captives entertained the people by fighting wild beasts. Compared to a 'Roman triumph,' our Lord's entry into Jerusalem was nothing."[434]

12:14-15 The Synoptic writers gave more detail about Jesus securing the young donkey. John simply reported that He entered Jerusalem riding on it and thereby fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy about how Messiah would present Himself to the nation (Zech. 9:9). "Fear not" comes from Isaiah 40:9,

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[432]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 432.
[433]Ibid.
[434]Wiersbe, 1:340.

which addresses those to whom good news about Zion comes. "Daughter of Zion" is a common Old Testament description of the people of Jerusalem as the oppressed people of God (cf. Isa. 1:8; Jer. 4:31; Lam. 2:4; Mic. 4:8; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 2:10; et al.). The context of Zechariah 9:9 is worthy of examination since it describes more about Messiah's reign. Even though Messiah had appeared, His reign would not begin then. He would not "give salvation now" because of Israel's rejection of her King.

12:16 Jesus' disciples did not realize all the implications of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at this time. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension they did (cf. 2:17, 22). Obviously they and the crowd realized that Jesus was the Messiah, as they conceived of the Messiah. However they did not understand the nature of His messiahship, the necessity of His death, or the plan for His kingdom then. For example, they did not understand the significance of His riding a donkey's colt rather than a war-horse. John's statement here helps the reader understand the difference between the disciples' understanding and comments before the Cross and their conduct and teaching after that event.

> "The Passion and the Resurrection were keys in unlocking the mystery of Jesus' person."[435]

12:17-18 John noted another witness to Jesus' person, namely, the crowd that had observed Jesus' healing of Lazarus and had accompanied Jesus from Bethany to Jerusalem. The multitude that had come out of Jerusalem to welcome Jesus joined the other people physically and as witnesses to Jesus' true identity. The raising of Lazarus was a miracle that very many people regarded as a sign that Jesus was the Messiah.

12:19 Yet many other people did not believe. The Pharisees looked on in unbelief frustrated by Jesus' popularity and unable to do anything to stop Him at the moment. Hyperbolically they said the whole world had gone after Jesus. This is another ironic comment that John recorded for His readers' instruction. Really relatively few people had truly believed on Jesus (vv. 37-43), but the whole world would go after Jesus as the Savior of the world to a greater degree than the Pharisees believed then (cf. 3:16-17). Their unconscious prophecy (cf. Caiaphas' unconscious prophecy in 11:50) received a partial fulfillment almost immediately in the request of some Greeks to see Jesus (vv. 20-22). The Pharisees later found it just as impossible to curtail the spread of Christianity as they did to restrict Jesus personally.

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[435]Tenney, "John," p. 127.

6. Jesus' announcement of His death 12:20-36

One example that Jesus was attracting people from other parts of the world follows. These individuals contrast with the Pharisees.

> "This rather curious incident is rather peculiar to John. I say 'rather curious' because it is unusual that we encounter Greeks in a narrative of events at Jerusalem, because the other Evangelists do not mention the incident, and because the Greeks simply say, 'Sir, we would like to see Jesus' and then disappear from the narrative. Clearly John regards their coming as significant but he does not treat their presence as important. Jesus recognizes in their coming an indication that the climax of his mission has arrived. Immediately when he hears of them he says, 'The hour has come,' and goes on to speak of his glorification and of death. In this Gospel we see Jesus as the world's Savior, and evidently John means us to understand that this contact with the Greeks ushered in the climax. The fact that the Greeks had reached the point of wanting to meet Jesus showed that the time had come for him to die for the world. He no longer belongs to Judaism, which in any case has rejected him. But the world, whose Savior he is, awaits him and seeks for him."[436]

The kernel of wheat teaching 12:20-26

12:20 The New Testament writers frequently referred to any Gentiles who came from the Greek-speaking world as Greeks (cf. 7:35; et al.). We do not know where the Gentiles in this incident came from. They could have lived in one of the predominantly Gentile areas of Palestine such as northeastern Galilee or the Decapolis, or they could have come from farther away (cf. Matt. 2:1-12). These were God-fearing Gentiles who worshipped Yahweh along with the Jews (cf. the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:27). They may or may not have been Jewish proselytes (i.e., full-fledged converts to Judaism). They could participate in synagogue worship and the annual feasts, and they would have worshipped in the temple court of the Gentiles.

12:21-22 It may have been Philip's Gentile name or the fact that he was from Bethsaida in a Gentile area of Galilee, specifically Gaulanitis, that attracted these Gentiles to him. Philip, who was a Jew, appears to have had some hesitation about introducing them to Jesus at first (cf. Matt. 10:5-6; Luke 18:15-16). Andrew favored bringing them to Jesus for an interview (cf. 1:40-42). The important revelation of this verse is that the disciples continued to bring people to Jesus, which continues to be the responsibility of Jesus' disciples.

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[436]Morris, p. 524.

12:23 Jesus' interview with these Gentiles was the occasion of His revelation that the time for His death, resurrection, and ascension was at hand (cf. v. 27; 13:1; 17:1). Until now, that hour had not been near (cf. 2:4; 4:21, 23; 7:30; 8:20). As mentioned earlier, Jesus' references to His glorification in the fourth Gospel are references to His death, resurrection, and ascension.

The title "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for Himself. It connoted suffering and glorification, and it avoided the misunderstanding that the use of some other messianic titles entailed.

John mentioned nothing more about these Greeks. Evidently he referred to them at all because they represented Gentiles who were expressing interest in Jesus and because their interview was the occasion for Jesus' revelation. Their presence at the announcement of Jesus' impending death hints at the union of Jews and Gentiles in the benefits of that death and in the body of believers after that death.

12:24 Jesus announced another important revelation with His characteristic introductory clause. He described His body as a kernel of wheat that someone sows in the ground. By dying He would produce a great harvest. His death was necessary for that harvest. The illustration also implies the humility of Jesus' death. Jesus' sacrificial death would result in eternal life for many other people.

12:25 Jesus now applied the principle in the illustration for His followers. This was a principle that He had taught them on at least three separate occasions previously (cf. Matt. 10:39; Mark 8:36; Luke 14:26). Obviously it was very important.

Anyone who selfishly lives for himself or herself loses his or her life in the sense that he or she wastes it. Nothing really good comes from it. Conversely anyone who hates his or her life in the sense of disregarding one's own desires to pursue the welfare of another will gain something for that sacrifice. He or she will gain true life for self and blessing for the other person. Jesus contrasted the worthlessness of what one sacrifices now with the value of what one gains by describing the sacrifice as something temporal and the gain as something eternal.

> "People whose priorities are right have such an attitude of love for the things of God that all interest in the affairs of this life appear by comparison as hatred."[437]

Obviously Jesus did not mean that we gain justification by living sacrificial lives. The Bible describes eternal life in some places as a gift (e.g., 3:16; 5:24; 6:40) and in other places as a reward (e.g., Matt. 19:29;

[437]Ibid., p. 527.

Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Rom. 2:7; 6:22; Gal. 6:8). It is the life of God, but we can experience that life to a greater or lesser degree depending on our obedience to God (cf. 10:10; 17:3).[438]

On one level Jesus was talking about how eternal life comes to people: through the sacrifice of the Son of Man (v. 24). On another level He was speaking of how to gain the most from life now: by living sacrificially rather than selfishly (v. 25). The general principle is a paradox. Death leads to life.

Over the centuries the church has observed that the blood of Christian martyrs has indeed been the seed of the church. Their literal deaths have led to the salvation of many other people. Even more disciples have discovered that any sacrifice for Jesus yields blessings for others and for them that far exceed the sacrifice.

12:26 For disciples of Jesus, self-sacrifice does not just mean putting others before themselves. It also means putting Jesus first (cf. 10:4). The disciple who wants to serve Jesus must follow Him. He or she must go where Jesus goes and do what He does. True servants stay close to their masters.

Jesus said these words on the way to the Cross and His glorification. Likewise His servants who follow Him could and can count on death, figuratively if not literally, but beyond that they can anticipate glory from the Father (cf. 17:24). The true disciple's life will essentially duplicate the experiences of his or her Lord.

The importance of believing now 12:27-36

12:27 Anticipation of the death that had to precede the glory troubled Jesus deeply (Gr. *tataraktai*, cf. 11:33; 14:1; Mark 14:32-42). It troubled Him because His death would involve separation from His Father and bearing God's wrath for the sins of the world.

The sentence following, "What shall I say?" could be a question (NASB, NIV) or a prayer. The Greek text permits either translation. In either case the meaning is almost the same. If Jesus meant it as a question, He resolved the difficulty at once.[439] If He meant it as a prayer, it is the expression of His agony (cf. Mark 14:36). Immediately Jesus voiced His continuing commitment to His Father's will. We see here the conflict that Jesus felt between His desire to avoid the Cross and His desire to obey the Father completely.

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[438]See Dillow, pp. 135-36.

[439]This was Morris' preference, pp. 528-29.

> "Jesus instructed His disciples on the cost of commitment to the Father's will by disclosing His emotions."[440]

John did not record Jesus' struggle with God's will in Gethsemane, as the Synoptics did (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). He narrated that struggle on this occasion instead.

12:28-29 More than deliverance from the hour of the Cross Jesus wanted God's glory (cf. 7:18; 8:29, 50; Matt. 26:39).

> "The whole of his life's dedication is concentrated in this statement."[441]

> "In the hour of suffering and surrender, there are only two prayers we can pray, either 'Father, save me!' or 'Father, glorify Thy name!'"[442]

The Father answered Jesus' petition from heaven audibly. The Gospels record three instances of God doing this. The other two were at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:21-22) and transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). The Synoptics record those events, and only John recorded this one. In all cases the purpose of the voice was to authenticate Jesus as God's Son in a dramatic way. However it was a veiled revelation as were all of God's revelations about Jesus. The people present could not understand the words clearly, though Jesus could (cf. Acts 9:7; 22:9). God had already glorified Himself through the Incarnation and Jesus' ministry. He would glorify Himself through Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

12:30 Jesus explained that the heavenly voice had sounded for the people's benefit more than for His. In that the voice assured Jesus, who was to die for their sins, it was for their sake. They probably did not appreciate that it was a confirmation of Jesus until after the Resurrection. The more spiritually sensitive among them must have sensed that it signaled something important. Jesus proceeded to explain the implications of what God had said in the next two verses.

12:31-32 Jesus' passion would constitute a judgment on the world. The Jews thought they were judging Jesus when they decided to believe or disbelieve on Him. Really their decisions brought divine judgment on themselves. By crucifying Jesus they were condemning themselves. Jesus was not saying that this would be the last judgment on the world. He

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[440]Blum, pp. 317-18.
[441]Tenney, "John," p. 130.
[442]Wiersbe, 1:342.

meant that because of humankind's rejection of Him God was about to pass judgment on the world for rejecting His Son (cf. Acts 17:30-31).

Jesus' passion would also result in the casting out of the ruler of this world. This is a title for Satan (14:30; 16:11; cf. Matt. 4:8-9; Luke 4:6-7; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). The death of Jesus might appear to be a victory for Satan, but really it signaled his doom. The Cross defeated Satan. He only functions as he does now because it is God's will for Him to do so. His eternal destruction is sure even though it is still future (Rev. 20:10). God will cast him out of His presence and out of the earth into the lake of fire forever (cf. Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

Jesus' passion would involve His enemies lifting Him up on a cross but also His exaltation to God's presence. The Cross would bring people to faith in Him, and His exaltation would involve others coming into God's presence around Him. Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension would draw all people without distinction, not all without exception, to Himself.

> "Jesus is not affirming that the whole world will be saved; he is affirming that all who are saved are saved in this way. And he is speaking of a universal rather than a narrowly nationalistic religion."[443]

All these things would happen "now," not in the eschatological future. They are all the immediate consequences of Jesus' work on the cross.

12:33 John explained that Jesus was speaking of His death by crucifixion so his readers would not think only of His exaltation to heaven.

12:34 Jesus' prediction of His death puzzled His listeners. They were probably thinking of the passages in the Old Testament that spoke of Messiah and or His kingdom enduring forever (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16; Ps. 89:26-29, 35-37; Dan. 7:13-14). Jesus had been speaking of His dying. How could Jesus be the Messiah and die? What kind of Son of Man was Jesus talking about?

> "We should not overlook the fact that this is the last mention of the crowd in Jesus' ministry. To the end they remain confused and perplexed, totally unable to appreciate the magnitude of the gift offered to them and the significance of the Person who offers it."[444]

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[443]Morris, pp. 531-32.
[444]Ibid., p. 533.

12:35-36a Jesus did not answer their question. He already had done so when He explained that He and the Father were One (cf. 5:18). The paradox of His dying and living forever would become clear with His resurrection.

Instead of answering, Jesus urged His hearers to walk in the light as long as they had it. If they would do that, the darkness would not overpower them when the light departed (cf. Isa. 50:10). If they did not do that, they would be lost. They needed to believe in Him then, before the Cross. After the Cross, when the Light was no longer present with them, it would be harder for them to believe. If they believed, they would become sons of light, namely, people who display the ethical qualities of light (cf. Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5).

> "The Semitic idiom 'sons of' describes men who possess the characteristics of what is said to be their 'father'. In our idiom, we should probably say 'men of light', cf. our expression 'a man of integrity'."[445]

12:36b Jesus had just told His hearers that the Light would not be with them much longer. He withdrew from them again giving them a foretaste of what He had just predicted (cf. 8:59; 11:54). His departure should have motivated them to believe on Him.

7. The unbelief of Israel 12:37-50

This section of the Gospel contains the writer's explanation of the significance of the events so far in Jesus' ministry. John first explained the conflict between belief and unbelief, and then He recorded Jesus' final appeal for decision. This is the final climax of the decision theme before Jesus' passion. The key word in this section is "believe," which appears six times.

The explanation of Israel's unbelief 12:37-43

12:37-38 The majority of the Jews did not believe on Jesus despite the many miracles that He performed that indicated His messiahship (cf. 1:11). John again attributed Israel's unbelief to God's will, though he balanced that again with the Jew's human responsibility in verse 43. He viewed Isaiah 53:1 as predicting Israel's rejection of her Messiah. The verse originally referred to the Gentiles' rejection of Israel, the servant of the Lord. However in another sense it predicted Israel's rejection of the Servant of the Lord whom He would send. The report or message that the people had rejected was Jesus' teaching, and the evidence of the Lord's arm or power was Jesus' miracles.

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[445]Tasker, p. 153.

> "John 12 records the second major crisis in the ministry of our Lord as seen by John the apostle. The first occurred when many of His disciples would no longer walk with Him (John 6:66), even though He is 'the way' (John 14:6). In this chapter, John tells us that many would not believe in Him (John 12:37ff), even though He is 'the truth.' The third crisis will come in John 19: even though he is 'the life,' the leaders crucified Him."[446]

12:39 John again affirmed that most of the Jews did not believe on Jesus because they could not. God had judicially hardened their hearts because they had refused to believe Him previously (cf. Exod. 9:12; cf. 2 Thess. 2:8-12).

12:40 Isaiah 6:10 is the prophecy that predicted this hardening (cf. Acts 28:26-27). Originally God had told Isaiah that the people to whom he ministered would not welcome his ministry because God would harden their hearts. Now John explained that this verse also revealed the reason for the Jews' rejection of Jesus' ministry. Prophecy not only described Israel's unbelief (v. 38), but it also explained it.

The apostle Paul gave the definitive answer to the problem of God's fairness that His predestination poses in Romans 9—11.

12:41 In the vision that Isaiah recorded in Isaiah 6, the prophet wrote that he saw God's glory (Isa. 6:3). Now John wrote that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of Jesus. Obviously John regarded Jesus as God (cf. 1:18; 10:30; 20:28; Col. 2:9). Isaiah had spoken of Jesus in that he had revealed many messianic prophecies. Earlier Jesus had claimed that Moses had written about Him (5:46).

These quotations justify interpreting the Old Testament servant of the Lord passages as referring to the Messiah. Today there is a debate within Judaism and liberal Christianity about whether these passages refer to a personal Messiah or only to Israel.

12:42-43 Even though most of the Jews rejected Jesus, some believed on Him (cf. 1:10-13). Even some of the rulers did, though the content of their faith doubtless varied. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea seem to have been such people (cf. 7:50-52; 19:38-39). Most of them did not admit that they believed in Him, however, because of fear of exclusion from synagogue worship (cf. 9:22).

Public confession of faith in Jesus is the normal expression of belief in Him (Rom. 10:9-10). However public confession is not a condition for salvation. Obviously mutes and other people can believe but for one

[446]Wiersbe, 1:338.

reason or another may not be able to confess their faith publicly with their mouths.

The final exhortation to believe 12:44-50

John added Jesus' words that follow as a climactic appeal to his readers to believe on Jesus. This exhortation summarizes and restates some of the major points that John recorded Jesus teaching earlier. These themes include faith, Jesus as the One sent by the Father, light and darkness, judgment now and later, and eternal life. Jesus evidently gave it to the crowd as a final challenge. He probably delivered it during His week of teaching in the temple during the Passover season.

12:44-45 The fact that Jesus cried these words out shows their importance. Jesus again claimed to be God's agent and so closely connected with God that to believe on Jesus constituted believing on God. There is both a distinction between the Son and the Father in their subsistence and a unity between them in their essence (cf. ch. 5).

12:46 Jesus again claimed to have come to dispel darkness. He did this by revealing God (cf. 1:18).

12:47-48 Disobedience to Jesus' words may indicate the absence of saving faith (cf. 3:36). The same message that brings life to those who believe it will result in condemnation for those who reject it. The last day is the day unbelievers will stand before God in judgment, namely, at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). God's purpose in the Incarnation was essentially positive, however. He wanted people to believe and experience salvation, not condemnation.

12:49-50 Jesus did not speak a message that He had devised but one that He had received from the Father (cf. Deut. 18:18-19). What God had commanded Him to say resulted in eternal life for those who believed it. Consequently Jesus was careful to convey this message exactly as He had received it.

This exhortation concludes and climaxes what John recorded of Jesus' public ministry.

III. JESUS' PRIVATE MINISTRY CHS. 13—17

The Synoptics integrate Jesus' ministry to the masses and His training of the Twelve, but John separated these two aspects of His ministry. There is obviously some overlapping in the fourth Gospel, but the present section contains ministry that Jesus directed almost exclusively to the Twelve. The Synoptics contain more of Jesus' teaching of the Twelve during His public ministry whereas John gave us more of His teaching in the upper room. This instruction was specifically to prepare the Twelve for leadership in the church. Jesus gave it after Israel's official and final rejection of Him resulted in the postponement of the messianic kingdom.

In the first major section of this Gospel Jesus customarily performed a miracle and then explained its significance. In this section He did the reverse. He explained the significance of His death and then went to the cross and arose from the dead.

A. THE LAST SUPPER 13:1-30

John recorded more of what Jesus said and did in the upper room than any of the other Gospel evangelists. Much of this was a discourse on the disciples' future. Jesus prefaced this instruction with other lessons for them.

John's description of the time of the Last Supper seems to conflict with that of the Synoptics. They present it as happening on Thursday evening, but many students of the fourth Gospel have interpreted John as locating it on Wednesday evening (13:1, 27; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, 42). Resolution of the apparent contradictions that these seven verses pose will follow in the exposition of them. The Last Supper was a Passover meal that took place on Thursday evening.

John's omission of the institution of the Lord's Supper has disturbed some readers of the fourth Gospel, especially sacramentalists, those who believe that the sacraments have some part in salvation. We can only suggest that John did so because the earlier Gospels contained full accounts of it, and he wished to record new material rather than repeating. Obviously John did not record many other things that his fellow evangelists chose to include. Each evangelist chose his material in view of his distinctive purpose.

1. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet 13:1-20

Jesus began His farewell address (cf. Moses, Deut. 31—33; Joshua, Josh. 23—24; Paul, Acts 20) with an object lesson.

The act of foot-washing 13:1-11

> "In the Synoptic account of the events of this evening we read of a dispute among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. John does not record this, but he tells of an action of Jesus that rebuked their lack of humility more strikingly than any words could have done."[447]

The emphasis in verses 1-3 is on what the Lord *knew*, and in verses 4-5 it is on what He *did*.

13:1 This verse contradicts the Synoptic accounts of the Passover (e.g., Mark 14:12) only if it introduces everything in chapters 13—17. Evidently it introduces only the account of foot-washing that follows.

[447]Morris, p. 544.

> "As the first Passover had been the turning point in the redemption of the people of God, so the Cross would be the opening of a new era for believers."[448]

The word "world" (Gr. *cosmos*) is an important one in this section of the Gospel where it appears about 40 times (ch. 13—17). The world represents the mass of lost humanity out of which Jesus has called His disciples and from which He would depart shortly when He returned to heaven. Jesus loved His own who believed on Him who would remain in the world. He loved them to the end (Gr. *eis telos*) or utmost, the demonstration of which was His sacrificial death on the cross. "The end" can also refer to the end of Jesus' earthly life, though this interpretation seems less fitting.

Jesus' realization that His hour had come (12:23) led Him to prepare His disciples for that hour and what it would mean for them. The double emphasis on love sets the tone for the whole Upper Room Discourse.

13:2 The supper (Gr. *deipnon*) in view was the evening meal (v. 30). It was a Passover meal. Jesus evidently washed the disciples' feet just after the meal had been served (vv. 4, 26). The fact that Jesus washed Judas' feet after Judas had determined to betray Him shows the greatness of His love (v. 1). John's reference to Satan's role in Judas' decision heightens the point even further.

13:3-5 Jesus washed the disciple's feet fully aware of His authority from the Father, His divine origin, and His divine destiny. John's mention of this awareness stresses Jesus' humility and love still further. Washing feet in such a situation was the role of the most menial of servants (cf. 1:27).[449] Here Jesus reversed normal roles and assumed the place of a servant rather than that of a rabbi. His act demonstrated love (v. 1), provided a model of Christian conduct (vv. 12-17), and symbolized cleansing (vv. 6-9). Jesus even dressed Himself as a slave (cf. Phil. 2:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:5). His humble service would take Him even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Normally a servant would have been present to perform this task, but there were none present in the upper room since it was a secret meal. The disciples did not want to wash each other's feet since they had just been arguing about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24).

> "We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility. The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge, but not in grace (see 2 Peter 3:18). 'Humility

[448]Tenney, "John," p. 135.
[449]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 462.

> is the only soil in which the graces root,' wrote Andrew Murray.[450]

13:6-7 Most of the disciples remained silent as Jesus washed their feet, but Peter could not refrain from objecting. The Greek construction of what he said stresses the contrast between Jesus and himself. Jesus encouraged Peter to submit to having his feet washed with the promise that he would understand later why Jesus was washing them (cf. vv. 12-20). As the disciples did not understand that Jesus would die, they did not understand either the lessons that led up to His death. They would understand after He arose and the Holy Spirit enlightened their minds.

13:8-9 This promise did not satisfy Peter who objected to Jesus' act in the strongest terms. Peter viewed the situation as totally unacceptable socially. Jesus' replied on the spiritual and symbolic level. He was speaking of spiritual cleansing, as the context clarifies. Peter understood Him to be speaking on the physical level. If failure to submit to Jesus' washing meant the termination of their relationship, Peter was willing to submit to a more thorough cleansing. Peter's words reflect his impetuous nature and his high regard for Jesus as well as his failure to understand and his self-will.

13:10-11 Jesus distinguished the two types of spiritual cleansing that believers experience, forensic and family forgiveness. When a person believes in Jesus as Savior, God removes all the guilt of that person for sins committed in the past, present, and future (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1; et al.). Jesus spoke of this forensic or legal forgiveness as a total bath (Gr. *louo*). After a person believes in Jesus as Savior, he or she commits sins and those sins hinder the believer's fellowship with God (cf. Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4; et al.). Jesus compared this family forgiveness to washing (Gr. *nipto*) the feet, which become dirty while walking through life. Therefore Jesus was illustrating the importance of believers obtaining spiritual cleansing from God periodically when He washed the disciples' feet. We obtain this cleansing by confessing our sins to God (1 John 1:9; cf. 1 John 2:24; 5:13). The basis for both types of forgiveness is Jesus' work on the cross.

Other views are that the foot-washing was symbolic of the complete cleansing that had already taken place or would take place. They are less probable since Jesus said that Peter already had experienced a spiritual bath but still needed his feet washed.

The unclean disciple was Judas who had not believed that Jesus was God's Son. Jesus' washing Judas' feet, therefore, was not a lesson in believers' securing spiritual cleansing but an offer of initial cleansing for him. There is nothing in the text that would warrant the conclusion that Jesus omitted washing Judas' feet.

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[450]Wiersbe, 1:345.

The explanation of foot-washing 13:12-20

13:12 Jesus now returned to His role as the disciples' teacher, which His change of clothing and physical position indicated. He began to explain the significance of what He had done, though full comprehension would come to the disciples later (v. 7). His question prepared them for the lesson that followed.

13:13 "Teacher" translates the Hebrew "Rabbi" (Gr. *didaskalos*) and "Lord," the Aramaic "Mari" (Gr. *kyrios*). The title "Lord" took on deeper meaning after the Resurrection as Christians began to understand better who Jesus is (cf. 20:28; Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9-11). Both titles were respectful and acknowledged Jesus' superiority over His disciples.

13:14-15 Jesus had given the Twelve a lesson in humble service of one another. Specifically He took a lower role than theirs for their welfare. Similarly Jesus' disciples should willingly and happily put meeting the needs of others before maintaining their own prestige (cf. Phil. 2:1-11).

> "The world asks, 'How many people work for you?' but the Lord asks, 'For how many people do you work?'"[451]

Some Christians believe that Jesus' command here is binding on the church in a literal sense. They practice foot-washing as an ordinance of the church along with water baptism and the Lord's Supper.[452] Most Christians believe that Jesus meant that His disciples should follow His example of serving humbly rather than specifically washing each other's feet. Nowhere else in the New Testament do its writers treat foot-washing as another ordinance.[453] Moreover the attitude of humility that disciples should have toward one another was Jesus' point, not simply the performance of a ritual (cf. 15:20; Matt. 10:24; Luke 6:40). Furthermore Jesus called foot-washing an example (Gr. *hypodeigma*, pattern) implying that there are other examples of the same attitude. This was an appropriate example of humble service in a culture where people wore sandals and soiled their feet easily. If Jesus was giving an example in modern North American culture, He probably would have selected another humble act.

13:16 Jesus again introduced a statement with a strong asseveration to indicate its importance. He put it in the form of an aphorism (cf. 15:20; Matt. 10:24; Luke 6:40; 22:37).[454] By common consent slaves occupy an

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[451]Ibid., 1:347.

[452]The Grace Brethren and certain Mennonite churches, among others, view footwashing as a third ordinance.

[453]1 Timothy 5:10 speaks of it as an example of humble service, not as an ordinance of the church.

[454]An aphorism is a concise definition or statement of a principle.

inferior role to that of their masters, and messengers (Gr. *apostolos*) do the same to those who send them.[455] Jesus was contrasting roles, not essential worth. His point was that no disciple of His should think it beneath him or her to serve others since He, the master and sender, had humbled Himself to serve.

Jesus had repeatedly referred to the fact that the Father had sent Him and that He had come from the Father. Likewise He would send the disciples (20:21).

13:17 Knowing what one ought to do and really doing it are frequently two different things. Jesus promised God's favor on those who practice humble service, not on those who simply realize that they should be humble (cf. 8:31; 12:47-48; Heb. 12:14; James 1:22-25).[456]

> "There is a form of religious piety that utters a hearty 'Amen!' to the most stringent demands of discipleship, but which rarely does anything about them."[457]

13:18-19 Again Jesus limited what He had said to those disciples who truly believed on Him (v. 10; cf. 6:71; 12:4; 13:2). He made this statement so that when the disciples would later remember His words they would not think that He had been mistaken about Judas. Instead they would believe that Jesus was "I am," connoting deity (Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; cf. John 8:24, 28, 58). He wanted the disciples to believe His claims before His crucifixion apparently invalidated them and before His resurrection confirmed them.

Jesus chose Judas as one of the Twelve to fulfill Psalm 41:9. The Son of David experienced treason from a close friend as the original David had. Perhaps the betrayer of David in view was Ahithophel, who also committed suicide (2 Sam. 15:12; 16:15-23; 17:3-4, 14, 23). Betrayal by one who had received table hospitality was especially heinous in the ancient Near East. Lifting up the heel against someone was probably a way of saying that one had walked out on his friend.[458] Other possibilities are that the expression derived from the lifting up of a horse's hoof preparatory to kicking,[459] or it alluded to shaking off the dust from the feet (cf. Luke 9:5; 10:11).[460]

13:20 Another strong asseveration underlined the statement that followed. In view of Jesus' claim to be the "I am," the disciples needed to appreciate

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[455]This is the only occurrance of *apostolos* in the fourth Gospel.
[456]This is one of only two beatitudes in John's Gospel (cf. 20:29).
[457]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 469.
[458]Bruce, pp. 287, 296, n. 14.
[459]Tasker, p. 161.
[460]Morris, p. 553.

that they enjoyed an intimate relationship with Jesus as His messengers. This relationship was similar to the one that Jesus enjoyed with His Father (cf. 5:19). Jesus was preparing them for the Great Commission (20:21; cf. v. 16). He was also warning Judas of the greatness of the sin that he anticipated committing.

2. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 13:21-30 (cf. Matt. 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23)

Jesus had spoken only briefly about His betrayal until now (cf. 6:70; 13:10, 18). Now He gave the Twelve more specific information.

13:21-22 The prospect of His imminent betrayal and death upset Jesus visibly (Gr. *etarachthe*, cf. 11:33; 12:27). Clearly the Twelve had not understood that one of them would betray Him (cf. Matt. 26:21-22; Mark 14:18-19; Luke 22:21-23). Judas had been a successful hypocrite. Jesus' solemn announcement now forced Judas to act quickly or to repent.

13:23 This is John's first reference to himself as the beloved disciple (cf. 19:26-27; 20:2-9; 21:1, 20-25; Mark 14:47, 51). He enjoyed an intimate relationship to Jesus similar to the one Jesus enjoyed with His Father (cf. 1:18). John was not claiming that Jesus loved him more than the other disciples by describing himself this way. Rather the description reveals his appreciation for God's grace in loving him as He did. He focused the reader's attention on Jesus more forcefully by omitting his own name.

> "Like the other John at the very beginning of the Gospel, the first witness to Jesus, he is only a voice. The identity of the speaker does not matter: what matters is the witness that he gives."[461]

> "It was customary to sit at most meals. Reclining at table, a hellenistic custom, was reserved for special meals. When first introduced into the Jewish world, it was probably a sign of extreme decadence (Am. 6:4-7), but by New Testament times it was normal at important banquets and feasts, and therefore was virtually required at the Passover celebration, almost as a mark of unhurried celebration and freedom, in self-conscious contrast with the haste with which the first Passover was eaten on the night of the exodus (Ex. 12:11; *cf*. B. *Pesahim* 108*a*; *NewDocs* 1. § 1; 2. § 26). In short, the posture of Jesus and his men is a

[461]L. Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel*, p. xiii.

> small indicator that they were in fact eating the Passover meal . . ."[462]

13:24-25 Evidently Peter was somewhere across the table from Jesus. He was unable to ask Jesus privately to identify the betrayer. John must have reclined on his left elbow immediately to Jesus' right. By leaning back against Jesus' chest John could have whispered his request quietly. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* is a beautiful painting, but it does not represent the table arrangement as it would have existed in the upper room.

13:26 Jesus identified Judas as the betrayer to John. The morsel or piece of bread (Gr. *psomion*) was probably a piece of unleavened bread that Jesus had dipped into the bowl of paschal stew. Passover participants normally did this early in the meal. The host would sometimes do this and pass a morsel of bread and meat to an honored guest. Jesus did this to Judas.

Judas must have sat near enough to Jesus for Jesus to do this conveniently (cf. Matt. 26:25). Possibly Judas reclined to Jesus' immediate left. If he did, this would have put him in the place of the honored guest immediately to the host's left.

Perhaps it was the apparently high honor that Jesus bestowed on Judas by extending the morsel to him that counteracted what Jesus had just said to John about the betrayer. Could Jesus really mean that the disciple who was the guest of honor would betray Him? This apparent contradiction may explain John's lack of response to Jesus' words to him about the betrayer.

Jesus' act of friendship to Judas triggered Judas' betrayal of Jesus' friendship.[463] This was Jesus' final gesture of supreme love for Judas (cf. v. 1).

Only Matthew recorded Judas' hypocritical question, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" and Jesus' reply, "You have said it yourself" (Matt. 26:25).

13:27 Judas accepted Jesus' food but not His love. Instead of repenting Judas continued to resist. This resistance opened the way for Satan to take control of him in a stronger way than he had done previously (cf. 3:16-19). Evidently Satan himself rather than just one of his demonic assistants gained control of Judas.[464]

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[462]Carson, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 473. "B. *Pesahim*" refers to the *Pesahim* section of The Babylonian Talmud, and "NewDocs" is an abbreviation for G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vols. 1 and 2, sections 2 and 26 respectively.

[463]Blum, p. 321.

[464]This is the only mention of Satan by name in this Gospel.

Undoubtedly Satan took control because he wanted to destroy Jesus. We should not conclude that Satan necessarily or directly controls everyone who opposes God's will. Judas' case was particularly significant in view of the situation. The text does not use the term "possession" to describe Satan's relationship to Judas, but certainly his influence on the traitor must have been very strong.

The opportunity for repentance had passed due to persistence in unbelief. Therefore Jesus did not appeal to Judas to change his mind but to get on with his evil work "quickly" (Gr. *tacheion*). Jesus' hour had come, and it was essential that Judas not thwart God's plan by delaying.

13:28 No one present knew what Jesus meant when He told Judas to do what he had to do quickly. John must have known that Judas was the betrayer, but even he did not know that Jesus was referring here to Judas' arrangements to betray Him.

> "There is nothing in the narrative to show that Jesus meant that betrayal was imminent. From all that has been said so far it may well have been far in the future."[465]

13:29 The fact that Judas was the treasurer of the Twelve shows that the other disciples trusted him implicitly. He was a consummate hypocrite. Jesus' trust of him shows the Savior's grace.

The feast in view (v. 29) must have been the feast of Unleavened Bread that followed Passover immediately since Jesus and the Twelve were then celebrating the Passover. Giving alms to the poor was a common practice in Jerusalem on Passover evening.[466]

13:30 Judas obeyed Jesus' command (v. 27) and left the upper room immediately. He missed most of the meal including the institution of the Lord's Supper. John's reference to it being night would be redundant if all he wanted to do was give a time reference. In view of his light and darkness motif, it seems that he wanted to point out the spiritual significance of Judas' departure both for Judas and for Jesus (cf. Luke 22:53; John 1:4-5; et al.).

> "As the Light of the world was about to depart and return to the Father, the darkness had come at last (cf. Luke 22:53). Again the contrast in imagery is clear. For John, Jesus is the Light of the world, and those who believe in Him come to the light and walk in the light. At the opposite extreme is Judas Iscariot, who rejected Jesus, cast in his lot with the

[465]Morris, p. 558.
[466]J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 54.

> powers of darkness, departed into the darkness, and was swallowed up by it."[467]

B. THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE 13:31—16:33

Judas' departure opened the way for Jesus to prepare His true disciples for what lay ahead for them. This teaching was for committed disciples only. Some writers have noted that in the Old Testament as well as in ancient Near Eastern literature generally the farewell sayings of famous individuals receive much attention (cf. Gen. 47:29—49:33; Josh. 23—24; 1 Chron. 28—29).[468] This discourse preserves Jesus' last and most important instructions in the fourth Gospel. One significant difference is that in His "farewell discourse" Jesus promised to return again (14:1-3).

1. The new commandment 13:31-35

Jesus began His instructions with His disciples' most important responsibility.

13:31-32 Judas' departure to meet with the chief priests signaled the beginning of the Son of Man's glorification, which John recorded Jesus as consistently regarding as beginning with His arrest (cf. 12:23). Note the Savior's positive albeit troubled attitude toward the events that lay before Him (v. 21). The title "Son of Man" unites the ideas of suffering and glory, as mentioned previously. This is the last of 12 occurrences of this title in John's Gospel.

> "In its general usage it is the title of the incarnate Christ who is the representative of humanity before God and the representative of deity in human life."[469]

Jesus explained that His glorification would mean glory for the Father who would glorify the Son. Thus Jesus continued to stress His unity with the Father to help His disciples appreciate both His individual identity and His essential deity. The disciples would not have to wait long to see the Son's glory.

How did Jesus glorify the Father? He explained how later: by finishing the work the Father gave Him to do (17:4). That is also how we glorify the Father.

13:33 Glorification for Jesus involved temporary separation from His believing disciples. Jesus used a tender term for His disciples that showed His strong affection for them as members of His family. "Little children" (Gr. *teknia*,

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[467]Harris, p. 204.
[468]E.g., A. Lacomara, "Deuteronomy and the Farewell Discourse (Jn 13:31—16:33)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974):65-84.
[469]Tenney, "John," p. 141.

dear children) occurs only here in the fourth Gospel, but John used it seven times in 1 John mirroring Jesus' compassionate spirit (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; cf. Gal. 4:19). Death and ascension to heaven would separate Jesus from them.

13:34 Having announced their inevitable separation, Jesus now began to explain what He expected of His disciples during their absence from Him. They were to love one another as He had loved them. They had seen His love for them during His entire earthly ministry and most recently in His washing of their feet, but they would only understand its depth through the Cross.

The command to love one another was not completely new (1 John 2:7-8), but in the Mosaic Law the standard was "as you love yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Now there was a new and higher standard, namely, "as I have loved you." It was also a new (Gr. *kainen*, fresh rather than different) commandment in that it was part of a new covenant that Jesus would ratify with His blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). In that covenant God promised to enable His people to love by transforming their hearts and minds (Jer. 31:29-34; Ezek. 36:24-26). It is only by God's transforming grace that believers can love one another as Jesus has loved us.[470]

13:35 That supernatural love would distinguish disciples of Jesus. Love for one another would mark them off as His disciples. It is possible to be a disciple of Jesus without demonstrating much supernatural love. However that kind of love is what bears witness to a disciple's connection with Jesus and thereby honors Him (cf. 1 John 3:10b-23; 4:7-16).[471] Every believer manifests some supernatural love since the loving God indwells him or her (1 John 3:14). However, it is possible to quench and to grieve the indwelling Spirit so that we do not manifest much love.

Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-47). Here He taught us to love one another. These instructions do not contradict one another or present two different standards. They simply point in different directions.

2. Peter's profession of loyalty 13:36-38 (cf. Matt. 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34)

Peter next declared his love for Jesus indirectly.

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[470]The Greek words for "love" appear only 12 times in John 1—12, but in chapters 13—21 we find them 44 times.

[471]John's first epistle is really an exposition of the themes that Jesus set forth in the upper room discourse. See John R. Yarid Jr., "John's Use of the Upper Room Discourse in First John" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002).

13:36 Peter returned to the subject of Jesus' departure (v. 33; 8:21). He was unclear about where Jesus meant He would go. Jesus did not answer him unambiguously, probably because such an answer would have created even more serious problems for him. It was not God's will for Peter to follow Jesus through death into heaven then, but it would be later (21:18-19). Jesus' answer implied that Peter had asked his question so he could accompany Jesus wherever He was going. Peter's statement was an indirect expression of affection for and commitment to Jesus.

13:37-38 Peter resisted the idea of a separation from Jesus. He felt willing even to die with Him if necessary rather than experience separation from Him. Nevertheless Peter grossly underestimated his own weakness and what Jesus' death entailed. Peter spoke of laying down his life for Jesus, but ironically Jesus would first lay down His life for Peter (cf. 10:11, 15; 11:50-52). Peter's boast betrayed reliance on the flesh. Perhaps he protested so strongly to assure the other disciples that he was not the betrayer about whom Jesus had spoken earlier (v. 21).

> "Sadly, good intentions in a secure room after good food are far less attractive in a darkened garden with a hostile mob. At this point in his pilgrimage, Peter's intentions and self-assessment vastly outstrip his strength."[472]

Mark recorded that Jesus mentioned the cock crowing twice, but the other evangelists wrote that He just mentioned the cock crowing (Matt. 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34). Mark's reference was more specific, and the others were more general.

3. Jesus' comforting revelation in view of His departure 14:1-24

Peter's question was only the first of several that the disciples proceeded to ask Jesus. This shows their bewilderment and discouragement. They should have been comforting Him in view of what lay ahead of Him (12:27; 13:21), but instead Jesus graciously proceeded to comfort them by clarifying what lay ahead of them.

The promise of a heavenly home 14:1-4

14:1 Jesus was troubled because of what lay before Him, and the Eleven were troubled (Gr. *tarassestho*) because they did not understand what lay before them. Jesus had just told them that He was going to leave them (13:33), but they had forsaken all to follow Him. Jesus had said that Peter would deny Him implying that some great trial was imminent (13:38).

God's revelations about the future should have a comforting and strengthening effect on His people (cf. 1 Thess. 4:18). This verse

[472]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 486.

introduces a short section of revelation that has given much comfort to God's people as they think about the future (vv. 1-4). It is a favorite passage at funerals.

Jesus explained how to calm their troubled hearts. The verb "believe" or "trust" (Gr. *pisteuo*), which occurs twice, can be either in the indicative or the imperative mood in each case. The spelling of the words in both moods is identical in the Greek text. Probably in both clauses Jesus meant to give an imperative command: "Believe in God; believe also in me." This makes the most sense in the context, as most of the modern English translations have concluded. He meant, "Stop being troubled." Jesus was telling the disciples (plural "your") to trust in God and to trust in Him just as they trusted in God. This was a strong claim to deity and a great comfort. They could rely on what He was about to tell them as coming from God.

The NASB translates the singular "heart" (Gr. *kardia*) that Jesus used collectively whereas the NIV interpreted it to mean each of their hearts individually. The heart is metaphorically the center of personality.

14:2 Jesus next explained the reason the disciples should stop feeling troubled at the thought of His leaving them. He was departing to prepare a place for them, and He would return for them and take them there later (vv. 3, 28).

The Father's house is heaven. This is the most obvious and simple explanation, though some commentators understood it to mean the church. However the fourth Gospel never uses the house metaphor for the church elsewhere. Moreover the phrase "the Father's house" occurs nowhere else in Scripture as a figure of the church.

There are many dwelling places (Gr. *mone*, cognate with the verb *meno*, meaning "to abide" or "remain") in heaven. The Latin Vulgate translated the noun *mansiones* that the AV transliterated as "mansions." The NIV "rooms" is an interpretation of *mone*. The picture that Jesus painted of heaven is a huge building with many rooms or suites of rooms in which people reside. The emphasis is not on the lavishness of the facility as much as its adequacy to accommodate all believers. Other revelation about heaven stresses its opulence (e.g., Rev. 21:1—22:5).

> "The imagery of a dwelling place ('rooms') is taken from the oriental house in which the sons and daughters have apartments under the same roof as their parents."[473]
>
> "This truth may reflect the marriage custom of the bridegroom, who would go to the bride's house and bring

[473]Tenney, "John," p. 143.

> her to his father's house, where an apartment would have been built for the new couple."[474]

Jesus assured His disciples that if heaven were otherwise He would have told them just how it was. This assurance recalls verse 1 where Jesus urged them to trust Him.

Jesus had previously spoken of His departure as including His death, His resurrection, and His ascension (13:31-32, 36). Consequently He probably had all of that in view when He spoke about going to prepare a place for believers. His death and resurrection, as well as His ascension and return to heaven, would prepare a place for them. The place, the Father's house or heaven, already existed when Jesus spoke these words. He would not go to heaven to create a place for believers there. Rather all that He would do from His death to His return to heaven would constitute preparation for believers to join Him there ultimately. The idea that Jesus is presently constructing dwelling places for believers in heaven and has been doing so for 2,000 years is not what Jesus meant here. Jesus' going itself prepared the place.

14:3 The commentators noted that Jesus spoke of several returns for His own in this Gospel. Sometimes Jesus meant His return to the disciples following His resurrection and before His ascension (vv. 18-20; 21:1). Other times He meant His coming to them through the Holy Spirit after His ascension and before His bodily return (v. 23).[475] Still other times He meant His eschatological return at the end of the inter-advent age. Some interpreters view this return as the Rapture and others believe Jesus was referring to the Second Coming. Another view is that Jesus was really speaking about the believer's death figuratively.[476] Many interpreters believe some combination of the above views is most probable.[477]

Since Jesus spoke of returning from heaven to take believers there, the simplest explanation seems to be that He was referring to an eschatological bodily return (cf. Acts 1:11). Though these disciples undoubtedly did not realize it at the time, Jesus was evidently speaking of His return for them at the Rapture rather than His return at the Second Coming.

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[474]Bailey, p. 184.

[475]R. H. Gundry, "'In my Father's House are many *Monai*' (John 14 2)," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 58 (1967):68-72.

[476]E.g., R. H. Lightfoot, pp. 275-76.

[477]E.g., Barrett, p. 457; R. H. Strachen, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Significance and Environment*, p. 280; Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:168.

> "John 14:3 is the only verse in the Gospels that is commonly accepted by contemporary pretribulationists and posttribulationists alike as a reference to the rapture."[478]

Other Scripture clarifies that when Jesus returns at the Rapture it will be to call His own to heaven immediately (1 Thess. 4:13-18).[479] In contrast, when He returns at the Second Coming it will be to remain on the earth and reign for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11—20:15).

> ". . . it is important to note that Jesus did not say that the purpose of this future coming to receive believers is so that He can be where they are—on the earth. Instead, He said that the purpose is so that they can be where He is—in heaven."[480]

> ". . . here in John xiv the Lord gives a new and unique revelation; He speaks of something which no prophet had promised, or even could promise. Where is it written that this Messiah would come and instead of gathering His saints into an earthly Jerusalem, would take them to the Father's house, to the very place where He is? It is something new. . . . He speaks then of a coming which is not for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, not of a coming to establish His kingdom over the earth, not of a coming to judge the nations, but a coming which concerns only His own."[481]

The emphasis in this prediction is on the comfort that reunion with the departed Savior guarantees (cf. 1 Thess. 4:18). Jesus will personally come for His own, and He will receive them to Himself. They will also be with Him where He has been (cf. 17:24). Jesus was stressing His personal concern for His disciples' welfare. His return would be as certain as His departure. The greatest blessing of heaven will be our ceaseless personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus there, not the splendor of the place.

14:4 Jesus could say that the Eleven knew the way to the place where He was going because He had revealed that faith in Him led to eternal life (3:14-15). This had been a major theme of His teaching throughout His ministry. However, they did not understand Him as they should have (v. 5).

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[478]Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):139.

[479]John 14:1-3 is one of three key New Testament passages that deal with the Rapture, the others being 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

[480]Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, p. 158. Cf. 1 Thess. 4:17. His entire eighth chapter, pp. 154-75, deals with this passage and various interpretations of it.

[481]Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John*, p. 268.

These four verses answered Peter's initial question about where Jesus was going (13:36). They also brought the conversation back to the subject of the glorification of the Father and the Son (13:31-32).

The question about the way 14:5-7

14:5 Thomas voiced the disciples' continuing confusion about Jesus' destination. Apparently the "Father's house" did not clearly identify heaven to them. Without a clear understanding of the final destination they could not be sure of the route there. Thomas' question was a request for an unambiguous explanation of Jesus' and their destination and how He and they would get there.

14:6 Jesus again gave an enigmatic answer. He had already said plainly that He would die and rise again at least three times (cf. Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Nevertheless the disciples' preconceptions of Messiah's ministry did not allow them to interpret His words literally.

The words "way," "truth," and "life" are all coordinate in Jesus' answer; Jesus described Himself as the way, the truth, and the life. The "way" is slightly more dominant in view of Thomas' question and its position in relation to the "truth" and the "life." Jesus is the way to God because He is the truth from God and the life from God. He is the truth because He embodies God's supreme revelation (1:18; 5:19; 8:29). He is the life because He contains and imparts divine life (1:4; 5:26; 11:25; cf. 1 John 5:20). Jesus was summarizing and connecting many of the revelations about Himself that He had previously given the Eleven.

> "He not only shows people the way (i.e., by revealing it), but he *is* the way (i.e., he redeems us). In this connection 'the truth' . . . will have saving significance. It will point to Jesus' utter dependability, but also to the saving truth of the gospel. 'The life' (see on 1:4) will likewise take its content from the gospel. Jesus is both life and the source of life to believers."[482]

Jesus was not saying that He was one way to God among many. He was not saying that He pointed the way to God either. He said that no one comes to God the Father but through faith in Himself. This means that religions that assign Jesus a role that is different from the one that the Bible gives Him do not bring people to God or eternal life. This was an exclusive claim to being the only way to heaven (cf. 10:9; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). It is only because of Jesus Christ's work on the cross that anyone can enter heaven. Since He has come it is only through faith in the promise of God that His cross work satisfied the Father that anyone

[482]Morris, p. 569.

experiences regeneration (1:12; 3:16; 1 John 2:2; et al.). Since He has come, rejection of God's revelation through Him results in eternal damnation (3:36).

This is the sixth of Jesus "I am" claims (cf. 6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 15:1).

> "We should not overlook the faith involved both in the utterance and in the acceptance of those words, spoken as they were on the eve of the crucifixion. 'I am the Way,' said one who would shortly hang impotent on a cross. 'I am the Truth,' when the lies of evil people were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph. 'I am the Life,' when within a matter of hours his corpse would be placed in a tomb."[483]

14:7 The construction of the first clause in the Greek text suggests that the condition was true for the sake of the argument. We could translate this "first class condition" as "Since . . ." The Eleven had come to know by personal experience (Gr. *ginosko*) who Jesus really was. This knowledge was the key to their coming to know God the Father as well.

Since they had come to know who Jesus really was, they had come to know God. Their knowledge of God virtually amounted to seeing God.[484] "From now on" (Gr. *ap arti*) also means "assuredly." Since the Eleven had come to know who Jesus really was, they had assuredly come to know the Father as well. Jesus was probably assuring the Eleven with this sentence rather than rebuking them, as some translations suggest.

The request to reveal the Father 14:8-14

14:8 The Eleven regarded Jesus very highly. Notwithstanding, they did not yet realize that He was such an accurate and full revelation of God the Father that to see Jesus was to see the Father. Philip asked for a clear revelation of the Father that would satisfy the Eleven. He apparently wanted Jesus to give them a theophany (Exod. 24:9-10; Isa. 6:1). People throughout history have desired to see God as He really is (cf. Exod. 33:18). Jesus in His incarnation made that revelation of the Father more clearly, fully, and finally than anyone else ever had (1:14, 18; 12:45).

14:9 Philip and the other disciples had not yet completely realized who Jesus was. They did not understand what John revealed in the prologue of this Gospel, namely, that the Son is the exact representation of the Father (cf. 1:18). Long exposure to Jesus should have produced greater insight in these disciples. Still that insight is only the product of God's gracious enlightenment (cf. Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 2:6-16).

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[483]Ibid., p. 570.

[484]John used "knowing God" and "seeing God" synonymously in 1 John as well (cf. 1 John 2:3-11; 3:2-3).

> "No material image or likeness can adequately depict God. Only a person can give knowledge of him since personality cannot be represented by an impersonal object."[485]

This was another clear claim to deity.

14:10 Jesus repeated again that He and the Father were one (cf. 5:19; 8:28; 10:30, 38; 12:49). The mutual abiding terminology that Jesus used expressed this unity without destroying the individual identities of the Father and the Son. Jesus did not just represent God to humankind as an ambassador would. He did everything the Father gave Him to do, and He did everything the Father did (5:19). Moreover ambassadors do not refer to those who send them as their father or claim that whoever has seen them has seen the one they represent. They do not affirm mutual indwelling with the one who sent them either.

14:11 Jesus cited another proof of His union with the Father beside His words, namely, His works (Gr. *erga*). Specifically He meant His miracles (cf. 5:36; 10:25, 37-38; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30-31). Jesus' miracles were signs that signified His divine identity (cf. 2:11). What we regard as a miracle was nothing more than a normal work for Jesus.[486]

14:12 Jesus prefaced another startling and important revelation with His customary phrase that John noted often in his Gospel. He stressed the importance of believing what He revealed about His divine identity by unveiling the consequences of believing that He was the divine Messiah.

The interpretation of the works that those who believe on Jesus would do, which commentators have found difficult, depends on how Jesus described them. He said that the basis for these and greater works would be His going to the Father. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer (Acts 2:3; cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). This divine enablement empowered believers to do miracles that only Jesus Himself could do previously. The Book of Acts records the apostles doing many of the same miracles that Jesus had done in the Gospels.

The disciples would do even greater works than Jesus in the sense that their works would have greater effects than His works had. During Jesus' earthly ministry relatively few people believed on Him, but after His ascension many more did. The miracle of regeneration multiplied after Jesus ascended to heaven and the Father sent the Holy Spirit. Three thousand people became believers in Jesus on the day of Pentecost alone (Acts 2:41). The church thoroughly permeated the Roman Empire during

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[485]Tenney, "John," p. 145.

[486]For a discussion of Jesus' "works," see Morris, pp. 607-13.

the apostolic age whereas Jesus' personal ministry did not extend beyond Palestine. The whole Book of Acts is proof that what Jesus predicted here happened (cf. Acts 1:1-2, 8). The mighty works of conversion are more in view here than a few miracles of healing.

Jesus probably did not mean that His disciples would do more stupendous miracles than He did. Feeding multitudes from a small lunch and raising people from the dead are hard miracles to supersede. We should not assume either that Jesus meant that these miracles would continue throughout church history as they existed in the apostolic era. Church history has shown that they died out almost entirely after the apostolic age, and the New Testament, while it does not specifically predict that, implies that they would (1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

14:13-14 Jesus next extended His promise beyond miracles to anything that the disciples might desire. This apparently blank check type promise has a condition that we often overlook. It is "in my name." We overlook this condition because many Christians think it means simply making our request and then adding the phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end.

Praying in Jesus' name means coming to the Father in prayer as Jesus' representative. Jesus introduced the idea of representing Him in verse 12. When we pray in Jesus' name, we claim to be acting for Him. Someone who prays that way will always ask only what is God's will or what is subject to God's will since that is always how Jesus related to His Father. It is impossible to pray in Jesus' name and to ask something contrary to God's will. These two acts are mutually contradictory.

The purpose of our praying must always be God's glory (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31) as it always was and always will be the Son's purpose (5:41; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 12:28). Thus Jesus promised here to grant petitions prayed in His name that the Father might receive glory from the Son.

Jesus repeated this promise probably because it is so great that it is almost unbelievable (cf. 15:16; 16:23-24).[487] John expounded it in his first epistle where he clarified that "in my name" means "according to His (God's) will" (1 John 5:14-15).

The New Testament teaching on prayer is that believers normally address the Father in prayer in the Son's name with the Spirit's help. However this is not a rigid requirement. In view of the unity of the Godhead we can understand occasional instances of prayers addressed to the Son and to the Spirit in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 7:59). However these prayers are atypical.

[487]One of John's stylistic characteristics was to restate with only slight variations. In these cases the meaning is not significantly different.

The promise of the Spirit 14:15-21

At the end of His answer to Peter's question (13:36), Jesus moved the conversation back to the general theme of preparation for His departure (v. 4). He did the same thing after answering Philip's question (v. 8). Obedience to the will of God is not only a condition for getting answers to prayer. It is also an evidence of love for God. Love for God is the controlling idea in the following verses (vv. 15-21).

14:15 This is Jesus' first reference in this Gospel to the believer's love for Himself. Typically Jesus first reached out in love to others and then expected love as a reasonable response (cf. 13:1; Rom. 12:1-2). The conditional sentence in the Greek text is "third class," which assumes neither a positive nor a negative response. Love for Jesus will motivate the believer to obey Him (cf. vv. 21, 23; 15:14; 1 John 5:3). In the context Jesus' commands are His total revelation viewed as components, not just His ethical injunctions (cf. 3:31-32; 12:47-49; 13:34-35; 17:6).

The greatness of our love for God is easy to test. It corresponds exactly to our conformity to all that He has revealed.

14:16 Love for Jesus would result in the disciples' obedience to His commands. It would also result in Jesus' requesting another (Gr. *allon*, another of the same kind) Helper to take His place in His absence from them (cf. v. 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). The Greek word translated "Helper" or "Counselor" is *parakletos*.[488] In secular contexts it often referred to a legal assistant, an advocate, or simply a helper (e.g., a witness or a representative in court).[489] The verbal form of this word, *parakaleo*, literally means to call alongside and, therefore, to encourage or to strengthen.

Jesus spoke of the Trinity in the following relationships. The Son would request that the Father send the Spirit to take the Son's place as the believer's encourager and strengthener. It was hard for these Jewish believers who had grown up believing that there is but one God to grasp that Jesus was God. It must have been even more difficult for them to think of the Spirit of God as a person rather than as God's influence. Nevertheless New Testament revelation is clear that there are three Persons within the Godhead (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Spirit of God had come on Old Testament believers temporarily to give them strength, but normally He did not remain with them (cf. Ps.

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[488]Both of these English words have connotations that are absent from the Greek word. Helper connotes an inferior, which the Holy Spirit is not. Counsellor can call to mind a camp counsellor or a marriage counsellor whereas a legal counsellor is more in harmony with the Greek idea. For further study of the term "paraclete," see Morris, pp. 587-91.

[489]H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *parakletos*.

51:11). What Jesus spoke of here was an abiding relationship in which the Spirit remained with believers for the rest of their lives (cf. Rom. 8:9). This new relationship to the Holy Spirit is one of the distinctive differences between the church age and former dispensations. It is a blessing few Christians appreciate as we should.

14:17 Jesus now identified the Helper as the Spirit of truth (cf. 15:26; 16:13), that is, the Spirit who would bear witness to and communicate the truth (cf. v. 6; 1:32-33; 3:5-8; 4:23-24; 6:63; 7:37-39).

> "To be filled with the Spirit is the same as to be controlled by the Word. The Spirit of Truth uses the Word of truth to guide us into the will and the work of God."[490]

The unbelieving world cannot receive Him because it cannot see Him and knows nothing of Him. The disciples, on the other hand, knew Him because He empowered Jesus. He had been with them in this way as well as strengthening them occasionally as they needed help when they preached and performed miracles. However in the future, after Jesus returned to the Father, the Spirit would not just be *with* them but *in* them. This is another distinctive ministry of the Spirit in the present age. He indwells believers (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). That ministry began on Pentecost when the church began (Acts 2:4; cf. Acts 1:5; 11:15).[491] The Spirit does have a ministry to the world, but Jesus explained that later (16:7-11).

14:18-19 Jesus changed the figure from the disciples being without a Helper to their being without a parent. He would not leave them in this traditionally destitute and vulnerable position. He would come to them. Which coming did He have in mind here (cf. v. 3)?

In view of the context that describes the Spirit's coming (vv. 16-17, 25-26), we might conclude that His coming in the Spirit is in view (cf. v. 23). However the passage seems to present Jesus as offering the disciples His personal presence. He had described the coming of the Spirit, but what about His personal return to them? This question, which would have been in the disciples' minds, is what Jesus appears to have been addressing here. He seems to have been referring to a post-resurrection appearance to the disciples (21:1-14). Support for this view is Jesus' assurance that His resurrection would be a pledge of their resurrection. Physical resurrections seem to be in view.

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[490]Wiersbe, 1:352.

[491]See Johnstone G. Patrick, "The Promise of the Paraclete," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:508 (October-December 1970):333-45.

14:20 Jesus post-resurrection appearances would convince the Eleven of His deity. He described this condition as mutual abiding with the Father (cf. vv. 10-11). Moreover these appearances would also convince them of their union with Jesus. They would do so by confirming Jesus' promises of their union with Him (vv. 13-14). Jesus expounded both abidings later (vv. 23-24; ch. 17).

Some interpreters take the day in view as referring to Pentecost.[492] However because of the flow of the argument "that day" seems to refer to Easter rather than Pentecost.

14:21 Love for God makes the believer more obedient to God. Moreover obedience results in a more intimate relationship with God that God's love for the believer and His self-disclosure to the believer identify.

The believer's obedience does not make God love him or her more than He would otherwise. God's love for all people is essentially as great as it can be. However in the family relationship that Jesus was describing the believer's obedience allows God to express His love for him or her without restraint. When there is disobedience, God does not express His love as fully because He chooses to discipline the believer (cf. Heb. 12:4-13).

In the context (vv. 18-20), this was a promise that Jesus would disclose Himself to the Eleven after His resurrection and an encouragement for them to continue obeying Him and loving Him. However that disclosure was only typical of many others that would come to believers who obey and love Jesus, including the one that happened on Pentecost.

Some believers love Jesus more than other believers do. This results in some believers obeying Him more than others and enjoying a more intimate relationship and greater understanding of Him than others enjoy. The way to become a great lover of Jesus is by learning to appreciate the greatness of His love for us (cf. Matt. 18:21-35; 1 John 4:19).

The clarification of Jesus' self-disclosure 14:22-24

14:22 There were two members of the Twelve named Judas. The one who voiced this question was Judas the son or brother of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). He is probably the same man as Thaddaeus (cf. Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19).

Judas' question reflects the disciples' understanding that as Messiah Jesus would manifest Himself publicly, which He had taught them (cf. Matt. 24:30). The disciples did not understand that Jesus would rise again bodily (20:9) much less that the Holy Spirit would come to indwell them.

[492]E.g., Tenney, "John," p. 147; Blum, p. 324.

Therefore it is unlikely that Judas was asking Jesus to clarify the manner of His appearing. Judas wanted to know what Jesus meant when He said that He was not going to disclose Himself publicly but just privately to the Eleven. He and his fellow disciples failed to realize that Jesus would reveal Himself to them privately after His resurrection before He revealed Himself publicly at His second advent.

14:23 Jesus did not clear up Judas' misconception apparently because He wanted to stay on the subject of the importance of loving and obeying Him. He did not deny an eschatological return, but He restated what He had just said about His post-resurrection appearance to the Eleven. Jesus stressed the principle that loving obedience always results in intimate fellowship. He was speaking here about the relationship that believers could have following Pentecost. In the process He again stressed His union with the Father.

Jesus began this instruction by referring to abiding places (Gr. *monai*, plural) that He would prepare for His disciples in heaven (v. 2). He now revealed that He and His Father would make their home (Gr. *monen*, singular) in believing disciples on the earth first. These are the only two occurrences of this word in the New Testament. They bracket this section of Jesus' discourse and indicate its unity.

> "Salvation means we are going to heaven, but submission means that heaven comes to us!
>
> "This truth is illustrated in the experiences of Abraham and Lot, recorded in Genesis 18 and 19. When Jesus and the two angels visited Abraham's tent, they felt right at home. They even enjoyed a meal, and Jesus had a private talk with Abraham. But our Lord did not go to Sodom to visit Lot, because He did not feel at home there. Instead, He sent the two angels. . . .
>
> "Charles Spurgeon said, 'Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.' Your heart can become a 'heaven on earth' as you commune with the Lord and worship Him."[493]

14:24 In conclusion, Jesus restated the ethical point He had made in verses 15 and 23a negatively. Lack of love for Jesus will result in lack of obedience to His teachings, which are the revelations of God the Father (cf. 12:49; 14:10).

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[493]Wiersbe, 1:353.

In summary, Jesus revealed that He would depart from the Eleven shortly. He would do so to go and prepare a place for His believing disciples to dwell with Him eventually in heaven. He would prepare this place by going to the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending to heaven. Then He would return for them and take them to that place. However in the meantime He would dwell in them by His Spirit. He would also come to them before He departed for heaven.

4. The promise of future understanding 14:25-31

Jesus realized that the Eleven did not fully understand what He had just revealed. He therefore encouraged them with a promise that they would understand His words later.

14:25-26 Jesus had made these revelations to His disciples while abiding with them, but when the Holy Spirit came to abide in them, the Spirit would enable them to understand them.

Jesus now identified the Helper whom He had promised earlier as the Holy Spirit (cf. vv. 16-17). He is the Spirit characterized by holiness as well as by truth (v. 17).

The Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name (i.e., as Jesus' emissary and with exactly the same attitude toward God's will that Jesus had). The Son had come as the Father's emissary, and now the Spirit was about to come as the Son's emissary.

The Spirit would teach them all things, which in the context refers to all things that were presently obscure, about which the various disciples kept raising questions (13:36; 14:5, 8, 22). He would do this partially by bringing to their memories things that Jesus had said that would become clear in the light of His "glorification" (cf. 2:19-22; 12:16; 20:9).

Notice that the particular ministry of the Spirit that is in view is teaching. The illumination that Jesus promised here was specifically to the Eleven and their contemporaries. It was a promise to those who had heard His teaching before the Cross but did not understand it until after the Resurrection. However this promise did not find complete fulfillment in the apostolic age. The Holy Spirit continues His teaching ministry today by enlightening disciples as they study Jesus' teachings. In this sense the Holy Spirit is the true teacher of every Christian, and human teachers serve a secondary role (cf. 1 John 2:27). The role of the Scriptures in the process is fundamental since they contain all that Jesus personally taught and approved.

14:27 The disciples' uneasiness at the prospect of Jesus leaving them without clarifying what they did not yet understand elicited this word of comfort from their Teacher.

"Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, Heb. *shalom*) was a customary word of greeting and farewell among the Jews. Jesus used it here as a farewell, but He used it as a greeting again after the Resurrection (20:19, 21, 26). Jesus probably meant that He was bequeathing peace to the Eleven as an inheritance that would secure their composure and dissolve their fears (cf. Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15).

The world cannot give true peace. That can only come from the "Prince of Peace," a messianic title (Isa. 9:6-7). He is the only source of personal and social peace. The world cannot provide peace because it fails to correct the fundamental source for strife, namely, the fallen nature of humankind. Jesus made peace possible by His work on the cross. He will establish universal peace when He comes to reign on earth as Messiah. He establishes it in the hearts and lives of those who believe on Him and submit to Him now through His representative, the indwelling Spirit (v. 26). Later in this discourse Jesus promised His love (15:9-10) and His joy (15:11) as well as His peace.

The peace Jesus spoke of was obviously not exemption from conflicts and trials. He Himself felt troubled by His impending crucifixion (12:27). Rather it is a settled confidence that comes from knowing that one is right with God (cf. Rom. 5:1). As the believer focuses on this reality, he or she can experience supernatural peace in the midst of trouble and fear, as Jesus did.

14:28 Jesus' impending departure still disturbed the Eleven. He explained that their fear was also a result of failure to love Him as they should. They should have rejoiced that even though His departure meant loss for them it meant glory and joy for Him. We experience a similar conflict of emotions when a believing friend dies. We mourn our loss, but we should rejoice more that our loved one is with the Lord.

It should be obvious by now that Jesus did not mean that He was less then God or an inferior god when He said that God was greater than He was.[494] Jesus was not speaking ontologically (i.e., dealing with essential being) since He had affirmed repeatedly that He and the Father were one ontologically (1:1-2; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28). Rather He was speaking of the Father's glory. Jesus had laid His heavenly glory aside in the Incarnation, but the Father had not done so and consequently enjoyed greater glory than the Son during Jesus' earthly ministry. However now Jesus was about to return to the Father and the greater glory that He would again share with the Father. This glorification should have caused the disciples to rejoice, but they sorrowed instead because they focused on themselves too much.

[494]Jehovah's Witnesses and other Arians interpret Jesus' words here this way. Arius was a heretic in the early church who denied Jesus' full deity.

This interpretation of the Father's superiority does not negate the functional superiority of the Father over the Son within the Godhead. However, that distinction does not seem to be primary in the logic of this verse.

> ". . . the Son, being begotten of the Father, is 'inferior' to Him in the sense that He that is begotten is secondary to Him who begets (see i. 14)."[495]

14:29 Jesus' reason for saying what He did was not to cause the disciples embarrassment but to strengthen their faith. Their faith would grow stronger after the Resurrection and Ascension (cf. 13:19). The disciples would then view Jesus' teaching here as fulfilled prophecy.

John stressed the importance of believing throughout his Gospel (cf. 1:50; 3:12, 15; 4:21, 41; 5:24, 44, 46; 6:29, 35, 47, 64; 7:38; 8:24, 45; 9:35; 10:38; 11:25, 41; 12:37, 44; 13:19; 14:1, 11; 16:31; 17:20; 20:27). Jesus' statement here returns to that theme. Both Jesus and John wanted to build faith in disciples of Jesus.

14:30-31 Jesus would not speak much longer with the disciples because His passion was imminent. He did not mean that His present discourse was almost over. Satan, the being who under God's sovereign authority controlled the present course of events, was about to crucify Jesus (cf. 6:70; 13:21, 27). "He has nothing in Me" or "He has no hold on me" translates a Hebrew idiom and means Satan has no legal claim on me. Satan would have had a justifiable charge against Jesus if Jesus had sinned. Jesus' death was not an indication that Satan had a claim on Jesus but that Jesus loved His Father and was completely submissive to His will (Phil. 2:8).

Many commentators interpreted the final sentence in this verse as an indication that Jesus ended His discourse here and that He and the Eleven left the upper room immediately. They viewed the teaching and praying that we find in chapters 15—17 as happening somewhere in Jerusalem on the east side of the Kidron Valley before Jesus' arrest (cf. 18:1). However, it seems more probable to many interpreters, including myself, that this sentence did not signal a real change of location but only an anticipated change, in view of 18:1. Anyone who has entertained people in their home knows that it is very common for guests to say they are leaving and then stay quite a bit longer before really departing.

Why would John have recorded this remark if it did not indicate a real change of location? Perhaps he included it to show Jesus' great love for His followers that the following three chapters articulate.[496] The time of

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[495]Tasker, p. 173.

[496]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., 479.

departure from the upper room is not critical to a correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching.

5. The importance of abiding in Jesus 15:1-16

Jesus continued to prepare His disciples for His departure. He next taught the Eleven the importance of abiding in Him with the result that they would produce much spiritual fruit. He dealt with their relationships to Himself, one another, and the world around them in chapter 15. Their responsibilities were to abide, to love, and to testify respectively.

The vine and the branches metaphor 15:1-8

Jesus often used a grapevine to describe the nation of Israel (cf. Matt. 20:1-16; 21:23-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 13:6-9; 20:9-16). The vine as a symbol of Israel appears on coins of the Maccabees.[497] Here Jesus used the vine metaphorically of Himself. One can hardly escape the inference that Jesus viewed Himself as the fulfillment of Israel.[498] This figure is similar to Paul's use of the body to illustrate the church. This is not a parable in the Synoptic sense since there is no plot. It is more of an extended metaphor similar to the shepherd and sheepfold metaphors in chapter 10.

> "It is possible that if the text of this discourse was spoken as they walked from the upper room in Jerusalem down into the Kidron Valley and across to the Mount of Olives, they could have seen the great golden vine, the national emblem of Israel, on the front of the temple."[499]

15:1 This is the last of Jesus' "I am" claims in this Gospel. Jesus and His Father occupy different roles in this extended metaphor.

Jesus is the true (Gr. *alethinos*, cf. 1:9; 6:32) vine. The Old Testament writers frequently used this plant to describe Israel (Ps. 89:9-16; Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1-2). The nation's failure to produce fruit and its consequent impending divine judgment are in view whenever the vine represents Israel in the Old Testament.[500] Because of this identification and emphasis it is clearly with unfruitful and guilty Israel that Jesus contrasted Himself as the "true" vine. He would produce good fruit as God intended (cf. Ps. 80:7-9, 14-17). No vine can produce good fruit unless it is good stock.

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[497]Morris, p. 593.

[498]Covenant theologians like to think of the church as the fulfillment of Israel, but there is no scriptural warrant for this conclusion except the similarities between the two entities. However the differences between them make dispensational theologians conclude that the church only superficially fulfills Israel.

[499]Tenney, "John," p. 150.

[500]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 513.

The Father cultivates the vine as a farmer (Gr. *georgos*) does his vineyard. The idea of functional subordination within the Godhead appears again here. No vine will produce good fruit unless someone competent cares for it.

15:2 Jesus earlier taught about the mutual indwelling of believers and Himself (14:20). Therefore it seems clear that Jesus was speaking here of genuine believers such as the Eleven, not simply professing believers.[501]

> "The phrase 'in Me' is used 16 times in John's Gospel (6:56; 10:38; 14:10 [twice], 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 [twice], 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23). In each case it refers to fellowship with Christ. It is inconsistent then to say the phrase in 15:2 refers to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not. A person 'in Me' is always a true Christian."[502]

This identification finds support in the illustration itself. Branches (Gr. *klema*, lit. tendrils) of a vine share the life of the vine.

Jesus taught that some believers in Him do not bear fruit (cf. Luke 8:14). Fruit-bearing is the normal but not the inevitable consequence of having divine life. This is true of grapevines too. Grapevines have branches that bear fruit, but they must also have branches that presently bear no fruit but are growing stronger so they will bear fruit in the future.[503] There can be genuine life without fruit in a vine, and there can be in a Christian as well. The New Testament teaches that God affects many changes in the life of every person who trusts in Jesus for salvation.[504] However these are all invisible changes. Fruit is what a plant produces on the outside that other people can see and benefit from. It is the visible evidence of an inner working power.

Thus a true believer who experiences the inner transforming work of the Spirit at conversion may not necessarily give external testimony to that transformation by his or her character or conduct immediately. It would be very rare for a Christian to resist the Spirit's promptings so consistently and thoroughly that he or she would never bear any fruit, but Jesus allowed for that possibility here. The form of His statement argues against interpreting it as hyperbole.

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[501]The interpreters who argue for professing believers include J. Carl Laney, "Abiding is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:581 (January-March 1989):55-66; and John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 166, 170-71.

[502]Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990):44-53.

[503]Gary W. Derickson, "Viticulture's Contribution to the Interpretation of John 15:1-6," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Lisle, Illinois, 19 November 1994.

[504]Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, noted 33 things that happen to a person the moment he or she trusts Jesus Christ as Savior. See his *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65.

What happens to the believer who bears no fruit? The Greek word *airo* can mean "to take away" or "to lift up." Those who interpret it here as meaning to take away (in judgment) believe that either the believer loses his or her salvation, or the believer loses his or her reward and possibly even his or her life. Those who interpret *airo* to mean "to lift up" believe that these branches get special attention from the vinedresser so they will bear fruit in the future.[505] The second alternative seems better since in the spring vinedressers both lifted up unfruitful branches and pruned (Gr. *kathairo*) fruitful branches of grapevines. Jesus gave this teaching in the spring when farmers did what He described in this verse.[506]

Assuming that this is the correct interpretation, Jesus was teaching that the Father gives special support to believers who are not yet bearing fruit. In viticulture this involves lifting the branch off the ground so it will not send secondary roots down into the ground that will prove unhealthful. Lifting the branch off the ground onto a pole or trellis also enables air to dry the branch and prevent it from getting moldy and becoming diseased.

The Father also prunes (Gr. *kathairo*) or cuts back the branches that bear fruit so they will produce even more fruit. This apparently corresponds to the disciplining process that God has consistently used to make His people more spiritually productive (Num. 14:22-24; Heb. 12:4-11; et al.). It does not involve removing the believer's life but his or her sinful habits and purifying his or her character and conduct, often through trials (James 1:2-4). No fruit-bearing branch is exempt from this important though uncomfortable process. The Father's purpose is loving, but the process may be painful.

> "The fruit of Christian service is never the result of allowing the natural energies and inclinations to run riot."[507]

Grapevines, in contrast to other types of wood, do not have many uses. Their total value is that they can produce fruit, specifically, grapes. Vines do not yield timber from which people can make other things (Ezek. 15). They are "good for either bearing or burning, but not for building."[508] Similarly the only reason believers exist is to bear spiritual fruit.

15:3 Jesus assured His disciples that they were indeed already clean. The Father's treatment of them was not to make them clean. Jesus again used the figure for possessing eternal life that He had used earlier when He had

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[505]J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 441.

[506]See Gary W. Derickson, "Viticulture and John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):34-52. This is a very helpful article.

[507]Morris, p. 594.

[508]Wiersbe, 1:355.

washed these disciples' feet (13:10). Divine care and discipline follow the granting of eternal life. Jesus did not want the Eleven to conclude, as many people do, that the absence of fruit or the presence of difficulties indicates the absence of salvation.

> "The ancients spoke of pruning as a 'cleansing' of the branches, just as we speak of 'cleansing' the land."[509]

15:4 The first sentence in this verse is capable of three different interpretations. It may be a conditional statement. In this case Jesus meant that if His clean (i.e., saved) disciples abode in Him He would abide in them. I believe this is the best interpretation. Earlier Jesus had presented abiding in (in contrast to departing from) Him as a real possibility for His believing disciples (cf. 8:31-32; 15:10). He did not speak of abiding as the inevitable condition of believers. Jesus' described His relationship with believers as more or less intimate depending on their love and obedience to Him (14:23-24). He did not present abiding and not abiding as white and black categories, as being either completely in or completely out of fellowship. Rather He presented our relationship to Him much more realistically, namely, as having a more or less intimate relationship.

Second, the sentence may be a comparative statement. The meaning would then be that the disciples should abide in Jesus as He abode in them. Obviously Jesus wanted His disciples to abide in Him, but the use of "and" (Gr. *kago*, from *kai ego*) is unusual. A comparison would usually contain "as" rather than "and." Moreover the verb "abide" (Gr. *meinate*) is an imperative, and the possibilities surrounding this verse indicate that not abiding is a real possibility for a believer. Jesus, on the other hand, would always abide in the believer by His Spirit even if the believer did not abide in Him (14:17; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12-13).

Third, this may be an imperative statement. If it is, Jesus meant that the disciples and He should commit themselves to abiding in one another. The idea would be, Let us commit to abide in one another. The problem with this view is that Jesus had already committed Himself to abiding within His believing disciples (14:17). Furthermore the strong second person imperative in the first clause of the sentence argues against a mutual exhortation. It puts the emphasis on the believer's responsibility primarily.

The branches then should make a deliberate effort (indicated by the imperative verb "abide") to maintain a close personal relationship to the true vine. We should do this not because failure to do so will result in our losing the life of God that we possess. Jesus promised that He would never withdraw that from us (6:37-40; 10:28-29). We should do it because the extent of our fruitfulness as believers is in direct proportion to our

[509]Tasker, p. 175.

intimacy with Jesus. Divine life depends on connection with the true vine by exercising saving faith in Him, but fruitfulness depends on abiding in the vine by exercising loving obedience toward Him.

Much confusion has resulted from failing to recognize that Jesus spoke of "abiding" in two senses. He used it as a synonym for saving faith (6:56).[510] However, He also used it to describe the intimate relationship that those who have exercised saving faith need to cultivate with God (8:31). All believers abide in Jesus in the first sense, but all do not abide in Him in the second sense (cf. v. 10; 1 John 3:24). It is in this second sense that Jesus spoke of abiding here (cf. vv. 9-10). He stressed the importance of believers abiding in Him by using the word *meno* ("abide") three times in this verse alone. It occurs 11 times in this chapter and 27 times in John's epistles, where John expounded Jesus' teaching on this subject further.

> "The imagery of the vine is stretched a little but the point is clear: continuous dependence on the vine, constant reliance upon him, persistent spiritual imbibing of his life—this is the *sine qua non* of spiritual fruitfulness."[511]

15:5 Jesus continued to stress the importance of believers abiding in Him (i.e., cultivating intimacy through loving obedience, 14:23; 15:10) to bear much fruit. The negative alternative illustrates the positive truth. No contact with the vine results in no fruit. Jesus had spoken of no fruit (v. 2), some fruit (v. 2), more fruit (v. 2), and now He spoke of much fruit (v. 5).

Obviously it is impossible for a branch to bear any fruit if it has no contact with the life-giving vine. Many unbelievers appear to bear the fruit of godly character and conduct, but their fruit is phony. It is similar to plastic fruit that one could hang on trees to give them the appearance of being healthy and productive. It is natural, though not inevitable, that a branch that has vital connection with the vine bear *some* fruit. The way to bear *much* fruit is for the branch to maintain unhindered fellowship with the vine by allowing the vine to have its way with the branch. The alternative would be resisting the Holy Spirit's work by neglecting and disobeying God.

Lack of fruit in the life, therefore, may not necessarily be an indication that the branch has no vital relationship to the vine (i.e., that the person is unsaved). It may indicate that the branch, though connected to the vine, is not abiding in it (i.e., that the believer is not cultivating an intimate relationship with the Savior).

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[510]Blum, p. 325, and others imported this meaning into 15:4.
[511]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 516.

> "How strange that in our day and time we have been told so often that fruitlessness is a sure sign that a person is unsaved. Certainly we did not get this idea from the Bible. Rather, the Bible teaches that unfruitfulness in a believer is a sure sign that one is no longer moving forward, no longer growing in Christ. It is a sign that the Christian is spiritually sick, and until well again, cannot enjoy spiritual success."[512]

15:6 Jesus appears to have been continuing to speak of abiding in the sense of believers remaining close to Himself. The "anyone" in the context would be any believer. Therefore what He said applies to believers, not unbelievers.

It is not proper to conclude that non-abiding disciples are all unbelievers. Many interpreters who believe that all genuine believers will inevitably persevere in the faith and good works tend to do this. They tend to impose their doctrine on this verse and make the verse fit their theology rather than interpreting the verse in its context.[513] Jesus was speaking in this context of abiding and non-abiding disciple believers and gave no hint that He was speaking about unbelievers.

Many interpreters have taken verse 6 as an exposition of verse 2. However the viticulture process that Jesus described in verse 6 took place in the fall whereas the process He mentioned in verse 2 happened in the spring.[514] In the fall the vinedresser would prune (Gr. *kathairo*) the vines for the winter by cutting off the dead wood. He would not cut off the unfruitful branches that would produce grapes the next season but only the branches that did not have a healthy connection to the vine. The point of the verse is that branches with other serious problems, not just non-fruit-bearing branches (v. 2), also experience pruning.

What happens to these branches? Jesus said the vinedresser disposes of them. This has led some interpreters to conclude that they lose their salvation and go to hell, especially since He mentioned burning in fire. Others believe He implied that believers who do not abide in Christ will suffer the loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15 where fire appears in connection with the judgment of believers).[515] Still others think the mention of fire is only incidental since vinedressers burned the branches they cut off in the fall pruning. They believe Jesus'

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[512]Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 118.

[513]This is an example of allowing theology to determine exegesis rather than allowing exegesis to determine theology.

[514]Derickson, "Viticulture and . . .," pp. 50-51.

[515]Fire is a common figure that occurs throughout Scripture to describe the judgment of believers as well as unbelievers (cf. Gen. 19:24-26; Num. 11:1; Isa. 9:19; Ezek. 15:1-8; et al.).

point was that some Christians are as useless to God as these branches were to vine-growers. The point is their uselessness, not their judgment. Pruning may involve premature death or some other form of divine discipline but certainly not loss of salvation and perhaps not even loss of reward. I prefer view three, but I concede that view two may be correct. All interpreters believe Jesus mentioned this pruning to encourage His disciples to abide in Him. Then they would bear much fruit.

15:7 Here the second use of "abide" is obviously in view, namely, its use as a synonym for fellowship rather than salvation. Jesus addressed His believing disciples and told them what would happen if they did abide in Him. He had already explained that believers may or may not abide in Him (vv. 3-5). Not only do abiding disciples bear much fruit (v. 5), but they also receive what they ask God for in prayer.

This verse has also been a stumbling-block to some sincere Christians. It appears to be a blanket promise to grant any request the disciple may offer. Really it is a blanket promise to grant any request that an *abiding* disciple may offer. An abiding disciple will ask only those things that are in harmony with or subject to God's will, as Jesus did. The wishes of abiding disciples are the same as Jesus' wishes. To ask anything else would make the praying believer a non-abiding disciple.

Putting this revelation together with what Jesus said earlier, we can see that abiding disciples pray in Jesus' name, and praying in Jesus' name requires abiding in Christ (14:13-14).[516] Perhaps we can understand better now what Jesus meant when He said earlier that He wanted His disciples to experience the same unity with Himself that He enjoyed with His Father (14:20-21).

> "To remain in Christ and to allow his words to remain in oneself means a conscious acceptance of the authority of his word and a constant contact with him by prayer."[517]

15:8 The granting of petitions to abiding believers glorifies the Father. Answered prayer is one form of fruitfulness. All fruitfulness springs ultimately from the Son, the vine. Therefore it is really the Son who is bringing glory to the Father through His abiding disciples (cf. 13:31; 14:13; 17:4). The believer's fruitfulness is one means by which the Son glorifies the Father.

Fruit-bearing demonstrates that a believer is one of Jesus' disciples (cf. Matt. 7:20; Luke 6:43-44). Notice that Jesus did not say that a believer will inevitably produce fruit. It is possible for a believer to give little or no

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[516]See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 175-76.
[517]Tenney, "John," p. 152.

outward evidence of being a disciple of Jesus (v. 2). This is one of the greatest problems in the church today: genuine Christians who make little or no attempt to follow God's will for their lives. However the presence of fruit in a believer's life shows others that that disciple really does possess eternal life.[518]

The exposition of themes in the metaphor 15:9-16

Jesus proceeded to expound further on some of the themes that He had introduced in His teaching on the vine and the branches (vv. 1-8).[519] The subject moves generally from the believing disciple's relationship with God to his or her relationship with other believers.

15:9-10 Jesus proceeded to explain that obedience is the key to abiding (cf. v. 7). The relationship between the Father and the Son is again the paradigm for the relationship between the Son and the believer. The idea is not that we can withdraw from the circle of God's love by being disobedient. God does not stop loving His disobedient children (cf. Luke 15:11-24). It is rather that we can withdraw from the enjoyment and blessings of His love. John stressed Jesus' obedience to His Father in this Gospel (4:34; 5:19; 6:38; 8:29, 55; 10:17-18; 12:27-28; 14:31). Now Jesus called His disciples to follow His example.

15:11 Loving obedience is the cause of the disciple's fruitfulness, but joy is its result. The fullness of believers' joy was John's purpose for writing his first epistle, as it was Jesus' purpose in giving this discourse (1 John 1:4). Specifically Jesus had told His disciples that joy would follow their obedience to His teachings (v. 10). He intended His teachings to produce freedom and joy, not bondage and grief (cf. 10:10; Matt. 11:30).

> "How can we tell when we are 'abiding in Christ'? Is there a special feeling? No, but there are special evidences that appear and they are unmistakably clear. For one thing, when you are abiding in Christ, you produce fruit (John 15:2). . . . Also, you experience the Father's 'pruning' so that you will bear more fruit (John 15:2). The believer who is abiding in Christ has his prayers answered (John 15:7) and experiences a deepening love for Christ and for other believers (John 15:9, 12-13). He also experiences joy (John 15:11)."[520]

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[518]Some expositors argue that fruit is inevitable in the true Christian's life by appealing to Matthew 7:20: "You will know them by their fruits." However in the context Jesus was talking about false teachers, not believers.

[519]We observed the same pattern in Jesus' teaching about the Good Shepherd in chapter 10.

[520]Wiersbe, 1:355.

15:12 Jesus summarized His teaching with the command to love one another as He had loved them (cf. 13:34-35; 1 John 3:16). This was especially relevant because of the disciples' earlier arguments about who of them was the greatest and their unwillingness to wash each other's feet.

15:13 Love for a friend reaches its zenith when one willingly sacrifices his or her life for that friend. Jesus had spoken of His love for His disciples (v. 12). He would shortly show them how great it was by making the supreme sacrifice for them. After that, they would not only have His command but also His example to follow.

Really Jesus did more than lay down His life for His friends. He died for His enemies (cf. Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 5:8-10). However in the context of this audience His statement was true as it stands. The most a person can do for a friend is to die for him or her.

15:14-15 "Friend" is another relative term such as "abiding" or "fellowship." A person can be a casual friend, a close friend, or an intimate friend depending on his or her love and loyalty. Likewise all believers are God's friends in one sense, but abiding believers are His friends on a deeper level because they seek to obey Him consistently (cf. Ps. 25:14).

A good servant (Gr. *doulos*, lit. slave) also obeys his master. What then is the difference between a servant of God and an intimate friend of God? Jesus proved to His disciples that they were His friends as well as His servants but pointing out that a master shares his plans with his friends but not with his slaves. He had told them what was coming thereby treating them as His friends. Abraham and Moses, the only Old Testament characters whom God called His friends, also received revelations of God's plans from Him (cf. Gen. 18:17; Exod. 33:11; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23).

Slaves customarily receive orders but no explanations or reasons for their orders. One of the differences between friends and slaves is the degree of intimacy they share with the Master. Jesus raised His disciples from the level of tools to being partners with Him in His work (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20—6:1).

Jesus said that He no longer called His disciples slaves implying that He had done so in the past. One of the common titles God used for the prophets in the Old Testament was "my servants the prophets" (e.g., Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 29:19; et al.). In former times God had not revealed His mind fully to His people (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). However with the coming of Jesus He revealed His plans as to friends rather than as to servants. This is another indication that Jesus viewed His Incarnation as the culmination of divine revelation. The revelation that Jesus gave through the apostles following His ascension was a continuation of that revelation (cf. Acts 1:1-2).

15:16 Again Jesus stressed that the initiative in the relationship between Him and His disciples lay with Himself, not them (cf. 1:39, 42-43; 6:70; 10:27). He probably did this because of their tendency to think too highly of themselves and since in their culture it was common for disciples to choose their rabbi. Even today students love to seek out the teacher of their choice and attach themselves to him or her.

He had chosen them to be His friends, but He had also appointed them to a specific task. They had a job to do as His servants, a mission to fulfill. Part of His purpose for them was that they bear fruit and that their fruit would have lasting effects. Evidently the fruit of their missionary outreach was particularly in Jesus' mind since He linked going with bearing fruit. In this case new converts are the fruits in view (cf. 20:21).

Asking the Father in prayer in Jesus' name was necessary for fruit-bearing to happen. Jesus linked prayer and fruit-bearing in a cause and effect relationship. Prayer plays an essential role in the believer's fruitfulness.

The NIV translation is misleading. It implies that answers to prayer will be the disciples' reward for effective fruit-bearing. In the Greek text there are two purpose clauses each introduced by *hina*: "that you should go and bear fruit," and "that whatever you ask the Father . . . He may give you." These purposes are coordinate, but logically praying precedes fruit-bearing (cf. 14:12-14; 15:7-8).

> "Five characteristics of genuine love are detailed in verses 13-16. True love is sacrificial; it is demonstrated in obedience in Christ; it always communicates truth; it takes the initiative in meeting the legitimate needs of others; and it will always bear fruit with abiding results."[521]

6. The warning about opposition from the world 15:17-27

Jesus had discussed the Father's unity with the Son, the Son's unity with His disciples, and the disciples' unity with one another, as recorded in this chapter. It was natural then that He should also address the disciples' relationship with the world. His reference to their mission led Him into this subject (v. 16).

> "This study [15:1-16] began in the vineyard and ended in the throne room! The next study will take us to the battlefield where we experience the hatred of the lost world."[522]

15:17 Again Jesus repeated the absolute importance of His disciples loving one another (cf. 13:34; 15:10, 12, 14). This was not only a repetition for emphasis, but it set the stage for Jesus' teaching on the world's opposition that follows.

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[521]Bailey, p. 186.
[522]Wiersbe, 1:359.

15:18 Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the opposition that they would face after His departure. To do this He announced first that they would encounter opposition from the world (cf. 1 John 3:13). Here the world (Gr. *kosmos*) refers to the mass of unbelievers. The conditional sentence in the Greek text assumes the reality of what Jesus stated for the argument's sake. The world would hate them. A person cannot be an intimate friend of Jesus (i.e., and abiding believer) without drawing hatred from His enemies.

The world hates Jesus because He testified that its deeds are evil (7:7). His abiding disciples draw hatred from the world because they associate themselves with Him and His teachings and because they seek to advance His mission. Remembering the world's hatred for the Master makes bearing that hatred easier for His disciple.

15:19 Believers are aliens in the world because Jesus has called us out of it to fulfill His plans and purposes (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). The world does not hate us because we are superior but because we are servants of the Lord whom it has rejected.

15:20 Jesus reminded the disciples of the principle that He had mentioned when washing their feet (13:16). Then He used this principle to encourage them to serve one another. Now He used it to explain why they would experience persecution.

People normally treat a person's servants as they treat him. Since unbelievers persecuted Jesus, His disciples should expect persecution too. Conversely if some people in the world followed Jesus' teachings, some would also follow His disciples' teachings. This is a more likely interpretation than the one that sees Jesus saying that since they had rejected His teaching they would also reject the disciples' teaching.[523] Some in the world did indeed believe Jesus' teachings, and some would believe the disciples' teachings.

15:21 Ultimately the disciples would experience opposition because of Jesus. "My name's sake" is the equivalent of "me." Responses to the lives and witness of Jesus' disciples really turn on who He is, not on who the witnesses are. Obviously we can aggravate and provoke persecution by our inept or carnal conduct, but Jesus was explaining the basic theological reason for the opposition we face, not the secondary sociological reasons.

People rejected Jesus because they did not know God who had sent Him. They were ignorant of Him because they were spiritually blind (cf. Rom. 1:28). Consequently they could not evaluate the Messenger whom God had sent. Jesus implied that they would reject His disciples too because

[523]*New English Bible*.

they did not know God who had sent them. Again the close unity between the Father and the Son and between the Son and abiding believers comes through.

15:22-23 Jesus obviously did not mean that it would have been better for the world if He had remained in heaven. His point was that by coming into the world and preaching and working miracles He had confronted people with their rebellion against God (cf. Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 11:31-32). Jesus' words and works were the Father's who had sent Him. Therefore the world's rejection of them constituted rejection of the Father. To hate Jesus amounted to hating God. This is another strong implication of Jesus' deity.

15:24-25 These verses amplify the former two. They also add the idea that the world's hatred did not jeopardize God's redemptive plan. Its hatred was part of what God predicted would accompany Messiah's mission. The Jews' own Scriptures condemned their unbelief. Probably the quotation comes from Psalm 69:4. David experienced hatred for no reason. How much more would the Son of David experience it?

15:26-27 Even though the world rejected Jesus, the Spirit characterized by truth would bear witness that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. 14:16-17, 26). He would do this after He came on the day of Pentecost. After that, the disciples would also testify, similarly empowered by the Spirit. The basis of their testimony would be their long association with and intimate knowledge of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:21-22).

These verses explain how the conflict between Jesus and the world would continue after He departed to heaven. The essence of the conflict would continue to be who Jesus is.

Verse 26 also contains a strong testimony to the deity of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus described as proceeding from the Father as He had done (cf. 14:26).[524] It refers to all three members of the Trinity and reveals something of their functional relationships to one another. "The beginning" is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

7. The clarification of the future 16:1-24

Jesus proceeded to review things that He had just told His disciples, but He now gave them more information. Particularly the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the subject of this section of the discourse, though Jesus also clarified other matters about which He had spoken.

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[524]See Gerald Bray, "The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit in Evangelical Theology Today: Do We Still Need It?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):415-26.

Jesus' method of teaching in the Upper Room Discourse was not to give a thorough explanation of one subject, then a thorough explanation of another subject, and so on. It was rather to introduce several subjects initially, then return to them and give a little more information, then return again and give even more information. This is, of course, excellent teaching methodology.

The reason for this revelation 16:1-4

Jesus introduced this teaching by explaining further why He was telling His disciples these things.

16:1 The phrase "These things I have spoken to you" (Gr. *tauta lelaleka hymin*) brackets this subsection of the discourse and highlights a reason for it (cf. 14:25; 16:25, 33; 17:1). Jesus did not want His disciples to stumble (Gr. *skandalethron*, be caught unaware) in their discipleship after His departure because the events that would follow took them completely by surprise (cf. Matt. 5:10-12). Even though they did not understand everything Jesus told them immediately, they would remember them and understand them more fully later (cf. 14:20, 25-26).

> "The greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy."[525]

16:2 Jesus announced that these disciples would experience excommunication from their Jewish synagogues (cf. 9:22, 34; Acts 18). The first strong opposition that the early Christians faced came from the Jews because most of them had been Jews (Acts 2:11, 14, 22).[526] Jesus also hinted that some of them would die as martyrs (cf. Acts 7:59; 9:1-4; 12:2). Church history indicates that all the Eleven did, though there is some division of opinion about the death of John. Moreover those who would kill the disciples would not do so believing themselves to be criminals for taking their lives but thinking that they were glorifying God by doing so (cf. 12:10; Acts 9:1-2; 22:5, 19; 26:9-11).

Jesus credited the Jews with good motives even though their actions were wrong (cf. Rom. 10:2). However, opposition that arises from religious conviction is often the most severe and brutal type. Ironically the Jews were opposing God by persecuting Jesus' disciples rather than serving Him (cf. Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11).

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[525]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 530. "Apostasy," from the Greek *apostasis*, meaning "to stand away from," is a word that describes people's relationship to Jesus and or His truth. It is a term that identifies departure from a position formerly held whether the person in view is a believer or an unbeliever. It does not necessarily identify an unbeliever. It is possible for believers to depart from the Savior and His truth as well as unbelievers (cf. 15:4, 7; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). Jesus gave this present teaching so His believing disciples would not depart from Him and what He had taught them when persecution assailed them following His departure from them (cf. Matt. 10:33; Mark 8:38; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:8).

[526]Unfortunately Christians have persecuted the Jews too.

16:3 The opponents of the disciples would do these things because they had not come to know the Father or the Son. Theirs would be a sin of culpable ignorance.

16:4 "Their hour" (NASB) refers to the time when the disciples' persecutors would control their fate. Ironically their hour would appear to be the time of their greatest victory, but really it would be the time of their greatest defeat. Conversely Jesus' "hour," His passion, would appear to be the time of this greatest defeat, but really it would be the time of His greatest victory.

The memory that Jesus had forewarned His disciples would enable them to realize that things were not out of control when they seemed to be. This remembrance would really strengthen their faith in Jesus rather than weakening it.

Jesus had not revealed the extent of opposition His disciples would face earlier because He was with them and He was the focus of unbelieving hostility. However now that He was preparing to depart from them they needed to be aware of what lay ahead for them.

The ministry of the coming Spirit 16:5-15

16:5 Jesus again pointed out that the revelation of His departure had made the disciples sad rather than happy. They had little interest in where He was going. What concerned them was the sorrow that His departure produced for them. Peter and Thomas had asked Jesus where He was going (13:36; 14:5), but Jesus evidently did not regard those questions as expressing genuine interest in Himself but themselves. He apparently regarded them as superficial protests against His departure.[527]

16:6-7 The disciples were full of grief (Gr. *lype*, cf. vv. 20, 21, 22) because they did not realize how good it would be for them when the Holy Spirit came to indwell them. Really it was to the disciples' advantage (Gr. *sympherei*) that Jesus should leave them. Consequently Jesus proceeded to give them more information about what His coming would mean for them. Some of the benefits of the new covenant that Jesus ratified by His death, into which all believers entered at Pentecost, required the indwelling presence of God's Spirit (Jer. 31:33-34).

Some Christians wish that they could have lived during Jesus' earthly ministry and accompanied Him around Palestine hearing His teachings firsthand and beholding His miracles with their own eyes. This would have been a treat, but Jesus here clearly affirmed that believers would be better off after the Spirit's coming than they were before.

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[527]Barrett, p. 485; C. H. Dodd, pp. 411-13, n. 1.

> "It is important to note that the Spirit comes *to the church* and not to the world. This means that He works in and through the church. The Holy Spirit does not minister in a vacuum. Just as the Son of God had to have a body in order to do His work on earth, so the Spirit of God needs a body to accomplish His ministries; and that body is the church. . . . The Spirit does not 'float' in some ghostly way up and down the rows of a church building, seeking to win the lost. The Holy Spirit works through the people in whom He lives."[528]

16:8 The Spirit's coming would result in heightened conviction among unbelievers concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.[529] Before then, that conviction had come mainly from the Old Testament, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples' personal influences.

What did Jesus mean when He said the Spirit would "convict" (Gr. *elenxei*) the world? This Greek verb occurs 18 times in the New Testament (Matt. 18:15; Luke 3:19; John 3:20; 8:46; 16:8; 1 Cor. 14:24; Eph. 5:11, 13; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15; Heb. 12:5; James 2:9; Jude 15, 22; Rev. 3:19). In each case it involves showing someone his or her sin with a view to securing repentance.[530]

> "In John 16:8 the Holy Spirit is involved in pointing out sin in order to bring about repentance. The legal idea suggested by some[531] seems to have been derived from the use of the term in extrabiblical literature, whereas the biblical writers used *elenxo* primarily to describe correction, not prosecution or conviction."[532]

Wherever the Greek preposition *peri* ("concerning" or "in regard to") occurs after *elenxei* ("convict"), as here, some evil or source of evil follows (cf. 8:46; Luke 3:19; Jude 15). The Spirit would not just accuse people of sin, but would bring an inescapable sense of guilt before God upon them (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Ps. 51:4).[533] This sense of guilt is an indispensable prerequisite for salvation.

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[528]Wiersbe, 1:362.

[529]See Chafer, 3:210-24: "The Convicting Work of the Spirit;" John Aloisi, "The Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8-11," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:1 (March 2004):55-69.

[530]Cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. *elenxo*, by F. Büchsel, 2:473-74.

[531]Paul Enns, "The Upper Room Discourse: The Consummation of Christ's Instruction" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 296-97; Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, pp. 564-65.

[532]Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):208.

[533]Tenney, "John," p. 157. Cf. Donald A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979):547-66.

The title *paraclete* (i.e., one called along side to help, cf. 15:26) is an appropriate one for the Spirit. He acts as a prosecuting attorney by demonstrating the guilt of those whom Jesus accused with His teaching. Earlier Jesus had spoken of the Paraclete as the defender of believing disciples (14:16-18), but now the Eleven learned that He is also the prosecutor of unbelieving sinners. Believers are witnesses, the Holy Spirit is the prosecuting attorney, and the lost are guilty sinners.

16:9 There is some question about the correct interpretation of "because" or "in regard to" (Gr. *hoti*) in these verses. Was Jesus identifying the *cause* for the conviction in each case, as "because" suggests (e.g., NASB), or was He identifying the specific *subject* of conviction, as "in regard to" suggests (e.g., NIV)? Normally *hoti* introduces a causal clause, and that is evidently what Jesus intended here. However, He could have meant both things. This may be another instance of double meaning, which is quite common in this Gospel.

Failure to believe on Jesus after He had come is the great damning sin (3:18, 36). If people believed Jesus, they would believe what He said about their guilt, and they would turn to Him in repentance. In spite of their unbelief the Spirit graciously convicts unbelievers of their sinfulness so they will believe on Jesus. He may convict them of the individual sins they have committed, but a person can clean up his life and still go to hell. It is the sin of unbelief in Jesus Christ that condemns people.

> "A court can convict a man of murder, but only the Spirit can convict him of unbelief."[534]

16:10 The Spirit would also convict the world of righteousness. Normally righteousness (Gr. *dikaiosyne*, which occurs only here in John's Gospel) refers to truly righteous conduct and standing before God. The world does not have that. It also refers to the righteousness that people profess to have that is far inferior to the righteousness that they need for acceptance with God (Matt. 5:20; Rom. 10:3; Phil. 3:6-9; Titus 3:5). This self-righteousness, which Isaiah compared to a menstrual cloth (Isa. 64:6), is apparently the negative side of what Jesus had in mind. The Spirit would convict the world of the inadequacy of its righteousness and move the unsaved to seek the true righteousness that only Jesus Christ provides.

The Spirit would convict the world of its lack of righteousness because Jesus was going to the Father with the result that His disciples would see Him no longer. Jesus had convicted those He contacted of their inadequate righteousness during His earthly ministry, but that source of conviction was about to depart. The Spirit would continue this ministry.

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[534]Tenney, "John," p. 157.

Jesus' reference to the disciples' inability to see Him implies the need for them to become the instruments through whom the Spirit would exercise this ministry. Moreover Jesus' ascension testified that His righteousness is the standard for divine acceptance (cf. Acts 3:14-15; 1 John 3:5).

16:11 Third, the Spirit would convict the world of judgment coming on it for its sins that culminated in the rejection of Jesus. The Jews of Jesus' day generally judged Him to be a false pretender to Messiah's throne. That judgment was wrong, and the Spirit would convict many of them of the error of their judgment (cf. Acts 2:36-37). The Cross and the Resurrection would be compelling proofs that would change the minds of many.

The Spirit would do this because God had judged Satan (cf. 12:31). The resurrection of Jesus constituted a condemnation of the devil (cf. Col. 2:15). Since the ruler of the world stands condemned, his children can expect the same treatment unless they believe in Jesus (cf. 14:30).

> "When a lost sinner is truly under conviction, he will see the folly and evil of unbelief; he will confess that he does not measure up to the righteousness of Christ; and he will realize that he is under condemnation because he belongs to the world and the devil (Eph. 2:1-3). . . . There can be no conversion without conviction, and there can be no conviction apart from the Spirit of God using the Word of God and the witness of the child of God."[535]

16:12-13 These verses begin the fifth and final *paraclete* passage in the Upper Room Discourse (14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15). The passage focuses on the completion of the revelation that Jesus brought from the Father (cf. 1:1, 14; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-4). The New Testament consistently views the revelation that Jesus gave the apostles through the Spirit following His ascension as a continuation of Jesus' revelation.

Jesus never acted on His own initiative but only in obedience to the Father. The Spirit who would reveal the truth would do the same. This description implies the Spirit's complete equality with Jesus in the Godhead. The Spirit would not give revelation that conflicted with what Jesus had taught. The source of both the Son's and the Spirit's teaching was the Father.

Specifically the Spirit would reveal things still future. While this revelation would include yet unknown facts about the future (i.e., eschatology), the expression covers all that would be ahead for the disciples following Jesus' separation from them. This would include the

[535]Wiersbe, 1:362.

full significance of Jesus' passion (cf. 14:26) as well as all the revelation now contained in the New Testament.

16:14-15 The Spirit would glorify the Son by expounding Him, as the Son had glorified the Father by expounding Him. The Spirit would really be taking what the Father had given the Son and explaining its significance to the disciples. The Eleven are particularly in view. They were the individuals who were presently unable to understand further revelations, and they had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry (v. 12; cf. 14:26; 15:27).

> "The Spirit worked in the apostles' minds so that they could perceive, understand, and teach about the Savior."[536]

Notice that it is not the Spirit's function to attract attention to Himself or to promote Himself. As John the Baptist, His purpose is to make Jesus increase in prominence. This fact should make suspect any human attempt to glorify the Spirit above the Son. Such an emphasis is not in harmony with the Spirit's purpose.

Jesus revealed that the Spirit would have a threefold ministry when He came. He would convict the world (vv. 8-11), enlighten the disciples (vv. 12-13), and glorify Jesus (vv. 14-15).

The reappearance of Jesus 16:16-24

Jesus next turned the disciples' attention from the Spirit's future ministries to His own reappearance.

16:16 As the following verses show, Jesus was referring here to His imminent departure in death and His return to the disciples shortly after His resurrection. The first "little while" was only a few hours in duration, and the second "little while" was only a few days. Other returns that Jesus had mentioned in this discourse included His return in the person of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and His bodily return at the Rapture.

16:17-19 This announcement prompted the disciples to voice their confusion again (cf. 13:36; 14:5, 8, 22), though this time they kept quizzing (Gr. imperfect tense) one another rather than Jesus. They still did not understand what He meant by His departure (cf. v. 12). Evidently they did grasp that Jesus had been talking about returning to His Father (14:28), but how could He do that and then reappear in a little while?

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[536]Blum, p. 328.

Jesus' references to "a little while" especially perplexed them (v. 18). The fact that John recorded the repetition of "a little while" five times in these three verses shows that he regarded it as very significant.

16:20 Again Jesus did not answer the disciples' question directly because they would not have been able to understand Him if He had (v. 12). What He did say was very important, however, as His introductory asseveration indicated.

Jesus' departure would mean great sorrow for His disciples but great joy for the world. This was the condition when Jesus died on the cross. Later the disciples' sorrow would turn to joy. This was the result of Jesus' resurrection (20:20). Some commentators viewed the second part of this verse as referring to the Lord's return at the end of the age. However what Jesus said about the disciples being essentially joyful during the inter-advent period argues against this view (15:11).

16:21 Jesus compared how the disciples would feel to the feelings of a pregnant woman at her delivery. This was an Old Testament illustration of how God's people would feel when Messiah appeared (cf. Isa. 21:3-5; 26:16-21; 66:7-14; Jer. 13:21; Mic. 4:9-10). Jesus again used the word "hour" (Gr. *hora*, 2:4; et al.) to focus the critical time of both painful experiences, His death and the woman's delivery. What issues from the painful experience is so wonderful, in both cases, that the resulting joy replaces the former sorrow.

16:22 Jesus applied the illustration to His disciples. Their sorrow had already begun with the news of His departure. Yet He would return to them. Jesus again stressed that the initiative rested with Him. The joy that that reunion would kindle within them would remain in them in spite of the persecution that Jesus had predicted they would encounter (cf. Isa. 66:14).

16:23 The context indicates that the day in view is the time when the disciples' joy would have become full. That would be after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The disciples would ask Him no questions then because He would be bodily absent from them. They would have to request answers to their questions from the Father in prayer.

Jesus encouraged the disciples to ask the Father for whatever they needed, however. He did this by repeating His promise that the Father would grant petitions that they would offer "in Jesus' name" (cf. 14:13-14; 15:16).

Some commentators made much of the two different Greek words for asking in this verse. The first one that occurs, *erotao*, usually means to ask a question, whereas the second one, *aiteo*, means to ask for something. However, John often used *erotao* to describe asking for something (4:31, 40, 47; 14:16; 16:26; 17:9). Consequently we should probably not make too much of this difference. John frequently used synonyms.

16:24 The disciples had not appealed to the Father in Jesus' name before now. As Old Testament believers, they had undoubtedly grounded their petitions on God's promises in the Old Testament. However the entrance that Jesus now gave them with the Father would assure an even warmer response to their prayers than Old Testament saints received.

Jesus urged His disciples again to ask the Father. The verb in the Greek text is a present imperative (*aiteite*, from *aiteo*). He also gave them assurance that they would receive what they requested "in His name" (cf. 1 John 5:14-15). The consequence of answered prayer would be fullness of joy for them (cf. 15:11; 16:22).

Jesus brought many of the themes of chapter 15 together in this concluding promise: loving obedience, asking, receiving, joy, and fruit-bearing.

8. The clarification of Jesus' destination 16:25-33

16:25 "These things I have spoken unto you" (NASB) indicates another transition in the discourse (cf. 14:25; 16:1, 4, 33; 17:1). Jesus acknowledged that He had not been giving direct answers to His disciples' questions. He had been speaking enigmatically or cryptically. The Greek phrase *en paroimias* has this meaning elsewhere (cf. 10:6). Jesus was referring to His entire discourse, not just His illustration about the woman (v. 21). He evidently did this to avoid presenting what lay ahead in such stark reality that the disciples could not accept it (v. 12).

The coming hour when Jesus would no longer speak figuratively to them but clearly (Gr. *parresia*, cf. 10:24; 11:14) probably refers to the time following His resurrection and ascension. Then He and the Spirit would help the disciples understand the meaning of what He had said earlier (cf. Acts 1:3).

Jesus used parables to teach the multitudes because they were not ready to receive clear teaching (Mark 4:33-34). He interpreted some of His parables for the disciples because they could receive some clear teaching. However, He also used enigmatic language with the disciples because even they were not ready to understand some things yet.

16:26-27 After Jesus' ascension, the disciples would pray in Jesus' name to the Father (cf. 14:13-14, 26; 16:23-24). The Father would grant their request—in the context it is a request for understanding of Jesus' former teachings—because the Father loved them in a special sense. They had loved His Son and had believed on Jesus. This is a second reason the disciples could take comfort in Jesus' promise that they would understand better in the future. The first reason was that the Father would grant them answers to their prayers because they prayed in Jesus' name.

Jesus was not denying that He would intercede for His disciples with the Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; cf. 1 John 2:1). His point was that the Father's love for them would move Him to grant their petitions, as well as Jesus' intercession and sponsorship (cf. 15:9-16). Believers have a direct relationship with the Father as well as with the Son and the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:2).

16:28 This was Jesus' clearest statement yet about where He was going. What Jesus explained here should by now have become clear to the reader of this Gospel (cf. 1:10-11, 14; 3:16-17; 14:19). However to the disciples who first heard these words they were fresh, clear revelation. This statement really summarized Jesus' mission from the Incarnation to the Ascension.

16:29-30 The disciples now felt that Jesus had answered their questions about where He was going clearly. This revelation helped them believe that Jesus knew what He was talking about when He taught them about God and His ways. It also helped them believe that Jesus had indeed come from God. However they did not yet understand the full meaning and significance of what Jesus had said, though they thought they did. Jesus had just said that they would not understand His meaning fully until a future time (vv. 25-26).

> "Had the disciples really possessed the understanding they claim, they would have reacted very differently when the crisis came."[537]

16:31-32 Jesus questioned the fact that the disciples now believed fully because of what He had just explained. The NIV translation, "You believe at last!" is an interpretation that the reader should understand as ironical. The events surrounding Jesus' arrest and crucifixion would show that their faith was still weak. They would desert Him in His hour of testing. That hour was coming very soon, but Jesus could speak of it as already present because Judas was even then negotiating with the religious leaders for His arrest. Jesus' confidence in His Father comes through in that He found consolation in the fact that the Father would not desert Him even though the disciples would. Jesus gave this gentle rebuke because the disciples again overestimated themselves (cf. 13:38).

It is true that Peter and probably John followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. It is also true that John stood near Jesus' cross during His crucifixion (18:15; 19:26-27). Nevertheless all the disciples abandoned Jesus at His arrest and returned to their own things temporarily (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50; John 18:17, 25-26; 21:3). It is also true that the Father abandoned Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). However that

[537]Morris, p. 631.

was only temporary too. The Father remained with Jesus throughout all His trials and only departed from Him when He judged sin, which Jesus took on Himself as our substitute (2 Cor. 5:21).

16:33 The structural marker "these things I have spoken to you" (cf. 14:25; 16:1, 4, 25; 17:1) identifies the conclusion of this section of the discourse. The ultimate reason for Jesus' revelations about His departure, as far as His immediate disciples were concerned, was that they might experience peace in their relationship with Him (cf. 14:27). "In me" probably harks back to the vine and branches intimacy that Jesus revealed in chapter 15. Their relationship with the world would result in turmoil because of the opposition that would come on them from unbelievers. However the proof that the peace that Jesus would give them would overcome the turmoil that the world would create was Jesus' victory over the world in the Cross (12:31; 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5). This was probably another statement that the disciples did not understand immediately.

Jesus closed this discourse with a word of encouragement. The Greek word *thareso*, translated "take courage" or "take heart," is one that only Jesus used in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11). Jesus was the great encourager. The Holy Spirit continues His ministry in us today.

The tension that the victory of Christ and the opposition of the world pose for the Christian is not one that we can escape in this life. Notwithstanding it is possible for us to be more peaceful than distressed as we realize and believe that Jesus has already won the victory (v. 11; cf. Rom. 8:37).

The Upper Room Discourse ends here (13:31—16:33). The rest of Jesus' private ministry (chs. 13—17) consisted of prayer.

C. JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER CH. 17

This part of Jesus' private ministry has many connections with the preceding Upper Room Discourse. In the Old Testament, prayers often accompanied important farewell discourses (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 32—33). The main theme is Jesus' desire for the Father's glory and the disciples' welfare. However many of the other themes that have run though this Gospel reach a new climax here too. These themes include Jesus' obedience to the Father, the revelation of God through the Son, the calling of the disciples out of the world, their mission, their unity, and their destiny.[538]

The similarities between the content of this prayer and the Upper Room Discourse, plus John's notation at its end (18:1), seem to indicate that Jesus prayed it before He entered Gethsemane. He probably prayed it in the upper room, though He may have done so somewhere else in Jerusalem.

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[538]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 551.

> "Whether He prayed it in the Upper Room or en route to the Garden, this much is sure: it is the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. John 17 is certainly the 'holy of holies' of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship."[539]

Though labeling this prayer "Jesus' high priestly prayer" is a bit misleading, I know of no better way to describe it. Obviously Jesus had not yet entered into His high priestly ministry, which He began when He ascended into heaven, when He prayed this prayer (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). This prayer, nevertheless, represents a foretaste of that intercessory ministry.

> "We so often understand this prayer as though it were rather gloomy. It is not. It is uttered by One who has just affirmed that he has overcome the world (16:33), and it starts from this conviction. Jesus is looking forward to the cross, but in a mood of hope and joy, not one of despondency."[540]

1. Jesus' requests for Himself 17:1-5

17:1 "These things Jesus spoke" (NASB, Gr. *tauta elalesen Iesous*) clearly connects what follows with what Jesus had just been saying (cf. 14:25; 16:1, 4, 25, 33). Lifting up the eyes to heaven indicated prayer, as did Jesus' words (cf. Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ezek. 33:25; Dan. 4:34; John 11:41). Perhaps John included the detail of Jesus lifting His eyes toward heaven to help the reader visualize His continuing submission to His Father.

The title "Father" was, of course, Jesus' common way of referring to God's relationship to Himself (11:41; 12:27; cf. vv. 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). The hour in view was the hour of the Son's glorification through death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27-28, 31-32; 13:1, 31). The inevitability of an impending event did not lead Jesus simply to accept it fatalistically. This is how some believers respond in similar situations. Instead it moved Him to petition the Father that what was coming would result in God's glory.

> "As so often in Scripture, emphasis on God's sovereignty functions as an incentive to prayer, not a disincentive."[541]

Jesus asked His Father to glorify Him so He could glorify the Father. To glorify in this context means to clothe in splendor (cf. v. 5). The only way this could happen was for Jesus to endure the Cross. Thus this petition is a testimony to Jesus' commitment to do the Father's will even to the point of

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[539]Wiersbe, 1:367.
[540]Morris, p. 634.
[541]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 554-5.

dying on the cross. His request for glory, therefore, was unselfish. It amounted to a request for the reversal of the conditions that resulted in the Incarnation (cf. Phil. 2:6-11). Jesus requested God's help (i.e., grace) in His sufferings, His sacrificial death, His resurrection, and His ascension. All of this was ultimately for the glory of the Father. It would magnify His wisdom, power, and love.

17:2 The Father had glorified the Son by giving Him the authority to give eternal life to all individuals whom the Father had given to the Son (cf. Matt. 28:18). The Father had given Him this authority before Creation (cf. Ps. 2). It was the basis for Jesus' request in verse 1. Both verses 2 and 3 are explanatory and consequently somewhat parenthetical. Jesus referred to believers as those whom the Father had given Him five times in this prayer (vv. 2, 6 [twice], 9, 24).

17:3 Jesus proceeded to define the nature of eternal life. Eternal life is essentially knowing (Gr. *ginoskosin*, cf. Gen. 4:1 LXX; Matt. 1:25) God experientially through faith in His Son (cf. 3:5; Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14; Heb. 8:11). Jesus described it in terms of relationship rather than duration. Everyone will live forever somewhere. However the term "eternal life" as Jesus used it means much more than long life.

> "Life is active involvement with environment; death is the cessation of involvement with the environment, whether it be physical or personal. The highest kind of life is involvement with the highest kind of environment. A worm is content to live in soil; we need not only the wider environment of earth, sea, and sky but also contact with other human beings. For the complete fulfillment of our being, we must know God. This, said Jesus, constitutes eternal life. Not only is it endless, since the knowledge of God would require an eternity to develop fully, but qualitatively it must exist in an eternal dimension."[542]

Jesus described the Father here as the only true God. He is knowable only through Jesus Christ whom He sent (cf. 1:18; Matt. 11:27). We sometimes say that it is a blessing and an inspiration to know certain people. This is all the more true when we know God. Knowing Him changes us and introduces us into a different quality of living.[543]

17:4-5 Jesus had glorified the Father by all that He had done in His incarnation. Jesus probably intended to include His death, resurrection, and ascension, to which He referred proleptically here (cf. 19:30). Jesus' crucifixion was a foregone certainty because of His commitment to do the Father's will

[542]Tenney, "John," p. 162.
[543]Morris, p. 637.

(Phil. 2:8). Now He asked the Father to glorify the Son by all that the Father would do in exalting the Son. Thus Jesus essentially restated the request of verse 1. He wanted to return to the condition in which He existed with His Father before His incarnation. This request presupposes Jesus' preexistence with the Father and His equality with the Father (10:30). Really Jesus requested His own glorification.

2. Jesus' requests for the Eleven 17:6-19

Jesus' glorification depended on the wellbeing of those whom the Father had given to Him (v. 2). Consequently Jesus prayed for them too. He made several requests for them but first expressed the reasons He was praying for them and why He wanted the Father to grant His requests.

The length of this section of the prayer suggests that Jesus had greater concern for His disciples' welfare than for His own.

> "Jesus prayed for His disciples before He chose them (Luke 6:12), during His ministry (John 6:15), at the end of His ministry (Luke 22:32), here (John 17:6-19), and later in heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)."[544]

Moreover in view of their weaknesses, they were in great need of God's grace to sustain them in the future. It was God's keeping power rather than their strength that made Jesus' confident as He prayed for them.

The bases for these requests 17:6-11a

17:6 Jesus viewed these disciples as those whom God had given to Him out of the world (cf. 6:37; 15:19), not as those who had chosen to follow Him. This viewpoint accounts for Jesus' confidence as He anticipated their future. They belonged to God, and God would therefore protect them. Jesus had revealed God to them. The name of God summarizes everything about Him (cf. Exod. 3:13-15; Isa. 52:6). Manifesting the name of God to people means revealing His essential nature to them. The Eleven had kept God's word by believing on and following Jesus even though they were not consistently obedient.

17:7-8 There was much that the Eleven did not yet understand, but they did believe that Jesus had come from God and that His utterances (Gr. *rhemata*) were God's words. Commendably they accepted Jesus' teachings even though they did not understand them fully, and what they understood they believed. Jesus' unusual phrasing stresses His unity with the Father.

> "As long as we stay with the figure of the Galilean Jesus (perhaps romanticizing over the beauty of his holiness and

[544]Blum, p. 331.

> lowliness) so long we miss what really matters. What is central is that all that we see in him is of God. It is not so much the Man of Galilee as the eternal God on whom our attention should rest."[545]

17:9-10 Because the Eleven had believed on Him Jesus made request for them, not for the world, at this point. The basis for that request was that these disciples belonged to God, so their welfare was His special interest. Those who belong to the Father belong equally to the Son. Thus Jesus claimed equal concern for the Eleven with the Father. This is another claim of equality with the Father. Glory had come to Jesus through the faith of the Eleven, as it had not come from the world.

17:11a Jesus also explained that He was praying for these disciples as He was because He was about to depart from them and return to the Father. They needed the Father's added grace because they would no longer have the Son's encouraging presence with them as they lived in the hostile world.

The request for protection 17:11b-16

17:11b The title "Holy Father" appears only here in the fourth Gospel and is a reminder of both aspects of God's nature. It balances ideas of ultimate purity with intimate paternity and so prepares for what lies ahead, namely, the need for loving sanctification (vv. 17-19). The Father's holiness serves as a model for the holiness of disciples (cf. Lev. 11:44; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). The reason Jesus and disciples can be holy is that the Father is holy.

Jesus asked His Father to keep these disciples "in your name" (Gr. *en to onomati sou*). The NIV interpreted this phrase to mean "by the power of your name" (cf. Ps. 20:1; 54:1; Prov. 18:10).[546] However the preposition *en* may be locative instead of instrumental in mood. In that case the idea would be "keep them in your name," meaning keep them loyal to you.[547] Some commentators argued that both ideas were in Jesus' mind.[548] The context favors the second view. Loyalty seems to be the objective of the keeping and the dominant idea, not the means to it, namely, the Father's power. The name that the Father had given to the Son probably refers to the revelation of God's character that Jesus had manifested (vv. 6-8; cf. 1:18; 14:9).

The ultimate end of God keeping these disciples loyal to the revelation that Jesus had given them was that they might experience unity. They would be one with one another as well as one with the Son and the Father

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[545]Morris, p. 641.
[546]Bruce, p. 332.
[547]Lindars, p. 524.
[548]E.g., Brown, 2:759.

if they remained loyal to Jesus' revelations. Projecting this idea further we can see that the Scriptures are the basis for the unity of believers with one another and with God.

17:12 Jesus had kept these disciples loyal to God and had protected them from external attacks while He was with them. The only exception was Judas Iscariot who was always the traitor that the Old Testament had predicted would betray the Messiah (Ps. 41:9; 69:25; 109:6-8; cf. John 13:18). His defection did not prove Jesus a failure but Scripture trustworthy. Jesus did not include Judas in His requests for the Eleven.

The term "son of perdition" (Gr. *ho huios tes apoleias*, NIV "the one doomed to destruction") could describe Judas' character (cf. Isa. 57:4) or his destiny (Ps. 35:4-8). He had a damnable character and would end in perdition, but the second idea seems to be stronger in the context. Perdition in the New Testament usually refers to eschatological damnation (cf. Matt. 7:13; Acts 8:20; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11).

The only other occurrence of the title "son of perdition" occurs concerning the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3). This fact has led some interpreters to conclude that the Antichrist will be the resurrected Judas Iscariot. However, God will not resurrect unbelievers until the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15), but the Antichrist will appear and carry out his work during the Tribulation that will precede the millennium (cf. Rev. 13:1-10; 19:19-21).

17:13 Jesus had protected the Eleven while He was with them in the world, but now He was about to leave them and return to the Father. Therefore He gave these teachings and offered these petitions that they might share the fullness of His joy after He had departed (cf. 15:11; 16:22, 24).

17:14 The revelations and teachings that Jesus had given the Eleven would be the basis for their remaining loyal, safe, and joyful. Nevertheless the world would hate them because they were no longer of the world even as the world hated Jesus because He was not of the world. The idea is not so much that the disciples' outlook was different than the world's but that their origin and character were since they had believed in Jesus.[549] Jesus spoke of the Father and the world as opposing loyalties (cf. 1 John 2:15).

Jesus was apparently saying some of these things in prayer for the disciples' benefit, as He had earlier prayed with the onlookers at Lazarus' tomb in view (cf. 11:42).

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[549]Morris, p. 646.

17:15-16 Jesus' was not asking the Father to remove the Eleven from the hostile world as He was about to leave it. He was petitioning Him to keep them loyal to Himself while they continued to live in it. Jesus repeated the thought of verse 14b in verse 16 to stress the disciples' essential distinction from the world. It was, therefore, protection from "the evil" (Gr. *ek tou ponerou*) in the world that they needed. This phrase could mean evil generally, or it could be a reference to the evil one, Satan. Other occurrences of the phrase elsewhere encourage us to interpret it as referring to the devil here (cf. Matt. 6:13; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19). Even though Satan now stands condemned, He still controls the world (1 John 5:19).

Throughout church history Christians have sought relief from the world's hatred by withdrawing from it socially, and in other ways, or by compromising with it. Some individuals tend to withdraw from a disagreeable and dangerous environment while others prefer to blend into it. Jesus' will, however, was that His disciples should do neither of these things. He wanted them to remain loyal to God while continuing to participate in the amoral aspects of its life. Our sense of mission and our sense of identity should control our desire for comfort.

> "Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God's protection while they witness for Jesus."[550]

The request for sanctification 17:17-19

17:17 "To sanctify" (Gr. *hagiazo*) means to set apart for God's service (cf. Exod. 28:41; Jer. 1:5). Jesus is the perfect example of a sanctified person. He devoted Himself completely and consistently to God's will for Him. Sanctification in John's Gospel is always for a mission.[551] The means of the disciples' sanctification was the truth, which Jesus explained was God's Word. Jesus came to reveal God's word to humankind (1:1, 14; 14:6), and the Spirit would help His disciples understand it (15:13). It is both personal and propositional. It comes to us through the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the written Word of God, Scripture.

The way Jesus asked the Father to sanctify the disciples was by using His word. This means that it is essential for disciples to know, understand, believe, and obey the revelation that God has given us. The words of God that Jesus revealed and that stand recorded in the Bible are the key to believers' practical sanctification. Practical sanctification involves separation unto God from the world, the evil one who controls it, and the lies that He promotes that the world believes.

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[550]Blum, pp. 332-3.
[551]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 566.

> "With the mind, we *learn* God's truth through the Word. With the heart, we *love* God's truth, His Son [cf. 14:6]. With the will, we yield to the Spirit [of truth, cf. 14:17; 16:13] and *live* God's truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification."[552]

17:18 Jesus next explained the purpose of the sanctification that He requested for His disciples. He had sent them into the world with a mission (cf. 13:20; 15:26-27; 20:21). Similarly the Father had sent the Son into the world with a mission (10:36). In both cases sanctification was essential for the success of the mission.

Comparison with verse 20 shows that in verses 6-19 Jesus was praying specifically for the Eleven. However, we should not regard what He requested for the Eleven as restricted to them exclusively. The change that takes place in verse 20 is not from one group of believers to another as though they were in separate containers. It is rather a broadening of the field from the Eleven to those that would follow them. Thus it is understandable that when Jesus prayed for the Eleven He would pray for some things that not only they but their successors would need. Clearly all subsequent believers would need sanctifying by God's Word so they could achieve their mission, as the Eleven did.

17:19 Jesus did not mean that He intended to make Himself more holy than He already was since this would have been impossible. He set Himself apart to do God's will partially for the sake of His disciples. He is our example of perfect sanctification, and His sanctification makes ours possible. Without the sacrificial death of Jesus there would be no salvation and no mission for us. There would be no sanctification for us either. One of the purposes of Jesus' death was to set believers apart to God and His mission for them to function as priests in the world (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9).

3. Jesus' requests for future believers 17:20-26

As Jesus thought about the disciples that would believe on Him through the witness of the Eleven, He requested two things for them from His Father: unity and glorification.

The request for unity 17:20-23

17:20 Jesus now identified future believers as the objects of His intercession, as well as the Eleven. He described them as those who would believe through the witness of the Eleven. All Christians have come to Jesus Christ either directly or indirectly through one or another of the original disciples or apostles. As we have seen, John had a special interest in stressing the

[552]Wiersbe, 1:370.

importance and effectiveness of the witness of believers. This witness is the concrete expression of the mission to which Jesus had been referring (vv. 18-19). Even though the Eleven would fail Jesus soon, they would return to follow Him and would carry on the mission that He gave them.

17:21 Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers as well as for the unity of the Eleven (v. 11). This unity rests on adherence to God's truth, and it reflects the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Furthermore it is union with the Father and the Son (cf. ch. 15). God answered this prayer initially on the day of Pentecost when He united believers with Himself in the body of Christ, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

The purpose of this unity is that the world might believe that the Father sent the Son, namely, that Jesus was God's Son. The display of mutual love among Jesus' disciples shows that they are His disciples. Their love for one another shows that they really do follow His teachings and possess His life. This gives evidence that Jesus really was who He claimed to be. It vindicates His teaching and so glorifies Him.

> "From the beginning of the believer's spiritual life to his final glorification the fatherhood of God is the basis for the believer's experience. . . . This relationship of God to men, perfectly exemplified in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, is both the highest expression of His consciousness of His relation to God and the fullest attainment that man can reach through union with Him."[553]

This verse is a favorite of promoters of the ecumenical movement. However as the content and context of this verse clarify, Jesus was not speaking about institutional unity but personal unity among genuine believers. He was praying that all true believers would be one in their love for one another, their submission to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to their mission. Disunity among professing Christians has frustrated Jesus' purpose that the world might believe on Him. Nevertheless the solution to this problem is not to impose an artificial institutional unity that ignores the bases of true unity and presents a hypocritical facade of oneness. It is to promote love for one another among genuine believers.

17:22 Jesus continued to explain the nature of the unity that He requested from His Father. In what sense do all believers share God's glory? Jesus probably was speaking of His bringing the full knowledge of God to them. The revelation of God results in glory for God. When believers understand and believe the revelation of God that Jesus brought, they become partakers of that glory. This is something else they share in unity with one

[553]Tenney, "Topics from . . .," p. 46.

another that the Father and the Son also share with one another. Another view is that the glory in view refers to Jesus' work of redemption, but that subject is not as prominent in the context as the revelation of God.

17:23 This verse advances the thought of verse 21. Jesus wanted the unity among believers to be so great and so clear that the world would believe Jesus' message. The world would also see that God had poured out His love on believers as well as Jesus. Notice that Jesus implied that He would indwell believers as the Father indwelt Him. All three members of the Godhead indwell the Christian (14:23; Rom. 8:9; Col. 1:27). God's indwelling presence unites Christians in the body of Christ and glorifies God.

The request for glorification 17:24-26

17:24 Here Jesus' request clearly included the Eleven with all the elect. He wanted them all to observe (Gr. *theorosin*) the glory that the Father would restore to the Son following His ascension (v. 5; cf. 1 John 3:2). This appears to be a reference to Jesus' essential preexistent glory. His humiliation in the Incarnation was only temporary. Glorification will begin for Christians initially at death or the Rapture, whichever comes first (cf. 14:2-3; 2 Cor. 5:6-8). Our glorification includes being with Jesus forever (cf. Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:17). Since Jesus' will (Gr. *thelo*) was identical with the Father's will (cf. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38), we can know that the Father will grant this request.

This is one of the clearest passages in the New Testament that sets forth the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24, 28; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 2:9-11).[554]

17:25-26 Jesus concluded His prayer as He began it, by addressing His Father by name (cf. vv. 1, 11). By calling God His righteous Father Jesus was affirming His belief that God would do what was right in granting the petitions that He was presenting. This included glorifying the Son and bringing believers safely to heaven where they would behold His glory.

Jesus' mission had not resulted in the whole world coming to know God experientially. Nevertheless Jesus Himself knew the Father, and the Eleven had come to believe that Jesus was the revelation of the Father. Jesus would continue to reveal the Father so the Father's love would remain in them. It would do so because Jesus Himself would remain in them.

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[554]See John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

So concludes Jesus' great intercessory prayer for His believing disciples. This was an important part of His private ministry of preparing His disciples for what lay ahead of them.

We could summarize its main points as follows. Jesus asked for *Himself glorification* (vv. 1, 5) that the Father might be glorified (v. 1). He asked for *the Eleven (and their successors) faithfulness* (v. 11). The results of their faithfulness would be their unity (v. 11) and their joy (v. 13). The means to their faithfulness would be their safety (v. 15) and their sanctification (v. 17). He asked for *future believers unity* (vv. 21, 22, 23) in the present that the world might believe (vv. 21, 23) and *heaven* (v. 24) in the future that believers might see His glory (v. 24) and fully experience God's love (v. 26).

This section of Jesus' ministry began with a call for present humility (13:1-12) and ended with an assurance of future glory (17:24-27). In between, Jesus gave revelations of the importance of love, the ministry of the coming Holy Spirit, the promise of answers to prayer, and instruction about the importance of abiding in Christ.

IV. JESUS' PASSION MINISTRY CHS. 18—20

There are several features that distinguish John's account of Jesus' passion from the ones in the Synoptic Gospels. First, the Romans feature slightly more prominently in John's Gospel, but they do not constitute such a large presence that they overpower the other characters who opposed Jesus. Second, John pictured Jesus as more obviously in control of His destiny. For example, John did not record Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. This is in harmony with His emphasis on Jesus as God's divine Son. Third, John included material that the Synoptics omitted. This, too, reflects emphases that John wanted to make in view of his purposes for writing. What these emphases were will become clearer as we consider what he included.

> "Man will do his worst, and God will respond with His very best. 'But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (Rom. 5:20)."[555]

A. JESUS' PRESENTATION OF HIMSELF TO HIS ENEMIES 18:1-11 (CF. MATT. 26:47-56; MARK 14:43-52; LUKE 22:47-53)

18:1 "These words" evidently refer to all of what Jesus had said in chapters 13—17 all of which He probably spoke in the upper room. The Kidron Valley formed the eastern boundary of Jerusalem. The Kidron was also a *wadi* or dry streambed that contained water only when it rained hard. The Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane lay across the Kidron to the east. John only mentioned Gethsemane as the site of Jesus' arrest. He did not record Jesus' praying there (cf. Matt. 26:30, 36-46; Mark 14:26, 32-42; Luke 22:39-46). The verbs that John used to describe Jesus

[555]Wiersbe, 1:372.

entering and leaving Gethsemane suggest that it may have been a walled garden (cf. v. 13).[556]

18:2 John apparently recorded this detail because it shows that Jesus was not trying to avoid arrest. Instead He deliberately went to a place where Judas evidently anticipated that He would go (cf. Luke 21:37; 22:39).

> "This probably means that he and the disciples used to bivouac, sleeping in the open air, and probably in this very garden."[557]

18:3 Only John mentioned the presence of Roman soldiers. A Roman cohort (Lat. *cohors*) normally consisted of 600 soldiers. However sometimes the Greek word *speira*, translated "cohort" or "detachment," referred to a smaller group of only 200 men.[558] John did not use a precise term to describe the number of soldiers that Judas brought, and it is possible that less than 200 soldiers were present. The Romans stationed troops in the Fortress of Antonia during the Jewish feasts. It stood just north of the temple. Normally these troops resided in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, the Roman provincial capital.

The officers of the Jewish temple police accompanied the Roman soldiers. Thus John presented both Gentiles and Jews as playing a part in Jesus' arrest. They carried lanterns and torches to find Jesus. Apparently they thought He might try to hide. Passover always took place when the moon was full. They also had weapons to restrain anyone who might oppose their plan to arrest Jesus. Judas served as their guide. He had no authority over them.

18:4 John noted that when Jesus approached the leaders of the soldiers He knew their intentions (cf. 10:14, 17-18). He consistently presented Jesus' death as a voluntary self-sacrifice. Earlier in His ministry Jesus had withdrawn from conflict with officials because His hour had not yet come (10:40; 11:54), but now His hour had arrived (17:1).

18:5-6 Perhaps John chose not to record the fact that Judas identified Jesus by kissing Him to strengthen the force of Jesus' question. He mentioned Judas' presence nonetheless since He was a primary figure in Jesus' arrest. John stressed Jesus' complete control of the situation.

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[556]The parallels between Jesus' experiences and David's at this point are striking. Both men crossed the Kidron having been rejected by their nation and betrayed by someone very close to them, and hangings followed both incidents (cf. 2 Sam. 15; 18:9-17; Matt. 27:3-10; John 18:1-3).

[557]Morris, p. 656. See Wiersbe, 1:372, for contrasts between what happened in the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane.

[558]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 577.

Jesus responded with the clause, "It is I" (Gr. *ego eimi*). As we have noted elsewhere, this was a claim to deity when Jesus uttered it in certain situations (e.g., 8:24, 28, 58). However it was also a normal way to answer the soldiers here (cf. 9:9). Some interpreters have concluded that John's description of the soldiers' response to Jesus' identification of Himself indicates that they viewed His words as a claim to being God (cf. Ps. 27:2). However on other occasions when Jesus' hearers understood that He was claiming to be God they tried to stone Him. Here they momentarily fell backward, stood up again, and proceeded to arrest Him. Perhaps John was hinting to his readers that the soldiers responded better than they knew by falling backwards. However, it seems unlikely that they took Jesus' words to be a claim to deity in this context. They probably fell back because they could not believe that the man they had come out expecting to have to hunt for was virtually surrendering to them. Rather than having to hunt down a fleeing peasant they found a commanding figure who confronted them boldly.

> "It may well be that in verses 5-6 John recorded an incident in which the opponents of Jesus recoiled from surprise or abhorrence of what they perceived to be blasphemy. But for the reader of the gospel, who already knows who Jesus is and that His claim to identification with God is true, the reaction of the enemies is highly ironic. The betrayer Judas himself fell down at Jesus' feet before the soldiers led Him away to His trial and crucifixion"[559]

18:7-9 Jesus seems to have been more intent on protecting His disciples than on making a claim to be God. He made sure that His disciples would be safe before He allowed His captors to lead Him away (17:12; cf. 6:38-39; 10:28). This was a preview of His work for them on the cross.

18:10 All the Gospels record this incident, but John is the only one that names Peter and Malchus. The mention of their names makes the story more concrete. John was an eyewitness of Jesus' sufferings, so it is not unusual that He would mention these names. The small sword (Gr. *machaira*) that Peter used was probably little more than a dagger. His action was foolish, but it illustrates his courage and commitment to Jesus (cf. 13:37).

18:11 Jesus' response, as John recorded it, focuses the reader's attention on Jesus. The Cross was necessary, and Jesus had committed Himself to enduring it. Peter's brave though misdirected act showed that He still failed to realize that Jesus' death was necessary. Zeal without knowledge is dangerous. Therefore Jesus rebuked Peter even though this disciple showed remarkable loyalty to His teacher. The cup to which He referred was the symbol of His lot in life (cf. Matt. 20:22-23), which in this case involved

[559]Harris, p. 182.

bearing God's wrath (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15; Ezek. 23:31-33; Matt. 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Rev. 14:10; 16:19).

> "Peter had a sword in his hand, but our Lord had a cup in His hand. Peter was resisting God's will but the Saviour was accepting God's will."[560]

John's account focuses on Jesus' presentation of Himself to His enemies. This was an essential step in His voluntary self-sacrifice for the sins of humankind. It was not surrender as such since that word implies that the person surrendering is guilty. It was not a request for arrest either since that would have removed some of the guilt for His death from His captors.

B. JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIAL 18:12-27

John is the only evangelist who recorded Jesus' interrogation by Annas. It was preliminary to His appearance before Caiaphas and then before the Sanhedrin (v. 24).

JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIAL				
	Matthew	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**
Before Annas				18:12-14, 19-24
Before Caiaphas	26:57-68	14:53-65	22:54, 63-65	
Before the Sanhedrin	27:1	15:1	22:66-71	
JESUS' CIVIL TRIAL				
Before Pilate	27:2, 11-14	15:1-5	23:1-5	18:28-38
Before Herod Antipas			23:6-12	
Before Pilate	27:15-26	15:6-15	23:13-25	18:39—19:16

1. The arrest of Jesus and the identification of the high priests 18:12-14

John began his account of Jesus' trials with a brief description of His arrest and by identifying the chief religious leaders who examined Him.

18:12 The commander (Gr. *chiliarchos*, cf. Acts 22:24, 26, 27, 28; 23:17, 19, 22) in view was the officer in charge of the Roman soldiers. He was evidently the person with the most official authority on the scene. However the Jewish officers (i.e., temple police) also played a part in Jesus' arrest. Perhaps John noted that they bound Jesus in view of Isaiah's prophecy that Messiah's enemies would lead Him as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7).

[560]Wiersbe, 1:374.

Jesus' disciples abandoned Him when His enemies took him into custody (cf. Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50).

18:13 The soldiers evidently led Jesus to the residence of the high priest. The location of this building is uncertain, though the traditional site is in the southern part of old Jerusalem just west of the Tyropoeon Valley.[561]

Both high priests evidently occupied the same building. One was Annas, the former high priest whom the Jews still regarded as the legitimate high priest since the high priesthood under the Mosaic Law was for life. He served as the official high priest from A.D. 6 to 15 when the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus deposed him. Five of Annas' sons plus his son-in-law, Caiaphas, succeeded him in this office.[562] Consequently it was natural that the Jews regarded Annas as the patriarch and the true high priest and that he continued to exert considerable influence throughout his lifetime. The other high priest was Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law whom the Romans had placed in the office in A.D. 18 where he remained until A.D. 36. Annas was the first of the two men to interview Jesus.

"That year" refers to the fateful year of Jesus' death (i.e., A.D. 33).

The High Priests of Israel (ca. A.D. 6-36)	
ANNAS (ca. A.D. 6-15)	Unofficial high priest with Caiaphas during Jesus' trial (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24) Unofficial high priest who, with Caiaphas, tried Peter and John (Acts 4:6)
ELEAZAR (ca. A.D. 16-17)	Son of Annas whose name does not appear in the New Testament
CAIAPHAS (ca. A.D. 18-36)	Son-in-law of Annas Official high priest during Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 3:2; Matt. 26:3, 57; John 11:49-50) With Annas tried Peter and John (Acts 4:6)

18:14 John doubtless identified Caiaphas as he did here to remind his readers of the prediction of Jesus' substitute sacrifice (11:50), not just to identify Caiaphas. This identification also makes unnecessary a full recording of the deliberations that led to the Sanhedrin's verdict. That record was already available in the Synoptics and was therefore unnecessary in John's Gospel.

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[561]See the map "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.
[562]Josephus, 20:1:9.

2. The entrance of two disciples into the high priests' courtyard and Peter's first denial 18:15-18 (cf. Matt. 26:57-58, 69-70; Mark 14:53-54, 66-68; Luke 22:54-57)

As the other evangelists, John alternated his account of the events surrounding Jesus' religious trial. He described what was happening in the courtyard (vv. 15-18), then what was happening inside (vv. 19-24), then what happened outside again (vv. 25-27). This literary technique contrasts Jesus with Peter.

18:15-16 Evidently Peter and another disciple had followed the arresting party from Gethsemane back into Jerusalem to the high priests' palace (Gr. *aule*, "court" or "courtyard," cf. 10:16).

Traditionally commentators have understood the "other disciple" to have been John, the "beloved disciple" (cf. 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2-9; 21:1, 20-23, 24-25). However because John described this "other disciple" as someone who had a close relationship with the high priest (Gr. *gnostos*, cf. 2 Kings. 10:11; Ps. 55:13; Luke 2:44) many modern interpreters question the traditional view. It has seemed incredible to some of them that a fisherman from Galilee would have had the close relationship with the high priest (i.e., Caiaphas, v. 13) that this passage presents. Nevertheless it is entirely possible that John as the son of a supposedly prosperous fisherman (cf. Mark 1:19-20) did indeed have such a relationship.

> "Salome, the mother of John, was a sister of Mary, Jesus' mother (cf. John 19:25 with Mark 15:40), and would have been equally related to Elizabeth, whose husband, Zechariah, was a priest (Luke 1:36)"[563]

Moreover the New Testament presents Peter and John as having the close relationship that this passage describes (e.g., 13:23-24; 20:2-10; 21:20-24; Acts 3:1, 11; 4:13; et al.). Therefore the traditional view may be correct.[564] The correct identification of the "other disciple" is not essential to a correct interpretation of the events, however.

18:17 The servant girl recognized the "other disciple" as one of Jesus' disciples. She asked Peter if he was one too, expecting a negative reply, as the Greek text makes clear. Her question reflected some disdain for Jesus. Peter succumbed to the pressure of the moment and denied his association with Jesus (13:37). Perhaps what he had done to Malchus made him more eager to blend into his surroundings.

18:18 Peter not only denied Jesus, but He also stood with Jesus' enemies as they warmed themselves in the courtyard of the high priest's large residence.

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[563]Tenney, "John," p. 172.

[564]Cf. Frans Neirynck, *Evangelica: Gospel Studies—Etudes d'Evangile. Collected Essays*, pp. 335-64.

The detail that the fire was a charcoal (Gr. *anthrakia*) one will feature later in John's narrative (21:9). Such a fire would not have generated much light or heat, so those who wanted to stay warm had to stand close together.

3. Annas' interrogation of Jesus 18:19-24

John's version of Peter's denial is quite similar to those of the other Gospel writers, but His revelation of Jesus' interrogation by Annas is unique. None of the other evangelists mentioned it.

18:19 Clearly Annas was the (unofficial) high priest who conducted this initial informal inquiry (cf. v. 24). He probably asked Jesus about His disciples to ascertain the size of His following since one of the religious leaders' chief concerns was the power of Jesus' popularity. Annas' interest in His teachings undoubtedly revolved around who Jesus claimed to be (cf. 7:12, 47; 19:4). Both subjects were significant since many of the Jews suspected Jesus of being a political insurrectionist.

18:20-21 Jesus affirmed that He had always taught openly. He had not promoted sedition secretly. He had no secret teaching to hide. Obviously He was not denying that He had taught His disciples privately. He was assuring Annas that His teachings were not subversive. He did not have two types of teaching, a harmless one for the multitudes and a revolutionary one for his disciples.[565] He invited Annas to question His hearers, not just His disciples, to determine if He had indeed taught anything for which someone might accuse Him of being disloyal. The testimony of witnesses was an indispensable part of any serious trial in Judaism.

18:22-23 The officer (Gr. *hypereton*) who struck Jesus was probably one of the Jewish temple police (cf. v. 3). He interpreted Jesus' response as discourteous and used it as an excuse to strike Him. The Greek word *rhapisma* translated "blow" (NASB) means a sharp blow with the palm of the hand. Jesus' response to this attack was logical rather than emotional or physical. He simply appealed for a fair trial (cf. Acts 23:2-5). The man who stuck Him was not treating Him fairly. This was a case of police brutality. Jesus had shown no disrespect for Annas.[566]

18:24 Annas could not produce anything for which the Sanhedrin could condemn or even charge Jesus. Therefore he sent Jesus to Caiaphas. The descriptions of Jesus' hearings in the Gospels alternate between Jesus' interrogations and Peter's denials. It seems clear therefore that Annas and Caiaphas lived and interviewed Jesus in different parts of the same large residence or palace. Caiaphas had to interview Jesus to bring charges

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[565]Morris, p. 670.

[566]See Laurna L. Berg, "The Illegalities of Jesus' Religious and Civil Trials," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):330-42.

against Him before the Sanhedrin since Caiaphas was the current official high priest. John noted that Jesus remained bound as a criminal even though He had done nothing to warrant physical restraint.

John did not record what happened when Jesus appeared before Caiaphas and, later, before the Sanhedrin (cf. Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-71). Perhaps he omitted these aspects of Jesus' religious trial because the earlier Synoptic Gospels contained adequate accounts of them. Maybe John considered the meeting of the Sanhedrin that he described in 11:47-53 as Jesus' official condemnation.

4. Peter's second and third denials of Jesus 18:25-27 (cf. Matt. 26:71-75; Mark 14:69-72; Luke 22:58-62)

John took his readers back to the courtyard where Peter stood warming himself with the high priest's servants and officers (v. 18).

18:25 Under pressure again, Peter denied for a second time that he was one of Jesus' disciples as the "other disciple" was (cf. Matt. 10:33; Luke 12:9). The person who voiced the question was another girl (Matt. 26:71; Mark 14:69).

> "John has constructed a dramatic contrast wherein Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything."[567]

18:26-27 The third questioner was a relative of Malchus whose ear Peter had cut off in Gethsemane (v. 10). Only John recorded the relationship. This fact supports the view that the "other disciple" was John. He knew the relationships of people within the high priest's household.

The accuser also identified Peter as a Galilean (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59). His question expected a positive answer in contrast to the former two that expected a negative answer. It posed the greatest threat to Peter's security. Peter responded by uttering his most vehement denial. Immediately a cock crowed (for the second time, Mark 14:72) fulfilling the prediction that Jesus had spoken just hours earlier (13:38). John also omitted Peter's oaths and curses (cf. Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71), Jesus' convicting look (Luke 22:61), and Peter's bitter tears of contrition (cf. Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62). The effect is that the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction receives the emphasis.

The encouraging record of Peter's restoration to fellowship and usefulness follows in chapter 21.

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[567]Brown, 2:842.

C. JESUS' CIVIL TRIAL 18:28—19:16

John reported much more about Jesus' trial before Pilate than did any of the other Gospel writers. He omitted referring to Jesus' appearance before Herod Antipas, which only Luke recorded (Luke 23:6-12). He stressed Jesus' authority, particularly His authority as Israel's King (cf. v. 36; 19:11, 14). John seems to have assumed that his readers knew of the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' passion. This supposition supports the view that this was the last Gospel written. The other Gospels stress the legal aspects of this trial. John presented it more as an interview between Jesus and Pilate similar to His interviews with Nicodemus (ch. 3), the Samaritan woman (ch. 4), and the blind man (ch. 9).[568] It proceeded as Pilate asked four questions: "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (18:29), "Are you the King of the Jews?" (18:33), "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" (18:39), and "Where are you from?" (19:9).

1. The Jews' charge against Jesus 18:28-32 (cf. Luke 23:1-2)

John began his version of this civil trial by narrating the initial public meeting of Pilate and Jesus' accusers.[569]

18:28 "They" (NASB) refers to all the Jewish authorities (cf. Matt. 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1). They led Jesus from Caiaphas in the sense that he was the head of the Sanhedrin that had passed sentence on Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus for blasphemy (Matt. 26:63-66; Mark 14:61-64), which was a capital offense in Israel (Lev. 24:16). However the Sanhedrin could not execute the death sentence for this offense without Roman agreement, and there was little hope of Pilate giving it. Therefore the Jewish leaders decided to charge Jesus with sedition.

The word "Praetorium" transliterates the Latin *praetorium* that identified the headquarters of the commanding officer of a Roman military camp or a Roman military governor's headquarters.[570] Pilate was such a governor.[571] His normal headquarters stood at Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea. However during the Jewish feasts Pilate came to Jerusalem with Roman troops to discourage uprisings. His headquarters in Jerusalem was either in Herod's palace on the western wall of the city or in the Fortress of Antonia immediately north of the temple enclosure. The traditional site is the Fortress of Antonia, the beginning of the Via Dolorosa or "way of sorrow" that Jesus traveled from the Praetorium to Golgotha.

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[568]Tenney, "John," p. 174.

[569]For helpful background material on this trial, see R. Larry Overstreet, "Roman Law and the Trial of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):323-32.

[570]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 587.

[571]The Gospels use the generic term "governor," though technically Pilate was the prefect of Judea, not its procurator, as Tacitus identified him in his *Annals* (15:44:4).

It is not clear just when Jesus first appeared before Pilate on Friday morning. John said that it was "early" (Gr. *proi*). This may be a reference to the technical term that the Romans used to describe the night watch that began at 3:00 a.m. and ended at 6:00 a.m. Probably it is just the normal use of the word that would not necessarily require a time before 6:00 a.m. It would have been early nonetheless, perhaps between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. Roman officials customarily began their work around sunrise and often finished their day's business by 10:00 or 11:00 a.m.[572] John wrote that Jesus was still in Pilate's presence late in the morning (19:14).

The Jews who brought Jesus to Pilate stayed outside the Praetorium because they wanted to avoid ceremonial defilement. The Jews thought that merely entering a Gentile's dwelling made them ceremonially unclean (cf. Acts 10:28).[573] This was because the Gentiles did not take precautions to guarantee kosher (i.e., proper) food as the Jews did. Specifically, Gentiles might have yeast in their homes that would have made participation in the Passover feast unlawful for a Jew (cf. Exod. 12:19; 13:7).[574]

Ironically these Jews were taking extreme precautions to avoid ritual defilement while at the same time preparing to murder the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (cf. 2 Sam. 11:4).

> ". . . they are anxious to avoid external defilement in order to observe a festival whose *real* significance was that, as well as reminding God's people of the ancient deliverance from Egypt, it pointed forward to the true Passover Lamb, whose sacrifice would bring to an end all distinctions between what was ceremonially clean and unclean, and effect an inward cleansing; and it was the death of that true Passover Lamb that the Jews at this moment are anxious to bring about."[575]

These Jews' superficial commitment to the Mosaic Law resulted in it becoming more difficult for them truly to obey that law. Their punctiliousness separated themselves from Jesus. Pilate had to shuttle between the Jews outside his headquarters and Jesus inside as his examination proceeded.

We have already drawn attention to the evidence that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples in the upper room on Thursday evening (cf.

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[572]A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p. 45.
[573]Mishnah *Oholoth* 18:7, 9. See also Dan Duncan, "Avodah Zarah, Makkoth, and Kerithoth," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):52-54.
[574]Bruce, p. 349.
[575]Tasker, pp. 200-1.

13:1, 27).[576] Why then were these Jews concerned that entering Pilate's Praetorium might preclude them from eating the Passover? Had they too not already eaten it the night before? The "Passover" was the name that the Jews used to describe both the Passover proper and the entire festival that followed it including the feast of Unleavened Bread (cf. Luke 22:1). Evidently it was their continuing participation in this eight-day festival that these Jewish leaders did not want to sacrifice by entering a Gentile residence.

18:29 Pilate evidently addressed the Jews who had assembled outside his headquarters, or perhaps in its courtyard, from a balcony. He wanted to know their formal charge against Jesus. Pilate probably knew something of Jesus' arrest since Roman soldiers had participated in it (vv. 3, 12). Moreover Jesus was a popular figure in Galilee and Jerusalem. The high priest may well have communicated with Pilate about Him before Jesus appeared on Pilate's doorstep.

18:30 The spokesmen for the Jews eventually evaded Pilate's question. Luke recorded that they initially charged Jesus with misleading Israel, with forbidding the Jews to pay their taxes to Caesar, and with claiming to be Israel's king (Luke 23:2). However they could not impress Pilate with those charges sufficiently.

They hesitated to bring the charge of blasphemy against Jesus because Pilate might dismiss it as unworthy of his consideration (cf. Acts 18:12-16). They evidently did not accuse Him of treason because this too would have incited His many followers, and they would have had difficulty proving it. Consequently they did not name the charge but assumed that it was serious and implied that Pilate should trust them and "rubber stamp" their decision. Perhaps the fact that Pilate had provided troops to arrest Jesus encouraged them to think that he had already judged Jesus guilty. They did not appreciate Pilate's question since it suggested that they would have to go through a formal trial from beginning to end.

> "It is possible that they were taken by surprise at Pilate's indication that he would try the case himself. They had had his cooperation in making the arrest; now they apparently expected that he would take their word for it that the man the Romans had helped to arrest was dangerous and should be executed."[577]

Pilate realized that the Jewish leaders had determined to do away with Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:18), but he had no evidence that Jesus had done anything worthy of death.

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[576]Morris, pp. 684-95, discussed this issue quite fully.
[577]Ibid., p. 676.

18:31 Since the Jews did not charge Jesus formally there was nothing that Pilate could do except hand Him back to them for discipline in their courts. The Jews' response explained why that was an unacceptable alternative. They wanted Jesus executed, but they did not have the authority to execute Him themselves.[578]

> "The Pilate disclosed in the [ancient] historical documents almost certainly acted like this not so much out of any passion for justice as out of the ego-building satisfaction he gained from making the Jewish authorities jump through legal hoops and recognize his authority."[579]

18:32 John noted that the Jews' admission that they could not put anyone to death was in harmony with the sovereign plan of God. Jesus had predicted that He would die by crucifixion, not by stoning (cf. 12:32-33). The Romans were the only ones who could condemn a person to death by crucifixion. The Jews did stone people to death for blasphemy (e.g., Acts 6:11; 7:58), but these seem to have been instances of mob violence rather than independent legal action. They probably wanted Jesus crucified too because the Mosaic Law regarded such a death as proof of God's curse (Deut. 21:22-23).

> "Ironically, the death that the Jewish hierarchy regarded as a final negation of Jesus' claims became the means of justification apart from the law (Gal 3:13)."[580]

> "It was necessary for three reasons for Jesus to be crucified by the Romans at the instigation of the Jews: (a) to fulfill prophecies (e.g., that none of His bones be broken; cf. 19:36-37); (b) to include both Jews and Gentiles in the collective guilt for the deed (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27); (c) by crucifixion, Jesus was 'lifted up' like 'the snake in the desert' [3:14] . . ."[581]

2. The question of Jesus' kingship 18:33-38a (cf. Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3)

Having heard the Jews' charges, Pilate returned to the inside of his headquarters and began interrogating Jesus. His questioning centered on the issue of Jesus' kingship.

18:33 The Jews' accusations motivated Pilate's question. He asked Jesus if He was claiming to be the King of the Jews. Messianic expectation was

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[578]See ibid., pp. 695-97, for a fuller explanation of the Jews' right to inflict the death penalty.
[579]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 591.
[580]Tenney, "John," p. 175.
[581]Blum, p. 337.

running high in Jesus' day, and many people were saying that Jesus was the Messiah. The Jewish leaders had charged Jesus with claiming to be this king (Luke 23:2). Now Pilate wanted to hear if Jesus Himself claimed to be this king.

18:34 The Synoptics reported that Jesus replied, "It is as you say" (Gr. *sy legeis*, Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3). John also recorded that Jesus gave that answer (v. 37), but he included additional conversation first. This added material included Jesus' explanation of the nature of His kingship (v. 36).

Jesus asked Pilate His question to determine how He would answer him. If his question had arisen from his own understanding and curiosity, Jesus presumably would have dealt with Him as a sincere inquirer. If he was merely trying to clarify the essence of the Sanhedrin's charge, Jesus would need to answer differently. If Pilate meant, "Are you a political king conspiring against Caesar?" the answer would have been, "No." If he meant, "Are you the messianic king of Israel?" the answer would have been, "Yes." The object of interrogation, Jesus, became the interrogator temporarily.

18:35 Pilate's reply clarified that he had no personal interest in Jesus' kingship, and he was indignant that Jesus would suggest such a thing. He simply wanted to understand what Jesus was claiming in view of the Sanhedrin's accusation. Beyond that, he wanted to discover why the Jewish leaders were so intent on doing away with Jesus. His question, "Am I a Jew?" sarcastically denied that Jewish matters such as Jesus' kingship were of any interest to him personally. Ironically Jesus was Pilate's King.[582] Pilate's comment about Jesus' own people handing Him over to him confirmed John's statement that Jesus came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him (1:11).

18:36 Jesus explained that He was indeed a king, as He claimed. However, His kingdom was not the type of kingdom that would compete with Pilate's kingdom by waging war. Jesus was not denying that His kingdom was an earthly kingdom. He was not saying it was only the spiritual rule of God over the hearts of His people. He was not saying that His kingdom had nothing to do with this world either.[583] This should be clear from Jesus' other references to His kingdom as being an earthly kingdom. His point was that He and His kingdom were not a threat to Rome (cf. 18:10-11). The reason was that God had postponed the messianic kingdom due to Israel's unbelief, though Jesus did not explain this to Pilate.

Jesus' kingdom is "not of this realm" or "from another place" (Gr. *ouk enteuthen*, lit. not from this place) in another sense. It will come down

[582]Cf. P. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 129-30.
[583]Beasley-Murray, p. 331.

from heaven to the earth rather than originating from the earth. It will begin when Jesus comes down from heaven to earth at His second coming.

18:37 Pilate did not understand the distinctions between Jesus' kingdom and his own that Jesus was making. He did understand that Jesus was claiming to have a kingdom. Consequently he next tried to get Jesus to claim unequivocally that He was a king. Jesus admitted that He was a king, but He needed to say more about His reign if Pilate was to understand the nature of His kingship. Jesus had defined His kingdom negatively (v. 36). Now He defined His mission as a king positively.

The main reason Jesus had come into the world was to bear witness to the truth. By this He meant that He came to reveal God (cf. 14:6). Jesus made subjects for His kingdom by revealing God, by calling on people to believe on Him, and by giving them eternal life. This prepared them to participate in His kingdom. Everyone who truly wanted the truth followed Jesus because His teachings had the ring of truth. Jesus' words were an invitation for Pilate to listen to Him and to learn the truth. Jesus showed more interest in appealing to Pilate than in defending Himself. This desire for the welfare of others marks all of Jesus' interviews in the fourth Gospel.[584]

18:38a Obviously Pilate was not one who truly sought the truth. He turned away from Jesus' offer to reveal it with a cynical comment that implied that the truth was unknowable. Undoubtedly Pilate's experience as a Roman official to whom others constantly lied and his personal desire to use the truth to accomplish his own ends accounted for his cynicism. The very idea that someone would aim his whole life at revealing truth was both foolish and improbable from his perspective.

Other views of Pilate's statement interpret it as despairing, impatient, or sincere. However the context seems to imply that it was facetious and scornful. Pilate turned away from the One who claimed to reveal the truth without waiting for an answer.

3. The Jews' request for Barabbas 18:38b-40 (cf. Matt. 27:12-21; Mark 15:3-11; Luke 23:4-19)

John condensed the scene in which Pilate declared Jesus innocent, the Jews accused Jesus further, Jesus replied nothing, and Pilate marveled at Jesus' silence (Matt. 27:12-14; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:4-6). He simply related Pilate's verdict (v. 38b). John also omitted the account of Jesus' appearance before Herod Antipas that followed this verdict and preceded Pilate's offer to release Barabbas in Jesus' place (Luke 23:6-12). The result of this selection of material is that John kept the focus of the reader's attention on Jesus and Pilate.

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[584]Tenney, "John," p. 177.

18:38b Pilate returned to the Jews who had assembled outside his headquarters and announced his verdict. Jesus had done nothing worthy of punishment by Rome (cf. Luke 23:14). He was guiltless of any activity that constituted a threat to Rome. Apparently Pilate concluded that Jesus was not a king in the normal sense but simply an idealist. This witness to Jesus' innocence was another important testimony in view of John's purpose in this Gospel (20:30-31).

18:39

> "Having displayed a lack of interest in truth, Pilate then revealed a lack of commitment to justice. He lacked the courage of his convictions. If Jesus was innocent of all charges, then Pilate should have set Him free. Instead, Pilate began a series of compromising moves to avoid dealing with an inconvenient truth in a difficult circumstance. First, when Pilate found out Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod (Luke 23:6-7). Second, Pilate tried to appeal to the crowd (John 18:38), hoping to bypass the desire of the chief priests and elders."[585]

Why did Pilate refer to this custom rather than simply releasing Jesus? Apparently he referred to it to draw attention to his generosity in releasing Jesus. He wanted the Jews to realize that He was being good to them by honoring this custom. However, Pilate made a horrible mistake by referring to it. He opened the door to the possibility that the Jews did not want him to release Jesus. They would not accept Jesus as the prisoner whose release would make it possible for Pilate to honor their custom. By referring to Jesus as the King of the Jews Pilate was further insulting the Jewish leaders. They had rejected the idea that Jesus was their King. His own greedy question set himself up for rejection.

About this time Pilate's wife warned him to have nothing more to do with Jesus because He was a righteous man (Matt. 27:19).

18:40 John described Barabbas as a robber (Gr. *lestes*, lit. one who seizes plunder). However, Barabbas seems also to have participated in bloody insurrection as a terrorist and guerrilla fighter (cf. Mark 15:7). The chief priests normally had nothing to do with Zealots and other freedom fighters who sought to overthrow the Roman yoke violently. However here they preferred such an individual to Jesus who had not actively opposed Rome but whom they regarded as a threat to their security. The irony of their decision is obvious to the reader and must also have been obvious to Pilate. Evidently Barabbas had a popular following among the people, as Jesus did, but for different reasons.

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[585]Blum, p. 338.

The release of a proven enemy of Rome, which John did not record, showed Pilate's poor judgment. This decision would not have stood him in good stead with his superiors. Evidently it was the pressure of the Jewish mob that encouraged him to act against his own as well as Jesus' interests.

4. The sentencing of Jesus 19:1-16 (cf. Matt. 27:22-26; Mark 15:12-15; Luke 23:20-25)

There is quite a bit of unique material in this pericope. This includes the details of the Roman soldiers' abuse of Jesus (vv. 1-5) and the situation that Pilate's learning that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God instigated (vv. 7-14). John omitted Pilate's washing of his hands (Matt. 27:24) and the Jews' taking the responsibility for Jesus' death (Matt. 27:25). He also did not mention the release of Barabbas (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24-25) and Jesus' most severe scourging (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

19:1 Pilate incorrectly hoped that if He flogged (Gr. *emastigosen*) Jesus this would satisfy the Jews (cf. vv. 4-6; Luke 23:16). Perhaps he thought that this action would increase popular support for Jesus against the chief priests, and then Pilate could release Him.

> "From him [John] we learn that Jesus was not scourged in order to be crucified but in order to escape crucifixion."[586]

There were three forms of flogging that the Romans administered. The lightest of these, the *fustigatio*, was a light beating that only hooligans experienced. The second, the *flagellatio*, was a severe beating that criminals who were guilty of more serious crimes received. The third, the *verberatio*, was the most brutal. The worst criminals including those sentenced to crucifixion underwent it.[587] Evidently Jesus received the first or second of these beatings at this time, namely, before His sentencing. He received the third type after His sentencing (v. 16; cf. Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

19:2-3 The crown of thorns that the Roman soldiers wove and placed on Jesus' head probably came from a local date palm tree.[588] Some Roman coins pictured various emperors wearing such crowns that appeared to radiate glory from their heads.[589] However the palm fronds when turned inward instead of outward on such crowns proved to be painful spikes. Perhaps John wanted his readers to connect these thorns with the symbol of the consequences of sin (Gen. 3:18).

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[586]Lenski, p. 1243.
[587]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 597.
[588]H. St. J. Hart, "The Crown of Thorns in John 19, 2-5," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1952):71-74.
[589]The article cited above contains photographs of such radiate crowns and palm thorns (plate 2).

Likewise the reddish purple garment, perhaps a trooper's coat, that the soldiers placed over Jesus' shoulders, was an obvious attempt to mock His claim of being a king (cf. Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17). Vassal kings wore purple in Jesus' day.[590] The soldiers also struck Jesus in the face with their open hands (cf. 18:22) contradicting their feigned verbal respect with violent hostility.

The Roman soldiers viewed Jesus as a pretender to the throne of Israel and despised Him as a loser. The Sanhedrin members would have been equally happy to see Jesus ridiculed and beaten for what they considered to be His pretense. The Jews who followed Jesus would have felt outraged and hurt by Jesus' treatment. The believing reader sees the irony in the situation because Jesus was really the King of the Jews (cf. Isa. 50:6; 52:14—53:6).

19:4-5 Jesus received the abuse that John just described inside the Praetorium. Now Pilate brought Him out so the Jews could see their King in His humiliation. First, he announced that he had found Jesus not guilty.

Undoubtedly guffaws of laughter mingled with gasps of horror as the Jews beheld the man who had done them nothing but good. Pilate called the Jewish leaders to behold the man (Lat. *Ecce homo*) whom they feared so much but who was now a beaten and pathetic figure. The governor meant, Look at this poor fellow whom you regard as a rival king! John called his readers to behold Him whom God had predicted would die voluntarily as a sacrifice for humankind's sins as the Lamb of God.

19:6 If Pilate had thought that the sight of Jesus bruised and bleeding would satisfy Israel's rulers, he was wrong. The sight of His blood stirred their appetites for even greater revenge. They cried out repeatedly for the ultimate punishment: crucifixion.

> "Well-meaning preachers have often said that the crowd that on Palm Sunday shouted 'Hosannah!' turned right around and shouted 'Crucify Him!' on Good Friday. However, it was two different crowds. The Palm Sunday crowd came primarily from Galilee where Jesus was very popular. The crowd at Pilate's hall was from Judea and Jerusalem where the religious leaders where very much in control."[591]

Pilate's reply reflected his disgust with the Jewish leaders. It was really an expression of frustration with them. They had brought Jesus to him for a decision, he had given it, and now they refused to accept it. Pilate knew that the Jews could not crucify Jesus without his authorization.

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[590]D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 573.
[591]Wiersbe, 1:381.

19:7 The Jewish leaders' objections to Jesus were both political and religious. Until now, they had been stressing the political implications of Jesus' claims to Pilate. Sensing that they were not going to receive the desired sentence against Jesus with this approach, they shifted their emphasis to the religious claims that Jesus had made.

Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, they admitted, which constituted blasphemy under normal circumstances. The penalty for blasphemy under the Mosaic Law was death (Lev. 24:16). This charge of blaspheming had been the major issue in Jesus' religious trial (cf. Matt. 26:59-66; Mark 14:55-64). John noted a growing conviction among the Jews that Jesus was blaspheming (cf. 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33, 36). Their rejection of Jesus was an intelligent and deliberate denial of the evidence that He was deity, not just a political Messiah.

19:8 John did not say specifically that Pilate was fearful before this verse. It seems obvious, however, that the predicament in which he found himself would have given him reason to fear. He had compromised his position as Rome's representative by considering freeing a convicted insurrectionist named Barabbas. He had displeased the Jewish rulers by failing to hand down a guilty verdict, and he had alienated many of the Jewish people by abusing and ridiculing one of their popular heroes.

The Romans viewed certain people as demigods. They believed that their gods were super-humans. Pilate evidently understood Jesus' claim to being God's Son as a claim to being one of these creatures who wielded supernatural powers. If He had heard much about Jesus, He would have heard that Jesus had powers that the Greeks and Romans attributed to these divine beings. Consequently he may have begun now to fear that Jesus would take some type of revenge on him for the unjust treatment that Pilate had given Him (cf. Matt. 27:19). Jesus' uncommon poise probably unnerved Pilate further.

> "In pagan mythology the Olympian deities frequently consorted with men and women, and their semi-divine offspring, such as Hercules, had appeared on the earth and performed miraculous deeds. Hardened as he was, Pilate feared lest he should offend one of these visitors. . . . If Jesus really was a supernatural being, Pilate did not wish to be responsible for mistreating him. Divine judgment would certainly be the inevitable consequence."[592]

19:9 This explains why Pilate asked Jesus where He had come from. Jesus did not answer him. Jesus' silence undoubtedly increased Pilate's fear. Jesus had earlier refused to answer questions from Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod

[592]Tenney, "John," p. 177.

(Matt. 26:63; 27:14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; cf. Isa. 53:7). He probably did not respond here because Pilate had already showed that he had no real interest in the truth. He only wanted to do what was personally expedient.

Moreover the answer to this question in Jesus' case was quite complex. Pilate had shown little patience with Jesus' explanation about His otherworldly kingdom. He would hardly have been more receptive to what Jesus might say about His otherworldly origin. The decision Pilate faced was clear-cut. Should he release this innocent man or not? The question of Jesus' origin was irrelevant.

19:10 Pilate did not appreciate Jesus' silence and the superior attitude that it implied. Consequently Pilate threatened Him by reminding Him of his power (Gr. *exousia*) to take or spare Jesus' life.

19:11 Jesus reminded the bullying governor that there was a higher authority than his. Pilate only had authority because God had given it to him (cf. Rom. 13:1). Apparently the authority over him that came to Pilate's mind was Caesar. He immediately sought to set this just man free and thereby avoid trouble with the Emperor over a breach of justice (v. 12).

> "Typical of biblical compatibilism, even the worst evil cannot escape the outer boundaries of God's sovereignty—yet God's sovereignty never mitigates the responsibility and guilt of moral agents who operate under divine sovereignty, while their voluntary decisions and their evil rebellion never render God utterly contingent (*e.g.* Gn. 50:19-20; Is. 5:10ff.; Acts 4:27-28)"[593]

Who did Jesus have in mind when He spoke of the one who had handed Him over to Pilate? Some interpreters believe that Jesus meant Caiaphas.[594] This seems most probable since it was Caiaphas who had sent Jesus bound to Pilate (18:28). Another possibility is Judas Iscariot (cf. 6:71; 13:21; 18:2). However, Judas did not hand Jesus over directly to Pilate but to the Jewish authorities. Obviously Jesus did not mean that God was responsible since He viewed the act of handing Him over as a culpable sin. Satan might be in view, but Jesus was apparently speaking of another human being. The Jewish rulers do not qualify because Jesus spoke of one other person delivering Him to Pilate.

Both Pilate and Caiaphas were guilty because they treated Jesus as they did. However, Caiaphas was guilty of a worse sin since Caiaphas had received greater power from God than Pilate had. God had given Caiaphas

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[593]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 600.

[594]Morris, p. 705; Blum, p. 338; Tenney, "John," p. 177; Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 601-2.

the authority to lead God's people as Israel's high priest. Pilate had only received power (Gr. *exousia*) to govern politically. Specifically Jesus seems to have been referring to Pilate's power to judge Him. Thus the reason for the greater sin of Caiaphas was his abuse of the greater privilege and power that God had given him.

19:12 Jesus' reminder of the authority over Pilate moved the governor to press for Jesus' release. However the Jewish leaders reminded Pilate that anyone who set someone who claimed to be a king free would not receive Tiberius Caesar's approval. They placed Pilate on the horns of a dilemma. It seemed that whatever decision he made he could get into trouble with Caesar. The solution to Pilate's problem, of course, was to do what was right, but Pilate was too much a man of the world to settle for that. He wanted to assure his own future with his boss. He cared less about his relationship with God.

The title "friend of Caesar" (Lat. *amicus Caesaris*) later became an official designation of an intimate friend of the emperor. At the time of Jesus' trial, it was probably at least a semi-technical term that denoted the same thing. Pilate had been the protégé of Aelius Sejanus, a highly influential prefect in Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote, "The closer a man is with Sejanus, the stronger his claim to the emperor's friendship."[595] Thus it is possible that the Jewish leaders were implying that if word of Jesus' release reached Tiberius, Pilate would lose his privileged relationship with the emperor. Bad reports about Pilate had already arrived in Rome, and another one might end his career and possibly his life.[596]

The Jewish leaders presented themselves as loyal subjects of Caesar, which was far from the truth. However ironically they were slaves of Rome and of sin (cf. 8:33-34). They appeared to be a greater threat to Pilate and to Rome than Jesus was.

19:13 It was evidently the "friend of Caesar" threat that moved Pilate to decide to execute Jesus. Again self-interest rather than commitment to justice determined his decision (cf. v. 1). He brought Jesus out where the Jews could see Him again and took his seat for Jesus' formal sentencing.

The judgment seat (Gr. *bema*, cf. 2 Cor. 5:10) was the place where a powerful ruler pronounced his official verdicts in Roman culture.

Pilate had his chair of judgment placed on a piece of courtyard called "the pavement" (Gr. *lithostrotos*). Archaeologists have unearthed what many of them believe was this site in the area of the Antonia Fortress. Some of the pavement stones in this approximately 3,000 square foot area have

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[595]Tacitus, *Annals* 6:8.

[596]Cf. Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 602, 607.

markings on them that indicate that soldiers played games there.[597] John gave the Aramaic (popular Hebrew) name of "the pavement" as *gabbatha* meaning "height" or probably "open space." He may have done so because it may have been a site in Jerusalem that was well-known to his Gentile readers by its Aramaic name when he wrote.

The irony of the scene again stands out. Here was a corrupt Roman official sitting in judgment on the Person into whose hands God the Father had committed all judgment (cf. 5:22).

19:14 John has appeared to many readers of his Gospel to be contradicting the Synoptics and his own account of Jesus' observance of the Passover meal with His disciples (cf. 13:1, 27). However the phrase "the day of preparation" normally described the day before the Sabbath.[598] The day in view then would be Friday. Likewise "the Passover" can refer to the whole eight-day feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread as well as the Passover day (cf. 18:28; Luke 22:1).[599] The day of preparation for the Passover, therefore, evidently refers to the Friday of the eight-day feast. This harmonizes with the other chronological references to the Passion Week.

Why did John make this chronological reference here? Apparently he did so to encourage the reader to connect Jesus with the Passover lamb. Secondarily, this reference helps to explain why the Jews wanted the body of Jesus removed from the cross prematurely (vv. 31-37). It was the day before the Sabbath, and a special Sabbath at that, since it fell during Passover week.[600]

Mark wrote that the soldiers placed Jesus on the cross "about the third hour" (i.e., 9:00 a.m., Mark 15:25). Here John wrote that Pilate sentenced Jesus about "the sixth hour." Obviously Jesus' sentencing preceded His crucifixion. What is the solution to this apparent contradiction?

One explanation is that John used the Roman method of reckoning time whereas Mark and the other Synoptic writers used the Jewish method.[601] In the Roman method, the sixth hour would be 6:00 a.m. The problem with this view is that apparently this Roman system of reckoning time was not common. The only documentary evidence that the Romans used it

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[597]*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "*Gabbatha*," by D. J. Wieand, 2:373.

[598]C. C. Torrey, "The Date of the Crucifixion According to the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50:4 (1931):241; A. J. B. Higgins, "The Origins of the Eucharist," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55):206-8; Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 1:343; Hoehner, p. 70.

[599]Cf. Josephus, 14:2:1; 17:9:3.

[600]A similar early reference to a Sabbath followed by a later explanation of the significance of that reference is observable in 5:9 and 16-18.

[601]E.g., Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:324-26; Tasker, p. 209.

appears in a few legal documents.[602] Nevertheless this seems to be the best explanation. Another explanation is that a scribe miscopied the Greek numerals and inadvertently substituted "six" for "three."[603] However there is no manuscript evidence to support this theory. A third view is that both evangelists intended only approximate time references and did not expect their readers to be too fussy about the differences.[604] Nevertheless time references as well as other factual statements are usually capable of harmonization in the Bible. A high view of inspiration has led most conservative interpreters to conclude that Mark and John meant just what they said. A fourth view is that the Synoptic writers used a Galilean method of reckoning time that began the day with sunrise while John used a Judean method that began it with sunset.[605] However according to this scheme John's sixth hour would have been about midnight.

Before passing sentence on Jesus, Pilate presented Him to the Jews as though this was a mock coronation ceremony. He knew that the Jews did not acknowledge Caesar as their king even though they had just professed to do so (v. 12). His announcement was therefore an expression of contempt for both Jesus and the Jews. Ironically Jesus was their King. Pilate spoke more truly than he knew.

19:15 The Jewish mob led by their leaders shouted their rejection of their King. They went farther than that and called for His crucifixion. They also hypocritically professed their allegiance to Caesar as their only king (Gr. *basilea*). This was going way beyond merely rejecting Jesus. They were now repudiating Israel's messianic hope, including the messianic kingdom, and rejecting Yahweh's sovereignty over their nation (cf. Judg. 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:7). The chief priests probably went this far to encourage Pilate to grant their request and to crucify Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:25).

The Jewish hierarchy had accused Jesus of blaspheming, but now these men were guilty of blasphemy themselves (cf. 1:11). Such firm rejection helps us understand why God turned from Israel temporarily to continue His dealings with humankind primarily through the church (cf. Rom. 9—11).

> "On this occasion they spoke in terms of cynical expediency. But they expressed the real truth. Their lives showed that they gave no homage to God."[606]

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[602]Morris, p. 708.
[603]Barrett, p. 545.
[604]Carson, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 605; Tenney, "John," p. 178; Morris, pp. 708-9; *A Dictionary of the Bible*, "Numbers, Hours, Years, and Dates," by W. M. Ramsay, extra volume:479.
[605]Hoehner, pp. 77-90.
[606]Morris, p. 710.

19:16 Pilate's action constituted his sentence against Jesus. Evidently John meant that Pilate handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to satisfy the demands of the Jews. He omitted any reference to the severe flogging (the *verberatio*) that the Roman soldiers then gave Jesus as preliminary punishment before His crucifixion (cf. Matt. 27:27-30; Mark 15:15-19).

> "He was slapped in the face before Annas (John 18:22), and spat on and beaten before Caiaphas and the council (Matt. 26:67). Pilate scourged Him and the soldiers smote Him (John 19:1-3); and before they led Him to Calvary, the soldiers mocked Him and beat Him with a rod (Mark 15:19). How much He suffered for us!"[607]

The NASB and NIV translators divided the material in verses 16 and 17 differently, but the content is the same.

In his account of Jesus' civil trial, John stressed the divine kingship of Jesus and the Jews' rejection of Him. The Gentiles also rejected Him in the person of their leader, Pilate.

> "From the human standpoint, the trial of Jesus was the greatest crime and tragedy in history. From the divine viewpoint, it was the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of the will of God. The fact that God had planned all of this did not absolve the participants of their responsibility. In fact, at Pentecost, Peter put both ideas together in one statement! (Acts 2:23)"[608]

D. JESUS' CRUCIFIXION 19:17-30

The unique material in John's account of Jesus' crucifixion includes the controversy about the superscription over Jesus' cross (vv. 19-22) and several references to the fulfillment of prophecy (vv. 24, 28-29; cf. vv. 36-37). John was also the only Gospel writer to record Jesus' care for His mother (vv. 25-27) and His sixth cry before His death (v. 30).

1. Jesus' journey to Golgotha 19:17 (cf. Matt. 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-33a)

John omitted the detail that Simon carried Jesus' cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26), which might have detracted from John's presentation of Jesus as the divine Savior. He also made no reference to Jesus' sufferings on the way to Calvary that Luke, who had a special interest in Jesus' humanity, stressed (Luke 23:27-32).

The soldiers led Jesus from Pilate's judgment seat to Golgotha. Normally an execution squad consisted of four legionnaires plus a centurion (cf. v. 23).[609] John did not comment

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[607]Wiersbe, 1:379.
[608]Ibid., 1:381.
[609]Tenney, "John," p. 180.

on Jesus' painful journey to the cross, probably because He wanted to stress His deity. He did mention the fact that Jesus bore His own cross, however, probably for the same reason (cf. Gen. 22:6; Heb. 13:11-13).

Criminals condemned to crucifixion, such as Jesus, normally carried all or only the crosspiece (Lat. *patibulum*) of their cross.[610] This was common procedure in crucifixions, as John's original readers undoubtedly knew.

All the Gospel writers identified the place of Jesus' crucifixion as "the place of the skull." All but Luke gave its Aramaic title, namely, *golgolta* ("skull") the transliteration of which is Golgotha.[611] Why the place bore this name remains a mystery. Most modern scholars believe that the site was the traditional one over which the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now stands. There is little support for the fairly recent suggestion that Gordon's Calvary was the correct location. The idea that Golgotha was on a hill came more from hymns than from Scripture.

2. The men crucified with Jesus 19:18 (cf. Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:33b)

The horrors and shame of crucifixion are difficult for people who have grown up hearing pleas against "cruel and unusual punishment" to appreciate. It was a deliberately long and painful form of death that humiliated the sufferer as well as torturing him. Its purpose was to discourage others from rebelling against Rome, the main reason for crucifixion. John's original readers would have been only too familiar with it, which probably accounts for his lack of elaboration.

> "It was so brutal that no Roman citizen could be crucifed [*sic*] without the sanction of the Emperor. Stripped naked and beaten to pulpy weakness . . ., the victim could hang in the hot sun for hours, even days. To breathe, it was necessary to push with the legs and pull with the arms to keep the chest cavity open and functioning. Terrible muscle spasm [*sic*] wracked the entire body; but since collapse meant asphyxiation, the strain went on and on. This is also why the *sedecula* [a piece of wood that served as a small seat in some cases] . . . prolonged life and agony: it partially supported the body's weight, and therefore encouraged the victim to fight on."[612]

> "Crucifixion was probably the most diabolical form of death ever invented."[613]

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[610]Morris, p. 711.

[611]"Calvary" is the transliteration of the Latin *calvaria* meaning "place of a skull."

[612]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 610. Cf. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion.*

[613]Tenney, "John," p. 181. There is an extended description of crucifixion on this page and the preceding one.

> "Popular piety, both Protestant and Catholic, has often emphasized the sufferings of Jesus; it has reflected on what happened and has dwelt on the anguish the Savior suffered. None of the Gospels does this. The Evangelists record the fact and let it go at that. The death of Jesus for sinners was their concern. They make no attempt to play on the heartstrings of their readers."[614]

All the Gospel writers mentioned the men crucified with Jesus (Matt. 27:38, 44; Mark 15:27, 32; Luke 23:32-33, 39-43). They were evidently robbers (Gr. *lestai*) and terrorists, such as Barabbas (cf. 18:40). John may have mentioned them to remind his readers of the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12.[615] Their mention also prepares the reader to understand John's description of the breaking of their legs but not Jesus' legs (vv. 32-33).

3. The inscription over Jesus' cross 19:19-22 (cf. Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38)

John evidently included the controversy about the inscription over Jesus' cross because it underlines the Jews' deliberate and conscious repudiation of and the true identity of God's Son.

19:19-20 Normally the judge of a person sentenced to crucifixion would order that a placard (Lat. *titulus*) identifying his crime would accompany him to the place of his execution. This would inform onlookers who the criminal was and why he was suffering such a terrible fate as he passed them. The soldiers would then affix the sign to the criminal's cross for the same purpose.[616]

The Gospels all give a slightly different inscription. Perhaps what Pilate really wrote was the sum of all these variations, and the Gospel writers each just quoted a part of the whole. Another possibility is that the Gospel writers may not have been translating the same language since Pilate ordered the charge written in three different languages. Aramaic (popular Hebrew) was the common language spoken by the Jews in Palestine. Latin was the official language that the Romans, including the soldiers, spoke. Greek was the *lingua franca* of the empire. Pilate continued to insult the Jewish hierarchy for forcing his hand by identifying Jesus this way for all to read. However, his trilingual notice was God's sovereign way of declaring to the whole world who His Son really was, the Jewish king whose rule is universal.

Clearly Pilate regarded Jesus as guilty of sedition, the political charge that the Jews had brought against Him rather than the religious charge of being the Son of God (18:33). By identifying Jesus as the Jews' king and then crucifying Him, Pilate was boasting Rome's superiority over the Jews and flaunting its authority.

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[614]Morris, p. 713.
[615]However see D. J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, pp. 154-55.
[616]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 610.

19:21-22 The chief priests' emendation of the title would have robbed Pilate of this last chance to humiliate the Jews. He had already conceded once to their request, but he refused to give them the satisfaction of robbing him of this revenge. Ironically what Pilate left stand was the exact truth. He had unwittingly become God's herald of His redemptive purpose.

4. The distribution of Jesus' garments 19:23-24 (Matt. 27:35-36; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34)

Normally the executioners of a criminal received his clothes following his death.[617] John spoke of the soldiers dividing Jesus' garments (plural). The Greek word translated "garments" is *himatia*. Usually when this word occurs in the singular it refers to the outer robe that most Jews wore. Here, because he used the plural, John evidently had in mind all of Jesus' outer garments including His robe, sandals, belt, and head covering. This would have resulted in each of the four soldiers receiving one piece of clothing. The tunic (Gr. *chiton*) that remained was a garment worn next to the skin, but it was not what we would think of as underwear. Since Jesus' tunic had been woven as one piece, the soldiers decided to cast lots to determine who would get it.

John alone among the evangelists noted that this procedure was another fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:18). The poetic parallelism in the prophecy found literal fulfillment in this event. Men continued to carry out God's foreordained plan of salvation though unconsciously. This is another tribute to God's sovereignty. Even as Jesus' humiliation reached its depths, as enemies took even His clothes from Him, the Father controlled His destiny.

> "That Jesus died naked was part of the shame which He bore for our sins. At the same time He is the last Adam who provides clothes of righteousness for sinners."[618]

5. Jesus' provision for His mother 19:25-27

John is the only evangelist who recorded this incident.

19:25 The four women standing nearby contrast with the four soldiers.[619] While the soldiers behaved callously and profited immediately from Jesus' death, the women waited faithfully and patiently for what God would do. It was apparently common for friends and relatives, as well as enemies, to stand at some distance around the crosses of crucified criminals.[620] Only John mentioned that Jesus' mother was present at His crucifixion.

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[617]Tenney, "John," p. 181.
[618]Blum, p. 339.
[619]Morris, p. 717, assumed that the four women were believers and the four soldiers were unbelievers.
[620]E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, pp. 111, 179, n. 1.

Some Women Who Observed the Crucifixion		
Matthew 27:56	**Mark 15:40**	**John 19:25**
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
		Jesus' mother (Mary)
Mary the mother of James and Joseph =	Mary the mother of James the less and Joses =	Mary the wife of Clopas
Mother of Zebedee's sons =	Salome =	Jesus' mother's sister

It is interesting that John did not identify his own mother by name or as the mother of Zebedee's sons.[621] He evidently wanted to play down his mother's identity as well as his own since he did not mention himself directly in this Gospel either. By referring to his mother as the sister of Jesus' mother, John prepared for Jesus' action in verses 26-27. John was Jesus' cousin on his mother's side. As such, he was a logical person to assume responsibility for Mary's welfare. Evidently Jesus' physical half-brothers did not become believers until after His resurrection.

19:26-27 Jesus addressed his mother by saying, "Dear woman" (Gr. *gynai*, cf. 2:4). This was an affectionate and respectful way of speaking to her. Mary's grief must have been very great (cf. 2:38). Even as He hung dying an excruciatingly painful death, Jesus compassionately made provision for his mother. The language Jesus used was legal and quite similar to the terms used commonly in adoption proceedings.[622] His action indicates that He was the person responsible for His mother, implying that Joseph was no longer on the scene and that He was her eldest son. Most interpreters assume that Joseph had died by now. Jesus' act also placed Mary under John's authority, a position that the Roman Catholic Church has found very uncomfortable in view of its doctrine of Mary's supremacy.

This was Jesus' third recorded saying from the cross.

Jesus' Words on the Cross				
	Matthew	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**
"Father, forgive them."			23:34	
"Today you shall be with me in paradise."			23:43	
"Woman, behold your son," and "Behold, your mother."				19:26-27

[621]John never named himself or his brother, James, or any other member of his family.
[622]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 616.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"	27:46	15:34		
"I thirst."				19:28
"It is finished."				19:30
"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."	27:50		23:46	

6. The death of Jesus 19:28-30 (cf. Matt. 27:48-50; Mark 15:36-37; Luke 23:46)

John did not mention the darkness that came over the land as the other evangelists did (cf. Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45). This is noteworthy in view of John's interest in the light and darkness motif. Perhaps he did not want to detract attention from the person of Jesus. He also omitted Jesus' words that indicated that the Father had withdrawn from Him (cf. Matt. 27:46-47; Mark 15:34-35). This is understandable since throughout this Gospel John stressed the Son's essential unity with the Father. The Father's temporary separation from the Son in judgment did not vitiate their essential unity.

19:28 All things necessary for the fulfillment of Scripture that predicted the provision of redemption were almost accomplished (Gr. *teleiothe*). John was speaking proleptically again (cf. 12:23; 17:1, 4). Obviously Jesus still had to die. As the moment of His death drew nearer, Jesus expressed His thirst. This showed His true humanity. A man in Jesus' physical condition hung up under a Near Eastern sun would have also experienced torture by dehydration. It is paradoxical that the Water of Life should confess thirst (cf. 4:4:14; 7:38-39). The solution obviously is that Jesus had referred to Himself as the source of spiritual rather than physical water.

> "One may no more assume that John's emphasis on the cross as the exaltation of Jesus excludes his desolation of spirit than his emphasis on the deity of the Son excludes the Son's true humanity."[623]

The Scripture that spoke of Messiah's thirst may be Psalm 22:15 (cf. v. 24) and or Psalm 69:21 (cf. 2:17; 15:25). Jesus' mention of His thirst resulted in the soldier callously giving Him vinegar to drink, which Psalm 69:21 mentioned. Thus John stressed that Jesus' death not only fulfilled God's will but also prophetic Scripture.

19:29 Evidently it was customary to offer wine vinegar (Gr. *oxos*) to the victims of crucifixion since John described the jar of it as "standing there" or "set there." Only John mentioned that the soldiers put the sponge soaked with

[623]Beasley-Murray, p. 351.

wine vinegar on a branch of hyssop that they extended to Jesus. Hyssop was readily available since it grew out of many rocky crevices as a weed. The hyssop reference may simply be a detail in the testimony of an eyewitness to Jesus' crucifixion. However, it may hint at Jesus being the Lamb of God since the Jews used hyssop to sprinkle blood on their doorposts and lintels at Passover (cf. Exod. 12:22; 1 Cor. 5:7). The sponge was evidently small enough so Jesus could put at least some of it in His mouth. The hyssop branch was obviously strong enough to remain erect under the sponge's weight. Jesus was probably not extremely high above ground level as He hung on the cross, many famous paintings notwithstanding (cf. 3:14).

19:30 Jesus' reception of the sour wine did not relieve His pain though it did moisten his parched throat so He could speak. It also fulfilled Scripture (Ps. 69:21).

> "The 'vinegar' was probably the cheap sour wine the legionnaires drank. Though it provided some refreshment, it was a strong astringent that could contract the throat muscles and prevent the condemned victim from crying out with pain.[624]

Nevertheless Jesus cried out with a loud voice (Mark 15:37), "It is finished" (Gr. *tetelestai*). He probably shouted with a cry of victory. The verb *teleo* denotes the completion of a task. Jesus was not just announcing that He was about to die. He was also declaring proleptically that He had fulfilled God's will for Him (cf. 17:4). The use of the perfect tense here signifies proleptically that Jesus had finished His work of providing redemption completely and that it presently stands finished. Nothing more needed or needs doing. This finished work of Jesus Christ is the basis for our salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

> "Papyri receipts for taxes have been recovered with the word *tetelestai* written across them, meaning 'paid in full.'"[625]

Having thus spoken Jesus handed over (Gr. *paredoken*) His spirit to His Father (cf. Luke 23:46) and bowed His head in peaceful death. Normally victims of crucifixion experienced the gradual ebbing away of life, and then their heads would slump forward. All the evangelists presented Jesus as laying down His life of His own accord. No one took it from Him (cf. 10:10, 14, 17-18). He did this in harmony with His Father's will (cf. 8:29; 14:31).

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[624]Tenney, "John," p. 184.
[625]Blum, p. 340.

John did not record Jesus' final utterance from the cross (Luke 23:46). He evidently ended his account of Jesus' death as he did to stress the completion of the work of redemption that Jesus' sixth saying expressed. John stressed Jesus' divine sovereign control over His own destiny in submission to His Father's will.

E. THE TREATMENT OF JESUS' BODY 19:31-42

John recorded two incidents that happened following Jesus' death and before His resurrection. They both deal with the treatment that His dead body received.

1. The removal of Jesus' body from the cross 19:31-37

This pericope is unique to the fourth Gospel.

19:31 The "day of preparation" was Friday, the day before the Sabbath (Saturday, cf. v. 14; Mark 15:42). The Jews considered sundown the beginning of a new day. In this case the new day was a Sabbath. This Sabbath was an extra special day because it fell during Passover week. The Jews wanted to get the bodies down off their crosses so they would not defile the land. The Mosaic Law instructed the Jews to allow no one to remain hanging on a gibbet overnight because this would defile the land. Such a person was under God's curse (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; Josh. 8:29). To allow someone to remain overnight on a Sabbath would be especially offensive.

Normally the Romans left victims of crucifixion hanging until they died, which sometimes took several days. Then they would leave their corpses on their crosses until the birds had picked the flesh off them. If they had to hasten their deaths for some reason, they would smash their legs with an iron mallet. This prevented the victims from using their legs to push themselves up to keep their chest cavities open allowing them to breathe. Death by asphyxiation, loss of blood, and shock would follow soon.[626] Archaeologists have found the remains of a victim of crucifixion with his legs smashed in Israel.[627]

19:32-33 The Roman soldiers therefore broke the legs of the two terrorists whom they had crucified with Jesus because they were still alive. They did not break Jesus' legs since He was already dead.

19:34 What led the soldier to pierce Jesus' side with his spear (Gr. *longche*) is unclear and unimportant. Perhaps it was just another senseless act of brutality, or he may have wanted to see if he could get some reaction from Jesus.

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[626]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 622.

[627]N. Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970):38-59.

It is also unclear why the wound produced a sudden flow of blood and water (cf. 1 John 5:6). Probably the spear pierced Jesus' heart and its surrounding pericardial sac that contains water. The fluids could have drained out as John described if the spear had entered the body near the bottom of the chest cavity.[628] Apparently the soldier pierced Jesus' side before His blood congealed into a solid. This eyewitness testimony stresses the fact that Jesus really did die and that He was a genuine man (cf. 1:14).

By the end of the first century when John wrote this Gospel, Docetism and Gnosticism were on the rise. Both of these heresies denied that Jesus was a real man. Docetists claimed that Jesus only seemed (Gr. *dokeo*, "to seem," therefore the name "Docetist") to be fully human. Muslims take a similar view of Jesus.[629]

Some interpreters have suspected that John was alluding to the Lord's Supper and baptism when he mentioned this blood and water.[630] However, there are no clues in the text that this was John's intention. Others have seen the blood and water as symbolic of the life and cleansing that metaphorically flow from Jesus' death.[631] Again it would be hard to prove or disprove that this was in John's mind from what he wrote. Several hymn writers have, however, developed this symbolism.[632] Other non-literal interpretations see the water as an allusion to Exodus 17:6.[633] Still others view it as referring to the Holy Spirit. However these are at best interpretations that rest on similarities.

19:35 Lest the reader miss the point of verse 34, John explained that he had personally witnessed what he narrated and that he was not lying. Furthermore the purpose of his reliable eyewitness testimony was that his readers might believe what he wrote and what it meant, namely, that Jesus was God's Son (cf. 20:30-31; 21:24).

Some commentators suggested that the eyewitness was someone different from John. Suggestions range from the soldier who pierced Jesus' side, to an unknown eyewitness whom John did not identify, to an unknown editor, to Jesus, and to God the Father. However the most reasonable

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[628]See A. F. Sava, "The Wound in the Side of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19 (1957):343-46.

[629]*Koran*, Sura 4:156. Bruce, p. 382, n. 38, noted that Muhammed's knowledge of Christianity came through docetic sources.

[630]E.g., Brown, 2:946-53; cf. Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:328-33.

[631]E.g., Dodd, p. 428; cf. Morris, p. 725.

[632]For example, Fanny Crosby wrote, "Jesus, keep me near the cross. There a precious fountain, free to all, a healing stream, flows from Calv'ry's mountain."

[633]Augustus Toplady wrote, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hid myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood, from they riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power." I do not mean to denigrate these worthy hymns but to point out that they are an extention of the teaching of this passage.

solution is to identify John himself as the eyewitness in view of the context and the parallel statements that follow (20:30-31; 21:24; cf. 1:14; 12:23).

19:36-37 "These things" refer to the facts that the soldiers did not break Jesus' bones but did pierce His side. Here were two more fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy.

In verse 36, John could have had any of three passages in mind: Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and or Psalm 34:20. The first two specify that the Israelites were not to break the bones of their Passover lambs. Elsewhere Paul and Peter described Jesus as the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19), and this figure is prominent in John's Gospel as well (cf. 1:36; et al.). Psalm 34:20 describes the righteous man by saying that God would not allow anyone to break his bones (cf. Luke 23:47). The first passage seems best since its fulfillment was more literal, though admittedly it involves the Passover typology.

This quotation has spawned the theory that Jesus died at the same time the Jews were slaying their Passover lambs. This view seems untenable since all the evangelists presented the Last Supper as a Passover meal. There have been several attempts to harmonize these views and to explain how there could have been two Passovers on successive days.[634] None of these explanations is convincing to me. It seems better to view the Passover meal as happening on Thursday evening, Thursday being the fourteenth of Nisan, which was the normal day for the Passover. Even though Jesus' death fulfilled the Passover typology it apparently did not coincide exactly with the Jews' sacrifice of their lambs for their Passover meals. That happened the afternoon before Jesus died.

Wednesday		**Thursday**		**Friday**
April 1	Midnight 9:00 a.m. Noon 3:00 p.m.	**April 2** The Jews slew their Passover lambs	Midnight 9:00 a.m. Noon 3:00 p.m.	**April 3** Jesus was crucified Jesus died
14 Nisan	6:00 p.m. Midnight	**15 Nisan** The Jews ate their Pass-over lambs	6:00 p.m. Midnight	**16 Nisan**

[634]See Hoehner, pp. 81-90.

In verse 37, the prophecy in view is clearly the one in Zechariah 12:10 (cf. Rev. 1:7). Jesus quoted this verse in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:30). There He stressed a different part of it. The piercing of God's coming Shepherd happened when Jesus died on the cross (cf. 10:11). The Gentile nations will look on Him whom they have pierced when He returns at His second coming (cf. Rev. 1:7). Both Jews and Gentiles were responsible for Jesus' death.

2. The burial of Jesus 19:38-42 (cf.Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54)

19:38 All four evangelists mentioned Joseph of Arimathea but only with Jesus' burial. The Synoptics tell us that he was a God-fearing rich member of the Sanhedrin who was a follower of Jesus and who had not voted to condemn Jesus. Only John identified him as a secret disciple who feared the Jews, namely, the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Jesus had warned His disciples about trying to hide their allegiance to Him (12:42-43). Finally Joseph "broke his cover" by courageously requesting Jesus' body from Pilate.

Normally the Romans placed the bodies of crucified offenders, whose bodies they did not leave to rot on their crosses, in a cemetery for criminals outside the city.[635] Family members could not claim the bodies of people who had undergone crucifixion as punishment for sedition.[636] Thus Jesus' corpse would have ended up in the grave of a common criminal but for Joseph's intervention. Pilate probably granted his request for Jesus' body because he realized that Joseph wanted to give Jesus' an honorable burial. That would have humiliated the Jews further.

Joseph's courageous act doubtless alienated him from many of his fellow Sanhedrin members. We do not know what the ultimate consequences of his action were for him. Evidently it was Jesus' death that made him face up to his responsibility to take his stand for Jesus.

19:39 Only John mentioned that Nicodemus also played a part in burying Jesus (cf. 3:1-15). He was also probably a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. 3:1). He, too, was now taking a more visible position as a disciple of Jesus (cf. 7:50-52). Nicodemus brought about 65 pounds (100 *litrai*, cf. 12:3) of spices with which to prepare Jesus' body for burial. This was a large quantity and reflected Nicodemus' great respect for Jesus. Evidently these two wealthy rulers decided to honor Jesus together. They divided their responsibilities, with Joseph securing Pilate's permission and Nicodemus preparing the spices.

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[635]Josephus, 5:1:14.

[636]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 629.

Myrrh was a fragrant resin that the Jews turned into powder and mixed with aloes, which was powdered sandalwood.[637] The purpose of covering a corpse with this aromatic powder was to dry it out and to lessen the foul odor that putrefaction caused.

19:40 The burial custom of the Jews was to place the corpse on a long sheet with the feet at one end. They would then fold the cloth over the head and back down to the feet, which they would tie together. They would also tie the arms to the body with strips of cloth. Normally a separate cloth covered the face.[638] John's interest was not in the manner of the burial as much as the honor that Joseph and Nicodemus bestowed on Jesus by burying Him in linen cloth (Gr. *othonia*). Their work had to be hasty because sunset was approaching quickly and all work had to cease when the Sabbath (Saturday) began.

The NIV translation of *othonia* as "strips of cloth" has seemingly contradicted the view that Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus in a single piece of cloth, which the Synoptics suggest (Matt. 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53).[639] However this Greek word does not necessarily mean narrow strips of cloth. It can describe one or more large pieces of cloth.[640] The burial customs of the Jews are still obscure enough that it is unwise to insist dogmatically that Jesus had only one shroud covering Him.[641]

19:41 John is the only evangelist who recorded that there was a garden and an unused new tomb near the place of Jesus' crucifixion. The tomb was probably an artificial cave in the limestone, many examples of which are observable in Palestine. Matthew noted that the garden and its tomb belonged to Joseph (Matt. 27:60). John's mention of the garden prepares for his reference later to a gardener (20:15). His reference to the tomb being new and unused prepares for the Resurrection in which no other corpse was in the tomb (20:8, 12).

> "The fall of the first Adam took place in a garden; and it was in a garden that the second Adam redeemed mankind from the consequences of Adam's transgression."[642]

The site was probably not the "Garden Tomb" near Gordon's Calvary since Jesus' tomb would have been closer to the crucifixion site that the

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[637]Ibid., p. 630.
[638]See my note at 11:44.
[639]Morris, p. 730, believed the custom was to wrap the body in long, bandage-like strips rather than in a shroud.
[640]Brown, 2:942.
[641]The shroud of Turin is such a piece of cloth, though whether it was the real burial shroud of Jesus is the subject of considerable debate.
[642]Tasker, p. 219.

Church of the Holy Sepulcher now covers. Jesus' tomb could have been quite similar in appearance to this "Garden Tomb," however.

19:42 John implied that the burial of Jesus was hasty. Mark and Luke presented the same picture by writing that three of the women came to anoint Jesus' corpse, on Sunday morning, with additional spices that they had prepared (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). Joseph and Nicodemus' work had necessarily been swift because the day of preparation before the Sabbath (i.e., Friday) was about to end with sundown.

John did not mention the fact that some of the women visited Jesus' tomb late Friday afternoon (cf. Matt. 27:61-66; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56). He also omitted that Joseph rolled a stone over the mouth of the tomb (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46). What follows in chapter 20 assumes these facts. John did not mention either that Pilate sealed the tomb and posted soldiers to guard it (Matt. 27:62-66).

F. JESUS' RESURRECTION 20:1-29

> "If the Gospel of John were an ordinary biography, there would be no chapter 20. I am an incurable reader of biographies, and I notice that almost all of them conclude with the death and burial of the subject. I have yet to read one that describes the subject's resurrection from the dead! The fact that John continued his account and shared the excitement of the Resurrection miracle is proof that Jesus Christ is not like any other man. He is, indeed, the Son of God."[643]

John viewed Jesus' resurrection as part of His exaltation. Jesus' exaltation would have been incomplete without His resurrection. Because of John's viewpoint I have outlined the Resurrection as part of the passion ministry of Jesus even though in another sense Jesus' passion ended with His death.

> "For John, as for all the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus was the immutable fact upon which their faith was based; and their faith in large part depended on the testimony and transformed behaviour of those who had actually seen the resurrected Jesus. Their Master was not in God's eyes a condemned criminal; the resurrection proved that he was vindicated by God, and therefore none less than the Messiah, the Son of God he claimed to be [cf. 1 Cor. 15:14-17]."[644]

> "In each of the following [resurrection appearances] we will discover a pattern with the following features: (1) The beneficiaries of the appearance are engulfed in a human emotion (Mary, grief; the disciples, fear; and Thomas, doubt). (2) The risen Christ appears to them in the midst of their

[643]Wiersbe, 1:387.

[644]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 631-32.

condition. (3) As a result, their condition is transformed (Mary, mission; the disciples, gladness; Thomas, faith)."[645]

"With Mary, the emphasis is on love; with the ten, the emphasis is on hope; and with Thomas, the emphasis is on faith."[646]

1. The discovery of Peter and John 20:1-9 (cf. Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8)

John omitted the earthquake, the angel rolling away the stone that covered the tomb entrance, and his sitting on the stone (Matt. 28:2-3). He also did not include the appearance of two angels to the women who visited the tomb early Easter morning, before Peter and John did, and the women's reactions (Matt. 28:5-8; Mark 16:5-8; Luke 24:4-8).

20:1 "The first day of the week" was Sunday. It is interesting that all the Gospel writers referred to the day of Jesus' resurrection this way rather than as the third day after His death. The latter description would have connected the Resurrection with Jesus' predictions of it more directly. Perhaps they did this to associate Easter more clearly with a new beginning.[647] John may have mentioned the darkness of the night to associate darkness with Mary's limited understanding then (cf. 13:30).[648] Alternatively this may simply have been a detail that adds credibility to the narrative.

The other evangelists noted that several women came to the tomb.[649]

Women Who Visited the Tomb Easter Morning			
Matthew 28:1	**Mark 16:1**	**Luke 24:10**	**John 20:1**
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
The other Mary =	Mary the mother of James	Mary the mother of James	
	Salome		
		Joanna	
		others	

[645]R. Kysar, *John*, p. 299.
[646]Wiersbe, 1:387.
[647]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 635.
[648]Ibid.
[649]See Zane C. Hodges, "The Women and the Empty Tomb," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):301-9.

Mary Magdalene evidently came first with the other women (cf. v. 2). Another possibility is that she came first and the other women followed shortly, but this seems less likely in view of the other evangelists' descriptions. John wrote that she saw (Gr. *blepei*) the open tomb of Jesus. He implied that she did not enter it. Perhaps John mentioned Mary Magdalene and none of the other women because of the testimony that she gave after she had seen Jesus (v. 18).

20:2 It would have been natural for Mary, and perhaps others of these women, to report the incident to the leading male disciples. The "other disciple" was probably John himself (cf. 13:23; et al.). Mary first assumed that grave robbers had stolen Jesus' body. Evidently robbing graves was not uncommon around Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 28:13-15). Obviously Mary meant that some of Jesus' enemies had stolen His body, but exactly who she thought they may have been remains a mystery. Mary's reference to "the Lord" could not have been as full of meaning as it was after His resurrection appearances. Here Mary perhaps used the title only in great respect.

20:3-4 The detail of John outrunning Peter to the tomb was probably just confirmation of an eyewitness report. It also shows that these disciples had not removed Jesus' body. There is no basis in the text for allegorizing these men and making them stand for the Gentile church and the Jewish church.[650]

20:5 John saw (Gr. *blepei*, cf. v. 1) the linen strips (*ta othonia*, cf. 19:40) that had formerly covered Jesus' body lying in the tomb. If grave robbers had removed the body, they would have undoubtedly taken the expensive cloth with which Joseph and Nicodemus had prepared it for burial. John may have assumed that Jesus' body was still there since the light was bad at that hour. Perhaps John did not enter the tomb because he did not want to violate its sanctity or incur ritual defilement.

20:6-7 When Peter arrived at the tomb, he barged right in, probably because he wanted to know exactly how things stood regardless of the consequences. He also beheld (Gr. *theopei*, beheld intently) the linen burial clothes (Gr. *ta othonia*) but also the cloth that had covered Jesus' face (Gr. *soudarion*, cf. 11:44). Evidently John could not see this from his vantage point. It's distance from the other clothes and the care with which someone had positioned it were unusual. Jesus was obviously not there, but someone had been there. That person had apparently been the resurrected Jesus. A grave robber would not have taken the time to fold the head covering neatly but would have left it lying in a heap. It is not clear whether the head covering lay where Jesus' head had lain. What is clear is that someone had folded it up carefully.

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[650]Bultmann, p. 685.

20:8 Encouraged by Peter's boldness John also proceeded into the tomb. There he saw (Gr. *eiden*, perceived intelligently) this evidence and believed what it implied. He believed that Jesus was alive. In this chapter, John carefully recorded that disciples who saw the resurrected Jesus believed on Him (cf. vv. 16, 20, 25, 29). John did not explain what he believed here, but in the context of this chapter it seems clear that he believed that Jesus was alive (cf. 2:22; 11:25; 16:22). The evidence of Jesus' resurrection convinced John even before he met the risen Jesus. Disciples since John can believe in Him because of this evidence too even though we have not yet seen the risen Jesus (cf. v. 29; 1 John 1:1-4).

The writer did not say that Peter also believed. This omission does not necessarily mean that Peter failed to believe. The writer was simply confessing his own belief, not contrasting it with Peter's reaction. Nevertheless John seems to have understood the significance of the empty tomb and the orderly grave clothes better than Peter did (cf. Luke 24:12). He evidently did not confess his belief to others then (cf. vv. 10-18).

Jesus had passed through the grave clothes and through the rocky tomb. The angel opened the tomb to admit the disciples, not to release Jesus (Matt. 28:2).

20:9 John's faith rested on the evidence that he had seen.[651] Later he and the other disciples would have additional reasons for believing that Jesus had risen, namely, the prophetic Scriptures that the Resurrection fulfilled (e.g., Lev. 23:11; Ps. 16:10-11; 110:1, 4; Isa. 53:11-12; Hos. 6:2; cf. Acts 2:24-31; 1 Cor. 15:3-7). John's faith took a step forward here, but it was not yet as strong as it would be (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 32, 44-47).

> "The empty cross and the empty tomb are God's 'receipts' telling us that the debt has been paid."[652]

2. The discovery of Mary Magdalene 20:10-18 (cf. Mark 16:9-11)

This is the first of four of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances that John included in his Gospel.

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[651]See Zane C. Hodges, "Form-Criticism and the Resurrection Accounts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:496 (October-December 1967):339-48.
[652]Wiersbe, 1:387.

Jesus' Post-resurrection Appearances[653]
Easter morning
to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10-18)
to other women (Matt. 28:9-10)
to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)
Easter afternoon
to two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-32)
Easter evening
to about 12 disciples excluding Thomas (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23)
The following Sunday
to 11 disciples including Thomas (John 20:26-28)
The following 32 days
to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23)
to 500 people including the Eleven at a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6)
to His half-brother James (1 Cor. 15:7)
to His disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:7)
to His disciples on Mount Olivet (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12)

20:10 This is a transitional verse. The NASB joins it to verses 1-9 whereas the NIV connects it with verses 11-18. Since verse 11 begins with "but," it seems natural to view verse 10 as beginning a new paragraph.

The translation "to their homes" implies that Peter and John had permanent residences in Jerusalem. That seems unlikely. The Greek phrase *eis ta idia* literally means "to their own" (cf. 1:11). Since the gender is neuter, John may have meant that these disciples returned to their own friends or temporary lodgings.

20:11 Apparently Mary Magdalene had returned to the empty tomb after she had informed Peter and John about it. Perhaps she returned with them. The other women had evidently departed by then. John presented her as lingering there after Peter and John departed. She was still grieving over the death and now the missing body of Jesus. She had not yet realized what John did. She now peered into the tomb for the second time (cf. Mark 16:5).

[653]It is very difficult to place these appearances in exact chronological order. The New Testament simply does not give enough detailed information to do so. Consequently the major value of this chart is that it places the post-resurrection appearances that the New Testament writers mentioned in general chronological order.

> "I recall Proverbs 8:17—'I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me. . . . Another verse comes to mind—Psalm 30:5, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"[654]

20:12 The Gospel writers did not describe the structure of the interior of the tomb in detail. It is of little importance. It was obviously large enough to accommodate two man-size angels sitting at either end of the place where Jesus' body had lain. The presence and positions of the two angels were of more consequence.[655] Evidently Mary had seen them earlier (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-7). The angels' white apparel distinguished them as angels (cf. Acts 1:10), but Mary apparently did not recognize them as such. She responded to them as she would have responded to human beings, probably because she was in the shock of grief and was weeping (cf. v. 15).

20:13 The angels asked Mary why she was weeping because weeping was inappropriate in view of Jesus' resurrection. However, Mary did not yet comprehend that Jesus had risen. Her answer revealed that she still thought that someone had removed Jesus' body from the tomb. She still doubted the Resurrection in spite of the angels' earlier announcement that Jesus had risen from the dead. That earlier announcement had produced some initial enlightenment and joy (Matt. 28:6, 8; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6, 8). Mary still wanted to mourn over Jesus' body but did not know where it was. Perhaps her inconsistent behavior is more understandable if we remember that many people in that part of the world still express their grief almost uncontrollably.

20:14 Mary's near hysteria could account for her failing to recognize Jesus at first too. She apparently withdrew from the tomb and saw (Gr. *theorei*, cf. v. 6) Jesus standing outside it. She beheld Him attentively, but she did not recognize Him for who He was.

> "The fact that He appeared to Mary rather than to Pilate or Caiaphas or to one of His disciples is significant. That a woman would be the first to see Him is an evidence of Jesus' electing love as well as a mark of the narrative's historicity. No Jewish author in the ancient world would have invented a story with a woman as the first witness to this most important event. Furthermore, Jesus may have introduced Himself to Mary first because she had so earnestly sought Him. She was at the cross while He was

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[654]Wiersbe, 1:389.

[655]It is interesting that cherubim stood at either end of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:17-19).

> dying (John 19:25), and she went to His tomb early on Sunday morning (20:1)."[656]

20:15 Jesus addressed this heartbroken disciple by respectfully calling her "woman" (Gr. *gynai*), as had the angels (v. 13; cf. 2:4; 19:26). He also asked the same question they had asked (v. 13). Jesus' first recorded post-resurrection words were these in which He combined compassion and mild rebuke. He also asked whom she was seeking as preparation for His self-revelation to her. He meant, what type of Messiah did she think Jesus was?

Mary did not answer either of Jesus' questions. Her grief had made her somewhat irrational (cf. 11:21, 32). However there seems to have been something about Jesus' resurrection body that made immediate recognition of Him difficult for many people (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:16; John 21:4; cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-49). Perhaps this was due partially to the terrible beatings that He had received. Instead she asked this apparent gardener for Jesus' body and promised to assume care of it. Her request revealed her devotion to Jesus. She thought that the gardener had removed it for some reason. Her "sir" (Gr. *kyrie*) here obviously was a courteous address, not a confession of faith.

20:16 Mary recognized Jesus when He called her by name (cf. 10:3-4). She responded by calling Him by the name she had undoubtedly used to address Him numerous times before. John accommodated his readers by translating the Aramaic word. This title probably did not reflect insight into Jesus' true identity. It simply expressed the joy of a restored relationship that she had concluded had ended. Mary swung from the depths of despair emotionally to the height of joy in one brief second. This is one of the greatest recognition scenes in literature.

> "Never was there a one-word utterance more charged with emotion than this."[657]

20:17 Jesus' next words help us to understand that Mary also embraced Jesus. Mary probably prostrated herself before Jesus and embraced His lower legs (cf. Matt. 28:9).

Jesus' words are very difficult to interpret. The translators rendered them, "Touch me not" (AV), "Stop clinging to me" (NASB), and "Do not hold on to me" (NIV). The meaning depends to some extent on what Jesus meant when He said, "For I have not yet ascended to the Father."

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[656]Blum, p. 342.
[657]Tasker, p. 221.

One view is that Jesus' second statement connects with what follows it rather than with what precedes it.[658] Since Jesus had not yet ascended to His Father (Gr. *anabebeka*, perfect tense) Mary should go to the disciples and tell them that He was not yet ascending (Gr. *anabaino*, present tense). According to this view the initial prohibition against touching Jesus stands alone. The weaknesses of this view are two. First, there is no other example of this anticipatory use of "for" (Gr. *gar*, translated "since") in the New Testament. Second, it fails to explain any reason for Jesus' prohibition.

Advocates of a second view understand Jesus as telling Mary to release Him because she must go to the disciples with a message.[659] However it is very unusual for the preposition "for" (Gr. *gar*) to link a prohibition and an imperative.[660] Furthermore this reading makes "for I have not yet ascended to the Father" a rather meaningless parenthetical remark.

A third view is that it was inappropriate for Mary to hold Jesus since He had not yet ascended to the Father, but it was appropriate for Thomas to touch Jesus (v. 27). Therefore Jesus must have ascended to the Father and returned between His appearances to Mary and Thomas.[661] Yet there is no biblical evidence that Jesus ascended to the Father and returned from Him between these two appearances. Moreover it is unclear why ascending to the Father should make any difference in the disciples' physical contact with Jesus' body.

A fourth view regards Jesus' statement as not expressing temporal sequence. Advocates regard it as a theological point instead. Jesus was contrasting His passing presence in His post-resurrection state with His permanent presence through the Spirit.[662] What Jesus meant was that Mary should refrain from touching Him because even though He had not yet ascended to the Father He would do so shortly. The resurrection had introduced a new relationship between Jesus and His disciples in which physical contact was inappropriate. This view puts more emphasis on Jesus' exaltation in His passion than the New Testament writers did, including John. Moreover it is impossible to dissociate Jesus' statement from a sequence of events since His death, resurrection, and ascension did happen in sequence (cf. vv. 28-29). Finally this view fails to explain why Jesus permitted Thomas to touch Him (v. 27) but did not allow Mary to do so.

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[658]S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, p. 356.
[659]M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*, pp. 159-60, §476.
[660]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 642.
[661]Chafer, 4:118; 5:262-63; 7:20.
[662]Brown, 2:1014-15; Barrett, p. 566.

The best explanation seems to be that Mary was holding onto Jesus as though she would never let Him go. Jesus told her to stop doing that or, if He knew she was about to do it, He told her not to do it. He was almost ready to disappear permanently. The reason she should release Him was that He had not yet ascended to the Father. He had other work to do first. Only in heaven would it be possible for loving believers such as Mary to maintain contact with Jesus forever. Rather than remaining with Jesus from then on Mary needed to carry out a mission. She needed to inform the other disciples of Jesus' resurrection. This was the time for telling good news (i.e., the gospel), not for remaining with Jesus ceaselessly.[663] This view makes good sense of the text and harmonizes with Jesus' invitation to Thomas (v. 27). Thomas needed to touch Jesus to strengthen his faith. Mary needed to release Him because He would not depart immediately, and Jesus had something else for her to do.

The message that Mary was to carry to the disciples was that Jesus was going to return to the Father. She would obviously report that Jesus was alive, but Jesus wanted her to communicate more than that. Jesus had spoken of His ascension before (e.g., 7:33; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17, 28). His disciples needed to understand that His death and resurrection had not wiped out these earlier predictions.

Jesus described the Father in a new way. He was Jesus' Father, but He was also the disciples' Father. Jesus did not say "our" Father. He and His disciples had a different relationship to the Father. Nevertheless they were all sons of the Father albeit in a different sense (cf. 1:12-13, 18; 5:19-30). Therefore Jesus called the disciples His "brothers" here. The context clarifies that Jesus was referring to the disciples and not to His physical half-brothers (v. 18). Likewise Jesus' relationship to God was similar to, though not exactly the same as, the disciples' relationship to God. The emphasis in Jesus' statement was on the privileges that His disciples now shared with Him because of His death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. Rom 8:15-16; Heb. 2:11-12).

20:18 As an obedient disciple, Mary went to the other disciples and told them that Jesus was alive plus the message that Jesus had given her. Again "the Lord" probably meant "Jesus" to her at this time, but she spoke better than she knew. Later she would understand more about the implications of that title. Mark mentioned that the disciples were weeping and mourning when Mary met them, and they failed to believe that Jesus was alive (Mark 16:10-11).

John did not mention Jesus' appearance to the other women that followed His appearance to Mary Magdalene (Matt. 28:9-10). He also omitted Matthew's account of how the

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[663]Cf. Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 644-45; Tenney, "John," p. 191; Blum, p. 342; Morris, pp. 742-43; Wiersbe, 1:390.

guards at Jesus' tomb reported to the Jewish rulers that it was empty (Matt. 28:11-15). Likewise he passed over Jesus' appearances to the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32) and to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; cf. 1 Cor. 15:5).

3. The appearance to the Eleven minus Thomas on Easter evening 20:19-23 (cf. Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-43)

This pericope contains another post-resurrection appearance of Jesus that bolstered the disciples' faith. It also contains John's account of the Great Commission.

20:19 John moved his readers directly from the events of Easter morning to those that happened that evening.

> "The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, commemorates God's finished work of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3). The Lord's Day commemorates Christ's finished work of redemption, the 'new creation.' . . .
>
> "For centuries, the Jewish Sabbath had been associated with Law: six days of work, and then you rest. But the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is associated with grace: first there is faith in the living Christ, then there will be works."[664]

Apparently the Eleven except Thomas were present (cf. Mark 16:14; John 20:24).[665] The disciples had gathered in a secure room because they feared the Jewish authorities. The Jewish authorities had crucified their rabbi, so it was reasonable to think that they might come after them as well.[666]

John implied that Jesus appeared miraculously even though the disciples had shut up (Gr. *kekleismenon*, i.e., "locked" NIV) the doors (cf. v. 26). Jesus' resurrection body had passed through grave clothes and a rocky tomb. Now it passed through the walls of this structure.

Jesus' greeting was common enough (i.e., Heb. *shalom 'alekem*). However, He had formerly promised His disciples His peace (14:27; 16:33). Consequently He was imparting rather than just wishing peace on them. This seems clear because Jesus repeated the benediction two more times (vv. 21, 26). "Shalom" summarized the fullness of God's blessing, not just the cessation of hostility (cf. Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7).

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[664]Wiersbe, 1:391, 392.

[665]How much Thomas missed because he did not meet with the other disciples on the Lord's Day (cf. Heb. 10:22-25)! He had to endure a whole week of fear and unbelief unnecessarily.

[666]Contrast their boldness following Jesus' ascension just a few weeks later.

> "'Shalom!' on Easter evening is the complement of 'it is finished' on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted . . . Not surprisingly it is included, along with 'grace,' in the greeting of *every* epistle of Paul in the NT."[667]

20:20 Evidently Jesus showed the disciples His hands and side with their wounds to convince them that it was really He and not just a phantom (cf. Luke 24:37-40). Luke added that He showed them His feet too (Luke 24:39). Then these disciples rejoiced because they saw (Gr. *idontes*, i.e., perceived intelligently, cf. v. 8) who Jesus really was.

> "Thus the disciples were forced to grasp what became a central confession of the church: the risen Lord is none other than the crucified sacrifice."[668]

The disciples' initial reaction to Jesus' unexpected appearance was terror (Luke 24:37). However upon examining His wounds their fear turned to faith. The disciples' joy was the proof of their perception and the testimony to their faith.

> "Christian joy has been born, the joy of the redeemed, which Jesus had promised would be theirs after the travail pangs had passed (see xvi. 20-22)."[669]

Clearly Jesus' resurrection body resembled His former body, but evidently His beatings and crucifixion had so scarred Him that even His closest friends could hardly recognize Him (cf. Isa. 52:14). His resurrection body also possessed properties of immortality that enabled Him to pass through solid objects and to materialize and dematerialize at will, though it was not ethereal.

20:21 Jesus repeated His benediction (v. 19). He then commissioned His disciples for their mission from then on.[670] He expressed this commission in terms of the relationships that John recorded Jesus teaching extensively in this Gospel. Jesus was sending His disciples on a mission just as His Father had sent Him on a mission (cf. 17:18). The emphasis here is on the sending and the authoritative person doing the sending. Thus Jesus' disciples became apostles (lit. sent ones) in a new sense.[671]

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[667]Beasley-Murray, p. 379.
[668]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 647.
[669]Tasker, p. 222.
[670]See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.
[671]The New Testament writers used the term "apostle" in a technical and in a general sense. In the general sense, it refers to all Christians (cf. Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). In the technical sense, it refers to the original 12 apostles—Matthias took Judas Iscariot's place (Acts 1:26)—plus Paul.

Each Gospel plus Acts records a different version of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). Jesus apparently gave this commission on at least three separate occasions.[672] The reader of the Gospels can scarcely escape its crucial importance. It expresses God's will for every believer in the present age.

Some Christians believe that Jesus intended this commission only for His original disciples. They point to the fact that the writers of the New Testament epistles never referred to it. However even though they did not refer to it explicitly they clearly presupposed its validity for the whole church. They simply cast it in different terminology (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:20). The universal scope of the commission also argues for its continuation. Third, the repetition of this commission five times suggests that Jesus intended all of His disciples to carry it out. Finally, this was the last charge that Jesus gave His disciples before He returned to His Father (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8). This fact also suggests that He intended it for all succeeding generations of disciples.

Clearly on this occasion Jesus was presenting His mission as a model for His disciples' mission. Many Christians have concluded, therefore, that what characterized Jesus' ministry must characterize the church's ministry. They see this mission including healing the sick, casting out demons, and feeding the hungry. They believe that the church's mission is much broader than just preaching the gospel, baptizing, teaching, and planting churches.

However the emphasis on Jesus' mission in John's Gospel has been primarily that Jesus always carried out God's will in perfect obedience (cf. 5:19-30; 8:29). Even before His crucifixion Jesus stressed the importance of the believer's obedience as the fulfillment of this paradigm (15:9-10). The purpose of Jesus' incarnation was the spiritual salvation of the world (1:29). That is also the believer's primary, though not our exclusive, purpose (cf. Gal. 6:10). As Jesus always operated in dependence on the Father with the Spirit's enablement, so should His disciples (cf. 1:32; 3:34; 4:34; 5:19; 6:27; 10:36; 17:4). As He was a Son of God, so are His disciples sons of God (cf. 1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 20:17).

Since believers no longer belong to the world (15:19), it was necessary for Jesus to send His disciples back into the world. Our mission does not replace Jesus' mission, however. He carries out His present mission through us.[673] We must consider all the versions of the Great Commission that Jesus gave to understand our mission correctly, not just this one.

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[672]The first recorded commission chronologically was evidently the one in Mark 16:15-16 and John 20:21-23. Matthew 28:19-20 appears to be another account of a later event. Likewise Luke 24:46-48 and Acts 1:8 seem to be two versions of one incident, the last giving of the commission.

[673]Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:349-50.

> ". . . what is central to the Son's mission—that he came as the Father's gift so that those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life (3:16), experiencing new life as the children of God (1:12-13) and freedom from the slavery of sin because they have been set free by the Son of God (8:34-36)—must never be lost to view as the church defines her mission."[674]

Jesus and John reminded all disciples of these central issues in the verses that follow (cf. vv. 23, 30-31).

20:22 These disciples needed supernatural spiritual power to carry out such a task, but what did Jesus really do next? There are several views.

One view is that Jesus gave these disciples a temporary infusion of His Spirit.[675] The act of breathing on them recalls the Creation in which God breathed His life into Adam (Gen. 2:7). Thus Jesus was suggesting that He was doing a new creative work by filling these men with His Spirit. Later Jesus explained that the Spirit would come upon these disciples again (Acts 1:8). This present act of Jesus then represented a preliminary and temporary enabling that helped the disciples understand what they could expect more fully and permanently later. That baptizing came on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15).

Some problems with this view are as follows. Two bestowals of the Spirit seem unusual in view of Jesus' earlier promises to send the Spirit (chs. 14—16) and the importance in Acts of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15). Also there is no indication that this temporary infusion with the Spirit had any effect on the disciples. Furthermore there is no evidence that when Thomas returned to the scene Jesus gave him the Spirit as one would expect if the Spirit's presence was essential for the disciples then (v. 26-29).

Many readers of the Greek text have noted that "Holy Spirit" (Gr. *pneuma hagion*) does not have a definite article preceding it. This has led some of them to conclude that the Holy Spirit is not in view, but the breath (Gr. *pneuma*) of God is. They take this breath of God to be symbolic of God's gift of spiritual power in an impersonal sense.[676] However, John earlier referred to the personal Holy Spirit without the article (7:39). That seems to be his meaning here as well. The absence of an article before a noun often has the effect of stressing the quality of the noun. In this case that would be the holiness of the Spirit.

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[674]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 649.
[675]Blum, p. 343; cf. Calvin, 2:205; Morris, pp. 747-48.
[676]G. Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, p. 11.

Many modern scholars view this verse as John's account of Pentecost.[677] However this view requires a weak view of the inspiration of John or Acts, or it does not take the chronological sequence of events that these books present seriously. Clearly the occasion that John described here and the events of the day of Pentecost were different.

Still others believe that Jesus was giving these disciples a symbolic and graphic reminder of the Spirit who would come upon them later. It was a demonstration of what Jesus would do when He returned to the Father and which He did do on Pentecost. He was not imparting the Spirit to them in any sense here.[678] This interpretation accounts for Thomas not receiving the Spirit before Pentecost. It also explains why this event had no changing effect on the disciples. Evidently there was only one coming of the Spirit on these disciples, and that happened on Pentecost.

20:23 The Great Commission not only requires supernatural power to carry it out (v. 22), but it also involves the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28). In the similar passages in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, the context is church discipline. Here the context is evangelism.

The second part of each conditional clause in this verse is in the passive voice and the perfect tense in the Greek text. The passive voice indicates that someone has already done the forgiving or retaining. That person must be God since He alone has the authority to do that (Matt. 9:2-3; Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21). The perfect tense indicates that the action has continuing effects; the sins stand forgiven or retained at least temporarily if not permanently.

Jesus appears to have been saying that when His disciples went to others with the message of salvation, as He had done, some people would believe and others would not. Reaction to their ministry would be the same as reaction to His had been. He viewed their forgiving and retaining the sins of their hearers as the actions of God's agents. If people ("any" or "anyone," plural Gr. *tinon*) believed the gospel, the disciples could tell the believers that God had forgiven their sins. If they disbelieved, they could tell them that God had not forgiven but retained their sins. Jesus had done this (cf. 9:39-41), and now His disciples would continue to do it. Thus their ministry would be a continuation of His ministry relative to the forgiveness of sins, as it would be in relation to the Spirit's enablement. This, too, applies to all succeeding generations of Jesus' disciples since Jesus was still talking about the disciples' mission.

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[677]E.g., Barrett, p. 570; Beasley-Murray, pp. 380-82.

[678]E.g., Harris, p. 201; Tenney, "John," p. 193; Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 651-55; idem, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, pp. 140-44.

> ". . . all who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearer accepts or rejects the Lord Jesus as the Sin-Bearer."[679]

This resurrection appearance has threefold importance in John's Gospel. It validated again Jesus' bodily resurrection, and it provided the setting for the commissioning of Jesus' disciples. It also provided the background for Jesus' appearance when Thomas was present and Thomas' climactic statement of faith that followed (vv. 24-29).

4. The transformed faith of Thomas 20:24-29

The last witness to Jesus' resurrection in John's Gospel is Thomas, and the record of it has two parts. The first part sets the scene for the second (cf. ch. 21). John is the only evangelist who recorded this post-resurrection appearance. Thomas' confession is John's climactic argument for belief in Jesus as the divine Messiah, the Christ.

Thomas' initial unbelief 20:24-25

John gave his readers the Aramaic and Greek names of this member of the Twelve, now the Eleven: "Thomas" and "Didymus" respectively (cf. 11:16; 14:5). John's previous pictures of this disciple present him as a loyal and courageous, though somewhat pessimistic, follower of Jesus. His more common identification as a doubter comes only from the present event.

Thomas had no doubts that Jesus had died. This is another evidence that Jesus really did die. However, he refused to believe the other disciples' report that Jesus was alive without personal physical proof. He insisted on touching Jesus, and specifically His crucifixion wounds, not just seeing Him. No one else in the New Testament made demands like these before believing.[680] The Greek text clarifies that the other disciples kept saying (Gr. *elegon*, imperfect tense) that Jesus was alive. In spite of this repeated verbal testimony by those who knew Him best, Thomas refused to believe (cf. 4:48). He had become so thoroughly convinced that Jesus was dead, as evidenced by his references to Jesus' wounds, that he could not see how Jesus' crucifixion could be overcome.

Thomas' final belief 20:26-29

20:26 John located this post-resurrection appearance eight days after Easter Sunday, namely, the following Sunday. His "eight days" (Gr. *hemeras okto*) evidently included both Sundays. Perhaps he identified the day because, by the time John wrote, Sunday had become the day of worship for Christians, when they commemorated Jesus' resurrection. They worshipped Him on Easter Sunday, then again the following Sunday, and then on succeeding Sundays from then on (cf. Acts 20:7). Sunday worship has its roots in tradition rather than commandment.

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[679]Tenney, "John," p. 193.
[680]Morris, p. 752.

The disciples were still meeting behind closed doors because they feared the Jewish authorities (cf. v. 19). Jesus again materialized in the presence of these disciples as He had a week earlier (v. 19). He also repeated His benediction (v. 21). Perhaps Jesus did these things because the disciples had told Thomas that He had appeared this way and had said these things. This would have bolstered Thomas' faith.

20:27 Jesus then invited Thomas to satisfy himself that He really was the crucified Jesus, as Thomas had said he would have to do to believe that Jesus was alive. Jesus knew what Thomas had said even though He had not been physically present when he had said it. This is further proof of Jesus' deity. The purpose of this test was not just to satisfy Thomas' curiosity, however. It was to bring him to faith that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah. We could render Jesus' statement literally, "Do not be unbelieving but believing."

20:28 Evidently Thomas did not take up Jesus' offer. The sight of his Savior seems to have been enough to convince him (cf. v. 29). Thomas then uttered one of the most profound declarations of saving faith in Scripture. For a Jew to call another human being "my Lord and my God" was blasphemy under normal circumstances (cf. 10:33). Yet that is precisely who Thomas believed Jesus was. It is also who John presented Jesus as being throughout this Gospel. Both titles were titles of deity in the Old Testament. Thomas had come to believe that Jesus was *his* lord in a fuller sense than before, and he now believed that Jesus was fully God.

> "The repeated pronoun *my* does not diminish the universality of Jesus' lordship and deity, but it ensures that Thomas' words are a *personal* confession of faith. Thomas thereby not only displays his faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but points to its deepest meaning; it is nothing less than the revelation of who Jesus Christ is. The most unyielding sceptic [*sic*] has bequeathed to us the most profound confession."[681]

Now Thomas believed as his fellow disciples had come to believe (cf. v. 25). His confession is a model that John presented for all future disciples. It is the high point of this Gospel (cf. 1:1, 14, 18). John's other witnesses to Jesus' deity were John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), Jesus Himself (5:25; 10:36), Peter (6:69), the healed blind man (9:35), Martha (11:27), and John the Apostle (20:30-31).

> "Nobody has previously addressed Jesus like this. It marks a leap of faith. In the moment that he came to see that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead Thomas came to see

[681]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 659.

> something of what that implied. Mere men do not rise from the dead in this fashion. The One who was now so obviously alive, although he had died, could be addressed in the language of adoring worship."[682]

20:29 We could translate Jesus' first sentence as either a question or a statement. It confirmed the reality of Thomas' belief in either case, and it prepared for the beatitude that followed (cf. 13:17). "Blessed" (Gr. *makarios*) does more than just describe the person in view as happy. It also declares him or her acceptable to God (cf. Matt. 5:3-12).

Most believers have believed on Jesus because of sufficient evidence without the physical confirmation that Thomas required (cf. v. 8; 1 Pet. 1:8-9). Those were the people whom Jesus had in view when He made this statement. This beatitude does not make believers who live after Jesus' ascension superior to those who saw Him in the flesh. Rather it guarantees their blessing by God.

> "Thomas's declaration is the last assertion of personal faith recorded in this Gospel. It marks the climax of the book because it presents Christ as the risen Lord, victorious over sin, sorrow, doubt, and death. It also presents the faith that accepts not only the truth of what Jesus said but also the actuality of what he was—the Son of God. In the experience of Thomas, the writer has shown how belief comes to maturity and how it changes the entire direction of an individual life."[683]

> "The growth of belief depicted in the Gospel of John thus moves from an initial acceptance on the testimony of another to a personal knowledge marked by loyalty, service, and worship; from assumption of the historicity and integrity of Jesus to a personal trust in Him; from an outward profession to an inward reality; from attending to His teachings to acknowledging His lordship over life. Full belief may not be attained instantly; yet the incipient and tentative belief is not to be despised."[684]

G. THE PURPOSE OF THIS GOSPEL 20:30-31

John followed the climactic proof that Jesus is God's Son with an explanation of his purpose for writing this narrative of Jesus' ministry. This explanation constitutes a preliminary conclusion to the book.

20:30 "Therefore" ties this statement to what immediately precedes it. John wrote his Gospel because those who believe on Jesus without seeing Him in the flesh are acceptable to God. He wrote, therefore, that people may

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[682]Morris, p. 753.
[683]Tenney, "John," p. 195.
[684]Idem, "Topics from . . .," p. 357.

believe and so enjoy eternal life. There were many other evidences of Jesus' deity that John could have presented. However, he chose those that he recorded here to lead his readers to the type of faith that Thomas just articulated and that Jesus just commended. That was John's confessed strategy in composing this Gospel under the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

What did John have in mind when he referred to other "signs?" Perhaps he meant the seven miracles that he featured, the significance of which Jesus usually explained in the context (chs. 2—12).

A SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN SIGNS IN JOHN				
Sign	**Significance**[685]	**Belief**	**Unbelief**	**Reference**
Changing water to wine	Jesus' power over quality	The disciples		2:1-11
Healing the official's son	Jesus' power over space	The official and his household		4:46-54
Healing the paralytic	Jesus' power over time	The paralytic?	The Jews	5:1-9
Feeding the 5,000	Jesus' power over quantity	Some people in the crowd		6:1-15
Walking on the water	Jesus' power over nature	The disciples		6:16-21
Healing a man born blind	Jesus' power over misfortune	The blind man	The Pharisees	9:1-12
Raising Lazarus	Jesus' power over death	Martha, Mary, and many Jews	The Jewish authorities	11:1-16

20:31 This verse unites many of the most important themes in the fourth Gospel. John's purpose was clearly evangelistic. His Gospel is an excellent portion of Scripture to give to an unbeliever. It is probably the most effective evangelistic tool available. Its impact on the reader is strongest when one reads it through at one sitting, which takes less than two hours for most people. This document can also deepen and establish the faith of any believer. However that is more a comment on its result than its purpose.

The implication of this purpose is that John meant unbelievers when he wrote "you." Did he have a particular group of unbelievers in mind, or was

[685]Idem, *John: The Gospel* . . ., p. 312.

he addressing any reader? Some commentators have tried to identify a particular audience from statements in the text. Yet it seems more probable that John wrote for a general audience since he did not identify his intended audience specifically. His presentation of Jesus as the divine Son of God certainly has universal application.

> "There cannot be any doubt but that John conceived of Jesus as the very incarnation of God."[686]

John's purpose was not academic. It was not simply that people might believe intellectually that Jesus is the divine Messiah. It was rather that they might believe those foundational truths so they could possess and experience the life of God fully (cf. 10:10). This divine life affects the whole person, not just the intellect. Moreover it affects him or her forever, not just during that person's present lifetime.[687]

John's clear purpose statement concludes the body of this Gospel.

V. EPILOGUE CH. 21

This Gospel began with a theological prologue (1:1-18). It ends with a practical epilogue. John concluded his narrative designed to bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ in chapter 20. Chapter 21 contains instruction for those who have come to faith in Him and explains how they are to serve Him as they carry out their mission (20:21-23). Many of the prominent themes in the rest of the Gospel recur here.

> "Some critics have argued that this chapter is anticlimactic after the great conclusion in chapter 20, and therefore was written by another (anonymous) writer. But the linguistic evidence does not support this notion. In addition, other great books of Scripture have appendixes after reaching a grand climax (cf. e.g., Rom. 16 following Rom. 15:33). Thus John 21 is neither without value nor out of harmony with other Bible books."[688]

The structure of this chapter is similar to the rest of the Gospel. John first narrated an event (vv. 1-14) and then related Jesus' teaching based on that event (vv. 15-23). Finally he concluded his Gospel (vv. 24-25).

A. JESUS' APPEARANCE TO SEVEN DISCIPLES IN GALILEE 21:1-14

21:1 John recorded still another post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to His disciples. It undoubtedly occurred during the 32-day period between Thomas' confession (20:28) and Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:9). Exactly when

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[686]Morris, p. 756.
[687]I regard 20:31 as the key verse in John's Gospel.
[688]Blum, p. 344; cf. Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 665-68.

is unimportant. John was the only New Testament writer to refer to the Sea of Galilee as the Sea of Tiberias (cf. 6:1). Evidently most of his original readers would have known it by this Roman name. John stressed the fact that Jesus revealed Himself throughout this Gospel (cf. 1:31; 2:11; 9:3; 17:6; 21:14; et al.; 1 John 1:2; 2:28; 3:2, 5, 8; 4:9). Now Jesus gave another revelation of Himself to these disciples. They were to learn something new about Him from this revelation.

21:2 John evidently identified all the disciples who were present on this occasion, five of them by name or patronym and two others anonymously. Simon Peter was the disciples' leader even after his denial of Jesus. Thomas was obviously a believer (20:28) perhaps suggesting that what follows has special importance for believing disciples. John mentioned Nathanael earlier (1:45-51), but here alone he identified this disciple as from Cana in Galilee. Perhaps he did so to remind the reader of Jesus' first sign that happened in Cana (2:1-11) since Jesus was about to perform another miracle. Zebedee's sons were James and John, though John did not identify them this way before. Perhaps this was John's way of hinting at his own presence as an eyewitness of what follows without drawing too much attention to himself. The two unnamed disciples brought the total to seven.

The exact number may be another detail designed to add credibility to the account, or John may have been hinting that a complete number of disciples was present. Seven was a number that symbolized completeness to the Jews (cf. Gen. 2:2-3; et al.). He may have been implying that the lesson that Jesus taught here was applicable to the full complement of disciples.

21:3 Some expositors have interpreted Peter's words as a renunciation of his calling as Jesus' disciple. They believe he meant that he intended to return to his former occupation as a fisherman permanently.[689] However there is no basis for this conclusion in the text. Indeed when Peter learned that Jesus was standing on the shore he jumped into the water to get to Jesus as quickly as he could (v. 7).

Peter's words simply expressed his intention to do some fishing, not to change his vocation.[690] He probably found it very difficult to sit around doing nothing while he and his friends waited for Jesus to appear. Jesus had instructed the disciples to return to Galilee and to wait for him there (cf. Matt. 28:7; Mark 14:28; 16:7). So Peter did something that he probably enjoyed doing and presumably did well. Alternatively he may have been returning to his former vocation temporarily only to earn some money so he could feed his family.[691]

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[689]E.g., Hoskyns, p. 552.
[690]Bruce, p. 399.
[691]Beasley-Murray, p. 399.

This was not the first time that Peter had met Jesus after the Crucifixion. Jesus had appeared to Peter evidently on Easter morning (1 Cor. 15:5) and undoubtedly on Easter evening (20:19-23; cf. Mark 16:14). Peter had also seen Jesus the following Sunday when Thomas made his profession of faith (20:26-29). Therefore we should not conclude that Peter would have been reluctant to see Jesus now because of his denial in the high priest's courtyard. Peter's moment of reconciliation with Jesus had already passed.

Peter's companions followed his lead and joined him. Apparently they launched out on the lake just before or during the night, a popular time to fish. John identified their boat specifically as "the boat." Probably this was Simon's boat that he had formerly used when he was a professional fisherman (cf. Luke 5:3). The disciples' failure to catch anything set the stage for Jesus' miracle that followed.

> "They are coming to grips with the resurrection, but they still have not learned the profound truth that apart from Christ they can do nothing (15:5) . . ."[692]

In view of Jesus' commission, these disciples' activity seems inappropriate even if it was not rebellious. It contrasts with their behavior following Pentecost when they began to carry out their mission zealously and joyfully. Therefore John's reference to nighttime may have symbolic overtones again.

21:4 Likewise the breaking of this new day is perhaps symbolic of the new era that was opening up for them as Jesus' disciples, though they did not realize that yet. Jesus' instruction would change the course of their lives forever.

The disciples could not identify Jesus as He stood on the shore within shouting distance from where they fished (v. 8). This may have been due to the twilight, the distance, Jesus' altered appearance, or some other reason (cf. Luke 24:16).

21:5 Jesus addressed the disciples with an affectionate masculine greeting (Gr. *paidia*). The translation "boys" captures the spirit of His word. The form of Jesus' question in the Greek text assumed a negative answer; He expected that they had caught nothing. One can sense the discouragement and mild embarrassment in the disciples' "no." Jesus was in the process of teaching these men their personal inadequacy even in the type of work they knew best and had most experience with. It was important that they articulate their failure.

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[692]Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 670.

21:6 Their nets had been hanging over the left-hand side of their fishing boat. The unknown authority on the shore now promised that if they would cast their net on the right-hand side they would catch some fish. Such a suggestion must have seemed ludicrous to these seasoned fishermen. The idea that such an insignificant change would accomplish anything was laughable. Yet amazingly the disciples followed Jesus' orders.

Why did they do so? Perhaps they remembered another night of unsuccessful fishing when Jesus had told Peter, James, and John to lower their nets. They had encountered such a large school of fish that their nets began to break (Luke 5:1-11). That had been the time when Jesus first called those disciples to follow Him. They had responded by leaving their fishing trade to follow Jesus full-time as His disciples. Nevertheless it seems clear that even after they obeyed the unknown armchair fisherman on the shore this dark morning they still did not realize that He was Jesus.

The reason for the disciples' obedience is not as important as the fact of it. Had they not obeyed Jesus' command they would have failed to catch any fish. However because they obeyed, they experienced overwhelming success, success far exceeding their natural ability. They even had trouble managing the results of their success because it was so great.

These men would reflect on this experience and realize that Jesus had been teaching them how important it was to obey His word. Obedience to Jesus was the key to supernatural success. Indeed obedience to His word even though they did not know it was His word yielded an unbelievable reward.

21:7 The reader has already suspected that "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was John himself. This identification fits because John was one of the disciples in the boat (v. 2). Again John realized something about Jesus before Peter did (cf. 20:8). Probably he sensed that a miracle had happened, and he remembered that a few years earlier Jesus had performed a similar miracle (Luke 5:1-11). True to the pictures we have of them in the New Testament John exhibited quick insight and Peter quick action.

Peter had learned that John's instincts about these things were better than his. He accepted John's conclusion and jumped into the water. Apparently he wanted to get to Jesus faster than his boat and net now full of fish would allow. He showed no concern for the fish; he willingly let them go. His only desire was to get to Jesus.

Fishermen usually worked in their light undergarments (Gr. *chiton*, not underwear). Peter evidently put his outer garment (Gr. *ependytes*) on so when he reached land he would be properly clothed albeit soaking wet. Normally people take unnecessary clothing off before going swimming. Peter's somewhat irrational behavior seems to be another indication of his

strong desire to get to Jesus quickly. He was again demonstrating his characteristic extravagant loyalty to his Lord (cf. 20:6).

21:8 The other disciples behaved more normally. John was one of these whom Peter left to struggle with the nets. His record of the distance and the labor involved in this task corroborates his claim to being an eyewitness of these events (v. 24).

21:9 While the other disciples struggled to get their catch to shore, Jesus was preparing breakfast for them. John noted that it was a charcoal fire (Gr. *anthrakia*) that Jesus had laid. The reader may remember that it was specifically a charcoal fire at which Peter had stood when he denied Jesus (18:18). Jesus was setting the stage for a lesson He was about to teach the disciples and especially Peter.

Bread and fish were common staples, but again they recall earlier miracles that Jesus had performed. He had miraculously provided meals for 5,000 and later 4,000 males plus women and children with bread and fish. Notice that He had already provided some fish for them before the disciples got out of their boat and pulled the fish that they had caught to shore.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus had served His disciples by washing their feet (13:1-17). Now He continued to serve them as their risen Lord by providing them with a warm fire and breakfast (cf. v. 13).

21:10 Even though there was already one fish (Gr. *opsarion*, singular) on the fire Jesus instructed the disciples to bring some of the fish (plural) that they had caught. He would not provide for their physical needs by multiplying the food miraculously as He had done in the past. Now He would use the product of their labor to satisfy their need. Nevertheless it was clear that their fish had been the result of His miraculous provision. Perhaps this was all symbolic of how Jesus would carry out His mission through His disciples in the future compared with how He had done it during His pre-cross ministry.

21:11 Peter did not leave his fellow disciples to struggle with the nets while he stood by. He helped them pull the huge catch of fish that Jesus had provided to land.

There have been many allegorical explanations of the meaning of the 153 fish.[693] Many of these involve gamatria.[694] One of the more credible of these is as follows. Jesus formerly told His disciples that they would

[693]Most of these are much too involved to explain here. See the commentaries, or for a brief overview, see Carson, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 672-73.

[694]Gamatria is the discipline of deriving a word or words from the Hebrew, or in this case the Greek, letters that also represent numbers in their respective languages.

become fishers of men, an obvious metaphor (Mark 1:17). If the fish here represent the converts that Jesus would miraculously provide for His disciples to "catch," perhaps their large number represents many converts (cf. Matt. 13:47-50). The fact that the net did not break may symbolize the capability of the gospel to "catch" many people without failing.[695]

Perhaps John simply recorded the number as a detail to lend authenticity to his testimony (cf. 2:6). He was, after all, a fisherman himself. Most fishermen know exactly how many fish they have caught whenever they catch some, and this was a very unusual catch. Probably the disciples divided the catch and so had to count the fish.

21:12 Jesus, as the host, invited the disciples to dine with Him. Perhaps He was reminding them of their last meal together in the upper room just before His arrest. In the ancient Near East a host who extended hospitality to others and provided food for them was implying that He would defend them from then on. Consequently Jesus' invitation may have been a promise of commitment to them like the oriental covenant meal. Such a meal involved acceptance, forgiveness, and mutual commitment. By accepting His invitation the disciples were implying that they were committing themselves to Jesus afresh.

> "Three 'invitations' stand out in John's Gospel: 'Come and see' (John 1:39); 'Come and drink' (John 7:37); and 'Come and dine' (John 21:12). How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before He dealt with his spiritual needs. He gave Peter opportunity to dry off, get warm, satisfy his hunger, and enjoy personal fellowship. This is a good example for us to follow as we care for God's people. Certainly the spiritual is more important than the physical, but caring for the physical can prepare the way for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize 'the soul' that He neglects the body."[696]

Apparently these disciples longed to ask Jesus if the person standing with them was truly He, but they did not dare do so. This tension within them helps us understand that Jesus' resurrection was a challenge to the faith of even those who knew Him best. Had the beatings and His crucifixion so marred His form that He scarcely resembled the Jesus they had known, or was His resurrection body so different? Probably we will have to wait to see Him for ourselves to get answers to these questions. In spite of everything, the disciples could only conclude that the One who stood among them really was Jesus.

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[695]Bruce, pp. 401-2.
[696]Wiersbe, 1:397.

21:13 Jesus provided for the physical needs of His own as He had done before (cf. 6:11-13). Hopefully the disciples recalled the significance of His feeding the multitudes earlier. Jesus could take meager human resources, multiply them, and so produce supernatural blessing. This was an important lesson for these believers to remember as they began to embark on the challenging mission that Jesus had given them.

21:14 John concluded the narration of this incident by identifying it as the third instance of Jesus' self-manifestation to His disciples after His resurrection. This verse forms an *inclusio* with verse 1 that sets this incident off as distinct.

John said that this was the third post-resurrection appearance "to the disciples" (i.e., the apostles, cf. 20:19-23, 26-29). Chronologically this was at least Jesus' seventh post-resurrection appearance (cf. 20:11-18; Matt. 28:8-10; 1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:13-32; John 20:19-23, 26-29). Nevertheless it was the third appearance to the disciples, and the third appearance to the disciples that John recorded.

John viewed this appearance as further proof of Jesus' resurrection. Perhaps he viewed it as completing a full compliment of testimonies since he drew attention to its being the third appearance to the disciples. The number three in Scripture sometimes connotes fullness or completeness (e.g., the three Persons of the Trinity). However by calling this appearance a "manifestation" (Gr. *ephanerothe*, cf. v. 1) John indicated that he also viewed it as a revelation of Jesus' true character.

So far Jesus had reminded these disciples of lessons that He had taught them previously that were important for them to remember in view of their mission. He had also set the stage for an even more important lesson that would follow.

B. JESUS' TEACHINGS ABOUT MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE 21:15-23

Jesus now proceeded to use the miracle that He had just performed as the background for important instruction. John presented Jesus doing this many times in this Gospel. The repetition of this pattern in the epilogue is evidence that the epilogue was an original part of the Gospel. Jesus focused His teaching on Peter, but clearly He wanted all disciples to view Peter as their representative.

21:15 Education again followed eating, as it had before, for example, in the upper room (chs. 13—17). The following conversation may have taken place as Jesus and Peter walked along the shore, with John within earshot close behind (cf. vv. 20-21).

Jesus began by addressing Peter as Simon the son of Jonas. In the Gospels, Jesus addressed Peter this way on only the most important occasions. These were his call to follow Jesus (1:42), his confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 16:17), and as he slept in Gethsemane (Mark 14:37).

When Jesus addressed Peter this way here, Peter probably realized that what Jesus was about to say to him was extremely important.

Jesus used a word for "love" (Gr. *agapas*) in His question that many scholars have understood to refer to total commitment to another person.[697] Other equally competent scholars, however, do not believe it had this strong meaning.[698] Nevertheless most scholars recognize that *agapao* expresses a somewhat stronger love than *phileo* does. In his Gospel John did not usually make fine distinctions in meaning on the basis of synonym differences.[699] Generally he treated synonyms as having essentially the same meaning.[700] However many expositors have concluded that Jesus was making a distinction between the meanings of the synonyms for love that He used here.[701] Because of the debate over the meaning of *agapao* and its synonyms, it seems wise not to put too much emphasis on this distinction.

> "His [Peter's] actions had shown that Peter had not wanted a crucified Lord. But Jesus was crucified. How did Peter's devotion stand in the light of this? Was he ready to love Jesus as he was, and not as Peter wished him to be?"[702]

Jesus asked Peter if he had more love for Jesus than he had for "these things" (Gr. *pleon touton*). What did Jesus have in mind? Was it the fishing boats and nets that Peter had returned to, or was it the other disciples? The comparison seems more likely to have been with the love of the other disciples for Jesus since Peter had earlier professed complete devotion to Jesus in the upper room (cf. 13:37; 18:10). Peter had professed that his love for and commitment to Jesus were so strong that even if all the other disciples forsook Him he would not (Matt. 26:33; Mark 14:29; Luke 22:33). Still Peter had denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples and that he even knew Jesus three times. Thus Jesus' question was reasonable. He wanted Peter to think about just how strong his love for Jesus really was.

Peter replied by professing his love for Jesus, but he used a different word for love than Jesus had used (Gr. *philo*). Expositors who believe that *philo* expresses weaker love than *agapao* think that Peter apparently could not bring himself to claim complete devotion to Jesus in view of his denials.

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[697]E.g., Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:367.
[698]E.g., R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 38-42.
[699]Carson, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 676-77; Tenney, "John," p. 201; Morris, p. 770.
[700]For example, John used both *agapao* and *phileo* to describe the Father's love for the Son (3:35; 10:17; 5:20), Jesus' love for Lazarus (11:5, 3, 36), and Jesus' love for the beloved disciple (13:23; 20:2).
[701]E.g., K. L. McKay, "Style and Significance in the Language of John 21:15-17," *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985):319-33; Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 227.
[702]Morris, p. 768.

Those who view *philo* and *agapao* as essentially synonymous understand Peter as professing that he did indeed love Jesus. Peter wisely appealed for proof of his love to Jesus' knowledge, not to his own former behavior.

Jesus responded graciously by giving Peter a command, not condemnation. He told Peter to tend (Gr. *boske*, feed) His lambs (Gr. *arnia*).[703] Previously Jesus had referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd (10:14). Now he was committing the care of His flock to this disciple who had failed Him miserably in the past. Jesus had formerly called Peter to be a fisher of men, an essentially evangelistic ministry (Matt. 4:19). Now he was broadening this calling to include being a shepherd of sheep, a pastoral ministry.

21:16-17 Jesus proceeded to ask Peter essentially the same question two more times. Peter gave essentially the same answer each time. Peter probably felt grief after Jesus' third question because Jesus asked the same question a third time, which is the reason the text gives. Some commentators suggested that Peter was grieved too because this time Jesus used the word for love that Peter had used (Gr. *philo*).[704]

Jesus probably intended that Peter's threefold profession of love would correspond to and in a sense counteract his former threefold denial. Peter had denied his Lord in the presence of witnesses near a charcoal fire three times (18:17, 25, 27). Now he affirmed his love for his Lord in the presence of witnesses near a charcoal fire three times. The Great Physician was healing Peter's wounds.

> "There can be little doubt but that the whole scene is meant to show us Peter as completely restored to his position of leadership. . . . It is further worth noting that the one thing about which Jesus questioned Peter prior to commissioning him to tend the flock was love. This is the basic qualification for Christian service. Other qualities may be desirable, but love is completely indispensable (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3)."[705]

Some failures in ministry may bar a believer from serving the Lord in particular ways from then on (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-16). Other failures may only require temporary suspension from service until

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[703]Three more pairs of synonyms in addition to *agapao* and *philo* occur in this passage. *Bosko* (feed, vv. 15, 17) and *poimaino* (tend, or take care of, v. 16) may be significantly different, but they are probably not. Likewise *arnia* (lambs, v. 15) and *probata* (sheep, vv. 16, 17) create the same interpretive problem. The third pair is *oidas* (know intellectually, vv. 15, 16) and *ginoskeis* (know experientially, v. 17).

[704]Morris, p. 770, noted that the original conversation between Jesus and Peter probably took place in Aramaic, so when John translated what they said into Greek he may have been using synonyms for variety rather than to express nuances of difference.

[705]Ibid., p. 772.

restoration is complete (cf. Acts 15:38; 2 Tim. 4:11). However regardless of one's failures he or she can always serve the Lord in some capacity (cf. 2 Tim. 2:20-21).

Peter had learned not to make rash professions of great love. Therefore he did not compare his love for Jesus to the love of the other disciples as he had done before. He simply appealed to Jesus' knowledge of his heart.

Notice that throughout this interchange Jesus consistently referred to the sheep as His sheep, not Peter's sheep. Moreover Jesus described Peter's ministry in terms of acts, not in terms of an office. Later Peter wrote to elders urging them to apply these same viewpoints to their pastoral ministry (1 Pet. 5:1-4).[706]

Some Roman Catholic scholars have used this passage to support their view that Peter was the first pope. They do this mainly because in the Old Testament the shepherd was a figure for a kingly ruler (e.g., 2 Sam. 5:2). However other New Testament revelation does not exalt Peter to a place of authoritative rule over other under-shepherds (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).[707]

21:18-19 Jesus then gave the last of the many important statements that He introduced with a strong asseveration. It was a prediction of the type of death that Peter would die.

Jesus contrasted the freedom that Peter had enjoyed in his youth with the constraint that he would experience in later life. He was describing crucifixion. The phrase "stretch out your hands" (v. 18) was a euphemistic reference to crucifixion in the Roman world.[708] This stretching took place when the Roman soldiers fastened the condemned person's arms to the crosspiece of his cross. This often happened before they led him to the place of crucifixion and crucified him.[709]

Peter had been learning how his self-confidence led to failure and how he needed to depend on Jesus more (i.e., "You know . . ."; vv. 15, 16, 17). Jesus reminded Peter that as time passed he would become increasingly dependent on others even to the point of being unable to escape a martyr's death. Therefore, Jesus implied, Peter should commit his future to God rather than trying to control it himself as he had formerly tried to do.

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[706]C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John*, pp. 165-66.

[707]Matthew 16:13-20 establishes Peter's role in the founding of the church, but it does not assign him the role of ruling over the other apostles.

[708]Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2:226-27.

[709]Beasley-Murray, pp. 408-9.

> "The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led."[710]

Peter later wrote that Christians who follow Jesus Christ faithfully to the point of dying for Him bring glory to God by their deaths (1 Pet. 4:14-16). He lived with this prediction hanging over him for three decades (cf. 2 Pet. 1:14). Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 96) wrote that Peter died by martyrdom (1 Clement 5:4; 6:1).[711] According to church tradition, Peter asked for crucifixion upside down because he felt unworthy to suffer as Jesus had.[712] Traditionally he died in Rome about A.D. 67 A.D.

Jesus then repeated His former command for Peter to follow Him (cf. Mark 1:17). This is a present imperative in the Greek text meaning "keep on following me."

> "Obedience to Jesus' command, Follow Me, is the key issue in every Christian's life. As Jesus followed the Father's will, so His disciples should follow their Lord whether the path leads to a cross or to some other difficult experience."[713]

Was Jesus saying that the Rapture would not occur before Peter died? Other New Testament writers who wrote before Peter's death wrote as though the Lord could return for the church at any moment (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:16-18; cf. 2 Thess. 2). Probably we should understand references to future events such as Peter's death as being contingent on the larger purposes of God including the Rapture (cf. Acts. 27:24).[714]

21:20-21 Why did John identify himself as he did in these verses? This description highlights his intimacy with Jesus. That intimacy was evidently a factor in Jesus' plans for John to which He proceeded to refer (vv. 22-24). These plans included his writing this Gospel (v. 24). Therefore by presenting the writer as an intimate of Jesus John was establishing his credentials as a reliable eyewitness of what he reported. A second reason is that this description also reminds the reader of John's intimacy with Peter. This helps us understand Peter's question about Jesus' will for John. Peter evidently wanted to know what would happen to his young friend if he himself was going to suffer crucifixion.

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[710]Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, p. 60. His book deals with this episode in Peter's life most helpfully, especially for Christian leaders.

[711]*Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers*, 1:11.

[712]*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 2:25; 3:1. There is little support for this tradition, however.

[713]Blum, p. 345.

[714]Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 113-14, believed that Peter and the early church did not understand Jesus' words here as meaning that Peter would live a long life but only that he would die a martyr's death.

Peter was not the only Christian who wanted to know God's will for another believer's life. Many Christians since him have wanted the same information but not always for as altruistic reasons as Peter presumably had.

21:22 Jesus essentially told Peter that John's future was none of his business. Rather than concerning himself with God's will for other people, even those closest to him, he should concentrate on following Jesus faithfully himself. The "you" in the Greek text is emphatic. Even if it was Jesus' will for John to remain alive until He returned, that was not to be Peter's concern.

The reference to Jesus' return is probably a reference to the Rapture rather than the Second Coming in view of what Jesus had promised these disciples in 14:1-3.

21:23 Jesus' statement here led to a rumor that John would not die before Jesus returned. This is one of the earliest instances of people setting a date for the Lord's return. All such attempts to identify exactly when Jesus will return go beyond Scriptural revelation.

John clarified what Jesus really did say to squelch the rumor, which was evidently circulating when he wrote this Gospel. The clarification was important because when John died some people might have falsely concluded that Jesus had not been faithful to His promise to return. Others might conclude that John's Gospel was not trustworthy. However, Jesus had spoken of a hypothetical possibility. He had not given a promise.

> "In view of the fact that in this Gospel slight variations when statements are repeated are almost universal, it is noteworthy that here the statement is repeated exactly from verse 22. The precise words used are significant, and the writer is at pains to be accurate."[715]
>
> "The author's explanation of Jesus' announcement may be taken as evidence that the disciple was still living at the time this Gospel was written and that he was the source of its content. Obviously, if he had died early, the rumor would have had no credence."[716]

It is interesting and significant that the last words of Jesus that John recorded were about His return. This is the great hope of His believing disciples.

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[715]Morris, p. 775.
[716]Tenney, "John," p. 203.

C. THE WRITER'S POSTSCRIPT 21:24-25

Some commentators refer to this ending as a colophon.[717] However, it is more similar to a postscript because it contains only hints of the writer's identity. Mainly it claims that this Gospel is a reliable though limited record of Jesus' actions.

21:24 Most careful students of this Gospel have deduced from this and other oblique references in the book that the Apostle John is the writer in view. This description of the writer stresses the reliability of his witness.[718] "These things" probably refers to the whole Gospel, not just what immediately precedes. The statement is general, and it occurs at the end of the book.

The identity of the "we" is less clear. They could be writers who recorded John's verbal witness as he dictated the material in this Gospel to them. They could be editors of the Gospel. Some scholars view these people as the elders of the Ephesian church where John traditionally served late in his life.[719] Others believe that they were influential men in his church though not necessarily in Ephesus.[720] Another view is that this is an indefinite reference similar to "as is well known."[721] Probably John himself wrote this statement in the plural, as authoritative people sometimes do. It would then be an editorial "we" (cf. 1:14; 3:2, 11; 20:2; 1 John 1:2, 4, 5, 6, 7; 3 John 12). Since the next verse returns to the first person, this option seems most probable to me.

21:25 This final verse along with the one preceding it returns to the broad perspective with which this Gospel began in its prologue (1:1-18). The prologue presents the Word humbling Himself and entering the world in incarnation. This verse presents the world as not able to contain all the revelation that the Word made. John's final word was that what he wrote, and what everyone else could write, would be only a small part of what could be written to bring honor to Jesus Christ.

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[717]A colophon is the finishing stroke and crowning touch to a document. It is an inscription placed at the end of a book or manuscript that contains basic information about it such as the title, writer's name, date and place of writing, etc.

[718]See Thomas D. Lea, "The Reliability of History in John's Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:3 (September 1996):387-402.

[719]Westcott, *The Gospel . . . Greek Text . . .*, 2:374.

[720]Bultmann, pp. 717-18.

[721]C. H. Dodd, "Note on John 21, 24," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS4 (1953):212-13.

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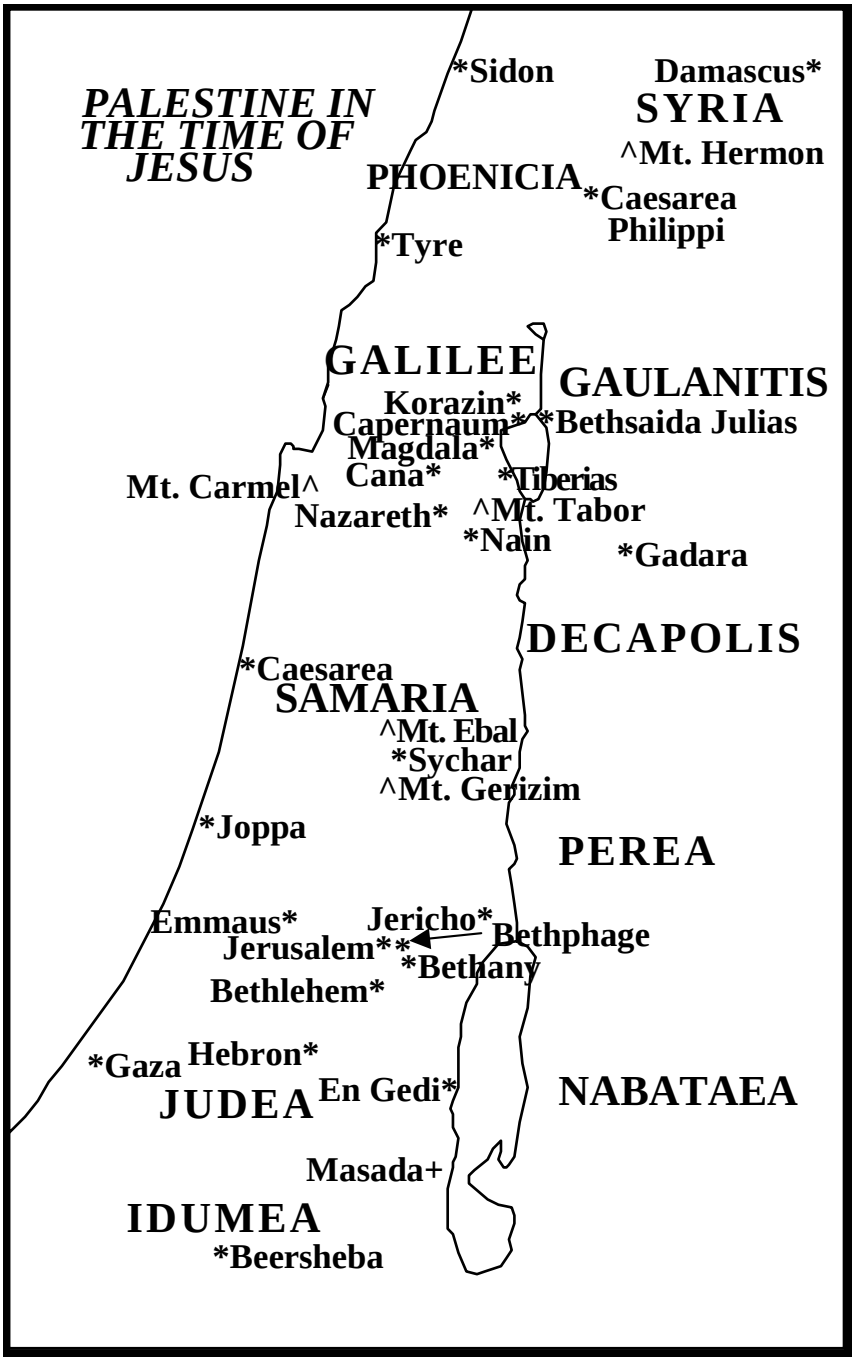
PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS
*Sidon
Damascus*
SYRIA
^Mt. Hermon
PHOENICIA
*Caesarea Philippi
*Tyre
GALILEE
GAULANITIS
Korazin*
Capernaum*
*Bethsaida Julias
Magdala*
Cana*
*Tiberias
Mt. Carmel^
Nazareth*
^Mt. Tabor
*Nain
*Gadara
DECAPOLIS
*Caesarea
SAMARIA
^Mt. Ebal
*Sychar
^Mt. Gerizim
*Joppa
PEREA
Emmaus*
Jericho*
Bethphage
Jerusalem**
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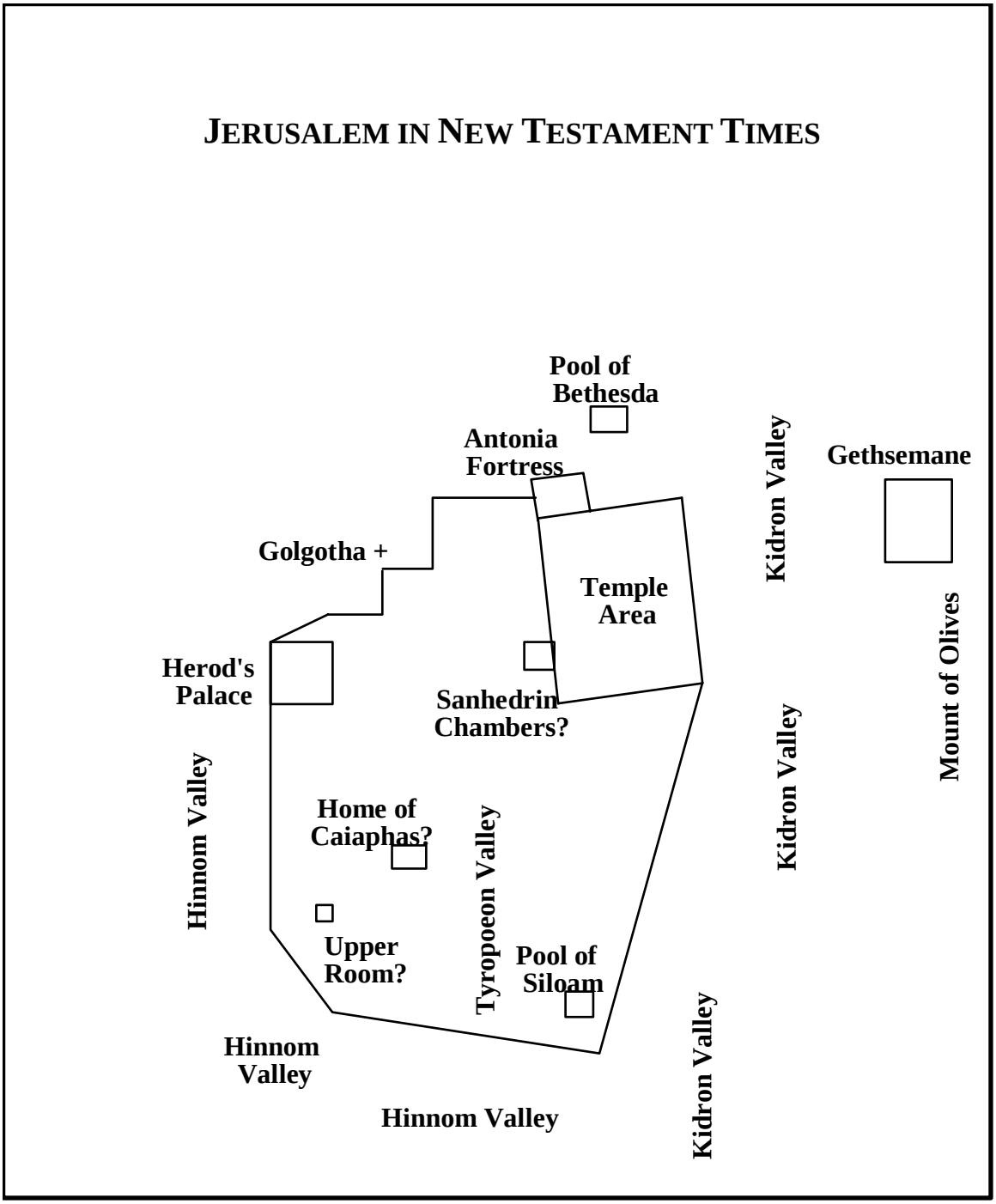
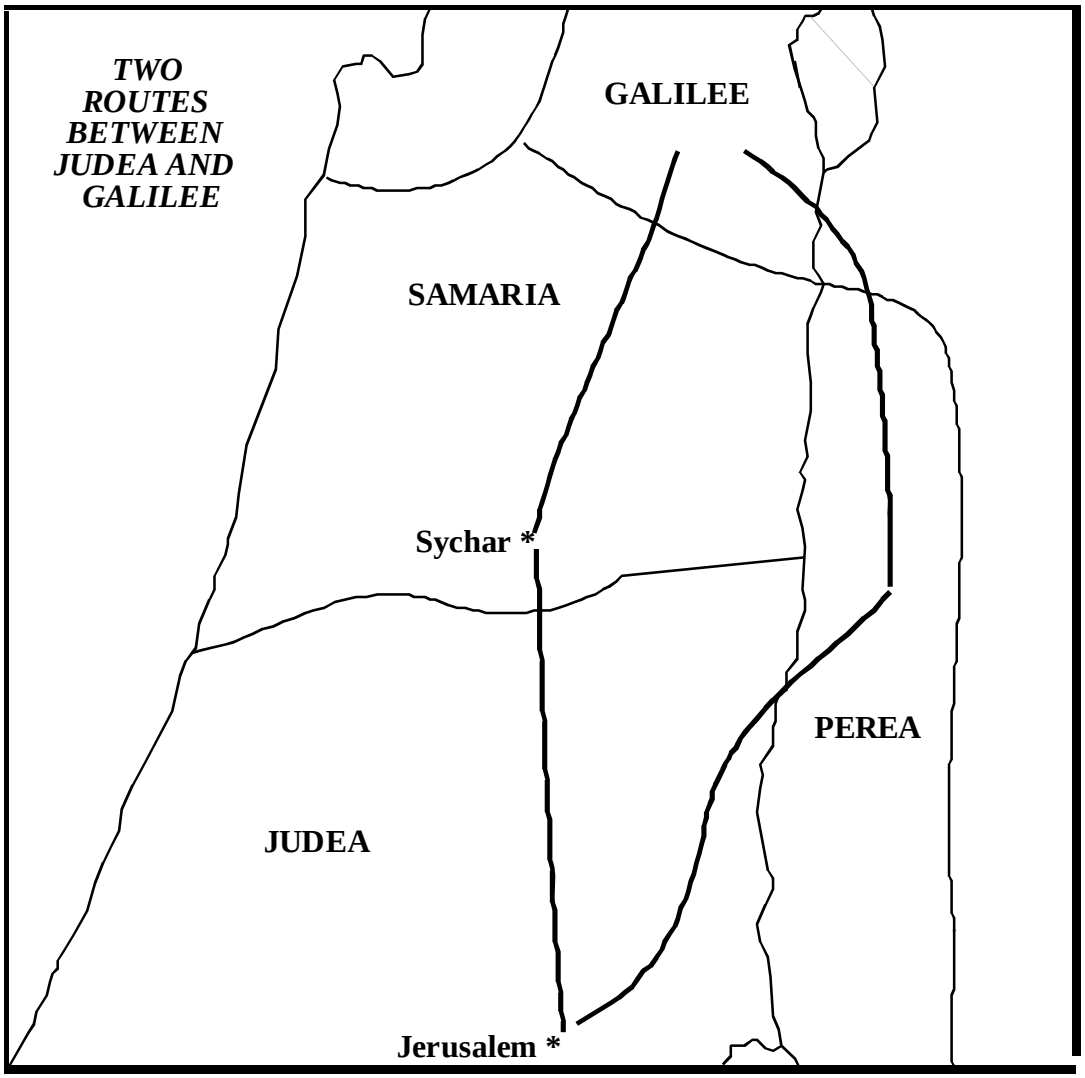
Hebron*
JUDEA
En Gedi*
NABATAEA
Masada+
IDUMEA
*Beersheba


JERUSALEM IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES
Pool of Bethesda
Antonia Fortress
Gethsemane
Kidron Valley
Golgotha +
Temple Area
Mount of Olives
Herod's Palace
Sanhedrin Chambers?
Hinnom Valley
Home of Caiaphas?
Tyropoeon Valley
Kidron Valley
Upper Room?
Pool of Siloam
Hinnom Valley
Kidron Valley
Hinnom Valley


TWO ROUTES BETWEEN JUDEA AND GALILEE
GALILEE
SAMARIA
Sychar *
PEREA
JUDEA
Jerusalem *