

Notes on John

2023 Edition
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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.¹

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).² 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 the disciple 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 John was one of Zebedee's sons, who was a fisherman before Jesus called him to leave his nets and follow Him.

¹See Marcus Dods, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:655-78; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 135-38.

²Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

"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

In the article just quoted, the writer showed how John projected his personality into his writing of this Gospel.

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), who was 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 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 generally comes from those who hold a lower view of Scripture. Answering their objections lies outside the purpose of these notes.⁵

PLACE OF WRITING

Eusebius also 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).

¹Merrill C. Tenney, "The Author's Testimony to Himself," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):223.

²Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:1.

³See 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; and George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, pp. lxvi-lxxv.

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

⁵For treatment of these views, see Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 68-81, and books on Bible Introduction. For a more complete discussion of authorship, see B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorised Version with Introduction and Notes*, pp. v-xxxv.

⁶Eusebius, 3:24:1.

Eusebius wrote that John composed his Gospel when he was at Ephesus.¹ During the first century, that city was one of the largest centers of Christian activity in the Gentile world. Antioch of Syria and Alexandria in Egypt have been suggested as sites of composition, but they do not have as good support as Ephesus does.²

DATE

A few scholars believe that 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).³ 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 the material in the Synoptics.⁴ This would put the fourth Gospel later than the Synoptics.

Second, according to early church tradition the Apostle John lived long in 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 the land of Israel and Jerusalem as they were before the Roman destruction (cf. 5:2).⁵ This may be a weak argument, since John frequently used the Greek present tense to describe things in the past. Some who hold this date note the absence of any reference to Jerusalem's destruction in John. However, there could have been many reasons that John chose not to mention the destruction of Jerusalem if he wrote after that event. A

¹Ibid., 3:24:3-8.

²For discussion, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: Revised Edition*, pp. 54-55.

³E.g., Edwin R. Goodenough, "John: A Primitive Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945): Part 2:145-82.

⁴See Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, pp. 93-94.

⁵E.g., Morris, p. 30; Robert N. Wilkin, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 1:357-58; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, pp. 531, 177-205.

date of writing before the destruction of Jerusalem is also a minority opinion among scholars.

Many scholars believe that John wrote his Gospel between A.D. 85 and 95, or close to A.D. 100.¹ 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 they 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 had probably read them and chose to include other material from Jesus' ministry in his account in order to supplement them.²

The latest possible date would be about A.D. 100, although some more liberal scholars date this Gospel in the second century. The Egerton papyrus, which dates from early in the second century, contains unmistakable allusions to John's Gospel.³ This seems to rule out a second century date.

It seems impossible to identify the precise date of writing, as evidenced by the difference of opinion that exists between excellent scholars. However, a date sometime between A.D. 65 and 95 is probable. I favor a date in the 90s.

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.⁴ Compared to the Synoptics, which present Jesus as a historical figure, as John did, John also stressed the deity of Jesus strongly. Darrell Bock described this difference as the

¹E.g., Westcott, p. xl; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 1:xxi; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5:1; Everett F. Harrison, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1072; Tenney, "John," p. 9; Blum, p. 268; Carson, p. 82; and Mark L. Bailey, "John," in *The New Testament Explorer*, p. 154.

²R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 32.

³Tenney, "John," p. 9; Carson, p. 82. See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 386-92, for more information about papyrus, leather, parchment, and vellum as writing materials.

⁴E.g., Blum, p. 268.

Synoptics viewing Jesus from the earth up, and John viewing Jesus from heaven down.¹ Obviously the Synoptics present Jesus as God 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, where Thomas confesses 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 emphasize the importance of active, vital trust in Jesus. Other key words are witness, love, abide, the Counselor (i.e., the Holy Spirit), light, life, darkness, Word, glorify, true, and real.² 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 for what lay ahead of them.

John selected seven signs or miracles that demonstrate that Jesus was the divine Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament (chs. 2—12).³ He also recorded the discourses that Jesus gave following these signs that explained their significance. In addition, he featured 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).⁴

About 93 percent of the material in John's Gospel does not appear in the Synoptics.⁵ This fact illustrates the uniqueness of this Gospel compared to the other three, and it explains why they are called "Synoptic" and John is

¹Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, p. 24.

²Tenney, "John," p. 12; Wilkin, 1:358.

³J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 5:292, believed that John included 8 sign miracles, and J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 4:365, believed that he included 11.

⁴See Bruce R. Reichenback, "The Theological Significance of Sevens in John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:707 (July-September 2020):286-307.

⁵Blum, p. 269. See Baxter, 5:271-85, for his consecutive view of the Lord's ministry.

not. For example, John recorded no story parables of Jesus, though he did include many extended discourses and personal conversations that the other Gospel evangelists omitted.

"... it is undeniable that the discourses of the Lord which are peculiar to St John's Gospel are, for the most part, very brief summaries of elaborate discussions and expositions in relation to central topics of faith."¹

"Its [this Gospel's] aim is, not to give us what Jesus said like a newspaper report, but to give us what Jesus meant."²

All four Gospels are quite similar, and the three Synoptics are even more similar, though each Gospel has its own distinctive features. John, on the other hand, is considerably different from the others. Specifically, it emphasizes Jesus' deity more strongly 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.³ I suspect that he did.

Another difference between the Synoptics and the fourth Gospel is the writers' view of eschatology (the end times). They all share the same basic view, namely, that the Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement (or delay) of the earthly kingdom of Messiah. However, the Synoptic writers focused on the future aspects of eschatology more than John did. He put more emphasis on the present or realized aspects of eschatology.

John stressed the aspects of messianic kingdom life that Christians currently enjoy as benefits of the New Covenant, which Jesus inaugurated with His death. These include 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 (delayed) the earthly kingdom, and believers' interest was more on life in the church than it was on life in the future earthly kingdom (cf. chs. 13—17).

¹Westcott, p. lvii.

²Barclay, 1:xxxix.

³For 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.

"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.' 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."¹

"A heresy is seldom a complete lie and a complete untruth; a heresy usually results when one side, one part, one facet of the truth is unduly emphasised [*sic*]."²

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

"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."³

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 and less Jewish 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."⁴

¹Morris, p. 31.

²Barclay, 1:xxvi.

³Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 101.

⁴Tenney, "John," p. 4. Paragraph division omitted.

As a piece of literature, John's Gospel has a symphonic structure. Baxter called this a style of "recurrent ideas."¹ This structural style also characterizes John's first epistle.

"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."²

Tenney identified the major themes as the signs, the sonship and messiahship of Christ, and eternal life. Tasker described the fourth Gospel as "the simplest and yet the most profound of the Christian Gospels."³

"The test of time has given the palm to the Fourth Gospel over all the books of the world. If Luke's Gospel is the most beautiful, John's Gospel is supreme in its height and depth and reach of thought. The picture of Christ here given is the one that has captured the mind and heart of mankind. ... The language of the Fourth Gospel has the clarity of a spring, but we are not able to sound the bottom of the depths. Lucidity and profundity challenge and charm us as we linger over it."⁴

Baxter believed that the structure of John corresponds to the furniture of the Old Testament tabernacle.⁵

Let me encourage you to read this Gospel through at one sitting sometime, if you have not already done so. I remember the first time that I did, when I was a teenager. The book made a profound impression on me. Read this

¹Baxter, 5:289.

²Merrill C. Tenney, "The Symphonic Structure of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:478 (April-June 1963):117-18.

³Tasker, p. 10.

⁴Robertson, 5:ix.

⁵See Baxter, 5:295-98, for further explanation.

way, the impact of Jesus' life is tremendous. One can hardly escape the conviction that Jesus is the Christ.

ORIGINAL RECIPIENTS

When one reads this Gospel one can get the impression that John wrote primarily for Christians. This impression may seem to contradict John's stated purpose for writing (20:30-31). One writer wrote that this is the only book in the Bible written to unbelievers.¹ Probably John wrote both to convince unbelievers that Jesus was the Son of God, and at the same time he wrote to give Christians—especially those who faced persecution—confidence in their Savior.² The word believe in 20:31 may be in the Greek present tense in order to imply that Christian readers should continue believing. Or it could be in the Greek aorist tense in order to suggest 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 was that they might obtain eternal life, and his purpose for believers was that they might experience abundant eternal life (10:10). Though most students of this Gospel have concluded that John's purpose in writing was primarily evangelistic, some have felt that it was primarily for the growth of believers.³

John explained Jewish customs, translated Jewish names, and located Jewish sites. These facts suggest that he was writing for Gentile readers who lived primarily outside the Jews' homeland. Furthermore, the prologue seems addressed to readers who thought in Greek terms. 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. Carson argued that John's purpose was specifically to evangelize Jews and Jewish proselytes.⁴

¹Wilkin, 1:357.

²Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. lxxxix.

³E.g., McGee, 4:364.

⁴Carson, pp. 87-95.

"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."¹

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, where John lived during the latter part of his life.²

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 pre-incarnate Word 1:1-5
 - B. The witness of John the Baptist 1:6-8

¹Tenney, "John," p. 10.

²See Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 225-84, for extensive discussion of introductory matters.

- C. The appearance of the Light 1:9-13
 - D. The incarnation of the Word 1:14-18
- 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 Andrew and Philip 1:43-51
 - B. Jesus' early Galilean ministry 2:1-12
 - 1. The first sign: changing water into 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. Jesus' announcement and command 13:31-35
 - 2. Peter's question about Jesus' departure and Jesus' reply 13:36-38
 - 3. Jesus' comforting revelation in view of His departure 14:1-24

4. Jesus' 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 priest's 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 20:1-10
 2. The discovery of Mary Magdalene 20:11-18
 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

MESSAGE

In one sense, the Gospel of John is more profound than the Synoptics. It is the most difficult Gospel for most Bible expositors to preach and teach for reasons that become evident as one studies it. For my first experience teaching a series of home Bible studies, I chose this book, because I thought it would not be too difficult. I soon discovered that understanding and communicating much of what John wrote was not easy. In another sense, however, the fourth Gospel is the easiest Gospel to understand. Leon Morris wrote that it is a pool in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim.¹ It is both simple and profound. It clarifies some things that the Synoptics leave as mysteries.

What are these mysteries? Matthew presents Jesus as the King, but it does not articulate the reason for Jesus' great authority—but John does. Mark presents Jesus as the Servant, but it does not account for His depth of consecration to God—but John does. Luke presents Jesus as the perfect Man, but it does not explain His uniqueness from the rest of humankind—but John does.

¹Morris, p. 3.

The Gospel of John reveals answers to the mysteries about Jesus that the Synoptics leave hidden. It is, therefore, an apocalypse, an unveiling, similar to the Book of Revelation in this respect. The Book of Revelation is the climax of biblical Christology. The Gospel of John plays that part among the Gospels (cf. Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch). It is a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ more than any of the others. John told us that it would be this in his prologue (1:1-18). Though it is an apocalypse in this sense, it does not contain apocalyptic content, which refers to a particular literary genre describing cataclysmic end times events.

The statement of the message of this Gospel occurs in 1:18: "No one has seen God at any time; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained Him." John claimed that Jesus, the Son of God, was the explanation of God the Father. This Gospel presents Jesus as the One who manifested God to humankind. It then stresses the revelation of the truth about God.

People have constantly sought to represent God in some way. We want to know what God is like. Ideas about God that do not come from the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ are usually wrong, even idolatrous. They create a false view of God. Typically human beings without divine revelation have imagined God as being an immense version of themselves, a projection of human personality into cosmic proportions. God's revelation of Himself, however, involved the limitation of Himself to humanity, the exact opposite approach. This is what God did in the Incarnation. God's revelations are often the exact opposite of what one would expect.

John presented Jesus as the Son of God. He wanted his readers to view Jesus and to see God. In the tears of Jesus we should see what causes God sorrow. In the compassion of Jesus we should see how God cares for His own. In the anger of Jesus we should see what God hates.

What do we learn about God from Jesus in John? The prologue gives us the essential answer, and the body of the book explains this answer with various illustrations from Jesus' ministry. The prologue tells us that Jesus has manifested the glory of God by revealing two things about Him: His grace and His truth (1:14). All that Jesus revealed about God that this Gospel narrates is contractible into these two words. Notice first the revelation of grace in this Gospel:

The Gospel of John presents God as a gracious person. Behind His gracious dealings lies a heart of love. There are probably hundreds of evidences of God's love resulting in gracious action in this book. Note just the evidence of these qualities in the seven signs that John chose to record.

The miracle of changing water into wine (ch. 2) shows God's concern for marital joy. The healing of the official's son (ch. 4) shows God's desire that people experience family unity. The healing of the paralytic (ch. 5) shows God's grace in providing physical restoration. The feeding of the 5,000 (ch. 6) shows God's love in providing material needs. The miracle of Jesus walking on the water (ch. 6) shows God's desire that people enjoy supernatural peace. The healing of the man born blind (ch. 9) illustrates God's desire that we have true understanding. The raising of Lazarus (ch. 11) shows God's grace in providing new life. All of these miracles are revelations of God's love manifesting itself in gracious behavior toward people in their various needs. These are only the most obvious manifestations of God's grace in this book.¹

This Gospel also reveals that God is a God of truth. Another one of God's attributes that we see revealed in this Gospel lies behind the truth that we see revealed in this Gospel. That attribute is His holiness. The figure that John used to describe God's holiness is light. Light is a common figure for God's holiness in the Old Testament. The principle of God's holiness governs the passion of His love.

Jesus' great works in John reveal God's love and His great words reveal God's truth. Consider the seven great "I am" claims of Jesus as illustrations of the various aspects of the truth that Jesus revealed about God. All of these claims point to God as the source of, and to Jesus as the mediator of, things having to do with truth.

The "bread of life" claim (ch. 6) points to God as the source of true sustenance. The "light of the world" claim (ch. 9) points to God as the source of true illumination. The "door" claim (ch. 10) points to God as the source of true security. The "good shepherd" claim (ch. 10) points to God as the source of true care. The "resurrection and the life" claim (ch. 11) points to God as the source of true life. "The way, the truth, and the life" claim (ch. 14) points to God as the source of true authority. The "vine"

¹For a defense of the possibility of miracles see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:533-46.

claim (ch. 15) points to God as the source of true fruitfulness. All of these claims pointed directly to Jesus as the mediator, but they also pointed beyond Him to God the Father. They were revelations of the truth concerning God.

These are all further revelations of the character of God that was introduced first in Exodus 3, where God said He would reveal Himself as "I am." The Law of Moses was an initial revelation about God. The revelation that Jesus Christ brought was a further, fuller, and final revelation of the grace and truth that characterize God (1:17). These revelations find their most comprehensive expression in the fourth Gospel.

What are the implications of the revelation in this Gospel?

First, such a revelation calls for worship. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself and dwelt among His people through the tabernacle. In the Incarnation, God revealed Himself and dwelt among His people through His Son (1:14). The tabernacle was the place where God revealed Himself and around which His people congregated to worship Him in response. The Son of God is the Person through whom God has now given the greatest and fullest revelation of Himself, and around whom we now bow in worship (cf. Heb. 9).

Second, such a revelation calls for service. Under the old Mosaic economy, worship prepared God's people to serve Him. Their service consisted of carrying out His mission for them in the world. The revelation of God should always result in service as well as worship (cf. Isa. 6:1-8). When we learn who God is, as we study this Gospel, our reaction should not only be worship but service. This is true of the church as a whole and of every individual believer in it. Thomas' ascription of worship (20:28) was only preliminary to his fulfilling God's mission for him (20:21-23). Worship should never be an end in itself. Even in heaven believers will serve as well as worship God (Rev. 22:3).

As recipients of this revelation of God, our lives too should be notable for grace and truth. These qualities should not only be the themes of our worship. They should also be the trademarks of our service. Truth and holiness should mark our words and motives. Graciousness should stamp our works as we deal with people. If they do not, we have not yet comprehended the revelation of God that Jesus came to bring to His own.

Sloppy graciousness jeopardizes truthfulness, and rigid truthfulness endangers graciousness. Jesus illustrated the balance.

This Gospel has a strong appeal to non-Christians as well. John wrote it specifically to bring the light of revelation about Jesus' true identity to those who sit in spiritual darkness (20:30-31). The knowledge of who Jesus really is is the key to the knowledge of who God really is. Therefore our service must not only bear the marks of certain characteristics, namely, grace and truth, but it must also communicate a specific content: who Jesus is. People need to consider who Jesus is. There is no better way for them to do this than by reading this Gospel. Remember the stated purpose of this book (20:30-31). Use it as an evangelistic tool. Many people have come to faith just by reading the Gospel of John.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:57-73.

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."¹

"John's prologue, without a doubt, is a bunch of keys which unlock all that follows."²

Some writers have identified a chiasmic structure in the prologue.³ Alan Culpepper's is essentially as follows:⁴

¹Carson, p. 111.

²Baxter, 5:302.

³A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form. This structure draws attention to the central element as most important.

⁴R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981):1-31.

- 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. 13E' 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

Jeff Staley also saw a chiasmus in these verses, though his perception of the parts is slightly different from Culpepper's:¹

- 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

¹Jeff Staley, "The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel's Narrative Structure," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48:2 (April 1986):241-63.

- 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 this Gospel (cf. 20:30-31).

A. THE PRE-INCARNATE 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 here 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. This was a pagan Greek philosophical concept. Origen and Plato held it, as do some modern eastern religions and some uninformed Christians, but it is not a biblical teaching.

Time is the way that God and people 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" ("beginning") that John referred to here.¹ At the beginning of this eternity, when there was nothing else, the Word existed. Another view, a less probable one, is that John

¹C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, p. 149; Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 1:19; H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, p. 13.

was referring back to the same beginning that Moses wrote about in Genesis 1:1.¹

"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."²

Obviously the word Word (Gr. *logos*; Aram. *memra*, used to describe God in the Targums), to which John referred, was a title for God. The Targums are Aramaic translations of the Old Testament. Later in this verse he identified the Word as God. John evidently chose this title because it communicates the fact that the Word was not only God—which is John's first identification of Jesus as God—but also the expression of God. A spoken or written word expresses what is in the mind of its speaker or writer.

The Greeks used the word *logos* to describe the reason or mind of God.³ 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 about Himself (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). The word *logos* 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."⁴

¹Westcott, p. 2; *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1756.

²Morris, pp. 64-65.

³Barclay, 1:xxii-xxiii; Ironside, p. 16.

⁴Tenney, "John," p. 28.

"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."¹

John adopted this word *logos* and used it as a personification to express Jesus ("the Word") as the ultimate divine self-revelation: God's final revelation of Himself (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), deliverance (Ps. 107:20; Isa. 56:1), and wisdom (Prov. 4:5-13; 8:1—9:2).

John's description of the Word as with God shows that Jesus was in one sense distinct from God. He was (and is) the second Person of the Trinity, who is distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit in the form of His existence. However, John was also careful to note that Jesus was in another sense fully God. He was not less of God than the Father was, or the Spirit, in His intrinsic being. 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 exists as a separate person within the Godhead.

There is probably no fully adequate illustration of the Trinity in the natural world. An egg consists of three parts: shell, yolk, and white. Each part is fully egg, yet each has its own identity

¹W. Hall Harris, "A Theology of John's Writings," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 190. See Beasley-Murray, pp. 6-10, for a brief discussion of the origin of the *logos* concept.

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 his or her own family. Each may have a different first name, but all bear the same family name. Light, when passed through a prism, is seen to be composed of three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. Similarly, the person of God, when revealed in Scripture, is seen to consist of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hydrogen dioxide can be water, ice, and steam and still be H₂O.

Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to this verse to support their doctrine that Jesus was not fully God but only the highest created being.¹ They translate the last part of this verse: "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, as here. 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. Often the absence of the article stresses the character or quality of the noun, as it does here. (cf. Heb. 1:1:2).

"As a rule the predicate is without the article, even when the subject uses it [cf. vv. 6, 12, 13, 18, et al.]."²

Jesus was not "a god." He was and is God.

"What John is saying is this—the Word is not of the created things; the Word was there *before creation*."³

"John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and

¹See John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects*, pp. 131, 161-62; Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, pp. 263-64.

²A. 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.

³Barclay, 1:15.

words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous."¹

John 1:1 is the first of many "asides" in this Gospel. An aside is a direct statement that tells the reader something. Asides are never observable events but are interpretive comments on observable events. These comments by John reveal 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)."²

Thatcher identified 191 asides in this Gospel and charted them by type.³

- 1:2 The Word "was 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. Further, 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).⁴
- 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

¹Barrett, p. 156.

²Tom Thatcher, "A New Look at Asides in the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):430.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 434-39.

⁴See David J. MacLeod, "The Eternality and Deity of the Word: John 1:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:637 (January-March 2003):48-64.

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 the Creation, because all of creation reveals God (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20).

"In the time of John this kind of belief was widespread. Men believed that the world was evil and that an evil God had created it."¹

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."²

Jesus was (and is) the source of life. Therefore He could impart life to the things that He created. Every living thing owes its life to the Creator: Jesus. Life for humankind consists of light (here used as a figure of knowledge and understanding). 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). In the spiritual realm, 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.

¹Barclay, 1:19.

²Morris, p. 73.

1:5 As light shines (Greek present tense for the first time) in the darkness, so Jesus brought the revelation and salvation of God to humanity in its fallen and lost condition. He did this when He became a man. As the word of God brought light to the chaos in Creation, so Jesus brought light to fallen humankind in the Incarnation.

Furthermore, the light that Jesus brought was superior to and stronger than the darkness that previously existed—both physically and spiritually. The darkness (in this case a figure for Satan's kingdom) did not overcome (Gr. *katelaben*, cf. 6:17; 8:3-4; 12:35; Mark 9:18) and consume the Light, but the Light overcame the darkness.

"The word in the Greek is *katelaben*, meaning actually 'to take down.' It is the picture of a secretary to whom the boss is giving dictation, and she stops and says, 'I can't take that down. I am not able to take it down.' The light shines in darkness and the darkness is not able to take it in."¹

John did not view the world as a stage on which two equal and opposing forces engage in 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 will overcome it.²

"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

¹McGee, 4:373.

²See David J. MacLeod, "The Creation of the Universe by the Word: John 1:3-5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:638 (April-June 2003):187-201.

brought light into darkness, and, though He suffered death, was not overcome by it."¹

Tenny's article just quoted contains discussion of about 20 images that John used.

Throughout these introductory verses, John was clearly hinting at parallels between what Jesus did physically in the Creation, and what He did spiritually through the Incarnation. These parallels continue throughout 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, who pointed those in darkness to the Light, and a model witness, who provided an excellent example for believers who would follow him.² 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" or "Gift of God." John was a prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who bore witness to the light (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.³ John the Apostle always referred to himself

¹Merrill C. Tenney, "The Imagery of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:481 (January-March 1964):21.

²See 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.

³See Cornelis Bennema, "The Character of John in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:2 (June 2009):271-84.

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 in order 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 one who gave witness about the Light. The writer often emphasized something by simply repeating it, as he did here with the word witness. The other Gospels also identified John the Baptist's 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 to draw out 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."¹

"But it is worthy of remark that St John does not notice explicitly his [John the Baptist's] call to repentance, nor do the terms 'repent,' 'repentance' find a place in his Gospel or Epistles ('Repent' occurs frequently in the Apocalypse)."²

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).³

"A Mandaean sect still continues south of Baghdad which, though hostile to Christianity, claims an ancestral link to the Baptist."⁴

Mandaism was a non-Christian type of Gnosticism.⁵

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 all of humanity, so God sent John the Baptist to illuminate the identity of the Light to individual people.

In this Gospel, there are eight witnesses to Jesus' unique position: (1) God the Father (5:37; 8:18), (2) Jesus Himself (8:14, 18), (3) Jesus' works (5:36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:25), (4) the Scriptures (1:45; 5:39, 46), (5) John the Baptist (1:7-8), (6) those with whom Jesus came into contact (4:39; 9:25, 38; 12:17), (7) Jesus' disciples, including the Apostle John (15:27; 19:35; 21:24), and (8) the Holy Spirit (15:26; cf. 1 John 5:6).

¹Timothy Paul Jones, "The Necessity of Objective Assent in the Act of Christian Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):150.

²Westcott, p. 6.

³See Barclay, 1:28-29.

⁴Blum, p. 272.

⁵See Morris, p. 57; Beasley-Murray, pp. lvii-lviii.

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

The first section of the prologue (vv. 1-5) presents the pre-incarnate 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."¹

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, NKJV).² The other is that the true Light comes into the world and enlightens everyone (Gr. neuter participle *erchomenon*, NASB, NIV, TNIV, RSV, NRSV, NET2, HCSB, ESV, NEB CEV).³ The second option seems preferable since the Incarnation is so much in view in the context.

The point is that Jesus as the "true 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.

¹Morris, pp. 82-83.

²AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, and NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

³NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, TNIV refers to *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*, RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, NRSV refers to *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, NET2 refers to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed., HCSB refers to *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*, ESV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, and CEV refers to *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*.

"... the light shines upon every man for judgement [*sic*], to reveal what he is."¹

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.² Their view is very close to the belief of some charismatic Christians 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, though He does give guidance and illumination.

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*), though He was. He meant that 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; Heb. 1:1-2).

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 at 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. He shines even on those who have

¹Barrett, p. 161.

²See Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:9.

never heard of Him, in that when He came, He brought revelation of God that is now available to everyone.

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."¹

1:11 More seriously, when Jesus visited His own creation (Gr. *idia*, neuter), His own 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.² They were His own in a double sense: He had not only created them, but He had also called them to Himself out from the nations. Jesus had created the earth like a house or home, 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 to His own house.

"Here there is the tragedy of a people being prepared for a task, and then refusing that task."³

1:12 The contrast to rejection is acceptance. Not everyone rejected Jesus when He came. Some accepted ("received") Him.⁴ To these He gave as a gift the right or 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 all the revelation of who Jesus is that God has given. Because that revelation includes the fact that Jesus died as a substitute sacrifice in the place of sinners, belief involves relying on Jesus for salvation rather than on oneself. It does

¹Morris, p. 85. See his additional note on "the world," pp. 111-13.

²Barrett, p. 163.

³Barclay, 1:39.

⁴See David J. MacLeod, "The Reaction of the World to the Word: John 1:10-13" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (October-December 2003):398-413.

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."¹

The context determines whether John had genuine or inadequate belief in view in any given passage.²

In one sense, all human beings are the children of God in that we are all 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. Usually it describes Christians 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 like nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), whereas sons emphasizes rights and privileges.

When Christians explain the way of salvation to unbelievers, one difficulty we encounter is how to make clear what is meant by receiving Jesus Christ as Savior. The following illustration may help. A man is rushed to the hospital where a doctor examines him and informs him that he is critically ill. The patient is told that he will die unless he gets proper treatment. The physician then prescribes medicine for the sick man and

¹Harris, p. 223. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid., pp. 225-26. Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 13.

says: If you will take this, I can assure you with absolute certainty that you will get well. Now, what should the man do? Should he just lie there on his sickbed and believe that the doctor knows his business, that he has diagnosed his illness correctly, and that the prescription will surely make him well? No, that is not enough. If that is all he does, he will die. To live, he must take the medicine.

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 in this verse 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 (descent). Many of the Jews believed that because they were Abraham's descendants, they were automatically 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.

New life does not come because of physical desire ("the will of the flesh") either. No amount of wanting it and striving for it with personal effort will bring it. Neither can one person make another person a Christian. The only thing that produces new life 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."¹

Third, new spiritual life does not come because of a human decision ("will of man") either, specifically, the choice of a husband to produce a child. No one can will himself or herself into becoming a Christian, or simply determine to become a Christian. New life comes as the result of a spiritual decision to trust in Jesus Christ. The Greek word for man here is *andros*, which means 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 coequal with God, before anything else came into being, became flesh: a human being.² This is the most concise statement of the Incarnation in the Bible. 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. The term flesh in Scripture has both a literal meaning, namely, material human flesh, and a metaphorical meaning: human nature. A second, less used, metaphorical meaning is all that we were in Adam (sinful humans) before our regeneration (cf. Rom. 7:5). Here

¹Harris, p. 206. See also Morris, p. 89.

²See Harris, pp. 189-92, or Morris, pp. 102-11, for fuller discussions of the title *Logos*.

John used the word flesh in the literal and the first metaphorical senses. God the Son assumed a human, though not sinful, nature.¹

"So staggeringly new and unheard-of was this conception of God in a human form that it is not surprising that there were some even in the Church who could not believe it."²

"... what intelligent meaning can one give to John's language here apart from the Virgin Birth? What ordinary mother or father ever speaks of a child 'becoming flesh'?"³

"John does not say, 'the Word became man,' nor 'the Word took a body.' He chooses that form of expression which 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."⁴

"If anything like this very great mystery can be found in human affairs, the most apposite [appropriate] parallel seems to be that of man, whom we see to consist of two substances. Yet neither is so mingled with the other as not to retain its own distinctive nature. For the soul is

¹See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:382-96, 3:33-34, for discussions of Christ's hypostatic union (the union of His divine and human natures in the Incarnation).

²Barclay, 1:45.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:12.

⁴Morris, pp. 90-91.

not the body, and the body is not the soul. Therefore, some things are said exclusively of the soul that can in no wise apply to the body; and of the body, again, that in no way fit the soul; of the whole man, that cannot refer—except inappropriately—to either soul or body separately. Finally, the characteristics of the mind are [sometimes] transferred to the body, and those of the body to the soul. Yet he who consists of these parts is one man, not many. Such expressions signify both that there is one person in man composed of two elements joined together, and that there are two diverse underlying natures that make up this person."¹

Jesus literally lived among His disciples. The Greek word *eskenosen*, translated "dwelt" or lived, is related to *skene*, meaning "tabernacle." As God's presence resided among the Israelites in the tabernacle, so He resided among them in the person of Jesus temporarily (cf. Exod. 25:8-9; 33:7, 11; 40:34).² Thus John hinted that Jesus was the fulfillment of what the Tabernacle in the wilderness typified. The Gospel of John contains the second largest number of quotations and allusions to the Old Testament in the Gospels after Matthew.³

"John is certainly dependent on the Old Testament, but his use of it differs from that of other New Testament writers, and is far from simple. His direct quotations are fewer, and he comparatively rarely uses the 'proof-texts' by which the earliest Christians often sought to show that Jesus was the Messiah whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament."⁴

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:14:1.

²See Merrill C. Tenney, "The Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):300-8, for discussion of the influence of the Hebrew Bible on John's teaching in this Gospel.

³*Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁴Barrett, p. 27.

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 clearly 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."¹

"The Word was God, and the Word was made flesh. These two sentences out of John contain far more philosophy; far more grace, and truth, and beauty, and love; than all the rest that has ever been written by pen of man, or spoken by tongue of man or angel."²

The glory that John and the other disciples observed 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 were expressed through Jesus, like a human son resembles his human father, except that the likeness in Jesus' case was exact (Phil. 2:6). John, writing for the other disciples ("we"), wrote that they beheld Jesus' glory. The Greek word translated beheld, *theasthai*, always means beheld with actual physical sight elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 1 John 1:1-3). The disciples saw Jesus' glory most fully at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). They were eyewitnesses of His glory.

"John has no account of the Transfiguration, for he presents the whole ministry as a transfiguration, except that the light he speaks of

¹Tenney, "John," p. 33.

²Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 2:43.

is moral and spiritual (**full of grace and truth**-rather than something visual (cf. Jn 1:17))."¹

Jesus' relationship to the Father was unique, and so was His similarity to the Father. Even though Jesus' relationship to God the Father was unique (Gr. *monogenous*, cf. v. 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), even we can become children of God (vv. 12-13). He is eternal and of the same intrinsic nature as the Father. "Only begotten" does not mean that there was a time when Jesus was not, and then the Father brought Him into being. *Monogenes*, literally "one kind," means unique or only (i.e., the only one of its kind). This word had come to connote specially beloved.²

"*Monogenes* (only born rather than only begotten) here refers to the eternal relationship of the Logos (as in 1:18) rather than to the Incarnation."³

"The glory of Jesus is thus dependent upon both his essential relationship with God (1.14) and his obedience."⁴

In particular, grace and truth characterized the glory of God that Jesus manifested (cf. Exod. 34:6). Grace in this context refers to graciousness (i.e., goodness, Heb. *hesed*), and truth means integrity (i.e., truthfulness, Heb. *'emet*, 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.⁵

¹Harrison, p. 1074.

²Barclay, 1:55.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:13.

⁴Barrett, p. 166.

⁵Morris, p. 95. See also David J. MacLeod, "The Incarnation of the Word: John 1:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:641 (January-March 2004):72-88.

The historicity of Jesus has been denied by some.¹ But there is ample testimony to His existence as a historical person in the writings of ancient secular historians.²

1:15 John the Baptist was another witness, besides John the Apostle and the other disciples of Jesus, who testified about 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."³

Even though John the Baptist was slightly older and began his ministry before Jesus began His, 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."⁴

Jesus' superiority rested in His preexistence (before Creation) 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 These words, and those that follow, are quite certainly those of the evangelist and not of the Baptist.⁵ All the resources of God are present in Jesus, which constitutes His fullness (Gr. *pleroma*; cf. Col. 1:19; 2:29). It is out of this "fullness" that people receive grace (undeserved favor). The glory of God that

¹E.g., Shirley J. Case, *The Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 39-61.

²See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, pp. 49-50.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:287.

⁴Carson, p. 131.

⁵Westcott, p. 13; Barrett, p. 168.

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" (Gr. *charin anti charitos*). The problem is the meaning of the Greek preposition *anti* here. Some interpreters believe that John was saying that grace follows grace like ocean wave follows wave, washing believers with successive blessings.¹ The NIV "one blessing after another" effectively expresses this view, and the translation "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)."² 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 John meant that God gives different grace (divine assistance) in different situations.³

A third view is that the Greek preposition *anti* means "instead of" here, as it often does elsewhere.⁴ According to this interpretation, John meant that God's grace through 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 suspect that John may have intended all of ideas: He could have been thinking of God's grace in Jesus Christ superseding His grace through Moses, and continuing to supply grace to the Christian day by day in a variety of ways. This interpretation recognizes John's mention of the fullness of God's grace, as well as the contrast in verse 17.

¹See F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, p. 43; Robertson, *A Grammar ...*, p. 574; idem, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:16; Morris, p. 98; Beasley-Murray, p. 15; Zane C. Hodges, "Grace after Grace—John 1:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):34-45; Bock, p. 415.

²Tasker, p. 48.

³See Barclay, 1:53.

⁴Carson, p. 132-34.

Another, less acceptable view, is that *anti* means "corresponds to."¹ 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."² 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; He does not give it in response to grace that we give to Him.

1:17 Whereas Moses was the individual through whom God gave His Law to the Israelites, Jesus Christ is the One through whom He has manifested abundant grace and truth. 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 that it appears in the entire New Testament. The compound name Jesus Christ, however, occurs again only in 17:3 in John. This evangelist used the name Christ 19 times, more than any of the other Gospel writers (cf. 20:31). This seems reasonable if John wrote late in the first century A.D., by which time "Christ" had become a titulary (a title turned proper name).

John's statement shows the superiority of the gracious dispensation (arrangement, economy) that Jesus introduced over the legal dispensation that Moses inaugurated (cf. Rom. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:8).³ The legal age contained grace, and the gracious age contains laws. For example, each sacrifice that God accepted under the old economy was an expression of His grace. John was contrasting the dominant characteristics of these two ages. Law expresses God's standards, but grace provides help so that we can do His will. Surprisingly, John used the great Christian word grace three times in his prologue (vv. 14, 16, 17) but nowhere else in his Gospel.

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

²See Carson, p. 131.

³For full discussions of grace, see Lewis S. Chafer, *Grace*; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God*.

"What God showed Himself to be through His revelation in the Torah [Genesis through Deuteronomy], 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!'"¹

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.² 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, dreams, and anthropomorphic (human-like) representations of God, rather than encounters with His unveiled spiritual essence (cf. Exod. 33:20-23; 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 in order to reveal Himself to humankind.

"In the bosom of ["in the arms of"] is a Hebrew idiom expressing the intimate relationship of child and parent, and of friend and friend (cf. xiii. 23)."³

¹Ronald B. Allen, "Affirming Right-of-Way on Ancient Paths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):10.

²Dispensationalists believe that God will fulfill His promises to Israel with the ethnic descendants of Jacob, whereas non-dispensationalists believe that He will fulfill them with both Jews and Gentiles in the church.

³Tasker, p. 49.

In the system that Moses inaugurated, no one could see God clearly, but Jesus has "explained" (given a detailed account of) Him now to everyone. Note also here that John called Jesus God ("God, the only Son") again. The NET2 Bible translated this phrase "the only one, God himself."

Jesus "explained" God in the sense of revealing Him. The Greek word is *exegesato* from which we get the word exegete. The Son has exegeted (i.e., expounded, interpreted, or narrated) the Father to humankind. The reference to Jesus being in the arms 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, which is invisible because He is a spirit Being.

"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."¹

John ended his prologue as he began it: with a reference to Jesus' deity.² He began by saying that the Word was with God (v. 1), and he concluded by saying that He was in the Father's arms. This indicates the intimate fellowship, love, and knowledge that the Father and the Son share. 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.³

"Three verses form the primary thesis of John's Gospel [vv. 1, 14, 18]. From this foundation he builds his message. All you

¹Tenney, "John," p. 34.

²For 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.

³See Stephen S. Kim, "The Literary and Theological Significance of the Johannine Prologue," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:644 (October-December 2009):421-35.

read in John's Gospel—all the seven miracles the Lord did, all His testimony, all His claims—is nothing more than the proof of these three verses."¹

"The rest of the Gospel of John, from the 19th verse of the first chapter to the very end, is simply a series of incidents given to illustrate the statements made in the first 18 verses."²

"... 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."³

Later John described himself as reclining on Jesus' chest (cf. 13:23). His Gospel is an accurate revelation of the Word, because John enjoyed an intimate fellowship with Him—just as Jesus was an accurate revelation of God that came from His 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 the land of Israel, who were primarily Jewish.⁴ Some writers have called this section of the Gospel "The Book of Signs" because it features seven miracles that signify various things about Jesus.

"Signs are miraculous works performed or mentioned to illustrate spiritual principles."⁵

¹John G. Mitchell, *An Everlasting Love*, p. 19.

²Spiros Zodhiates, *Was Christ God?* p. 1.

³Morris, pp. 103-4.

⁴See Appendix 1 "A Harmony of the Gospels" at the end of my notes on Matthew.

⁵Tenney, "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.

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

G. Campbell Morgan observed three distinct periods in Jesus' public ministry as recorded by John: Jesus' quiet one-year public ministry until the imprisonment of John the Baptist (chs. 1—5), Jesus' crowded five-year public ministry following John's imprisonment until Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (ch. 6), and Jesus' crowded six-month public ministry following Peter's confession (chs. 7—12).¹ (Most students of the life of Christ believe that His public ministry lasted about three years.)

"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."²

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 33-35.

²Morris, p. 114.

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 as Jesus' followers.

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.

"For John's Gospel, John is less John the Baptist [or Baptizer] and more John the Testifier."¹

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 clarified his own identity in relation to Jesus. As the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) reveal, John's ministry was so influential that the Jewish religious authorities investigated him (Matt. 3:5-6). The Sanhedrin (Israel's highest level religious/political court) 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.²

"The Jews" is a religious term that John used 71 times, in contrast to the other Gospel writers 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,

¹Bock, p. 416.

²Carson, p. 142.

who constituted the organized and established religious world apart from faith in Jesus. Consequently it usually carries overtones of hostility to Jesus.¹

1:20 The writer emphasized that John vigorously repudiated any suggestion that he might be the Messiah: "I am not the Christ." Christ (Gr. *Christos*) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew title Messiah, which means Anointed One, namely, the servant whom God had chosen and set apart as His representative. John's ministry consisted of pointing the Messiah out to others so that 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 at that time, due to Daniel's prediction that dated the appearance of Messiah at that general time (Dan. 9:25). Malachi had predicted that Elijah would return to herald the day of the LORD (Yahweh) that Messiah would inaugurate (Mal. 4:5-6).

"Popularly it was believed that Elijah would anoint the Messiah, and thereby reveal his identity to him and to Israel (see Justin, *Apology* 35.1)."²

When John the Baptist denied being Elijah, he was denying being Elijah himself, raised from the dead. 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). Merrill pointed out that of the 42 New Testament citations of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, fully 24 of them appear in John's Gospel.³ This Prophet was prophesied to bring new revelation from God and eventually lead the Israelites in a new Exodus and overcome their oppressors. The Jews incorrectly failed to identify this Prophet

¹Morris, p. 115.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 24.

³Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy, New Testament Faith, and the Christian Life," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 27.

with Messiah (cf. v. 25; 6:14; 7:40-41). In order to correct this misunderstanding, the earliest Christian preachers contended that the Prophet was identical with the Messiah (cf. Acts 3:22). John the Baptist claimed that he was not that long-expected Prophet any more than he was the Messiah or Elijah.

1:22-23 In response to the leaders' question, John the Baptist claimed to be a voice (a herald) who was preparing the way for the Lord's coming. He quoted 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. John was a voice for God, but Jesus was the Word of God (v. 1).

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

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.² There was no precedent for John to baptize other people, and the Jewish leaders did not regard themselves as needing to repent. This was something Gentiles needed to do when they converted to Judaism. Evidently, when Gentiles converted to Judaism the males of the family underwent circumcision, and

¹See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:308-35, for an extended discussion of the differences between the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes.

²Carson, p. 145.

all the members of the family, of both sexes, were baptized.¹ Since John did not claim to be one of the prophesied eschatological figures, he appeared to these Pharisees 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 among them, but yet unknown. John did not identify Him then. This would have exposed Jesus to the scrutiny of Israel's leadership prematurely. John simply referred to this One here, and implied that he himself baptized in water under His authority. He stressed the great authority of Jesus, by saying that he himself was unworthy to do even the most 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 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."²

Richard Lenski argued that John baptized by dipping or sprinkling, and that his baptism resulted in "forgiveness then and there."³ Most evangelical commentators believe that

¹Morris, p. 123.

²Ibid., p. 124.

³Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, pp. 119, 120.

baptism was by immersion—the Greek word *baptizo* means "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge"¹—and that forgiveness of sins depends on faith in Christ alone (cf. 15:3). Josephus denied that John's baptism resulted in the forgiveness of sins.² Jews who submitted to John's baptism were identifying themselves as believing what John preached, just as people who submit to Christian baptism identify themselves as believing what Jesus preached. Scripture does not attribute the forgiveness of sins to baptism.

- 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 of the Jordan, just east of Jerusalem. Perhaps John mentioned this 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."³

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 (section of text).

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 to promote 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 (cf. Ps. 2:2). Behold (Gr. *ide*) is a favorite expression of John's. Of its 29 New Testament occurrences, John used it 15 times. Probably his questioners had returned

¹A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*baptizo*," p. 94.

²Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:5:2.

³A *Greek-English ...*, s.v. "*bethania*," p. 100.

to Jerusalem by this time. The title Lamb of God presented Jesus as the Lamb that God had provided as a substitute sacrifice for people's sins (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)."¹

"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, you sing with the heavenly choir, 'Worthy is the Lamb!' (Rev. 5:12)"²

John spoke of sin, not sins (cf. 1 John 1:9), by which he meant the totality of the world's sin (all human rebellion against God), rather than a number of individual acts.³ 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.

The Lamb would take away the sin of the world, not just that of the Jews.⁴ Some interpreters have understood this reference to the world as the world of believers.⁵ But such a restriction seems unwarranted in the light of other passages that indicate that Jesus' death reconciled everyone to God

¹Tenney, "John," p. 37.

²Wiersbe, 1:287.

³Morris, p. 130.

⁴See 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."

⁵E.g., Pink, 1:59.

(i.e., made everyone savable; e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19-20; 1 John 2:2).¹

"He is a very great Savior for He is the Lamb of God. He is the complete Savior because He takes away sin. He is the almighty Savior because He takes away the sin of the world. He is the perpetual Savior because He 'taketh' away—present tense. Anyone can come to Him at any time."²

1:30 Probably some of those to whom John addressed these words were present and had 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). He may have suspected it, but 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 to Israel as a goal (cf. Mark 1:4). The symbolic descent of the Holy Spirit, like a dove that remained on Jesus, identified Jesus to John the Baptist as the Messiah, who was predicted to baptize in (Gr. *en*, with, by) the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2; Ezek. 36:25-26; Mark 1:10; Acts 2:3).

"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."³

In the Synoptics, the writers only mentioned Jesus seeing the descent of the Spirit as a dove. John is the only evangelist who

¹See Lenski, p. 129.

²McGee, 4:375.

³Harris, p. 197.

recorded that John the Baptist also saw it. The purpose of Jesus' baptism in this Gospel, then, was to point Jesus out as the Messiah to John the Baptist so that he could bear witness to Jesus' identity. All the other disciples were dependent on a human witness, in John's Gospel, for divine illumination about Jesus' true identity. 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.

1:34 John fulfilled his purpose by testifying 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 anything less than deity. It means full deity (v. 18). This verse is the climax of John the Baptist's testimony concerning Jesus. Previously, John had identified Jesus as the Sin-Bearer (v. 29) and as the Spirit-Baptizer (v. 33).

"It is significant that in this fourth Gospel we find there are just *seven* who bear witness to Christ's Deity. First, John the Baptist (1:34); second, Nathanael (1:49); third, Peter (6:69); fourth, the Lord Himself (10:36); fifth, Martha (11:27); sixth, Thomas (20:28); seventh, the writer of this Gospel (20:31)."¹

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 for 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 in order to record the reactions of some men to John's witness. Two

¹Pink, 1:73.

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.

"The very mixture of Hebrew (Simon, Nathanael) and Greek (Andrew, Philip) names seems to indicate the representative character of this first group of disciples ..."¹

1:35-36 Was the writer describing what happened on the same day as what he recorded in verses 29-34 or on the following day? Probably the "next day" in verse 35 is the next day after the "next day" in verse 29.² It happened after John identified Jesus, at least for the second time, 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 in person in order to learn from Him. They also took the first steps toward genuine discipleship. This was no tentative inquiry but a commitment of themselves to Him as disciples.³

"First meetings are sacred as well as last ones, especially such as are followed by a momentous history, and accompanied, as is apt to be the case, with omens prophetic of the future."⁴

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

¹Westcott, p. 23.

²See my discussion of 2:1 below.

³Morris, p. 137.

⁴A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, p. 2.

"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 demands that they articulate what they really want in life."¹

This two-level or dual intention becomes obvious in many places as John's Gospel unfolds. It is similar to Jesus' purpose in telling parables.

"Here then was, and is the first question, the first question of Jesus [in John's Gospel] to a human being; the first question of Jesus to humanity as He begins His ministry. It is a question that plumbs the deepest thing in human life. What are you seeking?"²

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 careful (or non-committal) response may have implied that they simply wanted to have a preliminary interview with Him.³ Or they may have been expressing a desire to become His disciples.⁴ 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

¹Carson, pp. 154-55.

²Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 44.

³Carson, p. 155; Lenski, p. 147; Tenney, "John," p. 40.

⁴Morris, 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.

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.¹

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.

"The two first words of Jesus then in His public ministry [according to John's Gospel], were, What are you seeking? and Come with Me, and your eyes shall be opened, and you shall see."²

Jesus apparently offered His invitation at about 4:00 p.m.³ John was more precise in his time references than the Synoptic evangelists (cf. 4:6, 52; 19:14). The Jews reckoned their days from sunset to sunset, and they divided both night and day into 12-hour periods.

"To his latest day John never forgot the hour when first he met Jesus."⁴

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 Him (v. 41). John probably 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

¹William 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.

²Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 44.

³See *A Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Numbers, Hours, Years, and Dates," by W. M. Ramsay, extra volume:478.

⁴Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:26.

Gospel have suggested that it may have been the writer himself.¹ 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.

1:41 Andrew first sought to bring his own brother to Jesus, and he was successful in doing so. The implication may be that Andrew was the first to bring his brother to Jesus among others who did the same.² 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).

"Andrew and John had made the greatest discovery of the ages, far beyond gold or diamond mines."³

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 already, 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.

As noted previously, 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 evolved 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

¹E.g., A. B. Bruce, p. 2.

²Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 41-42.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:27.

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 grace of God, not what he was then.

"In bringing his brother Simon Peter to Christ, no man did the church a greater service than Andrew."¹

Every time we meet Andrew in this Gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus (cf. 6:8; 12:22). Thus he serves as an excellent example of what a disciple of Jesus should do.

4. The witness of Andrew and Philip 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.

1:43-44 The "next day" appears to be the day after John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God a second time, and two of his disciples—one of whom was Andrew—started following Jesus. John was evidently baptizing in Perea and Judea near the Jordan River (cf. Matt. 3:1, 5-6; Mark 1:5).² 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: First, everyone else in this chapter who came to Jesus came on the invitation of someone other than Jesus. Secondly, John

¹Blum, p. 275.

²See the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

(the Gospel writer) 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, probably Bethsaida Julius (or Julias) in the region of Galilee (12:21). There may have been another Bethsaida on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, which some believe is in view here.¹ 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).² However, there is no convincing 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. Philip's statement suggests that the early disciples understood messiahship in the light of the Old Testament background, rather than entirely in a political sense.³ Philip described Jesus as Joseph's son, which is how people knew Him before they learned that He was the God's Son (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

¹E.g., Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 1:701.

²E.g., A. B. Bruce, p. 6; Westcott, p. 26.

³Harris, p. 188.

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."¹

1:46 Nazareth had an negative reputation, at least for Nathanael, who came from Cana, a neighboring town (21:2). (Flavius Josephus also lived in Cana for some time, though after these events.²) Nathanael doubted that the Messiah could come from such a lowly place as that. He did not yet understand that Messiah would come from humble origins.

"His inward thought was, 'Surely the Messiah can never come from among a poor despised people such as we are—from Nazareth or any other Galilean town or village!'"³

"The best thing in all the world came out of Nazareth ..."⁴

"This Nathanael is a wiseacre, and he makes a wisecrack here."⁵

Philip wisely did not argue with Nathanael. 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."⁶

"The words contain the essence of the true solution of religious doubts."⁷

¹Ibid., p. 215.

²Flavius Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, par. 16.

³A. B. Bruce, p. 7.

⁴Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:29.

⁵McGee, 4:376.

⁶F. F. Bruce, p. 60.

⁷Westcott, p. 27.

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. After all, they all lived in and around Capernaum.

"The words ["in whom there is no deceit"] suggest the idea of one whose heart was pure; in whom was no doublemindedness, impure motive, pride, or unholy passion: a man of gentle, meditative spirit, in whose mind heaven lay reflected like the blue sky in a still lake on a calm summer day. He was a man much addicted to habits of devotion: he had been engaged in spiritual exercises under cover of a fig-tree just before he met with Jesus."¹

1:48 Nathanael acted surprised that Jesus knew who he was. Evidently they had not met previously, even though Nazareth and Cana, Nathanael's hometown (21:1), were only a few miles apart (cf. Isa. 53:2). Jesus explained that He had seen Nathanael under the 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 rather than a literal meaning here.

"This sentence [Jesus' reply], like the former one [Nathanael's question], points to some secret thought or prayer, by knowing which the Lord shewed [*sic*] His divine insight into the heart of man. He *saw* not that which is outward only, but

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 7.

that which was most deeply hidden. Compare iv. 19."¹

Evidently Jesus' insight was prophetic; He had supernatural knowledge of Nathanael, not just knowledge from previous exposure to him.² Jesus probably had the same kind of prophetic insight that other prophets had—given by God. Since He did not know everything during the years of His incarnation (Mark 13:32), His knowledge was probably not divine omniscience (Phil. 2:5-8).

1:49 Jesus' simple statement elicited a 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 except God could have seen him when he was under the fig tree.

"The Lord Jesus had two doubters among His apostles. The one at the beginning was Nathanael; the one at the end was Thomas. This man, this skeptic, this one who wonders whether any good can come out of Nazareth, confesses before the interview is over that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel."³

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? One answer is 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). Another answer is that God enabled Nathanael to understand Jesus' true identity (cf. Matt. 16:17).

¹Westcott, p. 27.

²Barrett, p. 184. See also Alford, 1:701-2; Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:1:191.

³McGee, 4:376.

Nathanael appears to have regarded Jesus as the Messiah, who was considered to have supernatural knowledge (cf. v. 45; Ps. 2:2, 7; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:6-7; Isa. 11:1-2).¹ However, Nathanael may have spoken better than he knew. Jesus was indeed the Son of God in a fuller sense than he may have understood. Nathanael identified Jesus as God.² This seems to be the conclusion that John wanted his readers to reach as a result of this incident.

"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."³

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 disciple (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.

Some Bible students have concluded that these early disciples became believers, in the sense of becoming "saved," at this time.⁴ However, as mentioned above, the Gospels seem to present these men as progressively gaining insight into the person of Jesus as time went by. It is very difficult, if not

¹A. B. Bruce, pp. 9-10.

²E.g., Beasley-Murray, p. 27.

³Morris, p. 147.

⁴E.g., Pink, 1:63.

impossible, to pin down exactly when they believed enough about Jesus to be "saved."

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

"In this Gospel the term [Son of Man] is always associated either with Christ's heavenly glory or with the salvation he came to bring."¹

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. 14:6; 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 whole 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.² John highlighted John the Baptist's

¹Morris, p. 151. For a good summary of the meaning of the "Son of Man" title, see Carson, p. 164, or Morris, pp. 150-52.

²See Stephen S. Kim, "The Relationship of John 1:19-51 to the Book of Signs in John 2—12," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):323-37.

witness to Jesus' identity, first in a 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 may have been, 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). Clearly one of John's purposes in this Gospel was to draw attention to who Jesus is.

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.¹ The larger underlying theme continues to be the revelation of Jesus' identity.

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

The first miracle that Jesus performed, in His public ministry and in John's Gospel, was semi-public.² Apparently only Jesus' disciples, the servants present, and Jesus' mother understood what had happened.

"I use the word *Miracle* to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural power."³

¹C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 297.

²See Appendix 6 "The Miracles of Jesus" at the end of my notes on Matthew. See also Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1080, for their chronological table of Jesus' miracles.

³C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 15.

2:1 "The third day" evidently refers to the third day after the day that 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). Jesus fulfilled His promise to Nathanael (1:50-51) very quickly.

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.

Customarily, the wedding of a maiden took place on a Wednesday, and that of a widow on Thursday.¹ 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), which also happened in seven days. If so, this would be another witness to Jesus' deity.

Cana was about nine miles north of Nazareth in Galilee.² John never mentioned Mary, the mother of Jesus, by name, perhaps to avoid confusing her with other Marys in his Gospel.³ This is the second of four public encounters that Mary had with Jesus (cf. Luke 2:41-52; Mark 3:31-35; John 19:26-27).

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

¹Edersheim, 1:345.

²See the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

³Westcott, p. 36. See James M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:649 (January-March 2006):65-69.

Jesus did. A Christ-like person can be a socially active person and a joyful person.

In a small village such as Cana—probably modern Khirbet Kana—a wedding would have been a community celebration.¹ 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!"²

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

"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."⁴

The loss would not only have brought shame and social disgrace, however, but also financial embarrassment, 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."⁵

¹For a description of how a typical Galilean wedding was conducted, see Edersheim, 1:354-55.

²Wiersbe, 1:290.

³See Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):241-52.

⁴Tenney, "John," p. 42.

⁵J. 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. Being a compassionate person, He would try to help the groom, who was responsible for the food and drink (v. 9), in order 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 Israel at this time was fermented grape juice diluted with water.¹

2:4 Westerners would consider anyone addressing his mother as "woman" to be disrespectful, but this was an acceptable word for Him to use in Jesus' culture (Gr. *gunai*, cf. 19:26; 20:15). It did not have negative connotations.² It is remarkable that the Gospel writers never recorded Jesus referring to Mary as His mother.

"That Jesus calls Mary 'Woman' and not 'Mother' probably indicates that there is a new relationship between them as he enters his public ministry."³

Similarly the words "What business do you have with me?" 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 same⁴; or Madam, that concerns you, not Me⁵; or Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?⁶ captures the spirit of the question. Jesus was saying in effect:

¹See Robert Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* 19:19 (June 20, 1975):9-11; and Norman Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:553 (January-March 1982):46-56.

²Derrett, pp. 89-90.

³Morris, p. 158.

⁴Tasker, p. 60.

⁵*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1125.

⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *The Miracles of our Lord*, p. 15.

We're not on the same page. He 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.

"Christ here showed that His season of subjection to Mary and Joseph (*Luke* 2:51) was over, His public ministry had now commenced and she must not presume to dictate to Him."¹

Another interpretation is that Jesus was not distinguishing Himself from His mother, but he was distinguishing Himself and His mother from the wedding host:

"'They have no wine,' she whispers. He replies, 'We are guests. What is that to you and me? My hour,' He adds, 'is not yet come.' That is, 'When I give a feast there will be no such accident.' When He did, in the upper room, there was plenty for all."²

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, resurrection (and ascension, though this was not emphasized by John)."³

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 having arrived in order to help Mary realize

¹Pink, 1:82.

²E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 382.

³Harris, p. 196.

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.

"When all other help fails, then and not till then the '*hour*' of the great Helper will have struck."¹

- 2:5 Mary accepted Jesus' statement humbly and did not nag Him. She did, however, urge the servants to cooperate with Him if He asked anything of them. 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 Christians.
- 2:6 The Jews washed before eating in order 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 18 and 24 gallons.² Their combined capacity would have been between 108 and 144 gallons of liquid. Stone pots did not absorb moisture and uncleanness like earthenware vessels did, so they were better containers for water used in ceremonial washings.
- 2:7-8 "Them" refers to 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 did not know

¹R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, p. 112.

²Barrett, p. 192.

that what the servant handed him came from there. Probably the pots were outside the house and he was inside.

"The *architriklinos* [headwaiter] was originally the superintendent of the dining-room who arranged the couches and tasted the food, not the toast-master (*sumposiarches*)."¹

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.² This led some of them to envisage a different scenario: Perhaps 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.

Many 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. The servants had, after all, filled the pots with water up to the brim, so nothing else could have been added. 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 that 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;

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:36.

²E.g., Westcott, pp. 37-38; Carson, p. 174.

the new order, symbolized by the wine, could not be drawn from jars so intimately connected with merely ceremonial purification."¹

I believe it is somewhat questionable 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 hull.²

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 the lesson that John wanted to communicate to his readers here.

Perhaps Jesus ordered the pots filled to the brim simply so that there would be enough wine for everyone: approximately 2,400 servings. Filling the pots to the brim also precluded any possibility of wine being added to only partially filled pots. It would have been clear that Jesus was not just playing a trick.³

2:9-10 John's point in recording the headwaiter's comments was apparently to stress the superior quality of the wine that Jesus produced for the guests. Jesus, the omnipotent Creator, produced the best, as He always does whenever He creates.

"There isn't any record in this Gospel of Christ healing a leper or a demoniac. ... John give us a revelation of our Lord as God. For this reason John selected Christ's first public miracle to present Him as the Creator."⁴

¹Ibid. See also Tasker, pp. 55-57.

²*A Greek-English ...*, s.v. *antleo*, pp. 51-52.

³Ryrie, *The Miracles ...*, p. 15.

⁴Mitchell, p. 42.

"The world (and Satan also) gives its best first, and keeps the worst for the last. First the *pleasures* of sin—for a season—and then the *wages* of sin. But with God it is the very opposite. He brings His people into the wilderness before He brings them into the promised inheritance. First the Cross then the crown."¹

Jesus' immediate creation of wine, which normally takes time to ferment, may parallel God's creation of the universe with the appearance of age.² "Are drunk" and "had too much to drink" (NIV) translate the Greek word *methysko*, which refers to drunkenness. The fact that Jesus created something that people could abuse should not surprise us. Humans have consistently abused God's good gifts. Fortunately that does not keep God from giving them, nor does it make Him responsible for our abuse of them.

"Christ was the One to work the miracle, yet the 'servants' were the ones who seemed to do everything. *They* filled the waterpots, *they* drew off the wine, *they* bore it to the governor of the feast. There was no visible exhibition of putting forth of Divine power. Christ pronounced no magical formula: He did not even command the water to become wine. What was witnessed by the spectators was men at work, not God creating out of nothing. And all this speaks loudly to us. It was a parable in action. The means used were human, the result was seen to be Divine."³

Is there a deeper meaning to this story? Many students of this passage have identified the wine as symbolic of the joy that Messiah produces. This harmonizes with the metaphorical use of wine throughout Scripture. I think it is significant that that Jesus did here what the Old Testament prophets said that Yahweh would do, namely, provide wine for His people (cf. Ps.

¹Pink, 1:88.

²Alford, 1:706; Bailey, p. 162.

³Pink, 1:85.

104:15; Jer. 31:12; Joel 2:19, 24; Zech. 9:17). Thus this "sign" signified that Jesus was God.

McGee suggested another parallel:

"This [story] holds a great spiritual lesson for you and me. Jesus uses us as water pots today. We're just beaten and battered water pots. We're not attractive and ought to be pushed to the side and covered up. But He wants to use us. He wants to fill us with water. What is the water? The water is the Word of God, friend. He wants to fill you and me with the water of the Word of God. Then, after He fills us with the water of the Word of God, He wants us to ladle it out. When we ladle it out—I don't know how to explain it—but when the water leaves the water pots and gets to those for whom it is destined, it becomes wine. It becomes the wine of joy through the working of the Holy Spirit. ... The Holy Spirit takes that water and performs a miracle in the life of an individual."¹

Some have seen wine as typical of Christianity, as contrasted with Judaism (the water).² 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 an official host at this banquet, but He will certainly be the Host at the messianic banquet, which will take place on earth at the beginning of His earthly reign.

"Christ began His ministry on this earth at a wedding. He will conclude it, as far as the church is concerned, with a wedding. At the marriage supper of the Lamb the church will be presented to Him as a bride."³

¹McGee, 4:379.

²E.g., Blum, p. 278.

³McGee, 4:378.

"The first miracle of Moses was a turning of water into blood (Exod. vii. 20); and this had its fitness; for the law, which came by Moses, was a ministration of death, and working wrath (2 Cor. iii. 6-9). But the first miracle of Christ was a turning of water into wine, this too a meet [fitting, appropriate] inauguration of all which should follow, for his was a ministration of life; He came, the disperser of that true wine that maketh glad the heart of man (Ps. civ. 15)."¹

2:11 In conclusion, John mentioned that this miracle was a "sign." It was a miracle that had significance.² 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).

Since this was the "beginning of His signs," we can rest assured that Jesus did not perform other miracles before this one. Specifically, he did not make clay pigeons as a young boy, touch them, and cause them to fly away, as a popular legend has it.³

It was "not merely the first sign but 'a primary sign', because representative of the creative and transforming work of Jesus as a whole."⁴

This demonstration of His power to create glorified Jesus in the eyes of those who witnessed and heard about it.⁵ 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

¹Trench, p. 122.

²See Mark R. Saucy, "Miracles and Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):281-307.

³See Trench, pp. 44-49, for a discussion of Jesus' miracles in the apocryphal (uninspired) Gospels.

⁴Barrett, p. 193.

⁵Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 35.

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).

"The idea which it [the phrase "believed in Him"] conveys is that of the absolute transference of trust from oneself to another."¹

"This is the first of about fifteen instances in the Gospel through John where individuals are said to have put their trust in Christ."²

John's concluding references to the time and place of this miracle 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. ... 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)."³

The Greek god Dionysus supposedly discovered wine. He was also credited with changing water into wine on some occasions when he was worshipped. These instances, which were first recorded about five centuries before John wrote his Gospel, may have been known to John's earliest readers.⁴ If they were, these people would have probably concluded that Jesus was at least as great as Dionysus if not greater.

¹Westcott, p. 39.

²Mitchell, p. 43.

³Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Significance of the First Sign in John's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:533 (January-March 1977):50, 51. Paragraph divisions omitted.

⁴See Barrett, pp. 188-89.

2. Jesus' initial stay in Capernaum 2:12

Some time after the miracle just narrated, Jesus went down (topographically) from Cana to Capernaum. Cana was on a higher elevation than Capernaum, and Capernaum was about 13 miles northeast of Cana. Some family members (cf. Matt. 12:46; Mark 6:3) and Jesus' disciples accompanied Him. Jesus had physical brothers borne by Mary. (The idea of Mary's perpetual virginity appeared later in church history.¹) Evidently this trip was only for a short stay, since John wrote that they stayed in Capernaum 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

"It is impossible not to feel the change which at this point comes over the narrative. There is a change of place, of occasion, of manner of action. Jesus and Cana, the Passover and the marriage feast, the stern Reformer and the sympathizing Guest. So too the spiritual lessons which the two signs convey are also complementary. The first represents the ennobling of common life, the second the purifying of divine worship. Or, to put the truth in another light, the one is a revelation of the Son of man, and the other a revelation of the Christ, the Fulfiller of the hope and purpose of Israel."²

"In Cana Jesus manifested His power as the Creator. Now He came to manifest His authority as the Messiah, the Son of God."³

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

¹See Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 209; J. C. Macaulay, *The Bible and the Roman Church*, pp. 71-73.

²Westcott, p. 40.

³Mitchell, p. 45.

"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."¹

Josephus indicated that as many as three million Jews occupied Jerusalem during the Passover feasts.²

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, as well as their placement in the chronology of Jesus' ministry, argue for two cleansings rather than one.³

2:13 John alone recorded that Jesus went up to Jerusalem, topographically again, for three separate Passover celebrations.⁴ He 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. This first one was evidently the Passover of April 7, A.D. 30, the first one after Jesus began His public ministry.⁵ He celebrated the Passover because He was a Jew who obeyed the Mosaic Law (Deut. 16:1-8), and He used the occasion to minister. John's description of the Passover, as the Passover of the Jews, supports the view that he wrote his Gospel late in the first century for a general audience that was mainly Gentile. It also implies that Christians no longer observed this feast.

2:14-16 Jesus encountered the buying and the selling going on in the temple courtyard (Gr. *hieron*). This was undoubtedly the outer

¹Harrison, 1077;. See also Bailey, p. 164.

²Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:9:3; cf. 2:14:3.

³See W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 1:120; Morris, pp. 166-69; and Allan Chapple, "Jesus' Intervention in the Temple: Once or Twice?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:3 (September 2015):545-69.

⁴See Baxter, 5:283.

⁵Herold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, pp. 55-60, 143.

Court of the Gentiles, not the temple building (Gr. *naos*).¹ Probably the custom of selling sacrificial animals, and exchanging various types of silver and copper money (e.g., Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman) 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 it had replaced spiritual worship in the courtyard during the Passover season.² The priests had transformed this temple area from a place of quiet prayer into a noisy bazaar. It was virtually impossible for Gentiles to worship there, which was the only courtyard accessible to them, with all the business that was going on. This was probably where the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27) and other Gentiles like him worshipped when they came to Jerusalem. The priests set up tables for the moneychangers only for about three weeks leading up to Passover.³

Jesus responded to this situation actively and orally. He claimed that God was His Father ("My Father's house"), and that He acted for God in what He did. John's vivid description has inspired many artists who have painted on canvas what they believed this action-packed scene must have looked like. John noted that the reason for Jesus' actions was 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' expulsion of the temple merchants constituted a major threat to the financial arrangements for the sacrificial system.⁴

"The Talmud also records the curse which a distinguished Rabbi of Jerusalem (Abba Shaul) pronounced upon the High-Priestly families (including that of Annas), who were 'themselves

¹See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

²See Edersheim, 1:367-70.

³Mishnah *Shekalim* 1:1, 3. The Mishnah is an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud.

⁴Richard 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.

High-Priests, their sons treasurers (Gizbarin), their sons-in-law assistant-treasurers (Ammarkalin), while their servants beat the people with sticks.' (Pes. [Pesiqta] 57 a) What a comment this passage offers on the bearing of Jesus, as He made a scourge to drive out the very servants who 'beat the people with sticks,' and upset their unholy traffic!"¹

By claiming God as His Father, Jesus was citing authority for His action. He was not claiming equality with the Father, which He did on another occasion (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 (cf. Acts 21:31-32). 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*). The Greek masculine plural *pantas* ("all," v. 15) argues for Jesus driving the traders out, not just the animals, which the neuter plural *panta* would identify. *Schoinion* ("cords," v. 15) elsewhere describes the ropes on a ship (Acts 27:32).

"It is clear that it was not so much the physical force as the moral power he employed that emptied the courts."²

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 here did not fulfill these prophecies, however, which appear in Second Coming contexts. Jesus will yet return to the temple that will be standing in Jerusalem, when He returns at His

¹Edersheim, 1:372. The Talmud is the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara.

²Morris, p. 171.

second coming, and purify the Levites serving there then. This will be preparation for His messianic reign on earth that will follow. Another view is that Jesus' first coming to the temple did fulfill Malachi's prophecy.¹

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. The disciples 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 the third most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament (cf. 7:3-5; 15:25; Matt. 27:34, 48; Rom. 11:9-10; 15:3).² 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, Messiah. 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, which was 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

¹Bailey, p. 164.

²Cf. Bernard, 1:91.

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."¹

"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!"²

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 prove 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' indictment. They only inquired about His authority to act as He did.

"We notice here on the occasion of the first public act of Christ, as throughout St John, the double effect of the act on those who already believed, and on those who were resolutely unbelieving. The disciples *remembered* at the time (contrast *v.* 22) that this trait was characteristic of the true prophet of God, who gave himself for his people. The Jews found in it an occasion for fresh demands of proof."³

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

¹Morris, p. 172.

²Wiersbe, 1:292-93.

³Westcott, p. 41.

"As for 'the sign,' then and ever again sought by an 'evil and adulterous generation'—evil in their thoughts and ways and adulterous to the God of Israel—He had then, as afterwards, only one 'sign' to give: 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Thus He met their challenge for a sign by the challenge of a sign: Crucify Him, and He would rise again; let them suppress the Christ, He would triumph. A sign this which they understood not, but misunderstood, and by making it the ground of their false charge in His final trial, themselves unwittingly fulfilled."¹

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 but 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 special 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 doing this 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 (Himself) and a new way of worship (in spirit and in truth).

Why did Jesus answer enigmatically (with a riddle) 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 at the same time reveal it to believers.

¹Edersheim, 1:375.

The Sanhedrin later 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 dishonest and unfair, however, because Jesus had said, "Destroy this temple," not I will destroy the temple. Furthermore Jesus was speaking of His body, not the Jerusalem temple.

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. 30.¹ Work on Herod's temple had been proceeding for 46 years. It was not completed until A.D. 63. Another view is that the Jew said: This temple was built 46 years ago.²

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; 69:9).

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 then manifested Himself on earth, as He had done previously—though to a lesser extent—in the wilderness tabernacle and in the Jerusalem temple. Furthermore, it was the center of true worship following the Incarnation (cf. 4:20-24). In it the ultimate sacrifice would take place.³

Jesus spoke of the temple as a type (i.e., a divinely intended illustration) of Himself. Later, Christ's body became a metaphorical symbol 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

¹See Hoehner, pp. 38-43.

²See Andrew E. Steinmann, "Did It Take Forty-Six Years or More to Build the Temple in Jerusalem? Reconsidering John 2:20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:2 (June 2022):319-31.

³Carson, p. 182.

His physical body here, and not to the church. Yet there may be an intentional allusion to the ultimate abolition of the Jewish temple and temple sacrifices.¹ 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."²

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 performed a number of signs (miracles with significance) while He was in Jerusalem at this time. These were probably healings and perhaps exorcisms. The Synoptics record that Jesus ministered this way virtually everywhere He went. Consequently many people believed on Him ("in His name"). This does not necessarily mean that they placed saving faith in Him as the Son of God, however. Often the people who

¹Morris, p. 178.

²Edwin E. Reynolds, "The Role of Misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9:1-2 (1998):158-59.

observed His miracles concluded that He was a prophet, but they were not always willing to acknowledge Him as God.

John usually used the Greek 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 he sometimes used the verb believe (Gr. *pisteuo*) with the preposition into or in (Gr. *eis*) plus 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 instance.¹

2:24-25 Jesus' response to people, in contrast to their believing in Him, 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. Another view is that these were genuine believers who "were not ready for fuller disclosures from the One they had just trusted."² Some who initially believed on Jesus 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). Further, He did not commit Himself to anyone to testify for Him (do public relations work), because Jesus was not dependent on human approval.³

John may have meant that Jesus knew the nature of human beings, not that He knew the thoughts of every person that He encountered. The Great Physician could read people better than any human doctor can diagnose symptoms.⁴ Besides, Jesus was not just a prophet, but the greatest Prophet, and even lesser prophets often demonstrated supernatural insight. On the other hand, John could have meant that Jesus, as only

¹Carson, p. 183.

²Zane C. Hodges, "Untrustworthy Believers—John 2:23-25," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):148.

³Morris, p. 181.

⁴Tenney, "John," p. 46.

God can, knew the hearts of all people (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 139; Jer. 17:10; 20:12; Acts 1:24).¹ The following two chapters particularly illustrate the truth of both of these statements: Jesus had great human insight as well as divine insight.

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

John now presented evidence that Jesus knew people (2:25) like 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.²

"Narrative is in this section reduced to a minimum. ... We are made to hear [in effect] not a conversation between two persons but the dialogue of church and synagogue, in which (according to the Christian view) the former completes and fulfills the latter, which is in consequence superseded."³

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 would have had respect for the Jewish Scriptures and would have been nationalistic politically. He would have stressed the careful observance of Israel's laws and the traditions of the elders. Obedience to these 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,

¹Alford, 1:711; Lenski, p. 226.

²See Keith Vande Vrede, "A Contrast between Nicodemus and John the Baptist in the Gospel of John," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:4 (December 2014):715-26.

³Barrett, p. 202.

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."¹

The Sadducees, in contrast, were more liberal in their theology and were more politically accommodating. 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. 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 this prominent Pharisee made his call at night in order to keep his visit private and uninterrupted (cf. 19:39). He may also have come at night because he was ashamed to be seen with Jesus.² The Pharisees generally were antagonistic toward Jesus, and he apparently wanted to avoid unnecessary conflict with his fellow Pharisees. Whenever else John referred to night in his Gospel, the word has moral and spiritual connotations of darkness (cf. 9:4; 11:10; 13:30), and it probably does here. Nicodemus was in spiritual and intellectual darkness, as well as natural darkness, when he came to Jesus (cf. v. 10).³

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as "Rabbi," which was 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. All the same, he

¹Morris, p. 186. Paragraph division omitted.

²Pink, 1:104.

³E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1:157-58; R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary*, p. 116.

expressed belief that Jesus had come from God, in contrast to Satan (cf. 8:48, 52), in view of the miracles that Jesus 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.

To the Jews of Jesus' day, no unusual teaching would have been acceptable without the evidence of miracles.¹ By the way, the Gospels present no one, friend or foe of Jesus, ever doubting that He performed miracles. They were so clearly miraculous that everyone acknowledged Jesus as a miracle worker.

"We" could be a way of saying himself (cf. v. 11). On the other hand, Nicodemus could have been representing others on the Sanhedrin besides himself, such as Joseph of Arimathea (cf. 19:38). A third option is that "we" suggests the current popular opinion about Jesus.² Note Nicodemus' courtesy and lack of hostility. These qualities mark him as a non-typical Pharisee.

"One of the things which impresses the writer as he reads the Gospels, is the blessed *accessibility* of the Lord Jesus."³

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. *anōthen*, cf. v. 31).

"It is not *learning*, but *life*, that is wanted for the Messiah's Kingdom; and *life* must begin by *birth*."⁴

Anōthen means both "again" (v. 4; cf. Gal. 4:9) and "from above" (v. 31; 19:11, 23).

¹Edersheim, 1:380.

²Pink, 1:104.

³*Ibid.*, 1:106.

⁴Alford, 1:713.

"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.'"¹

The term "kingdom of God"—as Jesus used it consistently—refers to the messianic kingdom. That kingdom began with the appearance of Messiah, and it will culminate in His earthly kingdom, which will begin when He returns to this earth. It is not the universal sovereign rule of God over all throughout history but the rule of Messiah. To "see 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). This is the only passage in John that mentions the kingdom of God, though Jesus spoke of "My kingdom" in 18:36. He generally used life language instead of kingdom language (cf. 1:12-13). This is understandable, since he evidently wrote late in the first century, when it was clear that God had postponed (delayed) the earthly kingdom of Messiah due to the Jews' rejection of their King. 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 (enter) God's (messianic) kingdom without new birth.

"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

¹Harris, p. 220.

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."¹

"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."²

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.³ His crassly literal question may reflect some disdain for Jesus' affirmation, or Nicodemus may have been speaking wistfully, or he may have been eager or impatient to hear Jesus' explanation.

"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."⁴

"Had our Lord said: 'Every Gentile must be born again,' he [Nicodemus] would have understood."⁵

3:5 Again Jesus prefaced a further affirmation with the statement that guaranteed its certainty. Entering the kingdom and seeing the kingdom (v. 3) are 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

¹Carson, pp. 188-89.

²John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:63.

³Lenski, p. 235.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:295.

⁵Dods, 1:713.

our understanding of this difficult phrase (cf. 1:33). Whatever its meaning, born of water and the Spirit must be synonymous with being born again or from above (vv. 3, 7), and being born of the Spirit (vv. 6, 8), since Jesus used these words to clarify the process of the new birth for Nicodemus.

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 spirit."

The construction of the phrase being born of water and the Spirit 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 take place. It has but one Source.

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 of these factors is as follows: The Old Testament often used water metaphorically in order 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 like 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; Ezek. 36:26). Thus the revelation that God would bring cleansing and renewal like water, by means of or affected by His Spirit, was clear in the Old Testament.

Jesus evidently meant that unless a person has experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal (empowerment) 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).¹

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.² These proponents 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. This view also 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 "of" before the second noun.

Another popular view is that "water" refers to the written Word of God, and "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit.³ 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, like the former one, also specifies two separate entities, but again, the Greek text implies only one as the source of regeneration.

Some commentators take the "water" as an allusion to water baptism, and the "spirit" as referring to the Holy Spirit.⁴ According to this view, spiritual birth happens only when a person undergoes water baptism, and as a result experiences regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Some advocates of this view see support for it in the previous reference to water baptism (1:26, 33). However, Scripture is very clear that water baptism

¹Carson, pp. 191-96; cf. Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 50; Dods, 1:714; Morris, pp. 191-93; Barclay, 1:119.

²E.g., Wiersbe, 1:295; Wilkin, 1:374.

³E.g., Gaebelien, 3:1:197-98; Pink, 1:110; Ironside, p. 96; McGee, 4:384; Mitchell, p. 55.

⁴E.g., R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2:139-141.

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" is an allusion to the Holy Spirit.¹ 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 probably would not have responded this way. It would have been simpler for Jesus just to say "repentance" if that is what He meant. Repentance, however, in the sense of the fruit of a mental change, is not necessary as a prerequisite for salvation, since by that definition repentance is a meritorious 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, is 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.² This view holds that the "wind" is parallel to the "water," which also symbolizes God's supernatural work of regeneration. However, this is an unusual, though legitimate, meaning of *pneuma*. In

¹Alford, 1:714; F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, with a Critical Introduction*, 2:49-52; Dods, 1:713-14; Westcott, p. 50; Lenski, p. 237-38; Tenney, "John," p. 47.

²Zane C. Hodges, "Water and Spirit—John 3:5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):206-20.

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), namely, "all that belongs to the life of sensation."¹ The Holy Spirit gives people spiritual life. We are spiritually dead in sin until the Spirit gives us spiritual life. Jesus was speaking of a spiritual birth, not a physical one. Nicodemus should not have marveled at the idea that there is a spiritual birth in addition to a physical birth, because 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, either missed or misunderstood.

Dwight L. Moody said the following:

"Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield [Massachusetts], is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all—out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live for ever."²

3:7 Nicodemus needed spiritual life. He needed to experience the new birth. He had evidently viewed acceptance by God like so many of his Jewish contemporaries did. If so, he thought that his heritage (ancestry, position, works, all that made him what

¹Westcott, p. 51.

²W. R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody*, p. 475.

he was) was adequate to get him into the kingdom and make him acceptable to God. He had to realize that he needed a complete spiritual cleansing and renewal, which 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."¹

The second "you" in verse 7 is plural in the Greek text. It continues the general reference to "someone" 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."²

3:8 Jesus used the wind to illustrate how the Spirit regenerates. And He used wordplay 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 like the *pneuma* (wind).

There are three similarities; First, both the Spirit and the wind operate sovereignly. Man does not and cannot control either one.³ Second, we perceive the presence of both by their effects. Third, we cannot explain their actions, since they arise from unseen and partially unknowable factors. They are mysterious.

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

¹E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 204.

²Wiersbe, 1:295.

³See J. B. Philips, *Your God Is Too Small*, pp. 32-36, for his discussion of "God-in-a-box."

understood this too, since the Old Testament revealed the Spirit's sovereign and incomprehensible working in giving new life (e.g., Ezek. 37:1-10).

"Jesus' meaning is something like this: 'I am speaking most solemnly. Do not disregard this. It is, as you imply, quite impossible for a man to enter the womb of his mother for a second time and be born. But for all that a man must be reborn. This, I grant, is not a human possibility. But then I am not speaking about a human possibility. I am speaking about an activity of the Spirit of God.'"¹

3:9-10 Nicodemus betrayed his ignorance of Old Testament revelation with his question (cf. 1 Sam. 10:6; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 11:19; 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 entering the kingdom, but what Jesus now suggested was something new to him. The Jews spoke of converting to Judaism as a rebirth, and the Greek mystery religions referred to new birth, so the concept of being born again must not have been unknown to Nicodemus.²

Jesus responded with a question that expressed dismay that Nicodemus did not understand this biblical revelation. His deficiency was all the more serious because Nicodemus was the leading (or simply a³) teacher of Israel. 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 (i.e., renewal, regeneration).

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 authoritative figures who believed that Jesus had come from God (v. 2): "we

¹Leon Morris, *Spirit of the Living God*, p. 12.

²Barclay, 1:115.

³Dods, 1:715.

know." Now Jesus described Himself as one of several authoritative figures who was speaking the truth: "we know." Evidently He was referring to the Godhead. Another possibility is that both men were speaking editorially. Some believe that Jesus was referring to Himself and John the Baptist.¹ Others believe that He was referring to the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and Himself.² Nicodemus probably thought Jesus was referring to Himself humbly, or possibly to Himself as one of several teachers.

Jesus claimed to be speaking the truth as an eyewitness, but Nicodemus was rejecting His witness. The Apostle John later made a similar claim. He said he wrote his first epistle so that his readers might enter into the joy of fellowship with God, which the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, already enjoyed (1 John 1:1-4). John's purpose in this Gospel, similarly, was 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 (Gr. 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 evidenced.

"Nicodemus represents the half-believing Jews who were impressed by Jesus' signs but had not reached an adequate faith in him ..."³

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

¹Lenski, p. 246.

²Allan Chapple, "Jesus and the Witnesses (John 3:11)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63:4 (December 2020):675-701.

³Barrett, p. 211.

revelations as life beyond the grave, life in the kingdom, and the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17).

If Jesus' response to Nicodemus in this verse was typical, 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.

Arthur Pink pointed out that Jesus skillfully responded to Nicodemus' statements by using many of the same words. Thus Jesus met Nicodemus on his own ground, and "made his own language the channel of approach to his heart."¹ This approach provides a good example for personal evangelists.

Nicodemus' Statements	Jesus' Responses
"We know that" (v. 2)	"We speak of what we know" (v. 11)
"You have come ... as a teacher" (v. 2)	"Are you the teacher" (v. 10)
"Unless God is with him" (v. 2)	"Unless someone is born again" (v. 3)
"How can a person be born" (v. 4)	"Unless someone is born" (v. 5)
"He cannot enter" (v. 4)	"He cannot enter" (v. 5)
"How can" (v. 9)	"How will" (v. 12)
"These things be" (v. 9)	"These things" (v. 10)

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 many prophets had received visions of heaven (e.g., Isa. 6; cf. 2 Cor.

¹Pink, 1:123.

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 "except," contrast a human who could have ascended into heaven with 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."¹

3:14 In another sense, Jesus would be lifted up to heaven. The Ascension is not in view here. Jesus' enemies lifting Him up toward heaven, like Moses lifted up 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.

"Why was not one of the actual serpents spiked by Moses to the pole? Ah, *that* would have marred the type: that would have pictured judgment executed on the sinner himself; and, worse still, would have misrepresented our sinless Substitute. In the type chosen there was the likeness of a serpent, not an actual serpent, but a piece of brass *made* like one."²

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 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 and 34—it combines the ideas of crucifixion and exaltation (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12).³

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 197.

²Pink, 1:129.

³Carson, p. 201.

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."

This is the first reference to eternal life in this Gospel. Eternal life refers to one's life in the messianic kingdom and forever after. It is life that one experiences, normally after resurrection, that fits him or her for the earthly kingdom. However, John presented that life as something that people can experience in measure before the earthly 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."¹

Some authorities believe that verses 16-21 are the Apostle John's comments, his aside, rather than a continuation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus.² Others believe that Jesus' words continue through verse 21.³ Red-letter editions of John's Gospel reveal the various translators' preferences. I prefer the second opinion on this issue. Unfortunately the old Greek texts do not contain quotation marks, or any punctuation for that matter, so it does not identify quotations for the reader. John may have written these verses without identifying the speaker in order to help the reader realize that what follows in verses 16-21 is just as authoritative as Jesus' preceding words. This section of the text is the heart of John's record of Jesus' early ministry (chs. 2—4).

3:16 This perhaps favorite and best-known verse in the whole Bible expresses the gospel message more clearly and winsomely than just about 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 underscores the intensity of God's love. He gave His best: His unique and beloved Son. The Jews believed that God loved the children of Israel, but John affirmed that God loved all people regardless of race.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 201.

²E.g., Tenney, "John," pp. 49-50; Dods, 1:717; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:50; Carson, p. 203; Harrison, p. 1079; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 202; Westcott, p. 54; Barclay, 1:129; and Beasley-Murray, p. 51.

³E.g., Alford, 1:718-19; 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; F. W. Grant, *The Crowned Christ*, p. 19; Lenski, p. 258; Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 59-60; Wiersbe, 1:298; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 127; McGee, 4:385; Mitchell, p. 57; Wilkin, 1:376.

According to one commentator, no Jewish writer specifically asserted that God loved His whole world.¹ But there is nothing in this verse or in the context that would limit "the world" to just the world of the elect.² 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 His unique kind of selfless love that provided the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. Galatians 2:20 reveals that the Cross shows the Son's love.

"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."³

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

What God gave was His only Son. The title Son of God was first given to the prophesied Messianic King in 2 Samuel 7:14, and it is repeated in Psalm 2:7 and many other passages thereafter. Jesus stands in a unique relationship to God compared with other human beings who become God's children by new birth and adoption. He was always with the Father throughout eternity past, and is one in substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

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

¹Odeberg, p. 116.

²See Alford, 1:719.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 203-4.

He loves people. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those who believe in His Son.

"The universal offer of the gospel is consistent with the Divine purpose of predestination, because: 1. Christ's atonement is a sufficient satisfaction for the sins of all men. 2. God sincerely desires that every man to whom the atonement is offered would trust in it."¹

The consequences of belief are new birth (vv. 3, 5), eternal life (vv. 15-16), and salvation from sin and its effects (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."²

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 eventually judge everyone, but that was not God's purpose in

¹Shedd, 1:457. See also A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 771.

²Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 200.

the Incarnation. Rather, it was to provide salvation for everyone through His death on the cross.

"The Jewish idea was that the Messiah would come 'to judge,' i.e., to condemn the world."¹

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 associated with saving, but saving was Jesus' primary purpose (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). Jesus came into an already condemned world in order 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 a shadow is only an attendant circumstance that is inevitable when one brings light.

"Though 'condemnation' is to many the *issue* of Christ's mission (vs. 19), it is not the *object* of His mission, which is purely a *saving* one."²

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, therefore, becomes his or her failure to believe on the One whom God lovingly and graciously has provided as the Savior. Escaping condemnation does not depend, therefore, on one's being a physical descendant of Abraham, as the Jews commonly believed. 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

¹Dods, 1:717.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1031.

³See Michael A. Rydelnik, "The Jewish People and Salvation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:660 (October-December 2008):447-62, for defense of the view that Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus are lost.

- 3:19 John explained the process of mankind's judgment (Gr. *krisis*, separating or distinguishing, not *krima*, the sentence of judgment). Even though light ("the Light") entered the world, people chose darkness over light ("the 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. By rejecting that light they by the same token reject "the Light" (Christ Himself). The reason people choose darkness over light is that 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), but they also hate the light (or "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 (or Light) would convict them. Immorality lies behind much unbelief.
- "People offer many excuses for not accepting Christ. Some cite the presence of hypocrites in the church. Others claim inability to believe some of the truths about Christ or the gospel. [Many say that they cannot accept the fact that God permits so much suffering in the world.] These are merely attempts to conceal a heart in rebellion against God. The ultimate reason people do not come to Christ is that they do not want to."¹
- 3:21 People who responds positively to the truth, on the other hand, come to the "light" and its source: Jesus (the Light). 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

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 1764.

is their attitude toward the "light" (or Light). It is not their guilt before God. Both are guilty before Him. A minority interpretation is that Jesus was distinguishing believers who acknowledged Christ openly, like John the Baptist, and secret believers, such as Nicodemus, rather than believers and unbelievers.¹

Verses 19-21 point out the ultimate danger that each reader of this Gospel faces. If one tends to do as Nicodemus did and resists Jesus, it is because he or she does not want to come to the light for moral reasons (fear that their "deeds will be exposed). People essentially turn from Jesus because the light that He brings reveals evil 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."²

Much of contemporary people's problem with the gospel is anthropological: It arises from a faulty view of themselves. People generally view human beings as morally and ethically neutral if not good. Therefore the fact that God sent Jesus, and Jesus came to save sinners, seems only interesting at best. If people are good and not in need of salvation, they can applaud God's love as admirable. If people are neutral, they can take salvation or leave it. If they leave it, God appears unfair for condemning them. However, people are not good or neutral but bad. They already stand 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.

¹Zane C. Hodges, "Coming to the Light—John 3:20-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):314-22.

²Harris, pp. 203-4.

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 took place in Jerusalem (2:23), which 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 that tells us 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 in order 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).¹ 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 plausible sites are only a few miles west of the Jordan River.² John the Baptist evidently chose the location, whichever was the actual historical site, for its abundant water that came from nearby

¹See Tenney, "John," p. 52, and the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

²See Edersheim, 2:767-69, for further discussion of the location of Sychar.

springs. Many people were coming to him in order to express their repentance by undergoing water baptism.

"... the importance of the note is to show that John moved from the south to the north, leaving Jesus to baptize in the area not distant from Jerusalem."¹

- 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 Jesus' ministry in Galilee. They viewed the beginning of His 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 John alone we learn that between Jesus' temptation and John the Baptist's arrest, John and Jesus baptized at the same time. His reference to John the Baptist's imprisonment is important because it helps the reader to see that John's account does not contradict the Synoptics. Yet his primary concern was John the Baptist's witness for Jesus.
- 3:25 Evidently the "dispute" in view centered on the relation of John's baptism to other ceremonial washings ("purification") that various other Jewish authorities supported. 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 baptism campaigns was the one that 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 ("all" as they phrased it) 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.

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 52.

"It is interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition: 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!"¹

3:27 John replied to the implied question with an aphorism: a general saying. 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 the belief that God had permitted Him 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 ("the Christ"), but only Messiah's forerunner, the herald sent ahead of Him (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" (or "attendant").

"The assistant acted on behalf of the bridegroom and made the preliminary arrangements for the ceremony."²

"... groomsmen were customary in *Judaea*, but not in Galilee (*Cheth. 25 a*)."³

¹Wiersbe, 1:297.

²Blum, p. 283. See Zola Levitt, *A Christian Love Story*, for Jewish marriage customs.

³Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 152.

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, whose voice 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 should, John would continue to promote Him—even sending his own disciples to Jesus. He viewed this as God's will, and therefore said it must be so. Would that all of us who are God's servants might learn to view Jesus' position, and ours, similarly. Submission to God's will, and the exaltation of Jesus, not prominence in His service, are what should bring joy to His servants.

"Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a *by-product*."¹

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).

¹Pink, 1:149.

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

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

3:31-32 The incarnate Son of God has come to earth from above (cf. v. 13). The Apostle 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), also called the new birth, can only come by faith in Him who is from above. Christ's place of origin illustrates His superiority over all earthly people that humanity binds to the earth (Gr. *gē*, 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.

"He that is earthy in origin is earthy also by nature."¹

John the Baptist could call people to repentance, but he could not reveal divine counsels, as Jesus who came from heaven 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. The Greek word *martyria*, "witness" or "testimony," appears some 47 times in this Gospel.

3:33-34 However, some people do receive His witness. Those who do thereby demonstrate their belief that the Father, as well as the Son, is truthful.² Seals indicated a personal guarantee, as well as denoting ownership (cf. 6:27). They also made secure (Matt. 27:66) and concealed (Rev. 22:10) things. 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

¹Barrett, p.225.

²Westcott, p. 62.

only for limited times and purposes. However, God gave His Spirit to Jesus without limit. This guaranteed the truth of all 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).

Another view, which I do not prefer, is that if God is speaking through a true prophet, then whatever he says is absolutely true. Conversely, false prophecy is never the product of the Spirit.¹

"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, 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)."²

- 3:35 God not only gave Jesus His Spirit without measure, but He has placed everything in His hands as the executor of His will. 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 them. Everything that the Father has done, revealing and redeeming, flows from His love for people through the Son. This statement also points out the dependence of Jesus, in His humanity, on the Father, which is 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 suited 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

¹Wilkin, 1:378.

²Blum, p. 283.

of unbelief as disobedience (rejection, NIV), because when God offers salvation unbelief becomes disobedience.¹

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."²

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 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

¹See Brad McCoy, "Obedience Is Necessary to Receive Eternal Life," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:5 (September-October 1994):1, 3.

²Tenney, "John," pp. 52-53.

understanding of the gospel. Unless we are saved from real peril there is no meaning in salvation."¹

The reference to obeying the Son has confused some readers. To obey the Son means to believe in Him (cf. 6:29). It does not mean that obedience to other commands of God, in addition to faith in Christ, are necessary for salvation.²

This verse brings the whole third chapter to a climax, and it emphasizes the significance of the Son for salvation and judgment.

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 understanding in heaven. His words accurately and fully represented God. Most importantly, He came because the Father fully endowed Him with divine authority and assistance, out of love. Consequently He is to be the object of people's faith. All of these things show that He was superior to John the Baptist, as well as to 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

The writer now showed Jesus moving north, from Judea into Samaria, where He had another important conversation with a person who was completely different from Nicodemus. As in the previous chapter, theological explanation follows personal encounter in this one.

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.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 220. See J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 134-42, for a fuller explanation of God's wrath.

²See Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, pp. 169-75, for refutation of this view.

2:6; 3:5; 4:10-15). Another is the continuation of discussion in which Jesus reveals Himself as the fulfillment of what the Old Testament anticipated. There are also significant contrasts: an unnamed woman who was an ordinary, low-ranking Samaritan and a dissolute sinner, contrasts with a named man who was a high-ranking, morally upright teacher of the Jews and a Pharisee. Nicodemus sought out Jesus at night, but Jesus sought out the Samaritan woman at noon. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to do something (be born again), but he offered the woman a gift (the water of life). Concern over worship (the result of salvation) replaces concern over the new birth (the condition for salvation).

"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."¹

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.

"The Samaritan woman is a timeless figure—not only a typical Samaritan but a typical human being."²

4:1-3 This three-verse 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—not for fear of them, but because they would interfere with His ministry and schedule. John never referred to the Sadducees or the Herodians by name in his Gospel, because he viewed the Pharisees as the true representatives of the unbelieving nation of Israel.³

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 225.

²Tasker, p. 75.

³Westcott, p. 66.

This is the first time that 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).

Jesus may have refrained from baptizing people in order to differentiate Himself from John, and to train His disciples.

"He would teach us that what is done by his ministers, according to his direction, he owns as done by himself."¹

4:4 The most direct and most popular route from Judea to Galilee went through Samaria.² Even though the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along, most Galilean Jews chose to travel through Samaria rather than taking the longer route through Perea, east of the Jordan River, which Judean Jews preferred.³ The trip from Galilee to Jerusalem via Samaria normally took three days.⁴ 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.⁵ However, most students of this passage have believed that one of the reasons that 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). Herod the Great later changed its name to Sabaste.⁶ The name Samaria eventually came to describe the district in which the city stood, and later even the whole former Northern Kingdom.

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1522.

²See Finegan, pp. 309-11, and the map "Two Routes between Judea and Galilee" at the end of these notes.

³Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 20:6:1; Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:394.

⁴Josephus, *The Life ...*, par. 52.

⁵Barclay, 1:138.

⁶Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 15:8:5.

After the Assyrians captured the city and terminated the Northern 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 Babylonian Exile regarded the residents of Samaria as racial half-breeds and religious compromisers. The Samaritans ancestors resisted Nehemiah's attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:1-2). They also built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim opposite Shechem about 400 B.C., which they dedicated to Zeus Xenios. Centuries later, John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler of Judea, destroyed both the rival Samaritan temple and Shechem about 128 B.C.

These actions all resulted in continued hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans continued to worship on Mt. Gerizim, and they accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical and authoritative. A small group of Israelis who claim to be able to trace their ancestry back to the Samaritans survives to the present day.

4:5 The site of Sychar is fairly certain because of unbroken tradition and the presence of a water source there (v. 6). It was very near the Old Testament town of Shechem, which was 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. Nablus is the modern form of the name that the site later received in honor of the Roman imperial family Flavia Neapolis.

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

Edersheim estimated (in 1886) that the well was originally about 150 feet deep.¹

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

4:7-8 Jesus took the initiative to speak to the woman. 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 immorality 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 both because she was drawing water, and in order to initiate conversation with her.

It seems unusual to me that all of Jesus' disciples left Him to buy food. Would it not have been more normal for only one or two to go? Perhaps this was also part of Jesus' preparation for His encounter with the Samaritan woman, along with His having to go through Samaria.

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. By looser I do not mean that Jesus viewed the Mosaic Law more loosely than He should have, but more loosely than most of the Pharisees did.

4:9 The Jews typically regarded the Samaritans as unclean apostates.² 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.³ The Pharisees actually prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:404.

²See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:401. An apostate is a person who has renounced a formerly held religious belief.

³Mishnah *Niddah* 4:1.

the resurrection!¹ 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."²

This attitude accounts for the woman's shock at Jesus' request. Note that the woman's first word to Jesus was "How," and Nicodemus' first word to Jesus was also "How" (3:4). At this point she viewed Jesus simply as a Jew. Later, ironically, some Jews would call Him a Samaritan (8:48).

"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!'"³

John explained for his readers who were unfamiliar with Jewish prejudices that the Jews did not use (Gr. *synchronai*) the same objects (i.e., utensils) as the Samaritans or have any dealings with them.⁴ This was so that they could remain ceremonially clean.

4:10 Jesus ignored the woman's implied insult. She had drawn attention both to the gift of water that Jesus was requesting, and to the identity of Jesus as a Jew. Jesus picked up on both subjects and used them to whet the woman's curiosity. Jesus implied that God had a greater gift (Gr. *dorea*) for her, and that He had the authority to give it to her. The word that Jesus used for gift occurs only here in the Gospels. It stressed the freeness of God's gift.⁵ Here was another person who did not perceive Jesus' true glory or identity (cf. 1:14).

¹Wiersbe, 1:299; cf. Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:401.

²Blum, p. 285.

³Tenney, "John," p. 54.

⁴D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, pp. 373-82.

⁵See Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, pp.11-19.

Most interpreters understand Jesus' reference to "the gift of God" as a reference to eternal life, though some believe that He was alluding to the Torah.¹ 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 probably very limited knowledge of the Torah would not have enabled her to ask Jesus for living water. She did not yet recognize Him as the Messiah.

Jesus might have said: If you knew ... who I am. But this might have implied that He (as a human) was the source of living water. By saying "If you knew ... who it is" He implied that it is God who gives the water of life.²

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 a 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).³

Jesus' evangelistic method on this occasion was to start where the woman was—with something material (earthly or practical) that they both had in common, namely, the desire for water. He then captured her curiosity by implying that He was not just the person that 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 Nicodemus, He spoke about new

¹E.g., Odeberg, p. 150.

²J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 3:436.

³See Odeberg, pp. 149-69.

birth; but to this woman, He spoke about living water."¹

4:11-12 The woman responded by trying to find out how Jesus could give her that living water, and who He was. Jesus had no bucket, so how could He give her the running water from the spring at the bottom of the well. She apparently thought that Jesus was teasing her. Her question expected a negative answer. She could not see how He could be greater than the patriarch ("our father") Jacob.

Even today this is one of the deepest wells in Palestine, being over 75 feet deep, as local guides delight to point out.² 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'. The Samaritans traced their descent from Jacob through Joseph and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh.³

"There are not now [in the mid-19th century] two hundred Samaritans, all told, in the world. They themselves mention one hundred and fifty as the correct census."⁴

4:13-14 Jesus explained that He was not really speaking about literal water but about a spiritual source of refreshment and fulfillment that satisfied completely. To be able to provide such water Jesus would indeed have to be greater than Jacob. Jesus described this water as a fountain of water "springing up" within the individual. He was probably 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 pouring forth like 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 to

¹Wiersbe, 1:300.

²*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Jacob's Well," by R. L. Alden, 3:388.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:63.

⁴W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:214-15.

acquire it, in contrast to the literal water that the woman had to draw out of the well by hand.

4:15 The woman did not pretend to understand what Jesus was talking about, but she did want to avoid the tiresome 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 in order to help her realize that she had greater needs than physical needs, which He could meet (cf. 2:24-25). Jesus' instruction to call her husband was proper, because if He was really going to give her something valuable, her husband needed to be present. This was necessary to avoid any misunderstanding about the reason for the gift, especially in view of Samaritan/Jewish tensions. In that culture giving a gift to someone implied that the recipient would give something back to the giver. If Jesus had not told the woman to call her husband, she might have suspected that He wanted sexual favors in return for His gift.

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

We do not know how each of her previous marriages ended, whether in death or divorce. However, it would have been very unusual for all five former husbands to have died. The implication is that some divorce had torn her marriages apart. This implication is even 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, and 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 that 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."¹

"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."²

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. But Barrett claimed that this view psychologizes the story in a way that John did not intend.³

"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."⁴

¹Carson, p. 221.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 236. Cf. Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:414.

³Barrett, p. 236.

⁴F. F. Bruce, p. 108.

Another view is that the woman sincerely wanted to know the answer to her question:

"To a Samaritan no question could appear more worthy of a prophet's decision than the settlement of the religious centre of the world. Thus the difficulty which is proposed is not a diversion, but the natural thought of one brought face to face with an interpreter of the divine will."¹

Perhaps both elements figured in her motivation: discomfort and curiosity.

Part of the old Jewish/Samaritan controversy involved the proper place of worship. In Deuteronomy 12:5 God had said that His people were to seek the place 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 Torah (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). In the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Israelites are said to have built their altar on Mt. Gerizim, not on Mt. Ebal (Deut. 27:4).

Shechem had long associations as a place where God had met with His people. It was where God first revealed Himself to Abraham and Abraham first built an altar after entering the Promised Land (Gen. 12:6-7). It was also where Jacob had chosen to live, and where he had buried his idols after returning from Paddan-aram (Gen. 33:18-20; 35:4).

"They [the Samaritans] had a tradition that Abraham's offering of Isaac took place on this

¹Westcott, p. 71.

mountain [Gen: 22:2, 9] and they held that it was here that Abraham met Melchizedek [Gen. 14:17]. In fact, most of the blessed events in the time of the patriarchs seem to have been linked with Gerizim!"¹

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. After all, she had already acknowledged Him as a prophet. This command ("believe Me") 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.² "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. On top of this, the Samaritans had added pagan concepts to their faith that came from their Gentile forefathers. If the woman truly believed that Jesus was a prophet, as she claimed, she would have 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 some of that new revelation.

By contrast, the Jews accepted all of God's revelation in the Old Testament, and they 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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 237. See also *The Nelson ...*, p. 1766. 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*.

²See my comments on 2:4.

(having to do with salvation). God intended His revelation to result in salvation for humankind (cf. 3:17). In that sense, salvation had come from 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.¹

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 that was 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. An oxymoron involves the joining of contradictory or incongruous terms to make a point.² 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, contrasted with 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 (translated "in") that governs both nouns ("spirit" and "truth"), linked by the conjunction (translated "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.

¹Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 11:8:6.

²See Appendix 7 "Some figures of speech in Scripture" at the end of my notes on Matthew.

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. In other words, it is heartfelt. In addition, truly spiritual worship 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. And its subject is spiritual matters.

This worship can include physical matters, such as singing and 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. That is, it does not consist of merely physical actions but involves the interaction of the human spirit with the divine spirit. Generally speaking, Judaism was a worship of the letter, not of the spirit. It was external and emphasized ritual.

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 for the Lord.¹ 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. Samaritanism was a worship of falsehood, not of the truth. Worship "in truth" 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. It is also worship that is in harmony with the truth that God has revealed in His Word.

¹See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, pp. 77-84.

"A true idea of God is essential to a right service of Him."¹

True worship of God is all about Him, not about us. 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."

"The combination 'spirit and truth' points to the need for complete sincerity and complete reality in our approach to God."²

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).³ 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, suggesting a genuine offering from or of oneself to the real and actual, one and only, true God.

4:24 The AV has Jesus saying, "God is a spirit." One could infer that He is one spirit among many. Other English translations 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 to the noun (cf. 1 John 1:5; 4:8). That seems to have been Jesus' intention here.

¹Westcott, p. 73.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 239.

³Blum, p. 286.

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 (having a body), those who worship Him must do so in a spiritual rather than a material way. A spiritual (new) birth (3:5) is prerequisite for true spiritual worship.

The essential reason that worship of God must be spiritual is that God is a spiritual being, not a physical god. 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 His Spirit in His Word, has revealed that we should.

"The words 'in spirit and truth' relate both to the inner person [the heart] and to the outward acts. These must occur together, and when they do, true worship occurs."¹

4:25 Jesus' explanation must have made some 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 her about this: Messiah was coming, and when He arrived, He would reveal divine mysteries and clarify all these matters (cf. 16:13). The Samaritans anticipated Messiah's arrival, as the Jews did, but the Samaritans viewed Him primarily as a teacher (Deut. 18:15-19).² They usually referred to Him as the Taheb (probably meaning "the Restorer" or possibly "He Who Returns").³ Here John translated the meaning of Messiah ("He who is called Christ") for his Gentile readers (cf. 1:38, 41).

4:26 Because the woman was prepared to welcome Messiah in His prophetic dignity, Jesus then identified Himself to her as the Messiah whom she hoped for. Jesus did not reveal Himself to

¹Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship*, p. 93.

²See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:402-3, for other things the Samaritans believed.

³Barrett, p. 239; Carson, p. 226.

the Jews as the Messiah because of their identification of Messiah, almost exclusively, as a military deliverer. 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. However, Mark 9:41 records that He used the term of Himself on another occasion indirectly. 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 portrayed them in his narrative, they seem to typify Jews and non-Jews as well as the normal reactions of those groups to Jesus.

CONTRASTS BETWEEN NICODEMUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN¹		
	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

¹Chart adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 284.

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 a woman. Their reaction reflects the typical Jewish prejudices against Samaritans and women. It was uncommon for rabbis to speak with women.¹ However, they refrained from questioning her and Him, probably in order to avoid becoming involved in this unusual conversation.

4:28 The fact that the woman left her waterpot 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 "waterpot" (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 excitement. There is plenty of symbolism in this story already that Jesus explained.

¹For some of their sayings prohibiting conversation with females, see Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 242; Westcott, p. 74; and Barrett, p. 240.

It would have been natural for the woman to report her discovery to the men in Sychar, because they (as the spiritual leaders) would have had to determine if Jesus really was the Messiah.

- 4:29 Her hyperbole is understandable, and 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 (His words) but His ability to know her past (His works). She wisely framed her thinking about Jesus in the form of a question to encourage 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 of the city to the well in order 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 of Him to eat in order to teach them something about His priorities. Something was more satisfying to Him than physical food. They showed interest in physical need primarily, but He had more concern for spiritual need.¹
- 4:33-34 The disciples continued to think only on the level of physical food, like the woman had thought only of physical water (v. 15). They were all unspiritual in their thinking. Jesus responded that what satisfied Him ("My food"), 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 Messianic consciousness of Jesus is clear and steady (5:30; 6:38). He never doubted that the Father sent him."²

¹See Hodges, *The Hungry ...*, pp. 20-27.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:69.

"The creative will of God, realized in obedience, sustains life."¹

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 like so much living grain.

Jesus' reference to four months was probably proverbial. That was the approximate time between the last sowing and the earliest harvest reaping.² His point was that between the spiritual task of sowing the gospel and reaping belief, the intervening time may be very brief.³

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

"The trouble is not that the fields are not white. The trouble is that the labourers are not ready."⁴

4:36 The reaper ("the one who reaps," the harvester) in view was Jesus. Potentially His disciples could become reapers too. The wages that reapers receive are the reward for their labor. For Jesus, this was the exaltation that the Father gave Him and the people that God will give Him for carrying out His will faithfully. For the disciples, it is the rewards that they, and we, can receive 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 harvested grain, who will obtain eternal life. The person who

¹Barrett, p. 241.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 63.

³Barrett, p. 241.

⁴Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 78.

sows is anyone who proclaims the gospel, but ultimately it is Jesus (cf. Matt. 13:37).

4:37 This verse, 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."¹

4:38 This proverb was true in the case 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. Non-Jews normally responded more positively to Jesus than did Jews, both in the Gospels and in Acts.

4:39 Harvesting followed the arrival of the Samaritans who had come out from Sychar to see Jesus. Many of the Samaritans 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

¹Tenney, "John," p. 58.

types of people, witness concerning Jesus' identity, to bring others to faith in Him. Bearing witness is the work of disciples (cf. John the Baptist, and the apostles).

4:40-42 The openness of these Samaritans contrasts with the hostility of so many of Jesus' Jewish hearers (cf. 1:11).

"The citizens of Jerusalem never asked Jesus to stay; afterward he passed through Jericho, and not a soul asked him to stay."¹

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—more than just those who visited Jesus by Jacob's well—became believers in Him.

These additional converts believed because of Jesus' word (Jesus' own witness), which confirmed to them what the woman had said about Him. Jesus' testimony 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).

"... it is a significant fact that this magnificent conception of the work of Christ was first expressed by a Samaritan, for whom the hope of a Deliverer had not been shaped to suit national ambition."²

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.³ Nevertheless Jesus was the true Savior

¹Lenski, p. 340.

²Westcott, p. 77.

³Carson, p. 232.

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 title does not mean that everyone will experience eternal salvation, as the doctrine of universalism teaches, but that Jesus has made everyone savable, and that 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."¹

This was the first instance of cross-cultural evangelism that the Gospel evangelists recorded in Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry to Gentiles came later, according to their records. 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.

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

Jesus continued to move north, back into Galilee, where He healed a nobleman's son.

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

¹Wiersbe, 1:302.

(cf. 1:19, 29, 35, 43; 2:1). However, this move completed a cycle in Jesus' movements, and it 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 to Galilee 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.¹ Perhaps John regarded Judea and Jerusalem as Jesus' spiritual homeland and hometown, since He was 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 frequently referred to Nazareth as Jesus' physical home (1:45-46; 7:41, 52; 19:19). Besides, Jesus did not choose where He ministered based on the popular acceptance that 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.² 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.³ Jesus' own country was Jewish turf rather than Samaritan territory. On Jewish turf Jesus had not

¹Westcott, p. 77; Hoskyns, pp. 287-88; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 200-201.

²Lightfoot, p. 35.

³Brown, 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.

experienced the honor that He had among the Samaritans (cf. 2:18, 20, 22, 23-25; 3:10; 4:1-3). The "so" 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" introduces the reason for the Galileans' reception of Him that follows. The people from the Prophet's own country (Galilean Jews) only 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). Jesus performed at least three miracles in Capernaum: He healed a centurion's servant, He raised Jairus' daughter, and He healed this official's son (cf. Matt. 11:23-24).

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).¹ In short, this section seems to be an *inclusio*, framed by two miracles in Cana, with two conversations occurring between them.² 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).

¹See Pink, 1:231-32, for seven comparisons between the two Cana miracle stories.

²An *inclusio* is a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as bracketing, bookending, or an envelope structure, which consists of creating a frame by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section.

- 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, Nathanael's hometown (21:2), where He performed another significant miracle. John evidently included it in order 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'."¹

- 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 that Jesus returned there. The royal official (Gr. *basilikos*) was, going by his title, a man who served a king, in either a civil or

¹Tasker, pp. 82-83.

a military capacity.¹ That king 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). This official was probably Jewish (v. 48).

Whether this royal official was the Chuza who was Herod's steward, mentioned in Luke 8:3, remains a mystery. 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 occasion. An important feature of this sign was the significant 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 in order to heal his son. He obviously believed that Jesus could heal people, but there is no indication that he initially believed that Jesus was more than a healer.

"Instances are recorded in the Talmud, which may here serve as our guide. Various cases are related in which those seriously ill, and even at the point of death, were restored by the prayers of celebrated Rabbis."²

The official 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.

"Sometimes the Lord allows you to have a need in order to cause you to seek Him."³

"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

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:424.

²Ibid.

³Mitchell, p. 88.

lad, and that if the boy died meanwhile, it was too late."¹

4:48 The official was simply responding like most Galileans would have. Jesus used the plural you, indicating that this man's unbelief was typical of most of his neighbors (cf. 2:24). 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 these miracles produced in those who witnessed 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 that He could heal from a distance. 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.

"This miracle is a notable instance of our Lord 'not quenching the smoking flax:' just as His reproof of the Samaritan woman was of His 'not breaking the bruised reed.'"²

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

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 believed that Jesus could heal from a distance. If he had refused to go home without Jesus, he would have been disbelieving Jesus' word. He chose not to insist on receiving

¹Wiersbe, 1:303.

²Alford, 1:737-38. Cf. Isa. 42:3.

evidence, and he exercised faith without tangible proof. Thus he believed in Jesus in a deeper sense than he had at first, because he put his faith in His promise: "the word that Jesus spoke to him."

"The official became a model of what it means to believe apart from signs."¹

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. on the day before the official met his servants. When he met them, he learned that his son's condition had improved significantly—not just had begun to improve, as he had expected—but at the very moment Jesus had given His promise. His recovery was no coincidence. 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).²

"The miracle was a double one—on the body of the absent child; on the heart of the present father; one cured of his sickness, the other of his unbelief."³

4:54 John, interestingly, called this miracle the second sign that Jesus performed, even though He did other miracles in both Galilee and Judea after He had changed the water to wine (cf. 2:23; 3:2). Additionally, this is the second of several (seven) miracles that John labeled in his Gospel as signs, although he himself numbered only the first two. These facts point to John's regarding of the first and second signs as similar and related to each other. The structure of this part of John's

¹Howard, p. 70.

²Wiersbe, 1:303.

³Trench, p. 129.

narrative, as explained 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 signpost 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, like the first one that John described in detail, had a limited audience. Only the family and household servants of the official knew of it at first. This was typical of Jesus' 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). This part of John's Gospel is a section framed by two miracles in Cana with two statements about unbelief by Jesus, and two evangelistic conversations of Jesus occurring between those miracles. The first sign testified to His creative power to change the quality of things.¹ 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, which was a common Jewish response to Him. John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus' identity as the Messiah. The Samaritan woman's testimony implied that Jesus was omniscient. Many other Samaritans acknowledged Jesus as the Savior of the world, which was a common Gentile response to Him. 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.²

The first sign in John's Gospel shows Jesus' power over time, and the second sign shows His power over space. The first one resulted in Jesus' disciples believing in Him (2:11), and the second one resulted in non-disciples believing in Him (4:53). John the Apostle also called Jesus the Son of God, the Giver of eternal life, and the One from heaven. This section of

¹Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, p. 312.

²Ibid.

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* [from without], 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."¹

"Up to the present time the Lord has offered Himself to typical representatives of the whole Jewish race at Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria, and in Galilee, in such a way as to satisfy the elements of true faith. Now the conflict begins which issues in the Passion. Step by step faith and unbelief are called out in a parallel development. ... The crises of its development are the national Festivals. And the whole controversy is gathered round three miracles. (1) *The healing of the impotent man at Bethesda* (v.). (2) *The healing of the man born blind* (ix.). (3) *The raising of Lazarus* (xi.)."²

Until now John presented Jesus dealing with individuals almost exclusively. This continues, but now there is more interaction with the Pharisees. 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

¹W. H. Griffith Thomas, "The Plan of the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:500 (October-December 1968):319.

²Westcott, p. 80.

antagonism. However, the main emphasis in this 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 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."¹

In chapter 5, opposition to Jesus began with objection to His healing on the Sabbath. This led to Jesus explaining His relationship to His 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.²

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.³ It does, however, have implications for the length of Jesus' earthly ministry. Apparently John mentioned a feast just to account for Jesus' presence in Jerusalem.⁴ Hoehner favored one of the three pilgrim feasts that the Mosaic Law required Jewish males to attend, which were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. He preferred the last of these, though he conceded that certain identification is probably impossible.⁵ Andrews favored

¹Tasker, p. 84.

²Tenney, *John: The Gospel...*, p. 312.

³Alford, 1:740.

⁴Barrett, p. 251.

⁵Hoehner, pp. 58-59. See also Lenski, p. 360.

Passover.¹ Edersheim believed that this was the Feast of Purim:

"For no other feast could have intervened between December (John 4:35) and the Passover (John 6:4), except that of the 'Dedication of the Temple,' and that is specially designated as such (John 10:22), and not simply as 'a feast of the Jews.'"²

John probably only mentioned the feast to explain Jesus' return to, and presence in, Jerusalem.

5:2 John frequently used the Greek historic (dramatic) present tense in order to describe past events. Therefore this verse does not prove that he wrote his Gospel before the fall of Jerusalem. Wallace is one scholar who believed that it does prove this.³ He pointed out that the equative verb, *estin*, translated "is," used here, nowhere else in the New Testament is clearly a historical present. Perhaps this is the one place where it is.

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."⁴ The modern name is St. Anne's pool. 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.⁵ The pool may have been used for swimming, since the word pool (Gr. *kolumbethra*, which was a common word for "swimming pool"

¹Samuel J. Andrews, *The Life of Our Lord Upon the Earth*, p. 197. See also Jamieson, et al., p. 035.

²Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 332.

³Wallace, p. 531.

⁴See the map "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

⁵J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem as Jesus knew it: Archaeology as Evidence*, pp. 95-104.

outside the New Testament) is related to the word swim (Gr. *kolumbao*).¹

- 5:3a Many disabled people used to lie in these porticoes because of the healing elements in the water.
- 5:3b-4 This section of the text has doubtful authenticity. No Greek manuscript before A.D. 400 contains these words.² Evidently scribes added these statements later to explain the troubling of the waters that occurred periodically (v. 7).³ However, these scribal explanations were probably based on a superstition. They 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.⁴ Probably the 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 that resulted in his inability to walk at least (v. 7), which 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 and to others.⁵ For example, 38 years recalls the period during which the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, following their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, before they entered the Promised Land.
- 5:6 Jesus could have learned about the man's condition from others, or John may have written what he did in order to impress his readers with Jesus' supernatural knowledge. In Capernaum Jesus had healed another paralytic who was lowered through the roof in front of him (Mark 2:1-12), but at

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:78, 162.

²Blum, p. 289; Tenney, "John," p. 62.

³For 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.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 242.

⁵E.g., Westcott, p. 82.

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 and if he was willing to put himself in Jesus' hands. Other reasons may have been to focus attention on Himself, to remind the man of his utter helplessness, and/or to give the man hope.¹

Some people unfortunately are perfectly content to remain in their miserable condition (cf. 3:19-20). Jesus apparently only delivered people who wanted His help. Jesus' question also led the man to reflect on his helpless condition. Evidently this was the only person that He healed that day, even though there were many more whom He could have healed (v. 3; cf. Acts 3:2). Jesus only saves people who want salvation and whom He sovereignly chooses to save (cf. 6:37).

"It is impossible to find *any* ground in the man himself as a reason for Christ singling him out for special favor. The *only* explanation is the mere sovereign pleasure of Christ Himself [cf. v. 21]."²

"My question is this: Why didn't Jesus heal the whole crowd? ... There was only one who had given up hope of getting into the pool. All of them were still hoping to get in. They had their friends, their families. They had their different ones to help them. But this man said, 'Sir, I have on one. I've given up hope.'"³

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. His statement also shows that he had

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 1036.

²Pink, 1:248.

³Mitchell, p. 95. Paragraph divisions omitted.

more faith in the means of healing than in the Lord and that he had to do something to be healed.

"We must feel that, while faith was commonly the prerequisite of healing, it was not absolutely necessary. Jesus is not limited by human frailty as he works the works of God."¹

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 (v. 11). 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. Isaiah 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.

"The impotent man met the Omnipotent Man."²

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. This probably explains in part why Jesus healed this particular man: in order to provoke the controversy.

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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 269. Cf. Ryrie, *The Miracles ...*, p. 11.

²McGee, 4:396.

the Sabbath, like 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.¹ But they did not allow healing on the Sabbath. God's intent in the fourth commandment was to free people from having to work seven days a week in order to earn a living (Exod. 20:9-11; Deut. 5:12-15). Therefore this healed paralytic was not breaking the spirit of the law, but he was violating the rabbinic interpretation of it.

5:11-13 The healed man passed off his responsibility for disobeying the rabbis' rule by blaming Jesus. This was no way to express gratitude for what Jesus had done for him (cf. v. 15). But 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, Jesus was a worse offender than the man who had carried his pallet.

Significantly, the leaders did not show any interest in the man's cured condition. That should have shown them that Jesus was the Messiah, 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 with the leaders (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

¹Mishnah *Sabbath* 7:2; 10:5.

John wanted to emphasize but the lesson on the importance of believing in Him that Jesus used the occasion to teach.

- 5:14 Some time shortly after that Jesus found the man in the temple precincts, which 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 sin further. If he did, worse consequences than his former ailment would befall him (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). Jesus 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 spiritual regeneration. Jesus' point was that the man needed to regard his new health as an opportunity to make a new break with sin (cf. Gal. 5:13).

"Sickness is not always the direct result of personal sin (John 9:1-4), but in this case it apparently was."¹

- 5:15 It seems that the man's motive for telling the authorities about Jesus was not to glorify 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 in what had happened. 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.'"²

- 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 Jesus, or at least considering His claims, the Jewish authorities persecuted Jesus for doing what they

¹Ryrie, *The Miracles ...*, p. 26.

²Howard, p. 72. His quotation is from R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Four Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, p. 138.

considered to be work on the Sabbath. Their persecution initially took the form of verbal opposition, as the following verses clarify.

"This is the first open declaration of hostility to Christ (though the words *and sought to slay him*, which are wrongly added in this verse from v. 18, must be omitted); and it is based upon the alleged violation of the letter of the Law with regard to the Sabbath [e.g., Jer. 17:21], as in the other Gospels, Matt. xii. 2 ff. and parallels."¹

Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal the man. And He could have healed him without drawing attention to Himself. He also could have healed him without telling him to carry his mat. Jesus did all of these things in order to create a public situation in which He revealed that He had the same nature, power, and authority as God the Father.

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.² Jesus, too, viewed God as constantly at work ("My Father is working until now"). Jesus claimed to be doing Himself what God was doing ("I Myself am working"). He described His work as coordinate with the Father's, not dependent on it. 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 His Father's work. He provided deliverance and a new life for the paralyzed man, like the Father provides salvation for those whom sin has bound. Obviously Jesus was

¹Westcott, p. 83.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 247.

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."¹

5:18 The Jewish leaders did not miss the force of what Jesus was claiming, namely, equality with God the Father. Liberal interpreters who say that Jesus never claimed to be God have a difficult time with this passage. John here noted that these Jews had already been trying to do away with Jesus. These claims increased their efforts.

"Did Jesus *really* make Himself 'equal with God'? Well, let us see. He here claims equality in seven particulars. 1. Equal in working ... (verse 19). 2. Equal in knowing ... (verse 20). 3. Equal in resurrecting ... (verse 21 with verses 28, 29). 4. Equal in judging ... (verse 22 with verse 27). 5. Equal in honour ... (verse 23). 6. Equal in regenerating ... (verses 24, 25). 7. Equal in self-existence ... (verse 26)."²

To the contemporary western mind the idea of "son" connotes a different, independent person, but the ancient eastern mind thought of a son as the extension of his father. The word connoted identification with, rather than distinction from, the father. 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 the administrative order of the Trinity. 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.

¹Tom Thatcher, "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):448.

²Baxter, 5:309.

"It would seem that in their eyes God could exalt a man to be as God, but whoever *made himself* as God called down divine retribution on himself. They saw Jesus in the latter category."¹

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

"A close look shows how similar John's form of the Sabbath argument is to Jesus' Synoptic claim that he is Lord of the Sabbath. The Synoptics stress Jesus' position and authority; John stresses the relational foundation behind such a claim."²

This is the second of seven incidents that the Gospel evangelists recorded in which Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders over Sabbath observance. The chart below lists them in probable chronological order.

SABBATH CONTROVERSIES				
Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The disciples plucked ears of grain in Galilee.	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Jesus healed a paralytic at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem.				5:1-18
Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in Capernaum.	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus referred to the Jews circumcising on the Sabbath.				7:22-23
Jesus healed a man born blind in Jerusalem.				9:1-34

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 75.

²Bock, p. 442.

Jesus healed a woman bent over in Judea.			13:10-17	
Jesus healed a man with dropsy in Perea.			14:1-6	

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.¹

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 in order 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."²

¹See Stephen S. Kim, "The Christological and Eschatological Significance of Jesus' Miracle in John 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:660 (October-December 2008):413-24.

²Tenney, "John," p. 64.

"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)."¹

5:20 Jesus next clarified why He could do whatever the Father does. He could do so because the Father loves the Son (cf. 3:36). Because the Father loves the Son, the Father shows the Son all the things that 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) that the Father will show the Son 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 that they would consider His claims.

5:21 The fact that the Father discloses everything He does to the Son, and the Son does whatever the Father does, is clearly proven by the Son's giving life to the dead. The Jews acknowledged that only God could raise the dead (2 Kings 5:7; 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 with the Father's will 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 restating 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.

¹ *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1130.

18:25], and they expected to stand before him at the last day."¹

The Son's giving of life is in preparation for His judging. Judgment here probably includes discriminating (balanced and just review), not just announcing final condemnation (sentencing). 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 that the Father has delegated judging to the Son is so 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 equal with one another.

"The 'religious' people who say that they worship God, but who deny the deity of Christ, have neither the Father nor the Son!"²

These people include Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarian Universalists, if they believe what their churches teach.

"There is small comfort here for those who praise Jesus as teacher and yet deny his claims to worship."³

5:24 Jesus proceeded from talking about His relation to the Father to explaining His relation to people. He developed one idea from the preceding argument more fully. He introduced it with a solemn affirmation. Jesus had just said that He gave life to

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 279.

²Wiersbe, 1:306.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:86.

whomever He pleased (v. 21). He now described these people as those who hear His Word and believe the Father ("Him who sent Me"). They will not experience condemning judgment (cf. 3:18; Rom. 6:14; 8:1), but they begin already to experience eternal life (cf. 3:36; Eph. 2:1, 5).

"Realized eschatology" refers to the aspect of future conditions that exist already in the present. In this case, the condition is the believer's possession of eternal life. Whereas eternal life is something that believers look forward to in the future, we also already have it in the present. Beasley-Murray called this verse "the strongest affirmation of realized eschatology applied to the believer in the NT."¹ People pass from one realm (death) to another (life) the moment they believe (cf. 1 John 3:14)

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, as He had just explained, 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.

"The two conditions of eternal life are (1) knowledge of the revelation made by the Son, and (2) belief in the truth of it, that is, belief in the word of the Father who speaks through the Son."²

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

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 76. See Harris, pp. 235-37, for a discussion of realized eschatology in John's Gospel.

²Westcott, p. 87.

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."¹

- 5:25 Jesus continued to describe what believers will experience in the future fully, which they already experience now partially (cf. 4:23), namely, resurrection life. They will experience it in the future physically, but they experience it now spiritually (i.e., in the spiritual realm; cf. Rom. 6:13). 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 why Jesus can do these things. He can do them because He has life resident within Himself. He is self-existent, whereas humans must receive their life from Him: the source of life. The Father gave the Son life (cf. v. 22; 1:4). That is, the Father delegated it to Him, just as He delegated judgment to Him. The Son can give life to others because the Father gave Him the authority to do so.
- 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 the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14). He is the Anointed One whom God has sent, but He is also fully human—the only perfect Man who can represent mankind before God. Jesus can judge humanity because He belongs to humanity 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).²
- 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 in this context means believing on the Son (6:29; cf. 3:21). Theirs will be a resurrection resulting in eternal life. Those who

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 280. Paragraph division omitted.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 149.

do evil, by not believing on the Son (3:36; cf. 3:19), will experience eternal condemnation following their resurrection. As always, judgment is on the basis of one's works.

Another view is that only unbelievers are in view in both descriptions.¹ However, believers and unbelievers have both been prominent throughout the foregoing discussion.²

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).

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, because the Jews had questioned His authority.

"The train of argument in this section is like a court scene, reminiscent of the trial scenes in the OT, when witnesses are summoned by Yahweh to testify on behalf of the gods of the nations in the face of the manifest truth of the only God, whose witnesses his people are (see esp. Isa 43:8-13; 44:6-11)."³

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, and others take it as the beginning of the next one.

Jesus' point was that He could not do anything independently of the Father because of His submission to Him. His judgment is the result of listening to His Father. His judgment is righteous

¹Barrett, p. 263.

²See also Zane C. Hodges, "Those Who Have Done Good—John 5:28-29," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:542 (April-June 1979):158-66.

³Beasley-Murray, pp. 77-78.

(fair) because the desire for self-glory does not taint it. The Son's will (purpose) is totally to advance the Father's will.

"Judges often have difficulty in knowing what is law and what is right, but the Son's task as Judge is simple enough, the will of the Father which he knows (verse 20)."¹

5:31-32

"This second main division of the discourse consists, like the first, of two parts. The witness to the Son is first laid open (31-40), and then the rejection of the witness in its cause and end (41-47)."²

Jesus had said that the Son can do nothing independently of the Father (vv. 19, 30). That includes even bearing witness about Himself. 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.

"He says in substance, 'I do not ask you to take *my* word alone concerning who I really am.'"³

Jesus had just explained that He only said and did what the Father said and did. Therefore Jesus' witness ("testimony") 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.⁴

Some students of John's Gospel have thought that Jesus contradicted what He said here in 8:14, but there He was

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:88.

²Westcott, p. 88.

³Lenski, p. 403.

⁴See Tenney, "Topics from ...," pp. 229-41, "The Meaning of 'Witness' in John."

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."¹

- 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). Accordingly, 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 to the truth that Jesus was the divine Messiah (cf. 1:40-41).
- 5:34 However, Jesus did not need, and did not accept, human testimony in order to establish His identity in His own mind. The only witness He needed was the Father's witness. He simply mentioned John the Baptist's witness in order to establish His identity in His hearers' minds—so 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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 288.

no longer followed John. Thus John's witness to Jesus' identity was true, but it had little continuing impact.

"Ah! dear reader, will the Saviour be able to say of *you*, in the coming day, 'He was a burning and shining lamp?'"¹

5:36 Jesus had weightier evidence for His identity than John's witness. It came from His Father, and it took several forms. The first of these forms was the works (Gr. *erga*) that Jesus performed (cf. 10:25; 14:11). These works included all of Jesus' activities: 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. Everything that Jesus did was simply an extension of the Father's work (vv. 19-30). Once we understand the Father/Son relationship, we can see that everything that Jesus said and did was precisely 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 Israel's institutions—including His witness at Jesus' baptism. Jesus probably meant all of God's anticipatory revelation about Jesus (cf. Heb. 1:1).² Jesus probably did not mean the Father's witness through the Old Testament exclusively, since He mentioned that later (v. 39). Another, though 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 to be valid.

¹Pink, 1:276.

²Lightfoot, pp. 146-47.

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 His form (cf. 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). John used the phrase "remaining in" you, here and elsewhere in order to denote "permanent possession and abiding influence" (cf. 1 John 3:15).¹

"Many have the word of God coming into them, and making some impressions for awhile [*sic*], but it does not *abide* with them; it is not constantly in them, as a man at home, but only now and then, as a *wayfaring man* [a traveler on foot]."²

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 even done what their forefathers had done ("believe"), even though Jesus was a clearer revelation of God than what the patriarchs had.

5:39-40

"From the essential elements of revelation, external (*voice, shape*) and internal (*word*), the Lord passes to the record of Revelation in Scripture. This the Jews misused."³

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 "examine" 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

¹Dods, 1:744.

²Henry, p. 1533.

³Westcott, pp. 90-91.

wrong reason, namely, to earn eternal life through their studious 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 the fullest possible meaning from its words, because they believed that the very study itself would bring them life."¹

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). Eternal life comes through believing on Jesus, not through Bible study (vv. 21, 26; cf. 1:4; Rom. 10:4), even though it is through Bible study that one comes to know Jesus better. Like John the Baptist, the Old Testament pointed away from itself to Jesus.

"The teaching of the Old Testament is never exhausted. As we know more of Christ it reveals more to us concerning Him."²

"... we know that at the time of the Syrian persecutions, just before the rising of the Maccabees [2nd century B.C.], the possession of portions or of the whole of the Old Testament by private families was common in Israel. For, part of those persecutions consisted in making search for these Scriptures and destroying them (1 Macc. i. 57), as well as punishing their possessors (Jos. *Ant.* xii. 5, 4)."³

"It is blessed to note the *order* in which Christ placed the three witnesses to which He appealed

¹Tenney, "John," p. 68.

²Westcott, p. 91.

³Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, pp. 116-17.

in proof of His equality with God. First, there was the witness of His own Divine works. Second, there was the witness which the Father had borne to Him through the prophets. Third, there was the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, written by men moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus in these three witnesses there is a remarkable reference made to each of the three Persons in the Holy Trinity."¹

5:41-42 Jesus did not appeal to the testimony of humans in order 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 in order to win the Father's praise, not man's praise. Jesus' critics, in contrast, behaved in order 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."²

5:43 These critics also failed to come to Jesus for life (v. 40) because they refused to acknowledge that He had come from the Father. By rejecting Jesus, they had rejected the Father's Ambassador who had come in His name and had therefore rejected 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, especially another messiah coming in his own name: the Antichrist. Rejection of what is true always makes one susceptible to counterfeits (cf. Luke 23:18-23).

¹Pink, 1:280.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 294.

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 seek 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 to save, not to judge (3:17).

The Jews typically hoped that they could earn salvation by keeping the Law, and they 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, whom Moses wrote about.

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. Jesus believed that Moses wrote the Torah (Pentateuch), something many critical scholars deny.

This discourse constituted both 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, besides 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.

John omitted many events in the life of Jesus— between John 5:47 and 6:1—that the Synoptic evangelists recorded as happening. 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 Gospel records the high point of Jesus' popularity. His following continued to build, and antagonism also continued to increase. This is the only section in John that narrates Jesus' later Galilean ministry, which occupies so much of the Synoptic Gospels.

"As chapter 5 relates the rise of opposition in Jerusalem, so chapter 6 relates the rise of opposition in Galilee."¹

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 complements the others (cf. vv. 5, 15). This miracle demonstrated Jesus' authority over quantity.² It constitutes further proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

"The record of a critical scene in Christ's work in Galilee follows the record of the critical scene at Jerusalem. At Jerusalem Christ revealed Himself as the Giver of life; here He reveals Himself as the Support and Guide of life. In the former case the central teaching was upon the relation of the Son to the Father; in this case it is on the relation of Christ to the believer. ... The two signs, *the Feeding of the Five Thousand* (1-15), and *the Walking on the Sea* (15-21), combine to show Christ as the support of life and as the guide and strengthener of the toiling. Through His disciples He first satisfies the multitudes,

¹Lenski, p. 428.

²Tenney, *John: The Gospel ...*, p. 312.

and then He Himself, at first unseen and unrecognized, brings His laboring disciples to the haven of rest."¹

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 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 of the lake. Herod Antipas had founded it in A.D. 20 and named it in honor of the current Roman emperor, Tiberius, who ruled from A.D. 15 to 35.

6:2-3 Multitudes followed Jesus because they wanted to benefit from His miraculous powers, as well as to 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."²

Jesus went up on the mountainside in order 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.

¹Westcott, p. 94. Paragraph divisions omitted.

²Tasker, pp. 92-93.

Exod. 16:21). Or 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) and thus 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."¹

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. 32.²

"The movement from the miracle to the discourse, from Moses to Jesus (vv. 32-5, cf. i. 17), and, above all, from *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."³

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).

"If those thousands were all genuine disciples, it was well; but if not—if the greater number were following Christ under misapprehension—the sooner that became apparent the better. To allow so large a mixed multitude to follow Himself any longer without sifting would have been on Christ's

¹Blum, p. 293.

²See Hoehner, pp. 55-59, 61, 143.

³Hoskyns, p. 281.

part to encourage false hopes, and to give rise to serious misapprehensions as to the nature of His kingdom and His earthly mission. And no better method separating the chaff from the wheat in that large company of professed disciples could have been devised, than first to work a miracle which would bring to the surface the latent carnality of the greater number, and then to preach a sermon which could not fail to be offensive to the carnal mind."¹

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 prominent 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 understandable, 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.

"The 'compassion' of Christ, though noted frequently by the other Evangelists [e.g., Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:34], is *never* referred to by John, who dwells upon the dignity and glory of His Divine person."²

Francesco D'Andria, archaeological excavation director at Hierapolis, in present-day Turkey, announced in 2011 that he had discovered the tomb of the martyred apostle Philip in a newly excavated church.³

6:7 Philip too, like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, was thinking only on the physical level. Two hundred denarii represented about eight months' wages for a working man.

¹A. B. Bruce, pp. 124-25.

²Pink, 1:288-89.

³"Philip's Tomb Discovered—But Not Where Expected," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38:1 (January/February 2012):18.

Such a large sum might be the minimum they could scrape by with, but it would not provide enough bread to satisfy the people—even a little. Philip, like an accountant, put his mental calculator to work and concluded that the situation was hopeless.¹

6:8-9 Andrew had discovered a little boy (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.² Barley bread was the food of the poor in Israel. One writer called the boy's food mere "hors d'oeuvres."³ However, another writer believed that this was a larger meal than a boy could eat, and so he must have intended to sell it.⁴ 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 in order 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 plus Jesus' ability to feed a multitude with such meager rations. But notice too that the boy gave up all that he had to Jesus, which provides a great example for us readers.

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, abundant grass. Perhaps we should picture Jesus as the Good Shepherd here making His sheep lie down in green pastures (cf. Ps. 23:2). Perhaps Jesus seated them also in order 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

¹See Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 5: "Impossibilities: Uncrossable Rivers of Life," pp. 61-74.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 270.

³Tenney, "John," p. 72.

⁴Blaiklock, p. 376.

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. Evidently Jesus multiplied the food while 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 (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9).

John probably did not intend here 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. And there is no mention of drink. John also did not refer to the disciples' role in assisting Jesus by serving the people, probably in order 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.¹

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 in order to avoid waste. The leftover pieces (Gr. *klasmata*) that remained were not crumbs or scraps on the ground, but pieces broken by Jesus and not consumed.² All four evangelists noted that there were 12 large Jewish baskets (Gr. *kophinos*) of bread fragments left over. Commentators have suggested that these baskets and their number represent either 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.

"The Jews had a custom of leaving something for those that served."³

¹See Barclay, 1:206.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:99.

³Ibid.

"We need never be anxious that there will not be enough left for our own needs. God never allows a generous giver to be the loser. It is miserliness which impoverishes. The disciples had more left at the finish than they had at the beginning!"¹

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 fed the Israelites in a wilderness area (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:35), as Moses had, with bread that apparently came from heaven.

6:15 Moses additionally had provided military leadership for the Israelites and had liberated them from the oppression of the Egyptians. These later Jews concluded that Jesus could do the same for them, and so they now sought to secure His political leadership forcefully. This decision marks the high point of Jesus' popularity. Jesus realized their intention and withdrew from the crowd by ascending the mountainside farther by Himself in order 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).²

"... the feeding miracle is understood as falling within the fulfillment of the hope of a second Exodus. This flows together with the thought of the event as a celebration of the feast of the kingdom of God, promised in the Scriptures (Isa 25:6-9)."³

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). A fourth solution appears in the other Gospel accounts of the miracle (Matt. 14:15; Mark

¹Pink, 1:301.

²See Stephen S. Kim, "The Christological and Eschatological Significance of Jesus' Passover Signs in John 6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):307-22.

³Beasley-Murray, p. 88.

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).

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."¹

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 potential defeat—even loss of life. The feeding of the 5,000 was a lesson, and Jesus' walking on the water was the test following the lesson.

"In the feeding of the five thousand, our Lord revealed Himself to the multitudes as Jehovah Raah, the Lord our Shepherd (see Psalm 23:1). Here we read of another incident where He revealed Himself as God manifest in the flesh. By walking on the water, He revealed Himself as El Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth (see Genesis 14:19)."²

6:16 "Evening" could refer to any time in the late afternoon before sunset, as the Jews used this term. The feeding of the 5,000 evidently happened on the northeast coast of the Sea of Galilee, southeast of Bethsaida Julius. This town stood immediately east of the place where the Jordan River empties

¹Wiersbe, 1:309.

²Mitchell, p. 121.

into the lake on its northern coast. Some of the town may have been on the western side of the Jordan.¹

6:17-18 The disciples' destination was Bethsaida, to the north northwest of where Jesus had fed the 5,000 (Mark 6:45). When Jesus did not appear at Bethsaida by nightfall, they decided to travel on to Capernaum without Him. But because of the storm, they ended up at Gennesaret, farther to the northwest (Mark 6:53).

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 west, the direction in which the disciples headed. Mark described the disciples as straining at the oars (Mark 6:48). They were evidently rowing west against the wind.

6:19 The distance the disciples had rowed, in the Greek text, was 25 or 30 stadia, which is between two and three-quarters miles and three and one-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 downplay this miracle, have translated the Greek preposition *epi* as "by" the sea rather than "on" the sea.² 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 focusing on Jesus' reduction of their fear. The fear of the disciples, plus 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).

¹D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*, p. 164.

²E.g., Bernard, 1:186; Barclay, 1:211-12.

"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!"¹

"Notice that the disciples did not give up in despair—they continued 'rowing' (v. 19)! And ultimately the Lord came to their side and delivered them from the angry tempest."²

6:20 Jesus identified Himself by saying literally "I am" (Gr. *ego eimi*). This is sometimes a way that 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 also 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.

"Look around, and we shall be disheartened. Look within, and we shall be discouraged. But look unto Him, and our fears will vanish."³

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 may not have taken them long to reach land. Any of these explanations could account for John's description: "immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going." Some commentators believed that John

¹Wiersbe, 1:310.

²Pink, 1:309.

³Ibid., 1:310-11.

recorded a second miracle in this verse, and that the boat supernaturally reached Gennesaret swiftly.¹ There seems little point to such a miracle, however, and there is nothing in the text that draws attention to it.

"The storm on the lake, besides being an apt emblem of the trial of faith, was for the twelve an important lesson in faith, helping to prepare them for the future which awaited them. The temporary absence of their Master was a preparation for His perpetual absence. The miraculous interposition of Jesus at the crisis of their peril was fitted to impress on their minds the conviction that even after He had ascended He would still be with them in the hour of danger."²

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).³ John undoubtedly recorded the incident in order to teach his readers the same lesson. Both miracles demonstrated Jesus' equality with the Father, whom Old Testament writers described as doing these very 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 metaphor 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."⁴

"The discourses fall into three groups: vv. 26-40, vv. 41-51, vv. 52-58. Each group is introduced by some expression of

¹E.g., Barrett, p. 281.

²A. B. Bruce, p. 132.

³Tenney, *John: The Gospel ...*, p. 132.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:310.

feeling on the part of those to whom the words are addressed, a simple question (v. 25), a murmuring (v. 41), a contention among themselves (v. 52). The thoughts successively dealt with are distinct: (1) the search after life, (2) the relation of the Son to God and man, (3) the appropriation by the individual of the Incarnate Son; and it appears that the audience and place do not remain the same. There are evident breaks after v. 40, and v. 51. The 'Jews' are introduced in vv. 41, 52, but not before. The last words were spoken 'in synagogue' (v. 59), but it is scarcely conceivable that the conversation began there."¹

The people's search for Jesus 6:22-25

The multitude on the "other side" must have still been near the northeast shore, after Jesus had fed the 5,000, south of Bethsaida. They were across the lake from the northwestern shore, where Jesus and the disciples were now (cf. Mark 6:53). They could not figure out where Jesus could have gone. The disciples had left in one boat alone, without Jesus. There was only one other boat still there, so they knew that 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 there in that region, so they boarded the small boats that had come from Tiberias, and set out for Capernaum. They probably thought that they could find Jesus there because Capernaum was His headquarters. When they did find Him, they wanted to know how He got there.

Why did John bother to relate this seemingly unimportant information? Apparently he did so in order 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 were looking for 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.

¹Westcott, p. 99.

Jesus' creating desire for the bread 6:26-34

This section of the text contains Jesus' puzzling 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), but others stopped following Him (v. 66).

"He spoke ... with Calvary in view, setting Himself forth as the life of the world in terms applicable to a sacrificial victim, whose blood is shed, and whose flesh is eaten by those presenting the offering; not mincing His words, but saying every thing in the strongest and intensest manner possible."¹

6:26 Jesus' introductory words identified another very important statement (cf. vv. 32, 47, 53). He did not answer the people's 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 or the significance of His signs, which identified Him as the God-man, but because Jesus could fill their stomachs.

"They were more concerned with hungry stomachs than with hungry souls."²

"Do you go to church for some material need? social need? religious need? Or do you go to meet Him?"³

Many people today are only interested in Jesus because of the benefits that He might give them. Jesus proceeded to explain what the miracle that 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 lasts. He was, as previously, contrasting physical and spiritual nourishment. Consequently, the

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 136.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:104.

³Mitchell, p. 122.

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 lasts for eternal life as meaning physical bread that does not become stale and moldy. As the Son of Man, Jesus claimed to have authority 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, and God setting His seal on something or someone was a common expression for that thing being true.¹ 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 (i.e., believe the gospel, v. 29) for it too.

6:28 The works of God are the works that God requires to obtain the food that lasts, 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. Not only that, they assumed that they could do it, and that by doing it they could earn eternal life. They either ignored, or misunderstood, or forgot, or disbelieved, 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. That thing is pride.

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). However, it is a work that He also enables.² 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

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:28-29.

²See Sigurd Grindheim, "The Work of God or of Human Beings: A Note on John 6:29," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:1 (March 2016):63-66.

(1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; et al.). In this discourse, Jesus equated believing (vv. 29, 47) with coming to Him (v. 35), and eating this Bread (vv. 50, 51).

6:30-31 Jesus had just plainly told the people what work they needed to do in order to obtain eternal life (v. 29). 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 like 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 it was left uneaten overnight, but Jesus seemed to be promising bread that would not spoil ("that lasts").

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."¹

6:32-33 The people were viewing Moses as the source of their blessing in the past. They believed that the manna was given through his merits and ended with his death.² There is also some evidence that they believed that Moses was interceding for them in the present as well.³ Jesus pointed them beyond Moses to the true source of the manna, namely, God. He

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 320.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:30.

³See Beasley-Murray, p. 79.

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 lasts. God, not Moses, had given manna in the past, but He was giving a different type of bread now. Jesus described it as coming down out of 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 place 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 to humanity (vv. 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58).

6:34 Jesus had commended the new bread sufficiently now for the people to request it of Him, like He had commended the living water to the Samaritan woman. He had set the people 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, just as the woman at the well did not (cf. 4:15). They were still thinking of physical bread. They wanted some new type of physical bread from then on that would never spoil.

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). The Jews regarded the real bread from heaven as the Law.¹ Jesus did not say He had the bread of life, but that He was that bread.

"The Jews asked for something from Christ: He offers them Himself."²

He claimed to be able to satisfy completely, like bread and water satisfy physically. His hearers did not need to return to

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:30.

²Westcott, p. 102.

Him for salvation repeatedly, as they had assumed (v. 34), since He would also satisfy permanently (cf. 13:9-10). The word translated "never" is emphatic in the Greek text. Coming to Jesus and believing on Jesus 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 for salvation 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.

"If a man truly has life-giving contact with Jesus he never ceases to be dependent on him ... but the initial contact does not need to be repeated."¹

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. 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. Each of these seven "I am" claims 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

¹Barrett, p. 293.

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

"To Jewish ears this 'I am' aroused associations of the divine, for in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the expression is frequently used by God Himself. There is little doubt that John's repeated use of this expression is meant to awaken these divine associations."¹

"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."²

6:36 Jesus charged these Galileans with unbelief, like 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 really was spiritually. They did not believe that He was the divine Messiah. Physical sight and spiritual insight are two different things.

"At heart, the common people were no more ready for the Kingdom of Christ than their rulers. The main difference was that in the case of the rulers there were certain vested rights at stake,

¹Leon Morris, *The Lord from Heaven*, p. 97.

²Harris, p. 177.

while the people in general thought they had nothing much to lose in any event."¹

6:37 These people's lack of faith did not indicate that Jesus had failed or that 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 all the people whom the Father gives 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 ("cast out") anyone who comes to Him in faith. He used a figure of speech (litotes) in order to stress strongly the positive fact that all who believe in Him find acceptance and security. 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." 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 that the Father would draw 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 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 not a single individual ("nothing") 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 each believer. This is an added proof of our security.

"This thought is of the greatest comfort to believers. Their assurance is based not on their

¹Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 309.

feeble hold on Christ, but on his sure grip on them (cf. 10:28f.)."¹

"Here, as in 5.24-9, John balances exactly the two aspects of the Christian life, in present possession and future hope; and there is nothing to indicate that he thought one more important than the other."²

Seeing the Son equals believing in Him here. Jesus meant seeing 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 we cannot hope to plumb their depths completely. He explained that salvation involves both divine sovereignty and human responsibility."³

The fact of divine election did not embarrass Jesus or John—or the Apostle Paul. 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 further clarified what He meant.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 326.

²Barrett, p. 294.

³Wiersbe, 1:312.

6:41-42

"This verse [v. 41] seems to mark the presence of new persons and a new scene, as well as a new stage in the history. The verses 37-40 were probably addressed specially to the immediate circle of the disciples. Thus we can understand how the Jews dwelt on the words in which Christ identified Himself with the true spiritual food of the world, while they took no notice of the loftier prerogatives which followed from this truth, since the exposition of these was not directed to them."¹

Some of Jesus' hearers had known Him all His life. Even more of them had come to know Him and His family since Jesus had moved to Capernaum, where Jesus gave this discourse (v. 59). His claim to have come down out of heaven seemed to them to contradict what they knew about His human origins. Again they were thinking only in physical terms. If they had known the truth about His virgin birth and incarnation, they would have seen that it was consistent with His coming down from heaven.

"The Messiah was to come 'in the clouds,' suddenly to appear; but Jesus had quietly grown up among them."²

Micah 5:2 specified the Messiah's birthplace as Bethlehem of Judah, but Jewish apocalyptic literature said that he would appear suddenly in the clouds or from the sun (cf. 4 Ezra 7:28; 13:32; The Apocalypse of Baruch 13:32).³

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). People'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).

¹Westcott, p. 104.

²Dods, 1:755.

³Ibid., 1:765.

"The Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus was and remains the great stumbling block in Christianity for the Jews."¹

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, 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 by reminding them of what God had given them: the offer of salvation. However, He explained that those of them whom the Father had chosen for salvation 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 that they observed.

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 for salvation. 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 peoples (ethnic groups) without distinction, not just Jews but also Gentiles. He did not mean all people without exception.

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 93.

"The thought of the divine initiative in salvation is one of the great doctrines of this Gospel, and indeed of the Christian faith."¹

"These words of Christ [in v. 44] make manifest the depths of human depravity. They expose the inveterate stubbornness of the human will. They explain the 'murmuring' of these Jews."²

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). The person whom God enlightened about Jesus' identity would believe in ("comes to") Him. That enlightenment comes primarily through the Scriptures, which is 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."³

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 about God. God draws the elect to Himself by revealing Himself through Jesus. The Scriptures bear witness to that revelation.

6:47-48 "At this point the discourse takes a fresh start. The objection of the Jews has been met, and the Lord goes on to develop the idea set forth in vv. 35, 36, taking up the last word: 'He that believeth' (omit *on me*, the phrase stands absolutely [without further explanation]) *hath* 'eternal' *life*.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 328.

²Pink, 1:336.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 293.

The actual existence of true faith implies the right object of it."¹

Jesus introduced His repetition and summary of the essential truth that 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 something that deserves a reward from God; it is not meritorious. It is simply the proper response to God's working. The result is eternal or everlasting life, which the new 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.

Another interpretation of what Jesus meant, when He said, "The one who believes has eternal life," follows:

"Believing *is not* the cause of a sinner obtaining Divine life, rather is it the *effect* of it. The fact that a man believes, is the evidence that he *already* has Divine life within him. True, the sinner *ought* to believe. Such is his bounden duty. And in addressing sinners from the standpoint of human responsibility, it is perfectly proper to say 'Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish *but have* eternal life.' Nevertheless, the fact remains that *no* unregenerate sinner ever did or ever will believe. The unregenerate sinner ought to *love* God, and love Him with all his heart. He is commanded to. But he *does not*, and *will not*, until Divine grace gives him a new heart. So he ought to believe, but he will not till he has been quickened into newness of life. Therefore, we say that when any man *does* believe, is found believing, it is proof positive that he is *already* in possession of eternal life. 'He that believeth on me

¹Westcott, p. 105.

hath (already has) eternal life': cf. John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:1, etc."¹

Many Bible students, including myself, have difficulty accepting this view: that regeneration precedes faith. We believe that God gives the elect the grace to believe the gospel, without which grace no one can be saved, but that a person is not regenerated until he or she believes the gospel (cf. Acts 16:31).

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 physical death, but the result of believing in Jesus was permanent satisfaction and no death—i.e., victory over physical death and no threat of the second or spiritual 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 eternity), and white (His purity). It was sweet to the taste (Ps. 34:8) and it met the needs of the people adequately."²

¹Pink, 1:340-41.

²Wiersbe, 1:313. Paragraph division omitted.

"This is one of the many, many verses of Scripture which affirms the eternal security of the believer."¹

6:51 This verse contains a final summary of the main ideas in this section. Jesus is living Bread, not manna, but He also came down from God ("out of heaven"), like manna did. Those who believe on Him (whoever "eats from this bread") will experience eternal life ("live forever").

"This is the meaning of this *never dying*: though he go down to *death*, he shall pass through it to that world where there shall be *no more death*. To live for ever [*sic*] is not to *be* for ever, but to be *happy* for ever."²

Jesus would give His body like bread so that 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. John characteristically emphasized Jesus' death as being for life rather than for sin.³

"In words dark and mysterious before the event, clear as day after it, the speaker declares the great truth, that His death is to be the life of men; that His broken body and shed blood are to be as meat and drink to a perishing world, conferring on all who shall partake of them the gift of immortality."⁴

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

¹Pink, 1:342.

²Henry, p. 1539.

³Beasley-Murray, p. 94.

⁴A. B. Bruce, p. 138.

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 to eat as food?¹

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 reader of this discourse by now that Jesus was speaking metaphorically and not literally. By referring to His flesh and blood, Jesus 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 first negatively (v. 53) and then positively (v. 54a). He referred again to resurrection as well, because it is the inauguration of immortal eternal life (cf. vv. 39, 40, 44).

"... the present statement is only another form of v. 47 (compare v. 40), 'He that believes has life eternal.'"²

"This act of receiving Christ is done once for all. I cannot *receive* Him a second time, for He never leaves me!"³

Jesus was again stressing His identity as the revealer of God with the title Son of Man. Blood, when used as a symbol 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 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).

¹See Paul M. Hoskins, "Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:2 (June 2009):285-99.

²Lenski, p. 493.

³Pink, 1:347.

"It is misunderstood by many who hence infer that, if they take the sacrament when they die, they shall certainly go to heaven."¹

Many interpreters of these verses have seen allusions to the Lord's Supper in what Jesus said. Sacramentalists among them find apparent 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. Besides, He was clearly speaking of belief metaphorically, not the communion elements. Most importantly, the New Testament presents the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of Jesus' death, not a means 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."²

6:55 This verse explains why Jesus' statements in verses 53 and 54 are true. Jesus' Person, symbolized by His flesh and blood, is what truly satisfies and sustains life. This is the true function of food and drink.

"Four times over [vv. 39, 40, 44, and 54] He declared in express terms that all who partook of this bread of life should be raised again at the last day. The prominence thus given to the resurrection of the body is due in part to the fact that throughout His discourse Jesus was drawing a contrast between the manna which fed the Israelites in the desert and the true bread of which it was the type. The contrast was most striking just at this point. The manna was merely a substitute for ordinary food; it had no power to ward off death: the generation which had been so

¹Henry, p. 1540.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 298.

miraculously supported passed away from the earth, like all other generations of mankind. Therefore, argued Jesus, it could not be the true bread from heaven; for the true bread must be capable of destroying death, and endowing the recipients with the power of an endless existence."¹

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 about the importance of believers abiding in fellowship with God, as He did later in chapter 15. Here He was speaking to unbelievers about entering into a saving relationship with God.

6:57 Jesus traced the eternal life, which 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 believers. It also clarifies Jesus' central role as the Mediator of eternal life from the Father to humankind.

"The Christian life is a mediated life. John, though he has been called a mystic, is unaware of any religious life which is not wholly dependent on Jesus."²

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. 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. The Israelites who ate the physical bread that came down from God died in the wilderness (vv. 30-31), but those who believe in

¹A. B. Bruce, pp. 140-41.

²Barrett, p. 300.

("eat") 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 of Capernaum, which He had adopted as the home base of His ministry in Galilee (cf. 2:12). This verse evidently marks the conclusion of the discussion that took place within that synagogue.

Archaeologists have uncovered what they believe may be the foundations of this synagogue. Visitors to the site of Capernaum may now view a reconstructed building 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 they 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. What followed probably happened in the adjoining courtyard, or outside the synagogue, or perhaps inside after Jesus had concluded His discourse.

"The present paragraph [vv. 60-71] marks the close of the Galilean ministry of Jesus, and in it John presents, in summary form and in dependence upon certain significant synoptic incidents, the result of that ministry. Cf. 12.37-50, where the work of Jesus in Jerusalem, and indeed his whole public ministry, is similarly summarized."¹

¹Ibid., p. 301.

The response of many disciples 6:60-65

6:60 Not only the Jews generally (v. 52), but many of Jesus' followers ("disciples"), found His teaching about the bread of life unpleasant and offensive (Gr. *skleros*, "difficult" or "hard"). The term disciple (lit. learner) is clearly not synonymous with the term believer in the Gospels. In verse 64, Jesus said that some of these disciples did not believe on Him. Some of Jesus' disciples were believers, but many of them were following Him simply to learn from Him and then decide if He was the Messiah or not. The term disciples sometimes refers specifically to the 12 apostles (e.g., Luke 6:13).

This teaching about the bread of life persuaded many in this inquisitive category of disciple to abandon Jesus. Some of them undoubtedly wanted the physical benefits of Jesus' messianism, but they had little interest in spiritual 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 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 that would be even 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 actually saw Him ascend back into heaven?

"Thoughts are words to Christ; we should therefore take heed not only what we say and do, but what we think."¹

Jesus may have been referring to His bodily ascension, but perhaps He was speaking of His crucifixion (cf. 3:14). This latter explanation is in harmony with Jesus' metaphorical

¹Henry, p. 1541.

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, *skandalizei*, occurs). Perhaps Jesus' crucifixion and ascension are in view.

"The Passion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, were steps in the progress of the 'ascending up' through suffering, which is the great offence of the Gospel."¹

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 admonished 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. Again, a disciple is not necessarily a believer.

John added that Jesus knew who did not believe on Him—even which one of His disciples would betray Him (vv. 70-71)—in order 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

¹Westcott, p. 109.

whose faith was genuine and those whose attachment was only superficial."¹

"The beginning" may be a reference to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but it is probably another reference to Jesus' pre-incarnate 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. Even so, Jesus did not present the importance of belief on Himself as something that His hearers could take or leave either. It meant the difference between life and death for them, so He urged them to believe.

The response of the Twelve 6:66-71

6:66 Jesus lost many of His disciples 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* ("As a result of this") can mean "from this time" or "for this reason." Both meanings fit here.

"The sermon on the bread of life produced decisive effects. It converted popular enthusiasm for Jesus into disgust; like a fan, it separated true from false disciples; and like a winnowing breeze, it blew the chaff away, leaving a small residuum of wheat behind."²

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).³

6:67 Jesus' question in this verse assumed a negative answer, as is clear from the Greek construction. He undoubtedly asked it,

¹Tenney, "John," p. 79.

²A. B. Bruce, p. 145.

³Wiersbe, p. 311.

not because He had questions about the Twelve's perseverance (v. 64), but because they needed to reaffirm their commitment to Him. 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 up 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 ("words") resulted in eternal life for those who believed (v. 63), and they had believed in Him as the holy Messiah whom God had sent. It is less likely that Peter meant that Jesus' words only concerned or dealt with eternal life.

"Three anchors, we infer from these words, helped the twelve to ride out the storm: Religious earnestness or sincerity; a clear perception of the alternatives before them; and implicit confidence in the character and attachment to the person of their Master."¹

Peter's confession of faith here is not the same as the one He made at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). The content is different as is the occasion. 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.

"Here the confession points to the inward character in which the Apostles found the

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 148. Italic omitted.

assurance of life: there the confession was of the public office and theocratic Person of the Lord."¹

Peter referred to Jesus as the Holy One later in his preaching on the day of Pentecost, but that was after he had received much more understanding, 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 has chosen the elect who then later believe 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 ("a devil"). Jesus had chosen him to be one of the Twelve, but God had not chosen Him for salvation (cf. 13:10-11; 17:12; Acts 1:25; Ps. 41:9).

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 like Satan because Satan would direct him. This was the first time that Jesus hinted that one of the Twelve was a hypocritical believer.

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," Kerioth being a village in southern Judah (Josh. 15:25).

"The record of the great controversy at Jerusalem, during which faith and unbelief were fully revealed, falls into two

¹Westcott, p. 111.

parts. The first part ([chs.] vi.—x.) contains the outline of the successive stages of the controversy itself; the second the decisive judgment (xi., xii.). ... This central section of the whole Gospel [chs. 7—10] contains events and discourses connected with two national festivals, *the Feast of Tabernacles* and *the Feast of Dedication*, which commemorated the first possession of Canaan and the great recovery of religious independence. Thus the festivals had a most marked meaning in regard to the life of the Jews, and this, as will be seen, influenced the form of the Lord's teaching. There is a clear progress in the history. The discussions at the Feast of Tabernacles (vii., viii.) are characterized by waverings and questionings among the people. The discussions at the Feast of Dedication show the separation already consummated (ix., x.)."¹

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."²

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."³

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, which the Synoptics describe more fully. The Jewish leaders were continuing to lay plans for Jesus' execution (cf. 5:18). John

¹Ibid., p. 115. Paragraph divisions omitted.

²Wiersbe, p. 314.

³Tasker, p. 101.

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 ("Booths") occurred six months after Passover (6:4). Matthew 12—17 and 21 record some events that happened during this six-month period, which John passed over without comment. That year the Feast of Tabernacles fell on September 10-17, A.D. 32.¹ 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.² It commemorated the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness. Many devout Jews built temporary shelters out of branches and lived in them for the week in order 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 that His remaining disciples would continue to believe on Him and so that 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 to glorify Himself 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).

¹Hoehner, p. 143.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 8:4:1.

7:6 Jesus replied that it was not the right time (Gr. *kairos*) for Him to go to Jerusalem, namely, the Father's time, which Jesus called "My time" (cf. 2:4). However, they could go to the feast at any time (Gr. *kairos*). They were not on a mission and a timetable from God as He was.

"John's picture of Jesus is of one steadily moving on to meet his divinely appointed destiny."¹

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).

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). Another reason for the Jews' antagonism was Jesus' convicting preaching that called for repentance and 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 than their suggestion (cf. 2:4). God's immediate will for Him was to stay in Galilee.

The NIV added "yet" in the clause "I am not yet going up to the feast" (v. 8). This word 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).

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 352.

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 this teaching in his narrative because it contains important revelations of Jesus' identity, and because it explains the mounting opposition to Jesus that culminated in His crucifixion.

1. The controversy surrounding Jesus 7:10-13

7:10 Jesus proceeded to head for Jerusalem shortly after His half-brothers left Galilee to go there because the Father led Him to go at that time. He did not announce His arrival with great publicity (or "publicly"), 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 wicked.

7:12-13 Jesus was a controversial subject of conversation at the feast. His presence provoked considerable talk (Gr. *goggusmos*, grumbling, cf. 6:41, 61). Many of the common people from Judea, however, and pilgrims from elsewhere, debated His ministry in private, while suspecting that their leaders opposed Him. According to the Talmud, deceiving the people was a crime punishable by stoning.¹ "The Jews" here clearly refers to Israel's leaders.

This pericope provides background for the story of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem that follows. It helps the reader sense the atmosphere of public opinion in which Jesus then ministered.

2. Jesus' ministry at the Feast of Tabernacles 7:14-44

John presented this occasion of Jesus' teaching ministry as consisting of three emphases: Jesus' authority, His origin and destiny, and the promise

¹Blum, p. 299.

of the Holy Spirit. This section has also been seen as consisting of two cycles: Jesus' teaches (vv. 15-24; 37-39), the resultant speculation among the people (vv. 25-31; 40-44), and the mission of the Jewish officials and its consequences (vv. 32-36; 45-52).¹ Everything recorded as happening between 7:14 and 8:59 took place in the temple.

Jesus' authority 7:14-24

7:14 Toward the middle of the week Jesus began teaching publicly in the temple, perhaps in the court of the women.² This verse sets the scene for what follows immediately.

"... all along the inside of the great wall which formed the Temple-enclosure ran a double colonnade—each column a monolith of white marble, 25 cubits high, covered with cedar-beams."³

"Probably His teaching consisted in *exposition* [explanation] *of the Scripture*."⁴

7:15 It was quite common for Jewish males to be able 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 that He had not had a formal theological education under the rabbis (cf. Acts 4:13).

"To the Jews there was only one kind of learning—that of Theology; and only one road to it—the Schools of the Rabbis."⁵

"It is sometimes true today that unschooled men in various walks of life forge ahead of men of lesser gifts with school training. See the like puzzle of the Sanhedrin concerning Peter and John

¹Barrett, p. 316.

²Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 49.

³Idem, *The Life ...*, 2:151.

⁴Alford, 1:774.

⁵Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:151.

(Acts 4:13). This is not an argument against education, but it takes more than education to make a real man."¹

7:16 Jesus responded to the Jews' observation about His lack of rabbinic training by explaining that His teaching had come from the One who had sent Him. He was referring, of course, to God the Father (cf. 5:19-30). His teaching had not come from Himself. He meant that His was not teaching 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.

"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."²

7:17 Jesus further claimed that the key to validating His claim that His teaching came from God was a person's willingness to do God's will. The normal way that the rabbis settled theological 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 God (cf. 6:44).

"The only condition for understanding the claims of Jesus is faith. 'Doing the will of God' does not mean ethical obedience as a preliminary to dogmatic Christianity, but believing in him whom God sent (6:29 ...). Such faith enables the believer to perceive the congruence of the moral character of Jesus' mission with the divine will."³

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:122-23.

²Tasker, p. 104.

³Barrett, p. 318.

The most important starting point in understanding Jesus' teaching then is a commitment to follow God's will. Once a person makes that commitment, God begins to convince him or her regarding 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."¹

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 some very erroneous views about Jesus and His teachings. There are also other factors that determine how accurate our understanding may be—such as intellectual capacity and correct methodology. Neither was He saying that if a person happens to do God's will, he or she will automatically understand the origin of Jesus' teaching. His point was that submission to God, rather than intellectual analysis, is the foundation for understanding truth, particularly the truth of Jesus' teachings (cf. Prov. 1:7).

"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."²

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 person who advances the ideas of another ends up glorifying the other 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 demonstrated His righteousness and made it unthinkable that He would be deceiving the people (v. 12).

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 360.

²Tenney, "John," p. 84.

"In the Palestinian Targum the dutiful son is one 'who has consideration for the glory (*'iqar* or 'honour') of his father' (Gen. 32:7 (8), 11 (12), TJ1; Lev. 19.3 Neofiti)."¹

- 7:19 Jesus had just 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 people. Therefore it was incongruous that they sought to kill Jesus (cf. vv. 44-45). They accused Him of unrighteousness (vv. 12, 18), 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 as it came to them 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 hateful antagonism of Israel's leaders toward Him. They naively thought that 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). There are several stories about demon possession in the Synoptics, but there are none in John.
- 7:21 The one deed (lit. work, Gr. *ergon*, i.e., a miraculous work) that Jesus had done, to which He 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). Furthermore it had started the controversy about Jesus in Jerusalem.
- 7:22 The antecedent of "'For this reason" or "Yet" (NIV; Gr. *dia touto*) is unclear. It could refer to what precedes. This

¹Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, p. 142.

interpretation would yield a translation such as "you all marvel because of this."¹ However, John consistently placed this phrase first when he used it in other clauses.² Probably Jesus was referring to His healing of the paralytic (v. 21) as symbolizing God's desire for physical wholeness.

Jesus probably meant that Moses had prescribed circumcision for the physical well-being 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.³ Normally observant Jews did no work on the Sabbath.

Jesus' parenthetical reference to the fact that the circumcision legislation really began with the patriarchs, and not Moses, was a slight depreciation of Moses. Jesus' critics claimed to follow Moses faithfully, but in keeping the circumcision law, they were not truly honoring him but Abraham instead (Gen. 17:9-14). Technically Moses only incorporated the circumcision law into 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 a person, and an infant at that, on the Sabbath. They should not, therefore, object to His healing a whole adult ("an entire man") on the Sabbath. Besides, they performed circumcisions regularly on the Sabbath, but Jesus had healed only one man on one Sabbath. Circumcision was an operation designed to ensure good health, not restore health. The circumcised child was not ill. Jesus, on the other hand, had healed a man who had suffered with a serious handicap for 38 years. Furthermore, circumcision was also 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

¹F. F. Bruce, p. 177; J. N. Sanders, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, p. 207.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 314.

³Mishnah *Shabbath*, 15.16; 18.3; 19.2; *Nedarim* 3.11.

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 the Sabbath. The Jews had his words but not his meaning."¹

7:24 Jesus concluded His defense by warning His hearers against judging according to outward appearance (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 pass judgment 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 local residents of Jerusalem did. They marveled that Jesus was speaking out publicly and that the authorities were not opposing Him. They expected that if Jesus were a deceiver, the Jewish rulers would punish Him, 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 actually know that Jesus was the Messiah ("the Christ").

7:27 The people of Jerusalem felt inclined to disbelieve that Jesus was the Messiah, because they believed that their human Messiah's earthly origins would be unknown. This belief was a

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 362.

tradition.¹ It was certainly not scriptural, since the Old Testament clearly predicted that Messiah's birthplace would be Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

"It seems to have been expected that Messiah would appear suddenly (perhaps from Dan. vii. 13, or from Isai. liii. 8), no one knew whence, while Christ had lived long among His countrymen in obscurity and yet known to them."²

The common understanding of Jesus' origin was that since He was known to have grown up in Nazareth, He apparently was born there too. Not only did the people fail to perceive His heavenly origin, but they were also wrong about His earthly origin. In fact, 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 and where He was from. Probably He meant that they knew who He was superficially (cf. v. 24), and they knew that He came from Nazareth (6:42), but they knew less than they thought. They did not know the One who had sent Him, though Jesus did know Him, because He had come from that One. Jesus was speaking ironically: they knew of His earthly origins but not of His heavenly origin.

The One who had sent Jesus on His mission was true (Gr. *alethinos*, real, genuine; cf. 8:26). Jesus meant that the true God really had sent Him, regardless of what others might think about His origin and mission. 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 the Father who had sent Him. In verse 16, Jesus had disclaimed originality for His teaching, and here He now disclaimed responsibility for His mission.³

¹Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8:7.

²Westcott, p. 120.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 366.

"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."¹

7:30-31 Evidently those Jews who intended to arrest (Gr. *piazo*) Jesus wanted to prevent Him from teaching the people (cf. vv. 32, 44; 8:20; 10:39). However, they could not do this 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 in 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."²

7:32 The Pharisees heard that some of the Jews present were 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 toward the Pharisees, the rulers ordered the temple police ("officers") to arrest Jesus. This attempt illustrates the seriousness of the situation as the authorities viewed it. Probably the arrest

¹Wiersbe, 1:317.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 367-68.

warrant came from the Sanhedrin. The temple police were Levites who were responsible to the Sanhedrin.

7:33-34 Jesus again said that His hour had not yet come, only in different words. When His hour later passed, He would go 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 for Jesus. They could not come where He was going because of their present unsaved condition. That required regeneration and translation (cf. 8:21; 13:33).

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 while longer to place their faith in Him before Jesus would leave them and depart to heaven. After Jesus left them, many Jews would seek their Messiah but not find Him. That is what has been happening ever since Jesus ascended, and it will continue to happen until He returns to earth at His second coming (Zech. 12:10-13; Rev. 1:7). Jesus was, of course, referring enigmatically (in a veiled way) 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. Jesus' hearers thought He meant that He would be 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 far-fetched to them to be a messianic activity. Their question expected a negative answer.

"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."¹

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 peoples in order 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. Jesus gave much more information about the coming Holy Spirit to His disciples in the upper room just before His arrest (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 considered as part of the feast (cf. Lev. 23:36). It is difficult to tell if John meant the seventh or the eighth day when he referred to "the great day of the feast." Edersheim believed it was the seventh day.² Most interpreters believed it was the eighth.³

"For the rabbis 'the last day' of the festival was the eighth day, but they never spoke of it as the *greatest* day. Since the water-drawing rite and the dancing in the light of the great menoras were omitted on the eighth day, the description of 'the greatest day' is thought by many to denote the seventh day, when the priests processed around the altar with the water drawn from Siloam not once but *seven* times ... It is also to be recognized that the invitation [of Jesus] would have been equally relevant on the eighth day, which was celebrated as a Sabbath with appropriate

¹Tasker, p. 106.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:156.

³See Alford, 1:780; Andrews, p. 345; Lenski, p. 573; Barrett, p. 326; Mitchell, p. 151.

ceremonies and was attended by a great congregation."¹

Jesus used this occasion to make another important public proclamation (cf. v. 28). Perhaps Jesus laid low until this day, in order to avoid arrest, and then presented Himself again publicly. He invited anyone who was spiritually thirsty to come to Him and to take what would satisfy and sustain them (cf. 4:10, 14).

Early, on 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 pitcher with water from the pool. He would then carry it through the Water Gate, which was located 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 bronze altar, from which it would flow through a tube to the base of the altar.

Many Jews would accompany the ceremonial priests on those seven feast-day mornings. Some of them would drink from the Pool of Siloam, while others would chant Isaiah 55:1 and 12:3: "You there! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." "Joyously draw water from the springs of salvation."

Back in the temple courtyard, the priest would then pour water into the basin at the time of the morning sacrifice. Another priest, at the same time, would also pour the daily drink offering of wine into a different basin. Then they would both 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

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 114.

represented stages of the wilderness journey, marked by different kinds of vegetation, and the citrus fruit symbolized the fruit of the Promised Land.¹ Everyone would also shout three times: "Give thanks to the LORD!" Worshippers in the temple courtyard would then sing the Hallel (Ps. 113—118).² 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."³

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 foretokens 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 in order to announce His invitation to everyone in the temple courtyard. Normally rabbis sat when they taught. Therefore His standing position, as well as His words, stressed the importance of what He said. Jesus' claim was even more striking because on the eighth day no water was ever 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. Jesus' words compared His own Person to the rock in the wilderness that supplied the needs of the Israelites.⁴

"Here is the Gospel in a single short sentence [cf. Rev. 22:17]."⁵

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 372.

²*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v., "*lithos*," by J. Jeremias, 4(1967):277-78; J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 348; Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:157-60.

³Mishnah *Sukkoth* 5:1.

⁴See also Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 268-87.

⁵Pink, 1:401.

7:38 Some commentators believed that the end of Jesus' statement did not occur at the end of this verse but after "Me."¹ They saw Jesus saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me, and drink the one 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.²

The antecedent of "his innermost being" or "him" is most 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 like living water (4:14). Jesus also spoke elsewhere of the living water springing up like a fountain within the believer (4:14). The idea is not that the Spirit will flow out of the believer to other believers. Believers are not the source of the Spirit for others. Rather, the idea is that the Spirit from Jesus springs up within each believer and gives him or her satisfying spiritual refreshment.

Water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness. Similarly the Spirit satisfies the inner person and enables one to bear fruit. The Greek expression translated "From his innermost being" 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.³ The belly is that part of a person that constantly craves and is never really satisfied.

"The believer should not be like a sponge—taking in but not giving out—but like a spring, ever fresh and giving forth."⁴

¹E.g., Brown, 1:321.

²See Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 323-25.

³Tasker, p. 109.

⁴Pink, 1:402.

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; 17:6; Num. 20; Neh. 8:5-18; Ps. 78:15-16; Isa. 32:15; 44:3-4; 58:11; Ezek. 39:29; 47:1-9; Joel 2:28-32; Zech. 14:8). One writer believed that Jesus had Ezekiel 47:1-11 particularly in view.¹ In these passages, the ideas of the Spirit and the Law, sustaining God's people like 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 to understand that Jesus was referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which happened after Jesus' death, 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 all subsequent believers, in addition to the believers on the day of Pentecost (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus announced that the Holy Spirit would come on all believers, not just on select believers, as had been true previously. 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).²

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 ("the Christ"). Evidently it was His claim of providing living water—as Moses had provided physical water—that led to their associating Jesus with one of those predicted individuals. Formerly Jesus had provided bread like Moses had provided manna (6:14).

But apparently these Jews did not equate "the Prophet" with "the Christ." They apparently looked for two separate individuals to come, since they seem to have anticipated a

¹Zane C. Hodges, "Rivers of Living Water—John 7:37-39," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):239-48.

²See Westcott, p. 124; or Harris, p. 194.

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."¹

7:43-44 These opinions divided the people then as they still do today. Some of those who heard Jesus issue His invitation wanted to arrest Him (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 the way 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, but Jesus had arrested them with His words.

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 like robots. They were Levites whose interests were mainly religious. Their statement is another witness to the true identity of Jesus.

¹Tenney, "John," p. 87.

- 7:47-48 The religious leaders implied that the officers were ignorant and that none of the real thinkers and important people in the nation had believed in 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 (v. 50) 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; Matt. 9:18; Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). This was a clear case of intimidation. Again John's irony is apparent: The proudly wise were clearly 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), some of whom believed in Jesus. They condescendingly judged the officers' opinion of Jesus as worthy only of the "accursed" uneducated. The rabbis taught: "It is forbidden to have mercy on one who has no knowledge."¹ 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 crowd was supposedly under God's curse because they did not know the Law or obey it (Deut. 28:15). Really it was the leaders who were under its curse for not believing in Jesus (3:36).
- 7:50-51 All this blind prejudice apparently 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).

"Judges have two ears, to remind them to hear both sides."²

¹ *Midr. Sam* 5.9 (cited by Beasley-Murray, p. 120).

² Henry, p. 1548.

Nicodemus' word of caution alone does not necessarily indicate that he had become a believer in Jesus, though he may well have become one (cf. 19:38-39). The most we can say is that he was willing to defend Jesus' rights.

"John's Gospel depicts three stages in the spiritual career of Nicodemus. In John 3 it is midnight: here in John 7 it is twilight: in John 19 it is daylight in his soul."¹

7:52 Nicodemus' colleagues did not reply rationally but emotionally. They had already decided Jesus' case without hearing Him defend Himself. 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, which is 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, Hosea, Nahum, and other prophets had come from (out of) Galilee, so it seems unlikely that they meant no prophet. 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 the 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 that He had not come from Galilee originally but from Bethlehem.

"... rage is blind, and deep prejudice distorts all facts."²

¹Pink, 1:410.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1044.

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). 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 old 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 extra-biblical writings referred to above dates about 400 years after its composition.

None of the church fathers or early commentators, with the exception of Jerome, referred to this story 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. An obelus is a straight horizontal stroke, either simple, or with a dot above and another dot below it. Writers of ancient manuscripts used obeli to mark a forged, corrupt, doubtful, or superfluous word or passage. Some old copies have this pericope placed after 7:36, or 7:44, or 21:25, or Luke 21:38. Its expressions and constructions seem to some scholars more similar to Luke's writings than they are to John's.¹

"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

¹For a discussion of the evidence, see Hoskyns, pp. 563-64; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 219-22; Westcott, pp. 141-42; Bock, pp. 461-62. 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.

not original but represents a later addition to the text of the Gospel."¹

The event described here probably occurred, though the passage may represent a blending of two different accounts (cf. 21:25).² Perhaps it was a piece of oral tradition that later scribes inserted here in order to illustrate the sinfulness of the Jewish leaders (cf. 7:24; 8:15, 46).³

"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."⁴

Then did the Holy Spirit inspire it? I think He did, since He has preserved it as a part of John's Gospel through centuries of critical analysis. It is in some respects 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.⁵ However, other Christians disagree and accept it as equally authoritative as the rest of Scripture.⁶ Roman Catholics accept it because it was in Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation (late fourth century A.D.), which they regard as authoritative.

If this pericope may not have been 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 believe it is authentic. It is possible that even though it was not a part of John's original Gospel, the Holy Spirit did inspire it—though this view has problems connected with it.⁷ The fact that this chapter begins with a sinful woman possibly being stoned, and the next chapter ends with a sinless Man

¹ *The NET2 Bible* note on the heading preceding 7:53. See also Barrett, pp. 589-91.

² See Bart D. Ehrman, "Jesus and the Adulteress," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988):24-44.

³ Alford, 1:785.

⁴ Tenney, "John," p. 89. Cf. Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:135-36.

⁵ E.g., Lenski, p. 592.

⁶ E.g., Gaebelien, 3:1:209; Mitchell, pp. 162-63.

⁷ See Pink, 2:7-9, for a defense of its inspiration based on internal evidence; and Scott J. Kaczorowski, "The Pericope of the Woman Caught in Adultery: An Inspired Text Inserted into an Inspired Text?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61:2 (June 2018):321-37.

possibly being stoned, has led some interpreters to support its authenticity.¹

7:53 The wording of 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.² 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 the Pharisees together, though their association in the Synoptics is common. This is one reason that many scholars doubt that John wrote this passage. Jesus' critics brought a woman whom they claimed to have caught in the very act of committing adultery, and they placed her in the center of the group that Jesus was teaching. They addressed Him respectfully, though hypocritically, as "Teacher" (Rabbi).

We can only speculate about what had happened to the adulteress's partner in sin. Perhaps he had escaped, or perhaps the authorities had released him, since their main interest

¹E.g., Mitchell, p. 158.

²E.g., Tenney, "John," pp. 89-90; Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 334.

seems to have been the woman. The Mosaic Law required that both parties involved in adultery should be stoned (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus did not challenge the scribes and Pharisees' charge, nor did He try to prove it unjust.

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.¹ The writer said that the authorities wanted to trap Jesus into saying something that 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; 19:10), and He would advocate action contrary to Roman law. On top of that, He would alienate Himself from the Jews. The decision to execute might have gotten Him in trouble with the Roman authorities too (cf. 18:31). Essentially, the problem was how to reconcile justice and mercy.²

8:6b This is the only mention of Jesus writing that appears in the New Testament, along with verse 8. The Greek verb *katagrapho*, used here in the past tense ("wrote"), allows for writing words, drawing pictures, or making signs.³ 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, that is the LORD."⁴ Perhaps He wrote Exodus 23:1b: "Do not join your hand with a wicked person to be a

¹Ibid., p. 335.

²Pink, 2:13.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:139.

⁴McGee, 4:415.

malicious witness."¹ 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.

If the account of this incident is complete, the writer must have felt that what Jesus wrote was secondary to His writing action, since John 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, the Lawgiver.² His writing on the ground may have symbolized His ratification of God's moral law.³ Another possibility is that just 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 wrote on the ground in order to, at the same time, delay answering His critics. This would have had the double effect of heightening their anticipation of His reply and giving them time to repent. His action may have been simply "a studied refusal to pronounce judgment."⁴ The mention of this writing 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 they had to 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 involvement in prearranging this

¹Derrett, p. 187.

²Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:405.

³Pink, 2:14.

⁴Barrett, p. 592.

woman's adultery. They had asked Him to pass judgment, and now He was exercising His rightful function as the Judge of humankind. In addition to passing judgment on the woman, He also passed judgment on her judges.

"Christ was here intimating that *they*, His would-be accusers, were no fit subjects to demand the enforcement of the law's sentence."¹

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).

"It [this verse] is often used by opponents of capital punishment as indicating His [Jesus'] abolition of it. ... Jesus did not reject the Mosaic law, for He enjoined that a stone be thrown (v. 7). This is no abolition of the death penalty!"²

8:8 This is another puzzling reference. Jesus' second stooping over and writing on the ground had the result of freeing Jesus' critics from His convicting gaze. Perhaps the writer mentioned it to show that it was God who, by the Holy Spirit, 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 change their minds about what they were doing. He also possibly wrote so that He did not need to speak.

8:9 The scribes and Pharisees' actions virtually confessed their guilt. Evidently the older ones among them had the most tender consciences. They had plotted to kill the woman. Adultery is no insignificant sin, but compared to murder it has less severe consequences. Time and accumulated wisdom

¹Pink, 2:15.

²Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, p. 28. Paragraph divisions omitted.

frequently increase one's sense of personal guilt, unless a person hardens his or her heart completely. Probably we should understand the words "He was left alone" as implying that departed, which would have left Jesus, the woman, and perhaps other onlookers. This left the woman and Jesus with no accusers.

"When one turns on the light, all the rats, the bats, and the bedbugs crawl away."¹

The action of the woman's accusers was remarkable. Jesus' words brought deep conviction to His opponents remarkably soon. To top it off, they ended up making a public declaration of their own guilt, and dropping their charge against the woman, even though she was probably 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. She may have been. As the acting judge in her case, He showed more interest in her prosecutors than in her guilt. Without any prosecutors, Jesus dismissed the case. This was His prerogative as her acting judge (and her future 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 that He could exempt her from condemnation is that He would take her condemnation on Himself and die in her place (cf. Rom. 8:1).

"It was not, 'Go and sin no more, *and* I will not condemn thee,' for that would have been a death-knell rather than good news in her ears. Instead, the Saviour said, 'Neither do I condemn thee.' And to every one who takes the place this woman was brought into, the word is, 'There is therefore now no condemnation' (Rom. 8:1). 'And sin no more'

¹McGee, 4:416.

placed her, as we are placed, under the constraint of His love."¹

"This is not strictly forgiveness, because no word about forgiveness is given, but Jesus' act is gracious in allowing her the opportunity to recover from her sin."²

"Christ was *without sin*, and might cast the first stone; but though none more severe than he against sin, none more compassionate than he to sinners, for he is infinitely gracious and merciful, and this poor malefactor finds him so."³

"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."⁴

This incident is further proof that Jesus was far 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 stuck. 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

¹Pink, 2:18.

²Bock, p. 464.

³Henry, p. 1549.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:320.

to listen to the Prophet. John 7:53—8:11 shows in numerous ways that Jesus is indeed the Prophet of whom Moses wrote."¹

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, which contains the Noahic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant continued the same policy, as does the New Covenant. The way that 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 that 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 people believed on Jesus, most of His own 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 that it generated.

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 of whom were pilgrims from other parts of Israel and the world.

¹Charles P. Baylis, "The Woman Caught in Adultery: A Test of Jesus as the Greater Prophet," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):184. Paragraph divisions omitted.

This teaching may have taken place on the day after the feast, which was also a day of great celebration.¹

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). Incidentally, John used the word world some 77 times in his Gospel, in contrast to the other three evangelists who used it a total of only 15 times, which indicates John's global perspective and interest.² The water of life and the bread of life metaphors represent what satisfies and sustains life. The Light of life metaphor stands for what dispels the darkness of ignorance, sin, and death. Jesus was claiming that whoever believes in ("follows") 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.

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:164.

²Pink, 2:26.

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. They also spoke of Torah, the temple, Adam, and Johanan ben (son of) Zakkai, one of their leaders, as the light of the world.¹ 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). He invited the Jews to follow Him as the true Light (1:9; cf. the pillar of fire in the wilderness).

"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."²

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.³

"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."⁴

¹See Beasley-Murray, p. 128.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 338-39.

³Shepard, p. 352; Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:165-66.

⁴Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 388.

By the way, in chapters 6, 7, and 8, Jesus claimed that He fulfilled these wilderness types of God: manna, water, and light.

"... the Pharisees could not have mistaken the Messianic meaning in the words of Jesus, in their reference to the past festivity: 'I am the Light of the world.'"¹

"... 'light' is one of the three things which God is said to be. In John 4:24 we are told, 'God is *spirit*.' In 1 John 1:5, 'God is *light*'; and in 1 John 4:8, 'God is *love*.' These expressions relate to the *nature* of God, what He is in Himself. Hence, when Christ affirmed 'I am *the light* of the world,' He announced His absolute Deity."²

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, in order 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, seemingly without a second corroborating witness, therefore 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.

"Stier (*Words of the Lord Jesus*) argues that one might as well say to the sun, if claiming to be the sun, that it was night, because it bore witness of itself. The answer is the shining of the sun."³

Jesus' witness was not false because it stood alone, even though it was insufficient under the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees had misunderstood Him. Consequently He proceeded to review

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:166.

²Pink, 2:25.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:142.

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, in addition to Jesus' own testimony about Himself. Jesus was not judging (Gr. *krino*) anyone superficially, and they should not judge Him superficially either.

Another interpretation is that Jesus meant that He did not come to condemn anyone but to save them (cf. 3:17).¹ 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 who was really judging. Rather He would only be executing the Father's will (cf. 5:27, 45).² 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 at that time. That aspect of His ministry lies in the future. However, even if He did judge then, His judgment would prove right ("true"; Gr. *alethine*, valid), because in that activity as well 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

¹F. F. Bruce, p. 189.

²Blum, p. 303.

everything with divine authority and in harmony with divine intention.

8:17-18 Therefore Jesus was not really testifying alone. He had the 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). Furthermore, by referring to their Law Jesus was emphasizing that, since the Law was theirs, they needed to obey it.

"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."¹

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 for this, 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."²

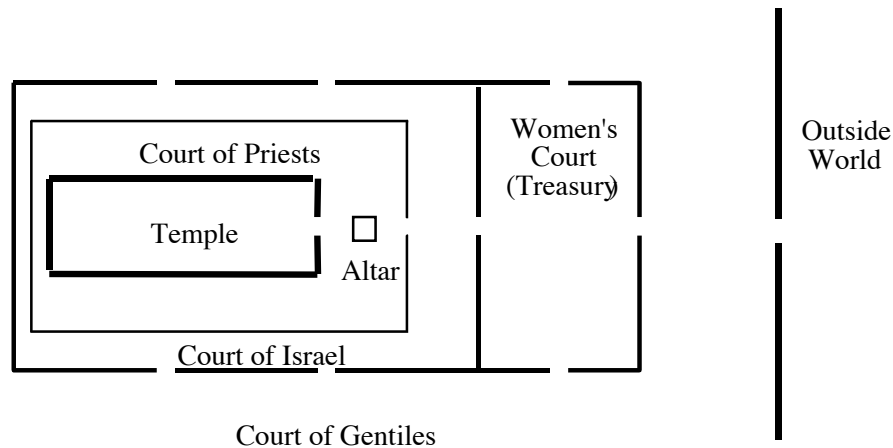
The Pharisees virtually admitted here, by their revealing question, that they did not know Jesus' origins—even though they had claimed that they knew where Jesus came from earlier (7:27). Their inability to recognize Jesus as the Son of God showed that they really did not know God. If they had known God, 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 called the Court of

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 393.

²Tenney, "John," p. 93.

the Women, "the treasury," because it contained 13 shophar (ram's horn) shaped receptacles for the Jews' monetary offerings (cf. Mark 12:41-42).¹ Each one bore an inscription showing how the priests would use the gifts deposited in them.



The last part of verse 20 makes the point that, if they could have, 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 again stressed the Father's sovereign control over the events that shaped Jesus' ministry. The Court of the Women was the most public part of the temple (cf. Mark 12:41-43; Luke 21:1).²

The main point of this section is the increasing animosity that the Jewish leaders felt and expressed toward Jesus.

Jesus' claims about His origin 8:21-30

Jesus began to contrast Himself with 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") 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 that He was going away, He was speaking of His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The Jewish

¹Mishnah *Shekalim* 2:1; 6:1, 5. See also Barclay, 2:11-12.

²Westcott, p. 129.

leaders would not seek Jesus personally, but they would continue to search for the Messiah. They would die in their sin (singular) of unbelief because they rejected Jesus. 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).¹

8:23 Jesus explained their reason for misunderstanding Him as being traceable to their origin. Jesus was from God above, whereas 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 many 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."²

Jesus' hearers needed to believe that He was "I am." In context, this phrase has heavy theological connotations (cf. vv. 28, 58; 13:19). It appeared puzzling at first, but later Jesus' hearers realized that He was claiming to be God (cf. v. 59). The NIV's "the one I claim to be" is an interpretation of Jesus' meaning that is perhaps more misleading than helpful.

¹Hoskyns, p. 334.

²Tenney, "John," p. 93.

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.¹ 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, and now being quite confused, they asked Him: "Who are You?" Jesus responded that He was saying nothing different from what He had been saying about His identity since the beginning of His ministry. Another interpretation follows:

"That is to say, The question which you ask cannot be answered."²

"I am" was a new title, but it represented revelation that was consistent with what Jesus had always claimed about Himself.

8:26 Jesus also claimed to have much more to reveal to His hearers, regardless of its immediate effect. 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 ("He who sent Me"). 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 did. Jesus had explained earlier that it was God the Father who had sent Him (5:16-30).

"Though Christ spoke so plainly of God as his Father in heaven, yet they did not understand whom he meant. Day and night are alike to the blind."³

¹See Charles Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:565 (January-March 1985):38-51.

²Westcott, p. 131.

³Henry, p. 1552.

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). However some interpreters believe it refers to both His crucifixion and His elevation to the messianic throne.¹ 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 of His critics regarding 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, and we know that it did (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."²

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 He gloried in the Father's presence with Him (cf. 3:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:16; et al.). Even though His own people rejected Jesus and crucified Him, the Father had 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, many others believed on Him because of these words (cf. 7:31). God opened their understanding with Jesus' illuminating and life-giving words.

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 the born again sense. A disciple

¹E.g., Dods, 1:776.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 398.

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 (e.g., Judas Iscariot). A believing disciple 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, though He urges them to do so (cf. 21:15-23).

Some interpreters have sought to differentiate two types of believers in verses 30 and 31 on the basis of the words used. The first, they say, were genuine believers, which the Greek phrase *pisteuo eis* plus the accusative ("believe in Him") in verse 30 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 counterfeit faith in 2:23-25. And the second construction, that supposedly always describes superficial faith, describes genuine faith in 5:24. As this story unfolds it becomes clear that the believers mentioned in this verse rejected Jesus' claims to deity, so they believed Jesus in a superficial way but not in a saving way.

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.

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.¹ 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-

¹E.g., John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, p. 152.

26; 3:14-17; 4:1-8; Titus 3:8). This verse is talking about discipleship, not salvation—and rewards, not regeneration. This 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.¹ It does not teach that believers inevitably persevere in the faith, but that believers 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).²

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.

"Those who have believed Jesus, that is, accepted his word, must continue in it if they are to be true disciples and to know the truth."³

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 truly understand His teaching. It liberates them spiritually from ignorance, sin, and spiritual death.

"... their own tradition had it, that he only was free who laboured in the study of the Law. Yet the liberty of which He spoke came not through study of the Law, but from abiding in the Word of Jesus."⁴

¹See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 546.

²See Dillow, pp. 7-23.

³Barrett, p. 344.

⁴Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:172.

Many people misapply this verse. It occurs as a motto in numerous public libraries in the United States, 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. 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. It is spiritual truth that Jesus revealed that is in view here. Jesus was speaking particularly of the gospel.

8:33 Jesus assumed that most of His hearers (the unbelievers among them) 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. Another view is that they meant that their spirit had never been broken.¹ 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.

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") implies continual sinning rather than an occasional lapse. This is a general truth that applies to both believers and unbelievers (cf. Rom. 6:16): People who continually commit sin become the slaves of sin. Sin tends to become habit-forming and is addictive, "like the worst narcotic".² This type of slavery is more fundamental and personal than mere political slavery.

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

¹Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 155.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:150.

have the power to enslave believers that it did before we believed in Jesus. However, believers can become sin's slaves by practicing sin (Rom. 6:16). We do not need to be sin's 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 repeatedly submitting to temptation and sinning. 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 have 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, which they did.

8:35 These unbelieving Jews thought of themselves as occupying a privileged and secure position, as sons within God's household, because they were Abraham's descendants (v. 33). 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 what actually happened after the Jews (as a nation) refused to receive Jesus as Messiah (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, like the illustration's slave-owner, also has the authority to liberate slaves—in this case 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 we ought 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 on 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 ("word")—did not evidence true spiritual kinship with Abraham. Abraham had welcomed God's three angel 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, while the Jews claimed to be Abraham's children.

"Jesus was not simply a man telling other men what he thought about things; He was the Son of God telling men what God thought about things."¹

As the conduct of these Jews showed, they were not Abraham's true children. By contrast Jesus' words proved that He was God's true Son, because His conduct backed His words. Jesus' point was that conduct reveals paternity. He was hinting that their father was not God since they wanted to kill 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.

"... no principle was more fully established in the popular [Jewish] conviction, than that all Israel had part in the world to come (Sanh. x. 1), and this, specifically, because of their connection with Abraham. ... Abraham was represented as sitting at the gate of Gehenna, to deliver any Israelite

¹Barclay, 2:30-31.

who otherwise might have been consigned to its terrors."¹

Jesus proceeded to repeat the difference between His hearers 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. They apparently had heard that Joseph was not Jesus' real father.

"The Jews put it about that Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph; that her paramour had been a Roman soldier called Panthera; and that Jesus was the child of that adulterous union."²

Who was Jesus then, with His questionable pedigree, to deny their ancestry? They 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 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 like God? If they were God's true children, they would love Jesus rather than be trying 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 ("you cannot listen to My word"), not in His ability to communicate clearly. The difficulty lay in their inability to accept the truth that He spoke because of their presuppositions, prejudice, and parentage (v. 44). Listening here does not mean mere hearing and understanding but responding positively.

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:271.

²Barclay, 2:32-33.

"The meaning of this *cannot* is an obstinate *will not*."¹

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: First, 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, who is "a liar and the father of lies," had consistently done the same thing throughout history (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:17).²

"Here, Jesus is as directly confrontational as anywhere in John."³

"... as believers are recognized as the children of God because they bear his image, so are those rightly recognized to be the children of Satan from his image, into which they have degenerated [1 John 3:8-10]."⁴

In one sense, every human being is a child of the devil, since we all do the things that he does, because of our 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 manifesting the traits of one spiritual father or the other. This phenomenon 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

¹Henry, p. 1554.

²See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Work as a Deceiver," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):190-202.

³Bock, p. 467.

⁴Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 1:14:18.

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 that He was guilty of committing sin (cf. 5:18). Jesus asked if any of them could prove Him guilty of sin (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 a challenge as Jesus did here.

The Qur'an does not say that Jesus was sinless, but Muslims believe that He was sinless because the Qur'an never says He sinned. They believe that He was a sinless man, but not God.

"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."¹

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 who were listening to Jesus could not refute His 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.² 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 had a demon or was demon-possessed (cf. 7:20; 8:52; 10:20). Perhaps these superficial believers

¹Godet, 2:350.

²F. F. Bruce, p. 199; J. Bowman, "Samaritan Studies," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 40:2 (March 1958):306-8.

concluded that only a demon-possessed heretic would accuse them as Jesus did.¹ 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).

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 dishonor 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 on the human level 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—by providing 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 here 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."²

8:52 The Jews interpreted Jesus' statements as referring to physical death. They did not believe that all people are spiritually dead because of the Fall.³ They judged that only a demoniac would claim that his words were more powerful than the revelations that Abraham and the prophets, who had died, had received and passed down. Tasting death here means

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:174-75.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 137.

³Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:175.

experiencing the second death (separation from God in hell; 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).¹ 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).

"Observe that this is more than asking, 'Who does he think he is?' It is a case of what he is exalting himself to be."²

Jesus rarely asserted His deity. He did not even 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). Yet He wanted people to believe in Him.

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. 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."³

8:55 Jesus next identified these superficial believers (cf. v. 31) as unbelievers. They had not yet come to believe that He was God (to "know Him"), even though some of them thought that He was a crazy prophet. For Jesus to deny knowing God would

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 416-17.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 137.

³Tenney, "John," p. 98.

be as much of a lie as His critics' claim that they knew God. The proof that Jesus really did know God was His obedience to God's Word.

Jesus knew (Gr. *oïda*) 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.¹

8:56 Jesus was, of course, referring here 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, which records the prediction that God would bless the whole world through Abraham.

"But how did Abraham see Christ's day: Some understand it of the sight he had of it in the other world. The longings of gracious souls after Jesus Christ will be fully satisfied when they come to heaven, and not till then. It is more commonly understood of some sight he had of *Christ's day* in this world. They that *received not the promises*, yet *saw them afar off*. There is room to conjecture that Abraham had some vision of Christ and his day, which is not recorded in his story."²

In any case, Jesus said that Abraham anticipated His "day" ("the entire dispensation of Christ"³). 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.

¹Ibid.

²Henry, p. 1556.

³Pink, 2:55.

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 descendants (the Jews, Gen. 12:1-3, 7; et al.), and his physical and spiritual posterity (saved Jews, Rom. 9:6, 8; Gal. 6:16).

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. According to Hoehner's chronology, Jesus would have been in His mid-thirties at this time.¹

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 only claiming preexistence but deity (cf. vv. 24, 28; 5:18; Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:13).²

"It is eternity of being and not simply being that has lasted through several centuries that the expression indicates."³

"The meaning here is: Before Abraham came into being, I eternally was, as now I am, and ever continue to be."⁴

"The doctrine of the eternity of the Son of God is the most important doctrine of Christology as a

¹Hoehner, p. 143.

²See John A. Witmer, "Did Jesus Claim to Be God?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):147-56.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 420.

⁴Barrett, p. 352.

whole because if Christ is not eternal then He is a creature who came into existence in time and lacks the quality of eternity and infinity which characterizes God Himself."¹

Jesus existed before Abraham came into being (Gr. *genesthai*).

8:59 The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. They prepared to stone ("picked up stones to throw at") Him for making what they considered to be a blasphemous claim (5:18; Lev. 24:16). Such treatment, without a trial, was an accepted form of punishment when someone supposedly defied the Mosaic Law or the traditions of the elders (cf. Luke 4:29; John 10:31; Acts 7:58; 21:31).² 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 grounds (cf. 7:14). He did not protest or retaliate, which is 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, represented by the man born blind in the next chapter.

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, like this blind man, who received both physical and spiritual sight. However, the Light blinded others (vv. 39-41). This chapter shows the continuing polarization of opinion that marked Jesus' ministry, while the differences between those who believed on Him and those who disbelieved became more apparent.

"This short chapter expresses perhaps more vividly and completely than any other John's conception of the work of Christ."³

¹John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 22.

²Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 66-67.

³Barrett, p. 354.

"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."¹

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.).² B. F. Westcott believed that 10:22 locates the time of the events in 9:1—10:2, as well as those in 10:22-39, during the Feast of Dedication.³ Robertson believed that this incident did not take place at this feast.⁴ This sixth of John's seven select signs shows Jesus' power over misfortune.⁵

9:1 Probably Jesus healed this man in Jerusalem (8:59), perhaps on the day following the events just narrated, in or near the temple.⁶ John apparently noted that the man had been blind from birth in order to prove his helpless condition, and perhaps 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. In fact, this is the only miracle recorded in the Gospels in which the sufferer is said to have been afflicted from birth.⁷ This miracle also illustrates the origin and development of faith.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 422.

²Hoehner, p. 143; cf. Brown, 1:388-90.

³Westcott, p. 143.

⁴Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:160.

⁵Tenney, *John: The Gospel ...*, p. 312.

⁶Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:177.

⁷Barclay, 2:43.

9:2 The Jews regarded blind people as especially worthy of charity.¹ 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.² That conclusion goes further 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 direct or observable.

The disciples, like their contemporaries, assumed that either one or both of the blind man's parents had sinned, or he had, and that some such sin was the cause of his blindness.³ Some of the Jews believed in pre-natal sin and/or the pre-existence of the soul.⁴

"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?'"⁵

Some of the Jews believed in reincarnation, so that may have been in the back of the disciples' minds.⁶

"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

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:178.

²Cf. Talmud tractates *Shabbath* 55a, and *Nedarim* 41a, quoted in Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:494.

³Idem, *Sketches of ...*, p. 163.

⁴Barclay, 2:44.

⁵Tasker, 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.

⁶Pink, 2:64-65.

subject like 'sin' than it is to minister to a concrete need in the life of a person."¹

9:3 Neither of the disciples' options was the reason for this man's blindness, but God was going to display His works in this man's life. There is no punctuation in the old Greek texts, 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 in order 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."² If this is the proper way to read these verses, and I think it is, Jesus was not giving an answer to His disciples' question. He was simply saying that it was neither that this man who sinned nor was it his parents. Period.

It is wrong to conclude that every instance of suffering springs immediately from a particular act of sin (cf. Job). Some suffering does (cf. 5:14; 1 Cor. 11:29-30), but some does not (cf. Luke 13:1-5). It is also wrong to conclude that God permits every instance of suffering because He intends to miraculously relieve it. Jesus did not reveal the reason for this man's condition. It is a mistake to conclude that God made him blind from birth so that Jesus could give him sight.

"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."³

"The question for us is not where suffering has come from, but what we are to do with it."⁴

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.

¹Wiersbe, 1:324.

²See Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 164-65.

³Wiersbe, 1:324.

⁴Dods, 1:783.

"If God be glorified, either by us or in us, we were not made *in vain*."¹

9:4-5 Jesus' "We" probably refers to Himself alone, though He could have meant Himself plus 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 spiritual daylight generated 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 one can work may refer to the spiritual darkness that would engulf the world after Jesus departed this earth and returned to heaven. 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 spit on the ground so that 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). In the case of blind Bartimaeus, Jesus simply healed with a word (Mark 10:46-52). Here He mixed His saliva with soil from the ground and made mud. Applying the moist mud to the blind man's eyes would have let him feel that Jesus was doing something for him. Jesus may have intended these sensory aids to strengthen the man's faith.² Another possibility is that, by making clay, Jesus did something on the Sabbath that his adversaries would have objected to, and so caused the discussion with them that followed (cf. v. 14). 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 mud in order to associate this act of healing with divine creation (Gen. 2:7).³ Another suggestion is that by covering the man's eyes with mud, Jesus was making his blindness even more intense in order to

¹Henry, p. 1557.

²Trench, p. 315.

³Lindars, p. 343; Blum, p. 307.

magnify the cure (cf. 1 Kings 18:33-35).¹ Some students of this passage have suggested that Jesus was using something unclean to cause a cure in order to show His power to overcome evil with good.² Another view is that Jesus introduced an irritant so the man would want to irrigate his eyes.³ Compare the Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction that leads to obedience. Another view is that Jesus used the methods and customs of His day, since spittle, especially the spittle of some distinguished person, was believed by some to have curative properties.⁴ Other interpreters take Jesus' action as symbolical: the saliva signifying the Word of God, and the clay humanity.⁵

"The use of clay also [as well as saliva] for healing the eyes was not unknown."⁶

"It was not that Jesus believed in these things, but He kindled expectation by doing what the patient would expect a doctor to do."⁷

"The blind man, introduced as the theme of a theological debate, becomes the object of divine mercy and a place of revelation."⁸

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.⁹ He obeyed Jesus, received his sight, and departed from the pool seeing. His obedience gave evidence of his faith that something good would come as a result of obeying Jesus.

¹Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries ...*, 1:241.

²D. 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*.

³Wiersbe, 1:324.

⁴Barclay, 2:48-49.

⁵Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:413.

⁶Alford, 1:803.

⁷Barclay, 2:49.

⁸Barrett, p. 358.

⁹See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

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. Similarly, all who obeyed Jesus' command to believe on Him received spiritual sight. Westcott believed that the interpretation of the name of the pool ("Sent") connects the pool with Christ, not with the man. It was when the man went to Him who had been "sent" from the Father, which the name of the pool reflected, that he was healed.¹

"Sight was restored by clay, made out of the ground with the spittle of Him, Whose breath had at first breathed life into clay; and this was then washed away in the Pool of Siloam, from whose waters had been drawn on the Feast of Tabernacles that which symbolized the forthpouring of the new life by the Spirit."²

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."³

Evidently this man had been a beggar out of necessity rather than by choice. He later demonstrated a sense of humor, a knowledge of history and Scripture, the ability to withstand intimidation, and the ability to argue logically and effectively

¹Westcott, p. 145.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:181.

³Tasker, p. 124.

(cf. vv. 27, 30-32). These traits show that he was far from mentally incompetent.

"Those who are savingly enlightened by the grace of God should be ready to own what they were before."¹

9:10-12 Jesus had not accompanied the man to the pool, so he could not point Him out to the crowd as his healer. Here is further evidence that Jesus was not promoting Himself in order 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."²

9:13 The formerly blind man's neighbors probably brought him to their religious leaders just 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 traditional Sabbath ordinances (cf. 5:9, 16; 7:21-24). He had,

¹Henry, p. 1559.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 429.

after all, made clay, anointed the man's eyes, and healed the man.

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' caused a division among the people again (cf. 7:40-43). Some of the Pharisees, offended by 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 most impressive, and they 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).

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 who is called Jesus" (v. 11). His faith was growing.

9:18-19 Evidently the Pharisees 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.

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 unique miracle had taken place. 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 not giving more information (vv. 22-23). They suggested that the investigators question their son on these points, since he himself was capable of giving legal testimony (cf. Ps. 27:12). 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 much older than 13.

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.

"The Jews had three types of excommunication: one lasting 30 days, during which the person could not come within six feet of anybody else; one for an indefinite time, during which the person was excluded from all fellowship and worship; and one that meant absolute expulsion forever. These judgments were very serious because no one could conduct business with a person who was excommunicated."¹

"For a Jew to be put out of the synagogue meant that he was ostracized by everyone."²

We now learn that the official position about Jesus was that He was not the Messiah, and anyone who affirmed that He was the Messiah was in danger of being persecuted (cf. 7:13). Some scholars have argued that such a test of heresy was impossible this early in the relations between believers and unbelievers in Jesus.³ However, other scholars have rebutted these objections effectively.⁴

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 1780. Cf. Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:183-84; Dods, 1:785-86; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:166.

² *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1139.

³ E.g., Barrett, pp. 361; et al.

⁴ E.g., Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 369-72.

"'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."¹

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) comprises 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, which was the popular conception of Messiah.

Some of John's original readers who had become Christians from a Jewish background, and had been put out of their synagogues because of their faith in Jesus, would have identified with the blind man and his parents at this point.

The Pharisees' second interrogation 9:24-34

The Pharisees, who considered themselves enlightened, now tried to badger the formerly blind man into denying that Jesus was a good man.

9:24 The Pharisees proceeded to question 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 that the healed man would cave in to pressure from the authorities and testify that Jesus was a sinner. Not only that, they suggested that the man would be glorifying God by speaking the truth, if he agreed with their conclusion (cf. v. 15; Josh. 7:19). Another evidence of Johannine irony appears: The Pharisees assumed that glorifying God and glorifying Jesus were mutually

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 435.

exclusive, when actually to glorify the Son is to glorify the Father.

Their disdain for Jesus comes through in their calling Him only this man. A sinner in the Pharisees' eyes was someone who broke the oral traditions as well as the Mosaic Law because they had no regard for them. They hoped the restored man would point to some instance of Jesus' disobedience that would confirm their conclusion (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). Notice that these judges prejudiced everyone against Jesus from the start by announcing 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. But he also 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 effected in one's own life.
- 9:26 The Pharisees hoped that, as the man repeated his story, he would either 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 person who performs them. Likewise, people are often more concerned about identifying whom they can 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 that they could use against Jesus. They had not listened to him in the sense of believing him the first time (cf. 5:25). He sarcastically suggested that perhaps the reason they wanted to hear about Jesus—one more time—was because they wanted to follow Him as His 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 mock 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 gather enough information so that they could execute Jesus. They undoubtedly realized that this former beggar had seen through their veiled attempt to condemn Jesus unjustly. They met his good-natured put-down 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; cf. 7:27). 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."¹

We see here an essential difference between Judaism and Christianity (cf. 1:17). The Jews continue to profess allegiance to Moses, like 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 just as they were wrong about His heavenly origin. Here they were speaking of His authoritative origin, specifically who had sent Him.

¹Wiersbe, 1:326.

9:30-31 The healed man not only possessed a sense of humor and courage but also common sense. It seemed amazing to him that the Pharisees could not see that Jesus had come from God ("not know where He is from"). 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 a man born blind. A fundamental biblical revelation is that God responds positively to the God-fearing, but He does not hear (in the sense of always 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 there 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."¹

9:32-33 The man was correct 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 therefore concluded that Jesus must have come from God. Jesus did not qualify as the sinner that the Pharisees were 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 ("You were born entirely in sins") that rendered him incapable of spiritual insight (cf. v. 2). By saying this, they unintentionally admitted that Jesus had cured a man blind from birth.

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 375.

He [the blind man] had not only taught the rabbis, but had utterly routed them in argument."¹

"Those that are ambitious of the favours of God must not be afraid of the frowns of men."²

"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!"³

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 appeared 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 in support of Jesus (cf. v. 22). Many other Jewish believers followed him in this fate throughout the years since this incident happened. This is the first persecution of Jesus' followers that John recorded.

"The Rabbinists enumerate twenty-four grounds for excommunication, of which more than one might serve the purpose of the Pharisees."⁴

"... how many a preacher there is today, who in his fancied superiority, scorns the help which oftentimes a member of his congregation could give him. Glorifying in their seminary education, they cannot allow that an ignorant layman has light on the Scriptures which *they* do not possess. Let a Spirit-taught layman seek to show the average preacher 'the way of the Lord more perfectly,' and he must not be surprised if his pastor says—if not

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:169.

²Henry, p. 1561.

³Blum, p. 308.

⁴Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:184.

in so many words, plainly by his bearing and actions—'dost *thou* teach us?'"¹

Spiritual sight and blindness 9:35-41

"John is interested in the way the coming of Jesus divides people."²

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.

"How true it is that those who honor God are honored by Him. ... He [Jesus] cheered this man with gracious words. Yea, He revealed Himself more fully to him than to any other individual, save the Samaritan adulteress. He plainly avowed His deity: He presented Himself in His highest glory as 'the Son of God [cf. 5:25; 10:36; 11:4].'"³

Jesus' purpose was not just to provide physical healing for the man, but to bring him to salvation. So when Jesus found him, He asked him: "Do you believe [place your trust] in the Son of Man?" Some early manuscripts and modern translations have "Son of God," but "Son of Man" has the better support. 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).

In other words, Jesus was asking the man if he trusted in the God-man, though Jesus did not identify Himself as that Man. The healed blind man, ironically, had never before seen Jesus, so he did not know Him by sight.

¹Pink, 2:94.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 439.

³Pink, 2:96.

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 he evidently thought that Jesus was going to identify his healer. Lord (Gr. *kyrie*) means "Sir" in this context. Once again, someone spoke better than he knew, since this man's questioner was Lord in a larger sense than he first realized (cf. v. 38).

"He asks that faith may find its object. His trust in Jesus is absolute."¹

9:37-38 Jesus then identified Himself, introducing Himself ("He is the one who is talking with you") as the Son of Man (cf. 4:26). Perhaps He told the man that he had seen Him in order 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 Him made the identification certain. The man had seen Him with the eyes of faith previously, but now he also saw Him physically, with recognition. Similarly modern believers see Him by faith, but in the future faith will give way to sight.

Jesus removed all possibility of misunderstanding when He identified Himself as the One who now spoke to the man. The man confessed his faith in Jesus, and appropriately proceeded to bow down (Gr. *proskyneō*) 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.

This blind man's pilgrimage from darkness to light is clear from the terms that he used to describe Jesus. First, he called Him "the man who is 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,

¹Westcott, p. 149.

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 of bringing 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 spiritual 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."¹

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.

"He had not come to act in judgment, but His coming did create a crisis."²

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 that 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.³ Jesus explained that what had

¹Tasker, p. 126. Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 161.

²Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 172.

³Tenney, "John," p. 105.

happened to this man and the Pharisees was an example of what His whole ministry was about.¹

"... 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 ..."²

"By willfully confining their vision men lose the very power of seeing."³

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 Jesus was not accusing them of spiritual blindness, since they considered themselves the most enlightened among the Jews.

Jesus replied to them using irony. He said that if they were spiritually blind, 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 but felt quite satisfied that they understood God's will 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

¹See Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus' Healing the Blind Man in John 9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:667 (July-September 2010):307-18.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 378.

³Westcott, p. 150.

sinner (v. 24), are shown to be ignorant (v. 29), and finally are pronounced blind and sinners (v. 41)."¹

"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."²

The deceitfulness of sin often makes those people 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."³

"Some of the most dogmatic people today are the atheists and the cultists. They say they see, but they are blind. They reject the Lord Jesus Christ, and so their sin remains. Although they are not walking around with a white walking stick, they are blind."⁴

This chapter advances the revelation of Jesus' true identity, which was one of John's primary objectives in this Gospel. It also shows that, as the light

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 432.

²Ibid., p. 442.

³Tasker, p. 126.

⁴McGee, 4:428.

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."¹

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 formerly 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).

"The Pharisees supported themselves in their opposition to Christ with this principle, that they were the *pastors of the church*, and that Jesus was an intruder and an imposter, and therefore the people were bound in duty to stick to *them*, against *him*. In opposition to this, Christ here describes who were the false shepherds, and who the true, leaving them to infer what they were."²

"A signal instance of the failure of hireling shepherds has been given; instead of properly caring for the blind man, the Pharisees have cast him out (9.34). Jesus, on the other hand, as the good shepherd, found him (9.35, *heuron auton*) and so brought him into the true fold."³

¹Tasker, pp. 122-23. See also Howard, pp. 73-75.

²Henry, p. 1563.

³Barrett, p. 367.

"In a sense, the chapter break here is unfortunate. This event really is a commentary on the conflict of John 9 (10:19-21)."¹

Jesus' presentation of the figure 10:1-6

This teaching is quite similar to what the Synoptic evangelists recorded Jesus giving in His parables.² 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 only one or a few points 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 in order to contrast Himself with the bad shepherds who were misleading God's sheep. Many Old Testament passages rebuked 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."³

10:1 Jesus again stressed the importance of this teaching with a strong introductory preface. 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.

Jesus described a flock of sheep in a fold or pen that had solid walls and only one door or gate. Evidently the fold in view was a large enclosure some distance from any human dwelling place. Customarily, several families who owned sheep would feed their sheep in nearby pastures and hire a watchman to

¹Bock, p. 473.

²J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 68, and Mitchell, p. 190, called this teaching a parable.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 443-44. Cf. Rev. 2:27.

guard the gate to such an exposed enclosure. The watchman would admit authorized individuals but would exclude the unauthorized ones who might want to steal or kill some of the sheep.¹ The words thief (Gr. *kleptes*, stressing trickery; cf. Luke 11:52) and robber (Gr. *lestes*, stressing violence; cf. Matt. 21:13) are quite close in meaning.

God frequently compared His relationship with 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). Additionally, God 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 special meaning for the Jews to whom Jesus first addressed this teaching. The sheepfold stands for Judaism.

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, identified them for what they were. Satan, the ultimate enemy, was working through them.

10:2 In contrast to thieves and robbers, an approved shepherd would enter the pen through its gate rather than over its wall. The door represented the lawful way of entrance into Judaism for the shepherd. (The Latin word for "shepherd" translates as "pastor.")

"Several flocks were often gathered into one fold for protection during the night. In the morning each shepherd passed into the fold to bring out his own flock; and he entered by the same door as they."²

¹See Pink, 2:102-3.

²Westcott, p. 152.

Jesus was saying figuratively 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, which 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. Another view is that the doorkeeper refers to the Holy Spirit.¹ However, all of the guardians of the flock throughout history may be in view: Moses, John the Baptist, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and others.² Normally there were sheep from several different flocks, belonging to several different owners, that stayed together in these large pens.

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. The shepherd in Jesus' story, however, called each sheep by its own name, which evidently was not uncommon in Jesus' day (cf. 1:43; 11:43; Luke 19:5).³ The scene thus pictures Jesus calling every individual whom the Father had given Him to follow Him out from the 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!"⁴

10:4-5 Many shepherds drove their sheep before them, and some of them used sheep dogs to help them herd the sheep. However this shepherd, as many others did, went ahead of his sheep and led them where he wanted to take them. This description reflects the style of Jesus' leadership. He led His disciples, who

¹Gaebelein, 3:1:215.

²Westcott, p. 152.

³Blum, p. 309; Tenney, "John," p. 108.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:329.

followed Him wherever He went in obedience to His lead and command (cf. Gal. 5:18).

The shepherd's 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.

"Alas and alas, if only our modern pastors had the sheep (old and young) so trained that they would run away from and not run after the strange voices that call them to false philosophy, false psychology, false ethics, false religion, false life."¹

Some people appeal to these verses to prove that true Christians will inevitably follow Christ and will never depart from Him. 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 was 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 a 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

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:175.

Jesus' voice disregarded Him, because they considered Abraham or Moses or some famous rabbi to be 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, which 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."¹

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. 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). In relation to the fold, Christ is the door, to which He gives admission. In relation to the flock, He is the good shepherd, to which He gives care and guidance.² Some commentators have pointed out that some ancient Near Eastern shepherds slept in the gateways of their sheepfolds and so served as human

¹Westcott, p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 153.

gates.¹ This may seem to alleviate the incongruity of Jesus being both the Shepherd and the door. 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.

"The 'door of the sheep' is to be distinguished from the 'door of the sheepfold' in v. 1. The latter was the Divinely-appointed way by which Christ had entered Judaism, in contrast from the false pastors of Israel whose conduct evidenced plainly that they had thrust themselves into office. The 'door of the sheep' was Christ Himself, by which the elect of Israel passed out of Judaism."²

Jesus contrasted Himself, as the door, 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, which is what a door is (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.

"The fullness of the Christian life is exhibited in its three elements—safety, liberty, support."³

¹E.g., Beasley-Murray, p. 169; Barclay, 2:67.

²Pink, 2:109-10.

³Westcott, p. 153.

"The 'door' in v. 1 was God's appointed way for the shepherd *into* Judaism. The 'door' in v. 7 was the Way *out of* Judaism, by Christ leading God's elect in separation unto Himself. Here in v. 9 the 'door' has to do with salvation, for elect Jew and Gentile alike."¹

10:10 Impostors' aims are ultimately selfish and destructive, but Jesus came to give life, not to take it.²

"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 contemptuously savage all that is valuable (they come 'only ... to destroy')."³

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: an "abundance of all that sustains life."⁴

10:11 Verses 7-10 expand the idea of the door from verses 1-5, and verses 11-18 develop the idea of the shepherd from those verses.

"Two points are specially brought out in the character of 'the good shepherd,' His perfect self-sacrifice (11-13), and His perfect knowledge (14,

¹Pink, 2:112.

²See James M. Wisland, "Suicide and the Thief in John 10:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:709 (January-March 2021):70-91.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 385.

⁴Dods, 1:790.

15), which extends beyond the range of man's vision (16)."¹

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 that 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. The other titles, great shepherd (Heb. 13:20-21) and chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), stress different aspects of Jesus' character as a shepherd. Good shepherding involves protecting, providing, and sacrificing.

Good (Gr. *kalos*) connotes nobility, attractiveness, and worth, not merely gentleness. It contrasts Jesus with the unworthy and ignoble shepherds that He proceeded to describe (vv. 12-13). Another interpretation follows:

"Jesus does not here compare himself with other shepherds; he asserts far more than that he is relatively better than other shepherds, namely that he is a shepherd in a sense in which no other man can ever be a shepherd. ... Unfortunately, the English is unable to reproduce this weight of meaning in translation."²

Laying down one's 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. But Jesus came to die for His sheep purposely. Of course, Jesus also came to die for the whole world (6:51; 11:50-52).

¹Westcott, p. 154.

²Lenski, p. 723.

"All through the Old Testament it is the sheep that die for the shepherd. But when we come to this picture, it is the other way around."¹

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 sheep themselves. While a good shepherd may be willing to sacrifice himself for the safety and welfare of his sheep, a hireling will typically save himself and run away 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 like hired hands when they tried to preserve their own positions and willingly sacrificed Jesus. Christian leaders behave like hired hands when they put their own needs ahead of those they serve (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Attitude is the crucial difference between a true shepherd and a hired hand.

10:14-15 The fact that the shepherd and the sheep know each other is very important. Jesus stressed His identity as the good shepherd again.

"What matters supremely ... is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me."²

The sheep must know their shepherd, and they can know Him like the Son knows the Father. The Son must know the Father in order to follow His will, just like the sheep must know the shepherd in order to follow Him faithfully. Jesus taught that the relationship that the sheep enjoy with Himself is unique, just as His relationship with His Father is unique. Yet each

¹Mitchell, p. 194.

²Packer, p. 37. Cf. v. 27; Exod. 33:17; Jer. 1:5.

person maintains his own identity. People do not become God, as the New Age movement, for example, teaches.

"Christ first took our nature that we might afterwards receive His."¹

The repetition of the shepherd's sacrificial death ("I lay down My life") 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."²

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.

"Within traditional Reformed theology the doctrine of limited atonement has been deduced from a doctrine of election. The doctrine is often presented more as a matter of logic than of direct scriptural testimony. Serious appeal is made to two central passages only, Jn. 10:15 and Eph. 5:25. Scriptural testimony, on the other hand, points in the direction of objective universal atonement."³

"The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect, and the elect only. This is equivalent to saying that He died for the purpose of saving only those to whom He actually applies the benefits of His redemptive work."⁴

¹Westcott, p. 155.

²Tenney, "John," p. 109. See also Wiersbe, 1:330.

³Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation*, p. 40. For other verses that advocates of limited atonement appeal to, see Shedd, 2:476; Berkhof, p. 395.

⁴Ibid., p. 394.

If the passages cited by Reformed theologians said that Christ died only for the elect (His sheep, His church, His people) there would be no doubt that He died only for the elect. But these passages simply identify a particular group within all of humanity. Christ died for all, including His sheep, His church, and His people.

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 a few intimations in the Gospels that a new body of people would replace Israel as the people of God in the future (cf. 17:20; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). These sheep, with those from Israel, would compose one flock, namely, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). This statement of Jesus rules out the possibility of a Jewish church and a Gentile church. That new flock would have one shepherd, namely Jesus, who would become—to change the figure—the Head of the church. Jesus knew these other sheep (vv. 14-15) as well as He knew 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 drew forth. Similarly, God loves all believers unconditionally, but when they obey Him, they enjoy an intimacy with Him that only obedience makes possible (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 one event in a larger chain of events, with the big picture always in view as Jesus anticipated the Cross.

10:18 Superficially, observers could have concluded that Jesus died because the Jews conspired against Him.¹ However, Jesus revealed that behind that instrumental cause was the efficient (or effectual) 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 the authority 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.

"It was not the nails, but the strength of His love to the Father and to His elect, which held Him to the Cross."²

Anyone can lay his or her life down in death sacrificially, but only Jesus could lay it down and then take it back again in resurrection. The New Testament writers attributed Jesus' resurrection to all three members of the Trinity: the Father (Rom. 6:4), the Son (John 2:19), and the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

The division among Jesus' hearers 10:19-21

Again Jesus' claims resulted in some of His hearers believing in 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 that He would die for the sheep, that caused the cleavage. Some even concluded that He was demon-possessed and therefore insane (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 sufficiently 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.

¹See Glenn R. Kreider, "'The Death of Christ was a Murder': Jonathan Edwards and Blame for Christ's Death," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:696 (October-December 2017):424-44.

²Pink, 2:131.

Some interpreters believed that Jesus returned to Galilee between this event and the next, and that He returned to Jerusalem later (cf. Luke 9:51).¹

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."²

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" is a general reference to the closeness 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.

"... His Peraean Ministry, which extended from after the Feast of Tabernacles to the week preceding the last Passover, was, so to speak, cut in half by the brief visit of Jesus to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Dedication. Thus, each part of the Peraean Ministry would last about three months; the first, from about the end of September to the month of December; the second, from that period to the beginning of April. Of these six months we have (with the solitary exception of St. Matthew xii. 22-45), no other account than that furnished by St. Luke, although, as usually, the Jerusalem

¹See the discussion in Andrews, pp. 369-76.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 458.

and Judaeen incidents of it are described by St. John. After that we have the account of His journey to the last Passover, recorded, with more or less detail, in the three Synoptic Gospels."¹

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). Besides the Mosaic feasts, the Jews of Jesus' day also celebrated the Feast of Esther, or Purim.²

"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."³

This feast commemorated the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus ("Judas the Hammer") on the twenty-fifth of Chislew (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."⁴

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:195.

²Idem, *The Temple*, p. 197.

³Jerry R. Lancaster and R. Larry Overstreet, "Jesus' Celebration of Hanukkah in John 10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):332-33.

⁴Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 459.

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). One writer suggested that John may have included the reference to winter because of the spiritual climate, namely, the generally frigid attitude of the Jews toward Jesus.¹ John may have made other references to times and seasons with such allusions in mind as well (e.g., 13:30).

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 ("the Christ") like He had when He had talked with the Samaritan woman (4:26). The reason the Jews wanted Jesus to make His claim clear here appears to have been so that they could condemn 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. He 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' Messiah publicly would have stirred up a political movement that He did not want to support.

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 indirectly, 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 that

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 173.

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."¹

10:27-28 Verse 27 repeats revelation that Jesus had previously given (vv. 3-5, 14). The eternal life that Jesus gives is made possible through His own life. Consequently it is impossible for His sheep to ever perish—not just after we die, but also after the moment we trust in Christ onward. The sheep's 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—including oneself (cf. Rom. 8:35-39).

The construction of the Greek clause translated "they will never perish," is with a double negative (*ou me apolontai eis ton aiona*). The double negative 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.

An Arminian interpretation, with which I disagree, follows:

"However weak the sheep are, under Jesus they are perfectly safe. Yet a believer may after all be lost (15:6). Our certainty of eternal salvation is not absolute. While no foe of ours is able to snatch us from our Shepherd's hand, we ourselves may

¹Wiersbe, 1:332. Paragraph divisions omitted. See also C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 52-53.

turn from him and may perish willfully of our own accord."¹

"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."²

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).

"Faith rests upon election, not upon human choice."³

"A dear little lady talking about the assurance of her salvation once said, 'Nobody can take you out of His hand.' Someone replied, 'Well, you might slip through His fingers.' And she replied, 'Oh my no, I couldn't slip through His fingers; I am one of His fingers.' That is true, friends. We are members of the body of Christ."⁴

10:29 Jesus strengthened this promise of security. He reminded His hearers that because what He did was simply to execute the Father's will, it was the Father, as well as Himself, who would keep His sheep secure (cf. 17:12).

"The 'hand of Christ' (v. 28) is beneath us, and the 'hand' of the Father is above us. Thus are we secured between the clasped hands of Omnipotence!"⁵

¹Lenski, p. 756.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 463.

³Barrett, p. 378.

⁴McGee, 1:248-49.

⁵Pink, 2:144.

"The greatness of the Father, not of the flock, is the ground of [basis for] the safety of the flock."¹

"The impossibility of true believers being lost, in the midst of all the temptations which they may encounter, does not consist in their fidelity and decision, but is founded upon the *power of God*."²

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 His sheep 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 harmonizes with the context, since Jesus had said that He would keep His sheep safe (v. 28), and that 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. Unitarians have limited this oneness to unity of will and design.³ Therefore we need to look at it carefully.

First, Jesus' claim to oneness here 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 this 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

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:186.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1050.

³See Van Baalen, pp. 285-340, for an explanation of Unitarian beliefs.

Jesus and the Father united in fulfilling one divine will and one 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 analogy, not the other way around, implying that the former is the more fundamental unity.¹

"... in order to prove that none can pluck them out of HIS hand [v. 28], He adds, 'I [the shepherd of the sheep] and the Father [the owner of the sheep] are one.' One in what? unquestionably in the work of power whereby He protects His sheep and does not suffer them to be plucked out of His hand."²

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 as well.³

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, which strongly suggested Jesus' deity. This statement is the climax of the preceding discussion (vv. 22-29; cf. 5:18; 8:59).

Jesus' claim to be God's Son 10:31-39

"He [Jesus] presented Himself to the nation and He was rejected: His works were rejected in John 5:16; His words were rejected in John 8:58-59; and His Person was rejected in John 10:30-31."⁴

10:31-33 Clearly the Jews understood Jesus to be claiming more than simple agreement with God in thought and purpose. They

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 394-95.

²John Brown, quoted by Pink, 2:145.

³See Jamieson, et al., p. 1050.

⁴McGee, 4:435.

understood Him to be claiming equality with the Father as deity. That is why they prepared to stone Him for blasphemy. This is the first explicit charge of blasphemy (though cf. 8:59). They believed Jesus was blaspheming because He was claiming to be God (cf. 5:18; 8:59; Mark 14:61-64). Before they could act, Jesus asked them for which of His many good works (Gr. *erga kala*) they were stoning Him.

Jesus' question confronted the Jews 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. God had made Himself into a Man (1:1, 14, 18)!

If Jesus was not really claiming to be God, He could have easily 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 "gods" (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 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).¹ Another view is that these gods were angels.² This seems unlikely, because the contrast in view

¹Blum, p. 312; Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 373-74.

²J. A. Emerton, "Some New Testament Notes," *Journal of Theological Studies* 11NS (1960):329-36.

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. There He spoke to the people as His sons, and in this sense was calling them gods in the psalm.¹ However, the context, which involves a 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 nullified" means that man cannot declare it invalid, set it aside, or prove it false.

"It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous."²

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* [nullified] (*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'.³

Jesus did not use this argument in order 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 used of human beings. They could not logically accuse Him of blasphemy for the simple reason that the Father had set Him aside and sent Him

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 398-99.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 468.

³Tasker, p. 136.

into the world with a special mission. He was a legitimate Son of God for this reason.

As the Jews had sanctified (set apart for a holy purpose) 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 His works, and continue to learn from them, that He was doing the same kinds of good works that God the Father did. Jesus manifested divine compassion and divine power in His works, the same traits that showed up in God the Father'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 arrest 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.

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 (cf. 1:28).

10:41-42 John the Baptist was by this time dead. However, many people from Perea recognized that Jesus was fulfilling 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, which he had not done. 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.

The Apostle John probably identified Jesus' destination as he did in order to imply the ending of Jesus' public ministry, which John the Baptist had 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 in these chapters. 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, plus 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.¹ It shows Jesus' authority over humankind's greatest and last enemy: death (cf. 5:21, 25, 28). Some scholars view Jesus' own resurrection as one of His signs.² Others prefer to view it in a different class from the miracles that Jesus performed while He was living on the earth.³ I favor the second option.

"The claim of Jesus to be working in complete and conscious union with His Father led the Jews to attempt unsuccessfully

¹See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:308.

²E.g., Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:476.

³E.g., Westcott, p. 163.

to stone Him [10:31]. But it was His claim to bestow upon believers the gift of eternal life by raising them from spiritual death which led, according to the Johannine narrative, to His crucifixion [11:53]."¹

"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)."²

There are some similarities between the first and the seventh signs: The context of both miracles was family life. Both were performed to strengthen faith (2:11; 11:15). And both are said to have been manifestations of divine glory (2:11; 11:4, 40). Jesus performed four of these signs in Galilee and three in Judea.

"Mark records the raising of Jairus' daughter, but she had only just died. Luke tells of the raising of the widow's son of Nain, but he had not been buried. But here, in the case of Lazarus, not only had the dead man been placed in the sepulcher, but corruption had already begun to consume the body. ... The same climactic order is to be seen in connection with *the state of the natural man* which John's 'signs' typically portray. 'They have no wine' (2:3), tells us that the sinner is a total stranger to Divine joy (Judges 9:13). 'Sick' (4:46), announces the condition of the sinner's soul, for sin is a disease which has robbed man of his original health. The 'impotent man' (5:7), shows us that the poor sinner is 'without strength' (Rom. 5:6), completely helpless, unable to do a thing to better his condition. The multitude without any food of their own (6:5), witnesses to the fact that man is destitute of that which imparts strength. The disciples on the storm-tossed sea (6:18), before the Saviour came to them, pictures the dangerous position which the sinner occupies—already on the 'broad road' which leadeth to *destruction*. The man blind from his birth (9:1), demonstrates the fact that the sinner is altogether incapable of perceiving either his own wretchedness

¹Tasker, p. 137.

²Blum, p. 312.

and danger, or the One who alone can deliver him. But in John 11 we have that which is much more solemn and awful. Here we learn that the natural man is spiritually *dead*, 'dead in trespasses and sins.' Lower than this we cannot go. Anything more hopeless cannot be portrayed. In the presence of death, the wisest, the richest, the most mighty among men have to confess their utter helplessness. Thus, this is what is set before us in John 11."¹

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 The name Lazarus probably is a variant of Eleazar, meaning "God Helps."² The Synoptic writers did not mention him, which is probably why John identified 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 almost 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 (v. 2) alludes to the later event that 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' affectionate 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).

¹Pink, 2:154-55. Paragraph division omitted.

²Brown, 1:422.

"The verse now before us plainly teaches that sickness in a believer is by no means incompatible with the Lord's *love* for such an one. There are some who teach that sickness in a saint is a sure evidence of the Lord's displeasure. The case of Lazarus ought forever to silence such an error. Even the chosen friends of Christ sicken and die. How utterly incompetent then are we to estimate God's love for us by our temporal condition or circumstances! ... The Lord loves Christians as truly when they are sick as when they are well."¹

11:4 Evidently Jesus spoke these words to the messenger who brought the news of Lazarus' death expecting that he would repeat them to Mary and Martha (cf. v. 40). Jesus meant that Lazarus would not die in the final sense, though his sickness did prove fatal. Lazarus' imminent death would give way to resurrection and the revelation of Jesus glorified as God's Son (cf. 9:3). In this Gospel, God's glory is usually a reference to His self-revelation, rather than to the praise that came to Him from others (cf. 1:14-18; 5:23; 12:28; 17:4).² Ironically this miracle not only displayed Jesus' identity as God's Son, but it also led to His death, which was the ultimate manifestation of His identity and glory.

"The purposes of a sovereign God in suffering are seen in three specific accounts in John's Gospel. With the healing of the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5), Jesus taught that sin may be the cause of suffering and sickness. In healing the man born blind, Jesus stated that the reason for the man's blindness was neither his sin nor his parents' sin, but that the work of God might be shown (9:3). And Jesus intentionally delayed his arrival at Bethany so that he and his Father would

¹Pink, 2:159-60.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 406.

be glorified when he raised Lazarus from the dead (11:4)."¹

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). His delay in moving toward Jerusalem and His death was entirely self-determined (cf. 2:3-4; 7:3-9).

"Let *us* learn from this that when God makes us *wait*, it is the sign that He purposes to *bless*, but in His own way—usually a way so different from what *we* desire and expect [cf. Isa. 30:18]."²

"Friend, sometimes He allows our loved ones to die. We need to recognize that He has a reason, and His ways are perfect. Jesus never moves by sentiment. That is what spoils people and that is how parents spoil their children. He is motivated by love, and that love is for the good of the individual and for the glory of God."³

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, or the inevitability of Jesus' death.

11:9-10 The Jews and the Romans commonly regarded the total daylight hours as twelve, and the nighttime hours as the other twelve. 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 this World, they would not stumble. Walking in the night pictures behaving without divine illumination or authorization.

¹Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 163.

²Pink, 2:164.

³McGee, 4:437-38.

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."¹

"... men must not follow a supposed inner light, but accept Jesus as the light of the world (8.12; 9.5)."²

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"; 1 Kings 2:10; 11:21; et al.). However, the idea that people would awaken 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 (dead). Thus the disciples' confusion is understandable, as is John's clarification of Jesus' meaning.

Jesus' mention of sleep here should have reminded the disciples of Daniel 12:2, where Daniel wrote that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." It should have led them to ask: Are You going to do what Daniel wrote that God will do in the future? Earlier, Jesus had used this same word, sleep, to describe Jairus' daughter, whom He also raised to life (Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52). Even though the disciples apparently failed to make this connection at the time, afterward they, and the readers of this account, could see that Jesus was claiming to do what God promised to do thereby signifying that He was God.

The New Testament writers commonly referred to death as sleep for the Christian, because his or her resurrection to life is a prominent revelation, and it is certain (cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 481.

²Barrett, p. 392.

"In the Bible the word *sleep* is used of physical rest (Genesis 2:21-22), of laziness and indifference (Romans 13:11), of an unsaved condition (Ephesians 5:14), and of death (Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:14)."¹

Pink pointed out seven things that the figure of sleep suggests: (1) Sleep is perfectly harmless. (2) Sleep comes as a welcome relief after the sorrows and toils of the day. (3) In sleep we lie down to rise again. (4) Sleep is a time of rest. (5) Sleep shuts out the sorrows of life. (6) One reason perhaps why death is likened to a sleep is to emphasize the ease with which the Lord will quicken us. (7) Sleep is a time when the body is fitted for the duties of the next day.²

That Jesus was not teaching "soul sleep" should be clear from Luke 16:19-31. 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.³ Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists believe in soul sleep.⁴

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.

"The disciples did already believe in one sense (ii. 11, vi. 69). But each new trial offers scope for the growth of faith. So that which is potential

¹Ryrie, *The Miracles ...*, p. 160.

²Pink, 2:174-76.

³See *ibid.*, 2:155, for contrasts between the two Lazaruses.

⁴See Gerstner, p. 186.

becomes real. Faith can neither be stationary nor complete."¹

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 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. Some commentators have suggested that Didymus was a name that Jesus had given to Thomas, indicating that faith and unbelief were twins in his nature.² 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!"³

Most Christians tend to think of Thomas as a doubter, because of His unwillingness to believe in Jesus' resurrection later (20:24-29). However, here his devotion to Jesus and his courage stand out. He did not understand how safe or unsafe the disciples would be, going up to Bethany, since they were with Jesus, who was walking in obedience to His Father (vv. 9-10). Neither did Thomas understand that the death that Jesus would die was a death that His disciples could not readily participate in with Him—at least not yet (cf. 1:29, 36). Nevertheless he spoke better than he knew. John probably recorded his well-intended challenge because it was a symbolic call to the disciples: to take up their cross and follow Jesus (cf. 12:25; Mark 8:34; 2 Cor. 4:10).

¹Westcott, p. 166.

²See Trench, p. 427.

³Wiersbe, 1:335.

"Though he was lacking in intelligence, he was deeply attached to the person of the Lord Jesus."¹

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 were 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 and then 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.² 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 a dead person. 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).³

"Not only the rich, but even those moderately well-to-do, had tombs of their own, which probably were acquired and prepared long before they were needed, and treated and inherited as private and personal property. In such caves, or rock-hewn tombs, the bodies were laid, having been anointed with many spices, with myrtle, aloes, and, at a later period, also with hyssop, rose-oil, and rose-water."⁴

It is impossible to reconstruct an exact timetable of these events as they progressed day by day, though most

¹Pink, 2:180.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 411.

³Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:315.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2:318.

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). Neither do we know how long it took Jesus to reach Bethany of Judea from where He was.

"... it was the practice to visit the grave, especially during the first three days."¹

11:18-19 Bethany of Judea was about 15 stadia (approximately one and three-quarters miles) east of Jerusalem. John implied that many family friends came from Jerusalem in order to console Mary and Martha. Prolonged grieving that often lasted several days was customary in the ancient Near East.² 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. They at least express Martha's great 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 than and there.

More likely Martha was reaffirming her personal confidence in Jesus that her severe loss had not shaken. Her words in both verses expressed what many others who had faith in Jesus also believed. Her words probably do, however, reveal that she believed that Jesus' power was limited by distance. And yet, Jesus had healed both a centurion's servant and a nobleman's son at a distance by His spoken word.

¹Ibid., 2:323.

²Cf. *ibid.*, 2:320-21.

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. This is typical of John's ironical style, in which he used words with two meanings.¹ 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, like the Pharisees, believed this Old Testament revelation, though the Sadducees did not (cf. Acts 23:7-8).² 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."³

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 itself. Jesus' own power raises people to life, just as Jesus' own Person satisfies people spiritually like bread satisfies physically. He Himself 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 is "the resurrection" (overcomer of death), and that He is also "the life" (sustainer of life). This is clear because He dealt with the two concepts of resurrection and life separately in the discussion that followed.

Whoever believes in Jesus will live spiritually and eternally, even if he or she dies physically (cf. 5:21). Jesus imparts eternal life to those who believe in Him. He Himself is the life in the sense that He is the source and benefactor of each believer's ongoing spiritual existence. Whereas He will cause

¹Barrett, p. 395.

²See Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 7:8:7, for evidence that many first-century Jews believed in the immortality of the soul.

³Wiersbe, 1:334.

resurrection after death, for those who believe and die physically, He bestows eternal life during one's earthly lifetime. It begins for the believer at salvation, 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)."¹

11:26 Furthermore, every living person who believes in Jesus will never experience eternal (spiritual) death (cf. 8:51; Rev. 20:6). This is another promise of salvation, but it is also a promise of eternal security. Robertson translated "will never die" as "shall not die for ever."²

"It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality."³

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). Jesus was claiming to do what Daniel prophesied that God would (Dan. 12:1-2).

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

¹Ibid., 1:336.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:200.

³Philips, p. 110.

and impart spiritual life, He must be the divine 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 had promised to send from heaven (cf. 1:9, 49; 6:14; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:2, 7). This saving faith first rested on facts about Jesus that were true, but then Martha 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, like 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). Martha used the same words to describe Jesus that John used in his purpose statement for this Gospel: "The Christ" and "the Son of God."

11:28 Martha's response 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). Like Andrew had done (1:41-42), Martha brought her sibling to the Savior. She described Jesus to her sister as "the Teacher," as they both had known Him best. She did it secretly, in order to enable Mary to meet with Jesus privately. Jesus had expressed interest in Mary coming to Him—He had been calling for her to come—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 that she became a believer in Jesus right 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 awful 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 where Jesus was outside the village, 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 give 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)."¹

"In Luke 10, at Christ's feet she owned Him as *Prophet*, hearing His word (v. 39). Here in John 11 she approaches Christ as *Priest*—that great High Priest that can be 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities,' who shares our sorrows, and ministers grace in every time of need. In John 12:3 Mary, at His feet acknowledged Him as 'King'—this will appear if we compare Matt. 26:7, from which we learn that she *also* anointed 'the head' of the rejected King of the Jews!"²

11:33 The phrase "deeply moved" translates the Greek word *enebrimesato*. As used in the Gospels 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).

¹Wiersbe, 1:336.

²Pink, 2:197.

Though John's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' deity, it also includes several unique statements about His humanity: He was wearied from His journey (4:6). He was deeply moved and troubled (here). He wept (11:35). And He thirsted on the cross (19:28).

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 humanity 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 the sin of unbelief.

Other explanations for Jesus' anger are that Jesus resented being forced to do a miracle (cf. 2:4).¹ However, Jesus had waited to go to Bethany so that He could perform a miracle (v. 11). Another idea is that Jesus believed that 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.² Still another view is that it was the unbelief of the Jews and Mary that provoked His indignation.³

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

¹Barrett, p. 399.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 494.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 10:53; Barrett, p. 398.

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.

Jesus wept three times, according to the New Testament: (1) here, (2) over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and (3) in Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7).

- 11:36-37 The Jewish onlookers interpreted Jesus' angry tears in two ways. (1) 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. (2) The Jews also wrongly concluded that Jesus' tears reflected the grief that He felt over His supposed 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, since they referred to it now.

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 several similar caves are visible to everyone. Normally a large round stone sealed the entrance against animals and curious individuals.
- 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 they added spices in order to

counteract the odors that decomposition produced. They did not embalm them as thoroughly as the Egyptians did.¹

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 her.

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 it was (cf. v. 11). His prayer was not a request for Lazarus' resurrection, even though such a prayer would have glorified the Father. Rather it was a prayer of thanksgiving for what the Father would shortly do: "I thank You that You have heard Me." It had the effect of focusing attention on the Son as God the Father's agent in performing the miracle. Jesus' prayer also had the effect of drawing the onlookers into His intimate relationship with the Father. It also demonstrated that He really did do nothing independently of the Father (cf. 5:19-47; 1 Kings 18:36-37).

"... they [the people standing by] should thus understand that He claimed his power from above, and not from beneath; that there was no magic, no necromancy here."²

Jesus' public prayer on this occasion is a good reminder that all leaders in public prayer should take those present into

¹Sanders, p. 274, footnote 1.

²Trench, p. 445.

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 man 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).¹ Furthermore, such a loud command emphasized Jesus' authority. Perhaps He also raised His voice so that the crowd could hear.²

Elijah and Elisha also raised the dead, but they had to labor over these miracles. Jesus, in contrast, raised Lazarus with a word (cf. Gen. 1:3; John 5:28-29). He called "His own by name" (10:3) and did what Daniel prophesied that God would do (Dan. 12:1-2). Thus this sign signified that Jesus could raise everyone to life as only God can do.

"While our Lord used different methods to perform His miracles of healing, his method of raising the dead was always the same. He called to them and spoke to them as if they heard Him. Do you know why He did that? Because they heard Him! I think that when He returns with a shout, every one of us [believers who have died] will hear his own name because He will call us back from the dead."³

The Jews did not wrap their dead in their grave clothes so tightly that Lazarus would have had difficulty doing what John wrote that he did: "Out came the man who had died."

"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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 498.

²Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 200.

³McGee, 4:436.

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."¹

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 an 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 (cf. 20:19, 26; 1 Cor. 15:35-49). Thus Lazarus' resurrection was only an 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]."²

This miracle illustrated Jesus' ability to empower people with new life (cf. 14:6). He had previously brought Jairus' daughter, who had been dead a very short time, back to life from her bed (Matt. 9:25; Mark 5:42; Luke 8:55). Then He had raised the widow of Nain's son, who had been dead probably about one day, from his stretcher (Luke 7:15). But Lazarus had been dead four days and was in his grave. 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).

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 418-19.

²Wiersbe, 1:334.

"... the resurrection of Lazarus therefore is an acted parable of Christian conversion and life."¹

"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."²

"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."³

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 in order to focus the reader's attention on Jesus.

"The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead authenticated Jesus' authority to grant eternal life to those who believe in Him. In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus was also demonstrating the validity of His own claims that He would rise again, and that He had the power and authority to do so. This miracle also illustrates Jesus' claims that He will raise people at the eschatological resurrection."⁴

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 people that Jesus was God's Son. Many who had come to console Mary believed in Him, but the depth of their faith undoubtedly varied. A faith based on miracles is not

¹Barrett, p. 395.

²Howard, p. 77.

³Harris, p. 178.

⁴Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:669 (January-March 2011):62.

the strongest faith, but John viewed it as better than no faith at all (cf. 2:23).¹ 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, perhaps so that 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" 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 with 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. They believed that their present tactics against Jesus needed adjusting, or He might destroy them (their position and power).

It is interesting that they admitted privately that Jesus had performed many signs, though publicly they had earlier asked Him to produce some in order to prove His claims (2:18; 6:30). Later, someone in the Sanhedrin, perhaps Nicodemus, must have reported this confession of the leaders' selfish reasons for killing Jesus to the disciples.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 500.

"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."¹

The reference to "our place" was probably to the position of authority that these leaders 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. Another possibility is that "our place" refers to the temple² and/or the city of Jerusalem.³ 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 (cf. King Saul). 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!"⁴

11:49 Caiaphas' remarks reflect the frenzy that characterized this meeting. He addressed his colleagues rather unflatteringly as ignoramuses ("You know nothing at all"). 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. He was, nonetheless, answerable to the Sanhedrin for Jewish affairs.⁵

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 insecure nature of the high priestly office in those days, when Rome

¹Ibid., p. 502.

²Harrison, p. 1099.

³Westcott, p. 174.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:338.

⁵Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 93.

arbitrarily deposed and appointed leaders with little warning.¹ Caiaphas' insulting statement to his fellow Sanhedrin members presents him as an arrogant egotist.

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 major step. He viewed Jesus' death as a sacrifice that was in the best interest of the Sanhedrin members. 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. Furthermore, it did not 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. Caiaphas spoke God's will as the high priest, even though he did not realize that he was doing so. Caiaphas' motive was, of course, completely contrary to God's will, but God overruled that in order to accomplish His will through the high priest's selfish advice (cf. Gen. 50:20; Num. 22—24).

"John sees that this unscrupulous diplomatist, who supposed that he was moving Jesus and the council and the Romans as so many pieces in his own game, was himself used as God's mouthpiece to predict the event which brought to a close his own and all other priesthood. In the irony of events he unconsciously used his high-priestly office to lead forward that one sacrifice which was for ever to take away sin and so make all further priestly office superfluous."²

¹J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, pp. 28-29.

²Dods, 1:804.

"God is able to speak through an unwilling agent (Caiaphas) as well as through a willing one (Jesus)."¹

Caiaphas unknowingly 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, in light of this information, the later 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.

John did not record Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, as the Synoptic writers did. He may have viewed this meeting of the Sanhedrin as the real trial of Jesus.

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 may have been Old Testament Ephron, which stood about four miles northeast of Bethel and twelve miles from Jerusalem (2 Chron. 13:19).² However, this location would not

¹Barrett, p. 407.

²Bock, p. 482.

have removed Him very far from Jerusalem. The only two wildernesses mentioned in the Gospels are the wilderness of Judea, south and east of Jerusalem, and the wilderness north of Perea, where John baptized. The second of these two sites seems to be the more probable place of Jesus' retreat.¹

11:55 This is the third and final Passover that John mentioned in his Gospel (cf. 2:13; 6:4), and it is probably the fourth one that took place during Jesus' public ministry. John mentioned the first, third, and fourth of these.² 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 up to Jerusalem at least one week before the feast began in order to undergo purification. Brown estimated that between 85,000 and 125,000 pilgrims were added to the normal Jerusalem population of 25,000.³

11:56 These pilgrims wondered if Jesus would attend that Passover, since official antagonism against Him had become common knowledge (v. 57; cf. 7:11). Jesus 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 many people wondered whether He would appear at this feast.

11:57 There was a warrant out for Jesus' arrest. The reader can hardly miss the point that Israel's leaders, who represented the whole nation, 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 demonstrated 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

¹See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:127.

²Hoehner, p. 143.

³Brown, 1:445.

ministry (1:19—12:50). Chapter 12 records Jesus' last teaching before the general public.

It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that John began his account of Jesus' public ministry with a domestic scene (the wedding at Cana, 2:1-11) and he ended it with another one (here).

12:1 The day when Jesus arrived in Bethany of Judea was evidently Saturday.¹

"St John appears to mark the period as the new *Hexaemeron*, a solemn period of 'six days,' the time of the new Creation. His Gospel begins and closes with a sacred week (comp. i. 29, 35, 43, ii. 1)."²

As noted before, John frequently grouped the events that 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 to identify which of the two Bethanys that John previously mentioned is in view here. It also shows that Lazarus was still alive, which is 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 repeated references to Lazarus imply 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 he made this uncommon appearance in order to honor Jesus (cf. v. 9).³

¹Hoehner, p. 91. See also the discussion in Andrews, pp. 423-24.

²Westcott, p. 176.

³Tenney, "John," p. 124.

In chapter 11, we see Jesus weeping with those who weep. In chapter 12, we see Him rejoicing with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15).

12:3 Mary anointed Jesus with a pound of ointment. The Roman pound equaled about 12 ounces and was a lavish amount to pour out on someone. Its quantity indicates Mary's great love and high regard for Jesus. The act of anointing often symbolized consecration to a divine work, as it did here. The ointment nard was an Indian oil that came from the roots (i.e., spikes, therefore "spikenard") of the nard plant.¹ Matthew and Mark used the more generic word *muron* (myrrh), translated "perfume," elsewhere (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). 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 liquid was in an alabaster flask, the neck of which Mary broke in order to pour it out on Jesus (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3).

John wrote that Mary proceeded to anoint Jesus' feet with the fragrant 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 His hands, arms, and legs as well (cf. Matt. 26:12; Mark 14:8). Perhaps Matthew and Mark mentioned Jesus' head in order to present this act as one that honored Jesus. John might have mentioned Jesus' feet in order to stress Mary's humility and devotion, in contrast to the Sanhedrin's pride and the disciples' pride (cf. 13:1-17).²

Only John noted that Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, which was another act of humility. Normally Jewish women never let their hair down in public, since to them 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 convenient for Mary to anoint Jesus' feet. At important meals

¹ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Spikenard," by W. E. Shewell-Cooper, 5:502.

² Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 427, 428.

the guests normally reclined on mats on the floor with their heads and hands close to the table and their feet extending out in the opposite direction.¹

This is the third mention of Mary of Bethany: In Luke 10:39 she sat at Jesus' feet for instruction. In John 11:32 she fell at His feet for comfort. And in John 12:3 she anointed His feet in worship.²

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 the 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 beloved brother was reason enough for great gratitude and festivity.

"Friend, if we would learn to sit at His [Jesus'] feet, we would give more to Him, too."³

McGee saw in Lazarus, Mary, and Martha three essentials in the church today, respectively: "new life in Christ, worship and adoration, and service."⁴

12:4-5 Judas Iscariot, 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, like David, 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.

¹Ibid., p. 473.

²Mitchell, p. 215.

³McGee, 4:444.

⁴Ibid., 4:443.

"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."¹

12:6 John knew Judas' real motive ("he was a thief") for objecting to Mary's sacrifice (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."²

Evidently the other disciples learned of their treasurer's financial mismanagement after he betrayed Jesus.

"The question has been asked why the office, which was itself a temptation, was assigned to Judas? The answer, so far as an answer can be given, seems to lie in the nature of things. Temptation commonly comes to us through that for which we are naturally fitted. Judas had gifts of management, we may suppose, and so also the trial which comes through that habit of mind. The work gave him the opportunity of self-conquest."³

12:7 By saying "Leave her alone" Jesus probably meant that the disciples should permit Mary *to* keep the custom of anointing for burial, since Jesus' burial was not far off. There is no indication that Mary realized that Jesus would die soon any more than the other disciples did, though she may have. However, she was anointing Jesus out of love, as mourners

¹Wiersbe, 1:339.

²Tenney, "John," p. 125.

³Westcott, p. 177.

anointed the bodies of loved ones who had died.¹ It was not uncommon to do this at lavish expense. Jesus viewed her act as a pre-anointing for His death and burial, though Mary may not have viewed it as such (cf. 11:51). If she did, perhaps this is why she did not go to Jesus' tomb with the other women in order to anoint His body.

It is a good idea to express our love for people that 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), Jesus' statement here would have demonstrated supreme arrogance. Jesus was not encouraging His 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).

"If language means anything, this explicit statement of Christ's positively repudiates the dogma of His 'real presence,' under the forms of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. It is impossible to harmonize that blasphemous Romish doctrine with this clear-cut utterance of the Saviour."²

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

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 299.

²Pink, 2:243. See Ott, pp. 371-90, for explanation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

sinful woman in the very different anointing story in Luke vii. 36-50 is a type of the true Christian penitent."¹

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 shown Himself in Jerusalem for Passover (11:54-57). But now the news came 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). These secondary characters in John's story are model disciples.

12:10-11 The huge numbers of people that were heading for Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus led the Sanhedrin members to conclude that they would have to kill 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 earlier, had also become a problem for the Sanhedrin. They had dealt with him differently (excommunication rather than execution) because Jesus' popularity then was not as great (9:34).

Both the intensity of the hatred of the Sanhedrin for Jesus, and the intensity of the love of Mary for Jesus, were feelings that many other people shared, and they suggest the inevitability of a major conflict soon in John's story.

¹Tasker, p. 144.

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, plus 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 involved Jesus that He allowed during His earthly ministry.

12:12 The "next day" would have been Sunday (cf. v. 1). The large crowd that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast 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 branches had become a common practice at national celebrations in Israel (Lev. 23:40). Palm branches had become a symbol of nationalistic hope (cf. 1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7).¹ They appear on the coins that the Jewish nationalists produced during the war with the Romans in A.D. 66-70.² Used on the present occasion they probably signaled popular belief that Israel's Messiah had appeared (cf. Rev. 7:9).

"We usually regard palm branches as symbols of victory and triumph but the oriental regarded them as symbols of life and salvation."³

"Hosanna" is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase that means "Give salvation now." The Jews commonly used this word in

¹Bock, p. 484.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 432.

³Lenski, p. 851.

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).¹ "Blessed is He ("the one") who comes in the name of the LORD" is the very next statement in Psalm 118 (Ps. 118:26). The Jews of Jesus' day regarded the phrase "the one 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 Psalm 118 to honor. "Indeed, 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."²

12:14-15 The Synoptic writers gave more detail than John did 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).

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 432.

²Wiersbe, 1:340. Paragraph division omitted.

"... a king came riding upon a horse when he was bent on *war*; a king came riding upon an ass when he was coming in *peace*."¹

"Do not fear" comes from Isaiah 40:9, 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 earthly reign would not begin then. He would not "give salvation now" ("Hosanna") to the nation 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 ("at the first"). After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, when He was glorified, then they did (cf. 2:17, 22). Obviously they and the crowd believed that Jesus was the Messiah, as they understood the Messiah. However, they did not then understand the true nature of His messiahship, the necessity of His death, or the plan for His kingdom. For example, they may not have understood 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."²

12:17-18 John noted another witness to Jesus' person, namely, the people who had observed Jesus' resurrection 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—both physically, and as witnesses to Jesus' identity as Messiah. The raising of Lazarus was a miracle

¹Barclay, 2:137.

²Tenney, "John," p. 127.

that very many people regarded as a sign that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Dan. 12:1-2).

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. It seemed to them that everyone was acknowledging Him as the Messiah. This is another ironic comment that John recorded for His readers' instruction. Actually, relatively few people had genuinely 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).

The Pharisees' unaware prophecy (cf. Caiaphas' unaware 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 in Person (cf. Acts 3—4).

6. Jesus' announcement of His death 12:20-36

"In John 11 we have seen a remarkable proof that He [Jesus] was the *Son of God*: evidenced by His raising of Lazarus. Next, we beheld a signal acknowledgment of Him as *the Son of David*: testified to by the jubilant Hosannas of the multitudes as the king of Israel rode into Jerusalem. What is before us now concerns Him more especially as the *Son of man*. As the Son of David He is related only to Israel, but His Son of man title brings in a wider connection. It is as 'the Son of man' He comes to the Ancient of days, and as such there is 'given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him' (Dan. 7:14)."¹

One example that Jesus was attracting people from other parts of the world follows. These individuals contrast with the Pharisees. Westcott noted that

¹Pink, 2:262.

as the Magi brought Jesus into fellowship with the Gentile world at the beginning of His life, so these Greeks did the same at the end of it.¹

"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."²

"This narrative presents interesting points of affinity with that contained in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel,—the story of the woman by the well. In both Jesus comes into contact with persons outside the pale of the Jewish church; in both He takes occasion from such contact to speak in glowing language of an hour that is coming, yea, now is, which shall usher in a glorious new era for the kingdom of God; in both He expresses, in the most intense, emphatic terms, His devotion to His Father's will, His faith in the future spread of the gospel, and His lively hope of a personal reward in glory; in both ... He employs, for the expression of His thought, agricultural metaphors: in one case, the earlier, borrowing His figure from the process of reaping; in the other, the later, from that of sowing."³

¹Westcott, p. 180.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 524.

³A. B. Bruce, p. 317.

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 Israel 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., converts to Judaism). These Gentiles were permitted to 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 (1:44) in a Gentile area of Galilee, specifically Gaulanitis, that attracted these Gentiles to him. The Pharisees had said, "the world has gone after Him" (v. 19). Now certain Greeks were saying, "we wish to see Jesus" (cf. Hag. 2:7).

"The Greek was characteristically a seeker after truth. It was no unusual thing to find a Greek who had passed through philosophy after philosophy, and religion after religion, a Greek who had gone from teacher to teacher in the search for the truth. The Greek was the man with the seeking mind."¹

Philip, who was a Jew, appears to have had some hesitation about introducing these Greeks 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). Perhaps Philip sought Andrew's help because introducing Gentiles to Jesus was difficult for these Jewish disciples, and Philip needed encouragement to do so. Another possibility is that Philip remembered Jesus' earlier instruction to His disciples, when He had sent them on a preaching tour throughout Galilee,

¹Barclay, 2:139.

forbidding them to go to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5). 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.

12:23 Jesus' visit 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 only referred to them at all because they represented Gentiles who were expressing interest in Jesus, and because their visit 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 grain of wheat that falls into the earth. 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 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:36-38).

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 ("loves his life") 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 ("eternal") life for oneself. Jesus contrasted the worthlessness of what one sacrifices now with the infinite 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."¹

Obviously Jesus did not mean that we gain salvation 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; 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).²

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.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 527.

²See Dillow, pp. 135-36.

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 then and can now count on death, figuratively if not literally. But beyond that they can anticipate honor from the Father (cf. 17:24). The true disciple's life will essentially correspond to 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 bearing God's wrath for the sins of the world.

"The 'soul' (*psyche*, Vulg. *anima*) is the seat of the human affections: the 'spirit' (*pneuma*, Vulg. *spiritus*) is the seat of the religious affections, by which man holds converse with God."¹

The statement following: "what am I to say?" could be a question or it could be 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.² 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: "But for this purpose I came to this hour." We see here the conflict that Jesus felt between His desire to avoid the Cross and His desire to obey the Father completely.

"Here as in Gethsemane the soul of Jesus instinctively and naturally shrinks from the Cross, but he instantly surrenders to the will of God in both experiences."³

¹Westcott, p. 181.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 528-29.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:227.

"Jesus instructed His disciples on the cost of commitment to the Father's will by disclosing His emotions."¹

John did not record Jesus' struggle with God's will in Gethsemane, which the Synoptics did (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). He narrated that struggle on this occasion instead.

12:28-29 Jesus wanted God's glory more than deliverance from the hour of the Cross (cf. 7:18; 8:29, 50; Matt. 26:39).

"The whole of his life's dedication is concentrated in this statement."²

"In the hour of suffering and surrender, there are only two prayers we can pray, either 'Father, save me!' or 'Father, glorify Thy name!'"³

"We tend to whimper and cry and complain and ask God why He lets unpleasant things happen to us. With Christ, we should learn to say, 'Father, through this suffering and through this pain, glorify Thyself.'"⁴

The Father answered Jesus' petition out of 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 the first instance, apparently only John the Baptist and Jesus heard the voice. In the second instance, only three disciples and Jesus heard it. And in the third instance, a multitude and Jesus heard it. In all of these cases the purpose of the voice was to authenticate Jesus as God's Son in a

¹Blum, pp. 317-18.

²Tenney, "John," p. 130.

³Wiersbe, 1:342.

⁴McGee, 4:448.

dramatic way, and in all cases the voice had some connection with Jesus' death.

However, this was a veiled revelation, as were all of God's revelations about Jesus. Its purpose was to strengthen the disciples' faith and to remove all excuses from unbelievers.¹ 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. Perhaps the resurrection of Lazarus is particularly in view.² He would glorify Himself again, through Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

Some of those present gave a supernatural explanation for what had happened. Others gave a natural explanation.

"That is the same reaction many people still have today. They say God's Word is full of errors and the miracles recorded can't be accurate. Because they don't believe in them, they say it just 'thundered.'"³

12:30 Jesus explained that the heavenly voice had sounded for the people's benefit more than for His. 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 that they were judging Jesus when they decided to believe or disbelieve on Him. In reality 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 meant that because of humankind's rejection of Him God was about to

¹Pink, 2:272.

²Darby, 3:493

³McGee, 4:448.

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. Satan only functions as he does now because God permits 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).

"We believe, then, the first stage in the 'casting out' of Satan occurred at the Cross, the next will be when he is '*cast out*' of heaven into the earth (Rev. 12:10); the next, when he is '*cast into* the bottomless pit' (Rev. 20:3); the final when he is '*cast into* the lake of fire and brimstone' (Rev. 20:10)."¹

Jesus' passion would involve His enemies lifting Him up on a cross, but it would also involve 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 (ethnic or social), not all people without exception, to Himself. It would make all people savable in the sense that His death would reconcile the world of humanity to God (cf. Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). It would remove the barrier of real guilt that made people inaccessible to God.

"Jesus is not affirming that the whole world will be saved; he is affirming that all who are saved are

¹Pink, 2:273.

saved in this way. And he is speaking of a universal rather than a narrowly nationalistic religion."¹

All these things would happen in Jesus' passion, 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 the kind of death that He would die—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). 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."²

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 while they had the Light (Jesus) among them. Walking is a metaphor for living. Jesus meant that they should live in His light, the light of His presence and self-revelation. If they would do that, the darkness would not overpower them (cf. Isa. 50:10). If they did not do that, they would be lost. They needed to believe in Him as soon as possible, 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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 531-32.

²Ibid., p. 533.

would become sons of Light, namely, His spiritual children who display the qualities of the 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'."¹

These last recorded words of Jesus to the world were an exhortation and a promise.²

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. So ends John's account of Jesus' public ministry.

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 (cf. 1:10-11). 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 signs that He performed that demonstrated His messiahship (cf. 1:11).

"Signs do not suffice if God does not give men eyes to see."³

John again attributed Israel's unbelief to God's will, though he balanced that again with the Jews' human responsibility in

¹Tasker, p. 153.

²Westcott, p. 184.

³Barrett, p. 430.

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 Messiah, whom God 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.

"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."¹

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 historic Israel was unable to move forward on its own level and so enter the kingdom of God (see on 3.3-5). It had to be regenerated through the Word of God and the Spirit; and this regeneration it refused."²

¹Wiersbe, 1:338.

²Barrett, p. 431.

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) and here it is clear that Isaiah also had written about Him.

These quotations justify interpreting the Old Testament servant of the LORD passages as referring to the Messiah. There has long been a debate within Judaism and liberal Christianity about whether these passages refer to a personal Messiah or only to Israel. John settled that debate: Some of them refer to Messiah.

12:42-43 Even though most of the Jews rejected Jesus, many believed in Him (cf. 1:10-13). Even some of the rulers did. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea seem to have been such people (cf. 7:50-52; 19:38-39). Some of the believers 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.¹ Obviously mutes and other people with verbal disabilities can believe, but for one 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

¹See Wilkin, *Confident in ...*, pp. 31-36.

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 shouted out these words shows their importance. Jesus again claimed to be God's representative and so closely connected with God that to believe in Jesus constituted belief in 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).

"Precisely because Jesus is the obedient Son and envoy of the Father, to see him is to see the Father, just as to believe in him is to believe in God. Cf. 1:18; 14:9."¹

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 in which 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 deliver 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. "What to say" may refer to the content of His teaching, and "what to speak" to the manner of its delivery.²

This exhortation explains what John recorded of Jesus' public ministry: It was exactly what God the Father directed Him to say and to do.

¹Barrett, p. 433.

²Dods, 1:814.

"The great subject of chap. 12 is the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus."¹

III. JESUS' PRIVATE MINISTRY CHS. 13—17

All of the Gospel writers integrated Jesus' ministry to the masses and His training of the Twelve. But John recorded much of Jesus' private teaching of the Twelve, between the Triumphal Entry and His arrest, that the other evangelists did not mention. There is obviously some overlapping, but the present section contains ministry that Jesus directed almost exclusively to the Twelve. The Synoptics contain more of Jesus' teaching of the Twelve in the course of His public ministry, whereas John gave us more of His teaching in the upper room. This instruction was specifically designed to prepare the Twelve for leadership in the church. Jesus gave this teaching after Israel's official and final rejection of Him resulted in the postponement (delay) of the earthly messianic kingdom.

"There are eighty-nine chapters in the four Gospels. Four of these chapters cover the first thirty years of the life of Jesus and eighty-five chapters the last three years of His life. Of these eighty-five chapters, twenty-seven deal with the last eight days of His life. So about one-third of the gospel records deal with the last few days and place the emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."²

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.

"The division which we call the Upper Room Discourse is about the subject of *love*. He loves His own. The last part of the gospel, from chapters 18 to 21, are [*sic is*] about *life*. He came

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 218.

²McGee, 4:441.

to bring us life, and that life is in Himself. Our life comes through His death."¹

This section (chs. 13—17) begins with a reference to Jesus' love for His own (13:1) and it ends with His prayer that the Father's love would be in them (17:26). These reference to Jesus' love for His own bracket this section that is full of more expressions of Jesus' love for His own.

A. THE LAST SUPPER 13:1-30

Jesus concluded each of His prolonged stays and ministries in a district with an important meal.

"At the first 'Supper,' [i.e., the feeding of the 5,000, at the end of the Galilean ministry, which was mainly to Jews] the Jewish guests would fain have proclaimed Him Messiah-King; at the second [i.e., the feeding of the 4,000, at the end of the Decapolis ministry, which was mainly to Gentiles], as 'the Son of Man,' He gave food to those Gentile multitudes which having been with Him those days, and consumed all their victuals during their stay with him [*sic* Him], He could not send away fasting, lest they should faint by the way. And on the last occasion [i.e., the Last Supper, the Judean ministry, which was mainly to the Twelve], as the true Priest and Sacrifice, He fed His own with the True Paschal Feast, ere He sent them forth alone into the wilderness. Thus the three 'Suppers' seem connected, each leading up, as it were, to the other."²

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

¹Ibid., 4:450. See also Wayne A Brouwer, "The Chiastic Structure of the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:698 (April-June):195-214; idem, "... Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:699 (July-September 2018):304-22.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:63.

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.¹ The normal observance of the Passover meal was on the following evening, but Jesus and His disciples observed it a day early out of necessity.

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 partaking of the sacraments plays some part in salvation). We can only suggest that John did not mention it 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 as guided by the Holy Spirit.

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."²

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.

¹See Andreas L. Köstenberger, "Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal?" in *The Lord's Supper*, pp. 6-30; Harold W. Hoehner, "Jesus' Last Supper," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 63-74.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, 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."¹

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 in this verse represents the mass of lost humanity out of which Jesus had called His disciples and from which He would depart shortly when He returned to heaven. Jesus loved His own, who believed on Him, and who would remain in the world after He departed from it. 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,² though this interpretation seems less fitting.

"The meaning is, that on the very edge of His last sufferings, when it might have been supposed that He would be absorbed in His own awful prospects, He was so far from forgetting 'His own,' who were to be left struggling 'in the world' after He had 'departed out of it to the Father' (ch. 17:11), that in His care for them He seemed scarce to think of Himself save in connection with them ..."³

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.⁴ 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

¹Tenney, "John," p. 135.

²Alford, 1:840.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 1057.

⁴See Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 389-401.

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 while 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).¹ 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 like 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 is the only soil in which the graces root,' wrote Andrew Murray.²

"In the preceding chapter, you will remember, we saw that the feet of Jesus were anointed. Here, the feet of the disciples are washed. What a difference! As the savior passed through this sinful world, He contracted no defilement whatsoever. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled. The feet speak of the walk of a person, and the

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 462; Beasley-Murray, p. 233.

²Wiersbe, 1:345.

anointing of Jesus' feet with spikenard tells of the sweet savor of the walk of our Lord."¹

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). Just 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.

"The first requisite in a disciple or follower is absolute trust in the wisdom of his Master."²

"We must let Christ take his own way, and we shall find in the issue it was the best way."³

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 spiritually 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, his high regard for Jesus, his failure to understand, and his self-will.

"The first condition of discipleship is self-surrender."⁴

13:10-11 Jesus distinguished the two types of spiritual cleansing that believers experience: forensic forgiveness and family forgiveness. When a person believes in Jesus, God removes all

¹McGee, 4:450-51.

²Dods, 1:816.

³Henry, p. 1584.

⁴Westcott, p. 191.

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, 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. Believers 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.

A second view is that Jesus was referring to the daily consecration of the disciple's life to a service of love, following Christ's example.¹ A third view is that the foot-washing was symbolic of the complete cleansing that had already taken place or would take place. This last view is less probable, since Jesus said that, although Peter already had experienced a spiritual bath, he still needed his feet washed.

"A subterranean passage, lit on both sides, led to the well-appointed bath-rooms [under Herod's Temple] where the priests immersed themselves. After that they needed not all that day to wash again, save their hands and feet, which they had to do each time, however often, they came for service in the Temple. It was, no doubt, to this that our Lord referred in His reply to Peter: 'He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.'"²

"Is it not most significant that nothing is said in this chapter about the washing of the disciples' *hands*? Does it not point [to] a leading contrast between the Mosaic and the Christian

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:500.

²Idem, *The Temple*, p. 149.

dispensations? Under the law, where there was so much of doing, the priests were required to wash both their hands and their feet (Ex. 30:19); but under grace all has been done for us, and if the *walk* be right, the *work* will be acceptable!"¹

The unclean disciple was Judas, who had not believed that Jesus was God's Son.² When Jesus washed Judas' feet, therefore, it 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.

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 just done, though full comprehension would come to the disciples later (v. 7). His question prepared them for the lesson that followed.

"he had turned a company of wrangling, angry, jealous men into a company of humbled and united disciples."³

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. They were ordinary titles of respect given to a rabbi.⁴

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,

¹Pink, 2:306.

²See Harrison, p. 1102.

³Dods, 1:817.

⁴*The Nelson ...*, p. 1791.

put meeting the needs of others before maintaining their own prestige (cf. Phil. 2:1-11).

"The world is full of people who are standing on their dignity when they ought to be kneeling at the feet of their brethren."¹

"The world asks, 'How many people work for you?' but the Lord asks, 'For how many people do you work?'"²

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. The Grace Brethren and certain Mennonite churches, among others, view foot-washing as a third ordinance.

Most Christians believe that Jesus meant that His disciples should follow His example of serving humbly, rather than specifically and literally washing each other's feet. Some find support for this in Jesus' statement: "What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later" (v. 7).

"If it was a matter of literally washing feet in water they knew all about it."³

Nowhere else in the New Testament do the writers treat foot-washing as another ordinance. Instead, 1 Timothy 5:10 speaks of it as an example of humble service ("good works"), not as an ordinance of the church. 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 were giving an

¹Barclay, 2:162.

²Wiersbe, 1:347.

³Ironside, p. 560.

example in modern North American culture, He probably would have selected another humble act.¹

13:16 Jesus again introduced a statement with a strong affirmation in order to indicate its importance. He put it in the form of two aphorisms (pithy observations that contain a general truth; cf. 15:20; Matt. 10:24; Luke 6:40; 22:37). By common consent, a slave occupies an inferior role to that of his master. Likewise messengers (Gr. *apostolos*) occupy an inferior role to those who send them. This, by the way, is the only occurrence of *apostolos* in the fourth Gospel. 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. Similarly He would send the disciples (20:21).

13:17 Knowing what one ought to do and actually doing it are frequently two different things. Jesus promised God's favor (blessing) 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). This is one of only two beatitudes in John's Gospel (cf. 20:29).

"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."²

13:18-19 Again Jesus directed 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," namely, deity (Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; cf. John 8:24, 28, 58). He wanted the disciples to believe His

¹See Pink, 2:317-18, for more reasons to take Jesus' words "do just as I did" non-literally.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 469.

claims before His crucifixion seemingly invalidated them and before His resurrection confirmed them.

Jesus chose Judas as one of the Twelve in order to fulfill Psalm 41:9. The Son of David experienced treason from a close friend, just 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.¹ Other possibilities are that the expression derived from the lifting up of a horse's hoof preparatory to kicking,² or that it alluded to shaking off the dust from the feet as an insult (cf. Luke 9:5; 10:11).³

"When Christ said, 'I know whom I have chosen' it is evident that He was not speaking of election to salvation, but to the apostolate. Where *eternal election* is in view the Scriptures uniformly [*sic*] ascribe it to God the Father. But where it is a question of ministry or service, in the New Testament, the choice and the call usually proceed from the Lord Jesus—see Matt. 9:30 [*sic* 13]; 20:1; 28:18-20; Acts 1:24; 26:16; Eph. 4:11, etc. His words here in 13:18 are parallel with those in 6:70: 'Have not I chosen you twelve? and one of you is a devil?'"⁴

13:20 Another strong affirmation underlined the statement that followed. In view of Jesus' claim to be "I am," the disciples needed to appreciate 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

¹F. F. Bruce, pp. 287, 296, footnote 14.

²Tasker, p. 161.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 553.

⁴Pink, 2:320-21.

(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 to this point (cf. 6:70; 13:10, 18). Now He gave the Twelve more specific information about it.

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. Jesus was speaking like a prophet here.

13:23 This is John's first reference to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved or the beloved disciple (cf. 19:26-27; 20:2-9; 21:1, 20-25; Mark 14:47, 51). He enjoyed an intimate relationship with 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. John 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."¹

"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

¹L. Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel*, p. xiii.

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* 108a, *NewDocs* 1. § 1; 2. § 26). In short, the posture of Jesus and his men is a small indicator that they were in fact eating the Passover meal ..."¹

"... the left elbow was placed on the table, and the head rested on the hand, sufficient room being of course left between each guest for the free movements of the right hand. This explains in what sense John 'was leaning on Jesus' bosom,' and afterwards 'lying on Jesus' breast,' when he bent back to speak to Him."²

13:24-25 Evidently Peter was somewhere across the table from Jesus, since John noticed when Peter gestured to him. Peter was unable, because of his position, to ask Jesus privately to identify the betrayer. At least one writer believed that Peter occupied the place of highest honor at Jesus' left.³ 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 masterful 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 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 customarily pass a morsel of dipped bread and meat to an

¹Carson, *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.

²Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 235.

³Jim Bishop, *The Day Christ Died*, p. 13.

honored guest.¹ Jesus did this to Judas. He would then hand each person present a piece of bread.²

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.³

Perhaps it was the apparently high honor that Jesus bestowed on Judas, by extending the piece of bread to him first, 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 ironically triggered Judas' betrayal of Jesus' friendship.⁴ 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, entered into Judas. 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

¹Pink, 2:332.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:506.

³See *ibid.*, 2:493-95, or Andrews, p. 484-86, for a description and a diagram of the probable seating arrangement.

⁴Blum, p. 321.

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 at that point 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.

The Gospels do not clarify whether Jesus selected Judas as one of His disciples fully knowing that he would betray Him. The answer lies in the mysterious realm of the God-man's knowledge, part of which He gave up in the Incarnation (Phil. 2:5-7). At least one conservative scholar believed that Jesus chose Judas not knowing that he would betray Him.¹

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.

"... the Passover, or rather the 15th of Nisan, was to be observed like a Sabbath, no manner of work being allowed. There was, however, one most important exception to this rule. It was permitted to prepare the necessary articles of food on the 15th of Nisan. This explains how the words of Jesus to Judas during the Paschal (not the Lord's) Supper could be misunderstood by the disciples as implying that Judas, 'who had the bag,' was to 'buy those things' that they had 'need of against the feast.'"²

"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."³

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:503.

²Idem, *The Temple*, p. 226.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 558.

13:29 The fact that Judas kept the money box and was the treasurer of the Twelve shows that the other disciples trusted him implicitly. He was the consummate hypocrite. Jesus' trust of him shows the Savior's grace.

The feast in view must have been the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed Passover immediately, since Jesus and the Twelve were now celebrating the Passover. Giving alms to the poor was a common practice in Jerusalem on Passover evening.¹

13:30 Judas, ironically and tragically, 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.² John's reference to it being night would be redundant if all he wanted to do was to 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 powers of darkness, departed into the darkness, and was swallowed up by it."³

"Judas was enveloped in an unilluminated night, never to be relieved. He was on the way to his own place (Acts 1:25)."⁴

¹J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 54.

²Andrews, p. 493.

³Harris, p. 204.

⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 239.

"Judas was the representative of that spirit of wilful [*sic*] self-seeking which was the exact opposite of the spirit of Christ."¹

B. THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE 13:31—16:33

Judas' departure opened the way for Jesus to prepare His faithful 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).² 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).

"The Upper Room Discourse is the genesis of the Epistles of the New Testament, for in it, in germ form, the great doctrines of grace are announced."³

1. Jesus' announcement and command 13:31-35

Jesus began His instructions by announcing His departure and by commanding His disciples' to love one another as He had loved them.

Jesus' announcement of His departure 13:31-33

13:31-32 Judas' departure in order to meet with the chief priests signaled the beginning of the Son of Man's glorification, which John recorded that Jesus consistently regarded 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.

¹Westcott, p. 196.

²E.g., A. Lacomara, "Deuteronomy and the Farewell Discourse (Jn 13:31—16:33)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974):65-84.

³Chafer, *Grace*, p. 81.

"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."¹

Jesus explained that His glorification (i.e., His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and glorification in heaven)—which He regarded neither as a martyrdom nor as a disgrace—would mean glory for the Father (by the Son's complete obedience), who would in return glorify the Son (by the resurrection and ascension of the Son). Thus Jesus continued to stress His unity with the Father in order 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 that the Father had given Him to do (17:4). That is also how we glorify the Father: by finishing the work that He has given us to do.

13:33 Glorification for Jesus required 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*, 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). Paul used it only once (Gal. 4:19). Both death and ascension to heaven would separate Jesus from His close disciples.

Jesus' command to love one another 13:34-35

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.

¹Tenney, "John," p. 141.

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 Jesus had loved them. 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 (make official and inaugurate) with His blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Under that new 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 them. The Greek words for love appear only 12 times in John 1—12, but in chapters 13—21 we find them 44 times.

Some Christians celebrate Maunday Thursday during "holy week" (the week leading up to Easter) as the day of the Last Supper. The word "maunday" stems from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning command—the command given here to love one another.¹

13:35 That supernatural love would distinguish disciples of Jesus. Love for one another would identify them 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). John's first epistle is really an exposition of the themes that Jesus set forth in the Upper Room Discourse.² 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/or to grieve the indwelling Spirit, so that we do not manifest much love (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30).

Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-47). In the Upper Room Discourse He taught His disciples to love one another.

¹John Putman, "Jerusalem and the Last Days," in *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, p. 360.

²See John R. Yarid Jr., "John's Use of the Upper Room Discourse in First John" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002).

2. Peter's question about Jesus' departure and Jesus' reply 13:36-38 (cf. Matt. 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34)

Peter next declared his love for Jesus indirectly.

- 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 confusion 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 that he could accompany Jesus wherever He was going. Peter's statement indirectly expressed 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 being separated 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 in order 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."¹

"Judas' betrayal of Jesus was absolutely deliberate ... But there was never anything in this world less deliberate than Peter's denial of Jesus."²

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 486.

²Barclay, 2:175-76.

Mark recorded that Jesus mentioned the rooster crowing twice, but the other evangelists wrote that He just mentioned the rooster 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. The questions show 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.

"Chapter 14 deals largely with specific encouragements to counterbalance the departure of Jesus, the defection of Judas, and the predicted failure of Peter. These are: the ultimate provision of the Father's house; the return of Christ for his own; the prospect of doing greater works; unlimited prayer possibility; the gift of the Holy Spirit; and the provision of Christ's peace."¹

Jesus' promise to return 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 crisis 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 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 passage that is often read at funerals.

¹Harrison, p. 1104.

Jesus explained how the disciples' could calm their troubled hearts. The verb believe (or trust, Gr. *pisteuo*), which occurs twice, can be either in the Greek 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."¹ This makes the most sense in the context, as most of the modern English translators have concluded.

"Everything seemed on the verge of collapse."²

Jesus meant: Stop being troubled. He was telling the disciples 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.

Jesus used the singular "heart" (Gr. *kardia*) collectively, The NIV interpreted it to mean each of their "hearts" individually. The heart used metaphorically is the center of personality.

"In a very short time life for the disciples was going to fall in. Their sun was going to set at midday and their world was going to collapse in chaos around them. At such a time there was only one thing to do—stubbornly to hold on to trust in God."³

14:2 Jesus next explained the reason that the disciples should stop feeling troubled at the thought of His leaving them. He was departing in order 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, and the phrase "the Father's house" occurs nowhere else in Scripture as a

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:248.

²Harrison, p. 1104.

³Barclay, 2:177.

figure of the church. Neither can it refer to the messianic kingdom, since Jesus said He was about to go there.¹ Chafer understood the Father's house to be "no less than the universe in which there are many abodes."²

"To-day the average 'home' is little more than a boarding-house—a place to eat and sleep in. But 'home' used to mean, and still means to a few, the place where we are loved for our own sakes; the place where we are always welcome; the place whither we can retire from the strife of the world and enjoy rest and peace, the place where loved ones are together. Such will Heaven be. Believers are now in a strange country, yea, in an enemy's land; in the life to come, they will be at *Home!*"³

There are many rooms (Gr. *mone*) in heaven. The Latin Vulgate translated the noun *mansiones*, which the AV transliterated as "mansions." The picture that Jesus painted of heaven is of 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 luxuriousness (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."⁴

"This truth may reflect the marriage custom of the bridegroom, who would go to the bride's house and bring her to his father's house, where an apartment would have been built for the new couple."⁵

¹See Ironside, p. 602.

²Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:7.

³Pink, 2:349-50.

⁴Tenney, "John," p. 143.

⁵Bailey, "John," p. 184. See Levitt for more information about Jewish wedding customs.

"The glories and blessedness of Heaven are brought before us in the New Testament under a variety of representations. Heaven is called a 'country' (Luke 19:12; Heb. 11:16); this tells of its vastness. It is called a 'city' (Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21[]); this intimates the large number of its inhabitants. It is called a 'kingdom' (II Peter 1:11); this suggests its orderliness. It is called 'paradise' (Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7); this emphasizes its delights. It is called the 'Father's house,' which bespeaks its permanency."¹

Jesus assured His disciples that if heaven was different from what He had described, He would have told them in what way it was different. This assurance recalls verse 1, where Jesus urged them to trust Him.

"The disciple is warranted in assuming an adequate divine provision even when it is not stated [here]."²

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.³ The place, which is the Father's house (heaven), already existed when Jesus spoke these words. Jesus would not go to heaven to create a place for believers there. Rather, everything 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

¹Pink, 2:349.

²Harrison, p. 1104.

³Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:514; Westcott, p. 201.

Jesus meant here, though this is how some have understood Him.¹

14:3 The commentators have 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). At other times He meant His coming to them through the Holy Spirit after His ascension and before His bodily return (v. 23).² Still other times He meant His eschatological return at the end of the inter-advent age.³ Some interpreters view this return as the Rapture, and others believe that Jesus was referring to the Second Coming. Another view is that Jesus was really speaking about the believer's death figuratively.⁴ Many interpreters believe that some combination of the above views is most probable.⁵

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 Christians at the Rapture, rather than His return at the Second Coming.

"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."⁶

Other Scripture clarifies that when Jesus returns at the Rapture it will be to call His own to heaven immediately (1

¹E.g., Lenski, pp. 972-73; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 273.

²R. H. Gundry, "In my Father's House are many *Monai* (John 14 2)," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 58 (1967):68-72.

³The inter-advent age is the time period between Jesus' first coming and His second coming.

⁴E.g., R. H. Lightfoot, pp. 275-76.

⁵E.g., Barrett, p. 457; R. H. Strachen, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Significance and Environment*, p. 280; and Westcott, p. 201.

⁶Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):139. Pretribulationists believe that Jesus will call believers to heaven before the future seven-year Tribulation, and posttribulationists believe that He will do so after the Tribulation.

Thess. 4:13-18). 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. In contrast, when Jesus returns at the Second Coming, it will be to remain on the earth and reign for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11—20:15).¹

"... 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."²

"... 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."³

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

¹See Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, ch. XI: "God the Son: His Coming for His Saints," pp. 56-61, and ch. XII: "God the Son: His Coming with His Saints," pp. 62-67.

²Renald 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.

³Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Gospel of John*, p. 268.

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).

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).

Thomas' question about Jesus' departure and Jesus' answer 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 way there. Thomas' question was a request for an unambiguous explanation of Jesus' destination and their destination, and how He and they would get there.

"For us generally a clear apprehension of the end is the condition of knowing the way. But in spiritual things faith is content to move forward step by step. There is a happiness in 'not seeing,'
xx. 29"¹

14:6 Jesus again gave an enigmatic answer. He had already said plainly, at least three times, that He would die and rise again (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, and the truth, and the life." The "way" is slightly more dominant, in view of Thomas' question and its relative position to the "truth" and the "life." Jesus is "the way" to God, because He is "the truth"

¹Westcott, p. 202.

from God and "the life" from God. He is the truth because He embodies God's supreme revelation (1:18; 5:19; 8:29), and 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."¹

"He himself goes to the Father by way of crucifixion and resurrection; in [the] future he is the means by which Christians die and rise. ... Because Jesus is the means of access to God who is the source of all truth and life he is himself the truth and the life for men (cf. vv. 7, 9)."²

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.³ This was an exclusive claim to being the only way to heaven (cf. 10:9; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5).

"He says the *only* way to God is through Him. That is a dogmatic statement! Years ago a student out at UCLA told me he didn't like the Bible because it is filled with dogmatism. I agreed with him that it is. He especially selected this verse and said,

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 569.

²Barrett, p. 458.

³See Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ among Other gods.*, especially pp. 104-7.

'That's dogmatic.' I said, 'It sure is, but have you realized that it is characteristic of truth to be dogmatic? Truth has to be dogmatic.' I had a teacher who was the most dogmatic, narrow-minded person I've ever met. She insisted that 2 plus 2 = 4. ... Friend, let me say to you that one of the characteristics of truth is its dogmatism."¹

"There is a mistaken idea today that you can come to Him your way. This isn't your universe; it's *His* universe. You and I don't make the rules. *He* makes the rules. And He says that no man comes to Him except through Christ ..."²

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 Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary satisfied the Father—that anyone 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."³

Commenting on how people come to the Father, Westcott wrote the following:

¹McGee, 4:460. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid., 4:676.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 570.

"It does not follow that every one [*sic*] who is guided by Christ is directly conscious of His guidance."¹

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 you have ..." 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 known who Jesus really was, they had also known God. Their knowledge of God virtually amounted to seeing God. John used "knowing God" and "seeing God" synonymously in 1 John as well as here (cf. 1 John 2:3-11; 3:2-3). The phrase translated "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.

Philip's request to see the Father and Jesus' answer 14:8-14

14:8 The Eleven obviously regarded Jesus very highly. Even so, 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 (a visible revelation of the Person of the Father; 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 has ever done (1:14, 18; 12:45; cf. Heb. 1:1-2).

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

¹Westcott, p. 202.

exact representation of the Father (cf. 1:18). God is exactly like Jesus. 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).

"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."¹

This was another clear claim to deity by Jesus.

- 14:10 Jesus repeated again that He and the Father were the same in essence (cf. 5:19; 8:28; 10:30, 38; 12:49). The mutually 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 said everything the Father gave Him to say, and He did everything the Father did (5:19). Besides, 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 besides 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). He had done things that only God can do. What we regard as a miracle was nothing more than a normal act for Jesus.²
- 14:12 Jesus prefaced another startling and important revelation with His customary phrase that John noted often in his Gospel. He re-emphasized the importance of believing what He had revealed about His divine identity by unveiling the startling and

¹Tenney, "John," p. 145.

²For a discussion of Jesus' "works," see Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 607-13.

enormous consequences of believing that He was the divine Messiah.

The interpretation of the same 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 works, 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 had done in the sense that their works would have greater numerical results than His total works had accomplished.¹ 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 the apostolic age, whereas Jesus' personal ministry did not extend much beyond the land of Israel. 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 trump. We should not assume, either, that Jesus meant that these miracles would continue throughout church history like they occurred in the apostolic era. Church history has shown that they died out almost entirely after the apostolic age, and the New Testament, while it did not specifically predict that, implied that they would (1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

¹Barrett, p. 460.

"His position with the Father would be related to the greater works in two ways: answering the prayers of his own, and sending the Paraclete as the unfailing source of wisdom and strength. The works, then, would not be done in independence of Christ. *He* would answer prayer; *he* would send the Spirit."¹

14:13-14 Jesus next extended His promise—beyond enabling His disciples to do greater works—to anything that the disciples might desire. This apparently blank check type of promise has a condition that many often overlook. It is "in my name." It is possible to misunderstand this condition if we think that it simply means making a 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 who is doing business on Jesus' behalf. 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 truly pray "in Jesus' name" and ask for something contrary to God's will. These two acts are mutually contradictory.

"In both cases [Jesus' two promises in verses 13 and 14] prayer 'in the name of Jesus' denotes petition with invocation of his name or appeal to his name; while there are evident differences of nuance, accordingly as prayer is addressed to Jesus or the Father, the fundamental factor is the role of Jesus as mediator between God and his people."²

¹Harrison, p. 1105.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 255.

"... here is direct prayer to Jesus taught as we see it practiced by Stephen in Acts 7:59 and in Rev. 22:20."¹

The purpose of Christians' 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 so that the Father might receive glory from ("be glorified in") the Son.

Jesus repeated this promise, probably because it is so great that it is almost unbelievable (cf. 15:16; 16:23-24). One of John's stylistic characteristics was to restate with only slight variations in order to stress a point. In the case of these prayer promises, the meaning is not significantly different. John clarified this promise in his first epistle, where he wrote 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, and 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 or to the Spirit in the New Testament (e.g., v. 14; Acts 7:59; 9:10). However, these prayers are atypical though obviously not inappropriate.

Jesus' provision to enable obedience 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, but it is also an evidence of love for God. Love for God is the controlling idea in the following verses (vv. 15-21).

"The thought of love follows that of faith (v. 12)."²

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:252.

²Westcott, p. 205.

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).

"To John there is only one test of love, and that test is obedience [cf. 1 John 5:3]. It was by His obedience that Jesus showed His love of God; and it is by our obedience that we must show our love to Jesus."¹

The greatness of our love for God is easy to test. It corresponds exactly to our conformity to all that He has revealed (cf. 1 John 5:3).

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; 16:7-15; 1 John 2:1). The Greek word translated Helper (or Counselor, Advocate, or Intercessor) is *parakletos*. All of these English words have connotations that are absent from the Greek word. "Helper" connotes an inferior, which the Holy Spirit is not. "Counselor" can call to mind a camp counselor or a marriage counselor, whereas a legal counselor is more in harmony with the Greek idea.² "Advocate" may suggest only a limited sphere of help, and "Intercessor" also implies only one type of help.

In secular contexts, *parakletos* often referred to a legal assistant, an advocate, or simply an enabler (e.g., a witness or a representative in court).³ This word conveys the ideas of

¹Barclay, 2:193. See also Charles W. Colson, *Loving God*, p. 40.

²For further study of the term "paraclete," see Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 587-91.

³H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *parakletos*.

helper, strengthener, and consoler.¹ The verbal form of this word, *parakaleo*, literally means "to call alongside" and, therefore, "to encourage" or "to strengthen." Muslims typically believe that Mohammed is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that He would send another helper.

Jesus directly referred to the Trinity, though not by that name, 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). Most non-Christian religions deny the tri-unity of God (e.g., Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others).

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. 51:11). What Jesus spoke of here was an abiding permanent relationship in which the Spirit would remain 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 present age and former dispensations. It is a blessing that few Christians appreciate as they should.

"Since the Spirit has been given and remains forever, it is a misconception to speak of or to pray for a new Pentecost."²

14:17 Jesus now identified the Helper as the Spirit of truth (cf. 15:26; 16:13), that is, the truthful Spirit, who would bear witness to (confirm or corroborate) and communicate the truth (cf. v. 6; 1:32-33; 3:5-8; 4:23-24; 6:63; 7:37-39).³

¹Alford, 1:852.

²Lenski, p. 998.

³Barrett, p. 463.

"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."¹

The unbelieving world cannot receive the Spirit because it cannot see Him and knows nothing of Him experientially. The disciples, on the other hand, knew Him because He empowered Jesus. The Spirit 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 only be with them, but in them as well. 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).² The Spirit also has a ministry to the world, but Jesus explained that later (16:7-11).

14:18-19 Jesus changed the metaphor: from the disciples being without a Helper, to their being orphans without a parent. He would not leave them in this traditionally destitute and vulnerable condition. He would come back 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 the coming of the Spirit is in view. However, the passage seems to present Jesus as offering the disciples His personal presence (cf. v. 23). He had described the coming of the Spirit, but what about His personal return to them (cf. v. 3)? This question, which would have been in the disciples' minds (cf. v. 22), is what Jesus appears to have been addressing here.

Jesus seems to have been referring to a post-resurrection appearance or appearances to these disciples (21:1-14).³ Support for this view is Jesus' assurance that His resurrection

¹Wiersbe, 1:352.

²See Johnstone G. Patrick, "The Promise of the Paraclete," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:508 (October-December 1970):333-45.

³See Lenski, pp. 1001-2.

would be a pledge of their own resurrection (v. 19). Physical resurrections seem to be in view. According to the New Testament, Jesus appeared only to believers after His resurrection.

14:20 Jesus' post-resurrection appearances would convince the Eleven of His deity. Additionally, these appearances would convince them of their permanent union with Jesus by confirming Jesus' promises of their union with Him (vv. 13-14). Jesus expounded both kinds of abiding later (vv. 23-24; ch. 17).

Some interpreters take "that day" as referring to Pentecost.¹ 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. Not only that, obedience results in a more intimate relationship with God, which God's personal love for the believer and His self-disclosure to the believer confirm.

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 results in God expressing His love for that believer without restraint. When there is disobedience, God does not express His love as fully, because He chooses to withhold blessing and/or 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 with Him, and a greater

¹E.g., Tenney, "John," p. 147; and Blum, p. 324.

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).

Judas' question about Jesus' self-disclosure and Jesus' reply 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 He would do (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. 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 had said earlier that He was not going to disclose Himself publicly, but just privately to the Eleven. Judas and his fellow disciples failed to realize that Jesus would reveal Himself to them privately after His resurrection and before He would later reveal Himself publicly at His second coming.

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 with Him that believers could have following Pentecost. In the process, He again stressed His union with the Father.

Jesus had begun this instruction by referring to abiding places ("rooms," Gr. *monai*, plural) that He would prepare for His disciples in heaven (v. 2). He now revealed that He and His Father would first make their dwelling (Gr. *monen*, singular) in believing disciples on the earth. 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."¹

"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."²

14:24 In conclusion, Jesus restated negatively the ethical point that He had made in verses 15 and 23a. 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).

In summary, Jesus revealed that He would depart from the Eleven shortly. He would leave in order to prepare a place for His believing disciples so that they could 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 back to see them before He departed for heaven.

4. Jesus' 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 fully understand His words later.

14:25-26 Jesus had made these revelations to His disciples while He was remaining with them, but when the Holy Spirit came to abide

¹Wiersbe, 1:353. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid..

in them, the Spirit would enable them to understand these revelations.

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' representative and with exactly the same attitude toward God's will that Jesus had). The Son had come as the Father's representative, and soon the Spirit would come as the Son's representative.

The Spirit would teach the disciples all things, which in the context refers to all the things that were presently obscure and about which the various disciples kept raising questions (13:36; 14:5, 8, 22). He would do this partially by bringing to their memories the things that Jesus had said, which 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 and authoritative Teacher of every Christian, and human teachers serve a secondary role (cf. 1 John 2:27).¹ The role of the Scriptures in the process is fundamental, since they contain all that Jesus personally taught and approved.

¹See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, pp. 62-94, for comments on the authority of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of many verses that contain proof that the Holy Spirit is a Person: He teaches.

14:27 The disciples' uneasiness at the prospect of Jesus leaving them without clarifying what they did not yet understand drew out this word of comfort from their Teacher.

"Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, Heb. *shalom*) was a customary word of both greeting and farewell among the Jews. Jesus used it here as a farewell, but He used it the next time as a greeting: after the Resurrection (20:19, 21, 26). Jesus probably meant that He was passing on peace to the Eleven like an inheritance that would secure their composure and dissolve their fears (cf. Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15).

"His peace was a heart untroubled and unfearful in spite of all the suffering and conflict ahead of Him."¹

The world cannot give true peace. That can only come from the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6-7). He is the only source of true personal and social peace. The world cannot provide peace because it fails to correct the fundamental source of strife, namely, the sinful 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 now in the hearts and lives of those who believe on Him and submit to Him through His representative: the indwelling Spirit (v. 26). Later in this discourse, Jesus promised His love (15:9-10) and His joy (15:11), in addition to His peace.

The peace that 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, like Jesus did.

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 447.

"Most of us in the modern world confuse the encouragement of our successes and accomplishments with 'God's peace.'"¹

14:28 Jesus' imminent 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.

"True love for Jesus, which they did not yet possess, would have made the disciples rejoice in his exaltation just as true understanding would have enabled them to see that his departure was for their advantage."²

It should be obvious by now that Jesus did not mean that He was less than God, or an inferior god, when He said that the Father was greater than He was. Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, and other Arians interpret Jesus' words here this way. Arius was a heretic in the early church who denied Jesus' full deity. We know that Jesus was not speaking ontologically (i.e., dealing with His essential being, His nature), 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 relative glory compared to Jesus' glory. Jesus had laid His heavenly glory aside in the Incarnation, but the Father had not done so, and consequently the Father enjoyed greater glory than the Son during Jesus' earthly ministry. However now Jesus was about to return to the Father and to 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.

¹J. Lanier Burns, "John 14:1-27: The Comfort of God's Presence," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:687 (July-September 2015):314.

²Barrett, p. 468.

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)."¹

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 more with the disciples because His passion was imminent. He probably 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 regard to Me" translates a Hebrew idiom and means: Satan has no legal claim on me.

"There was in Christ nothing which the devil could claim as belonging to his sovereignty."²

This is "A notable assertion of sinlessness."³

Satan would have had a justifiable claim on Jesus if Jesus had sinned. Jesus' death was not an indication that Satan had a

¹Tasker, p. 173.

²Westcott, p. 210. See also Henry, p. 1593.

³Dods, 1:828.

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 verse 31 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 in chapters 15—17 as happening somewhere on the way to Gethsemane before Jesus' arrest (cf. 18:1).¹ Blaiklock guessed that the discourse in chapter 15 took place in the Temple courtyard, in view of the giant cluster of grapes that adorned the Temple gateway and Jesus' reference to the grapevine.² However, it seems more probable to many interpreters, including me, 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, which the following three chapters articulate.³ Another view is that when Jesus got up from the table He prefigured His resurrection, and what follows in this discourse deals with post-resurrection realities: "There must be resurrection-life before there can be resurrection-fruit."⁴ Fortunately the time of departure from the upper room is not critical to a correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching.

"As the first part of the discourse ends, Jesus has reassured his disciples that his departure is not a defeat. On the contrary, it will enhance the union that he has with them and allows the provision of the Spirit to guide them into a deeper appreciation of what Jesus taught and did. The explanation helps us

¹E.g., Westcott, p. 211; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:256; McGee, 4:464.

²Blaiklock, p. 433.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, 479.

⁴Pink, 2:393.

understand why John sees the death and resurrection of Jesus as a glorification."¹

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, which would result in their producing much spiritual fruit. He dealt with their relationships to Himself, to one another, and to the world around them in chapter 15. Their responsibilities were to abide, to love, and to testify respectively.

"If in the Discourse recorded in the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel the Godward aspect of Christ's impending departure was explained, in that of the fifteenth chapter the new relation is set forth which was to subsist between Him and His Church. And this ... may be summarized in these three words: Union, Communion, Disunion [i.e., separation from the world]."²

"... the broad distinction between John 14 and 15 is that in the former we have the *grace* of God unfolded; in the latter Christian *responsibility* is pressed."³

"... the theme is no longer coming but abiding."⁴

"Now 'abiding' always has reference to fellowship, and only those who have been born again are capable of having fellowship with the Father and His Son."⁵

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 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;

¹Bock, p. 505.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:519.

³Pink, 3:8.

⁴Barrett, p. 470.

⁵Pink, 2:394.

Hos. 10:1-2). The vine as a symbol of Israel appears on coins of the Maccabees.¹

"Two-leaved doors, with gold plating, and covered by a rich Babylonian curtain of the four colours of the temple ('fine linen, blue, scarlet, and purple'), formed the entrance into the Holy Place [of the Temple]. Above it hung that symbol of Israel, a gigantic vine of pure gold, and made of votive offerings—each cluster the height of a man [cf. Ps. 80:8; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10; Joel 1:7]."²

Here Jesus used the vine metaphorically of Himself. One can hardly escape the inference that Jesus viewed Himself as the ideal Israel. 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.³ However, the differences between them make dispensational theologians conclude that the church only superficially resembles Israel.

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.

"The whole usage of the Lord leads to the belief that the image of the vine was suggested by some external object."⁴

"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."⁵

However, as stated previously, Jesus probably gave this teaching in the upper room.⁶

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 593.

²Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 58.

³Covenant theologians believe that God will fulfill His promises to Israel in the church, whereas dispensational theologians believe that He will fulfill them in Israel.

⁴Westcott, p. 216.

⁵Tenney, "John," p. 150.

⁶Alford, 1:857.

15:1 This is the last of Jesus' "I am" claims in this Gospel.¹ Jesus and His Father occupy different roles in this extended metaphor.

Jesus is the true (Gr. *alethinos*, real, "all that a vine should be in a spiritual sense"²; cf. 1:9; 6:32) vine. Israel's failure to produce fruit, and its consequent impending divine judgment, are in view whenever the vine represents Israel in the Old Testament.³ 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 Israel should (cf. Ps. 80:7-9, 14-17). No vine can produce good fruit unless it is good stock and, of course, Jesus' "stock" was God the Father.

The Father cares for the true vine like a vinedresser (Gr. *georgos*) cultivates his vineyard. The idea of functional subordination within the Godhead appears again here. No vine will produce good fruit unless someone who is competent cares for it. God the Father cared for His Son.

15:2 Jesus earlier taught about the mutually indwelling of believers with Himself (14:20). Therefore it seems clear that Jesus was speaking here of genuine believers such as the Eleven, not simply professing believers.⁴

"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

¹See John C. Hutchinson, "The Vine in John 15 and Old Testament Imagery in the 'I Am' Statements," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:669 (January-March 2011):63-80.

²Harrison, p. 1106.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 513.

⁴Westcott, p. 217. 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.

to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not. A person 'in Me' is always a true Christian."¹

"... his primary thought was of apostate Christians."²

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 may also have some branches that presently bear no fruit but are growing stronger so that they will bear fruit in the future.³ There can be genuine life without fruit in a vine, and there can be in a Christian as well.

No plant produces fruit instantaneously. It takes time for a plant to grow strong enough to bear fruit. The New Testament teaches that God effects many changes in the life of every person who trusts in Jesus for salvation. Lewis Sperry Chafer noted 33 things that happen to a person the moment he or she trusts Jesus Christ as Savior.⁴ Actually there are many more than that. However, these are all invisible changes.

Fruit is what a plant produces that other people can see and benefit from. It is the visible evidence of an inner working power. Jesus probably included every kind of benefit that the Christian demonstrates when He referred to fruit, though some commentators have limited this to evangelistic fruit.⁵

¹Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990):44-53. Cf. Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:448; Beasley-Murray, p. 272.

²Barrett, p. 473.

³Gary 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.

⁴Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65.

⁵E.g., A. B. Bruce, pp. 413, 419.

Thus a true believer who experiences the inner transforming work of the Spirit at conversion may not necessarily give external evidence of 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.

It is also possible for a grapevine to stop bearing fruit as a result of running to leaf, disease, or old age, and still continue to live.¹

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 salvation², or the believer loses his or her reward, and possibly even his or her life, or the opportunity to serve the Lord. 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.³

The second alternative seems better, since in the spring, vinedressers both lift up unfruitful branches and prune (or cleanse, Gr. *kathairo*) fruitful branches of grapevines. Cleansing the branches involves washing off deposits of insects, moss, and other parasites that tend to infest the plants.⁴ Jesus gave this teaching in the spring, when farmers did what He described in this verse.⁵

"Many commentators discuss only one pruning and incorrectly assume that all non-fruit bearing branches are removed and burned at that time. We have demonstrated from both historical and

¹Pink, 2:399.

²E.g., Lenski, p. 1029.

³Pentecost, *The Words ...*, p. 441; *The Nelson ...*, p. 1794.

⁴Pink, 2:400.

⁵See Gary W. Derickson, "Viticulture and John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):34-52.

current cultural practices that such is not the case and only serves to confuse the biblical record and our understanding of the Lord's intended message. The spring pruning actually encouraged the maturation of non-fruit bearing branches so they could bear fruit the following year. The fall pruning excised all of the leafy vegetation and much of the 'brush-wood' (as Pliny termed it), and it was then in the fall of the year that the significant burning occurred to eliminate the woody branches as they prepared the vine for the winter dormant period."¹

Assuming that this is the correct interpretation, Jesus was teaching that the Father gives special support to believers who are not yet bearing fruit.² In viticulture (the cultivation of grapevines), this involves lifting the branch off the ground, so that it will not send secondary roots down into the ground, which would prove counterproductive. 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 and unfruitful.

"Some Christians don't bear fruit. What's the matter with them? They need to have the Son shining on them. When a believer is out of fellowship with God and is occupied with the things of the world, he is not bearing fruit. The husbandman must come along and lift the branch, raising it up and bringing the individual believer back into fellowship in order that he or she might bear fruit."³

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

¹John A Tucker, "The Inevitability of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis of John 15:6 — Part II," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 15:45 (August 2011):52.

²See Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:448-49.

³Mitchell, p. 287.

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 rather 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 sometimes uncomfortable process. The Father's purpose is loving, but the process may be painful.

"Increased fruitfulness is the end of discipline, and to this all care is directed."¹

"The fruit of Christian service is never the result of allowing the natural energies and inclinations to run riot."²

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."³ Similarly, the only reason believers exist on the earth is to bear spiritual fruit that glorifies God.

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 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."⁴

¹Westcott, p. 217.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 594.

³Wiersbe, 1:355.

⁴Tasker, p. 175.

"In chapter 8 [v. 31] we are to abide in the Word. In chapter 14 [v. 23] we are to obey the Word. In this chapter we are cleansed by the Word."¹

15:4 The first sentence in this verse is capable of three different interpretations: First, it may be a conditional statement. In this case, Jesus meant that if His clean (i.e., saved) disciples abide in Him, He will 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 with Him. Rather, He presented our relationship to Him much more realistically, namely, as having a more or less intimate relationship.²

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." Further, 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 abiding 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

¹Mitchell, p. 288.

²See also Ironside, p. 654.

imperative in the first clause of the sentence argues against a mutual exhortation. It puts the emphasis primarily on the believer's responsibility.

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 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.

"The great prerequisite for fruit bearing is abiding."¹

"Dwell in God brethren; not sometimes go to Him, but abide in Him."²

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). Some interpreters have imported that meaning into this verse.³ Unfortunately the NASB, NIV, TNIV, NET2, and HCSB translators rendered *meno* "Remain," which implies saving faith. Even worse is the CEV translation "Stay joined." However, Jesus also used *meno* to describe the intimate relationship that those who have exercised saving faith in Christ need to cultivate with God (8:31). The AV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, and ESV translate *meno* as "abide." The NEB translation is "Dwell." 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")

¹Mitchell, p. 289.

²C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, p. 52.

³E.g., Blum, p. 325.

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."¹

"If I were asked what is the sweetest frame within the whole compass of human feeling, I should not speak of a sense of power in prayer, or abundant revelation, or rapturous joys, or conquest of evil spirits; but I should mention, as the most exquisite delight of my being, a condition of conscious dependence upon God."²

"Dependence upon God is the flowing fountain of success."³

Some interpreters have concluded that Jesus meant that His disciples should abide in His teaching; they should not depart from it.⁴ However, "Abide in Me" seems to be more inclusive than just remaining orthodox, in view of the context, though abiding in Him would certainly include doctrinal fidelity.

Reformed theologians usually interpret abiding in the sense of being saved, as Reformed scholar Anthony A. Hoekema wrote:

"The Heidelberg Catechism, one of the best-known Reformed creeds, expresses this truth as follows: 'It is impossible for those grafted into Christ by true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude' (Answer 64)."⁵

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 516.

²Spurgeon, p. 182.

³*Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴E.g., A. B. Bruce, p. 414.

⁵Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective" in *Five Views on Sanctification*, p. 66.

This statement seems to contradict the exhortations in this context that disciples should continue to abide in Christ and so bear much fruit. If abiding means simply being saved, and being saved makes fruit-bearing inevitable, why did Jesus say "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit" (v. 2)? Evidently it is possible to be "in Christ" (be saved) and not bear fruit.

15:5 Jesus continued to stress the importance of believers abiding in Him (i.e., cultivating intimacy through loving obedience, 14:23; 15:10) in order to bear much fruit. The negative alternative highlights 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 a tree to give it 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).

"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."¹

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, as some do.² 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. This is an example of allowing theology to determine exegesis, rather than allowing exegesis to determine theology. Jesus was speaking, in this context, of abiding and non-abiding believing disciples. He 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.³ 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 could 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.⁴

¹Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 118.

²E.g., Gaebelein, *The Annotated ...*, 3:1:229.

³Derickson, "Viticulture and ...," pp. 50-51.

⁴E.g., Lenski, p. 1040.

"Since the subject is the bearing of fruit and not eternal life, the burning is a judgment upon fruitlessness, not an abandonment to eternal destruction."¹

Others, secondly, believe Jesus implied that believers who do not abide in Christ will suffer the loss of gifts and opportunities that they failed to use (cf. Matt. 5:13; Luke 8:18; 2 John 8). Others, thirdly, believe that they will lose some reward at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15, where fire appears in connection with the judgment of believers; 2 Cor. 5:10). Fire is a common symbol that occurs throughout Scripture to describe the judgment of both believers and unbelievers (cf. Gen. 19:24-26; Num. 11:1; Isa. 9:19; Ezek. 15:1-8; et al.).

Still others, fourthly, think the mention of fire is only incidental, since vinedressers burned the branches they cut off in the fall pruning. They believe Jesus' point was that some Christians are as useless to God as these branches were to vine-growers. The point is their uselessness, according to this view, 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 know many who have been set aside today because they were no longer effective for God. ... Sometimes this removing from the place of fruit-bearing is by death, physical death."²

I prefer view four (fire is incidental), but I concede that view two (loss of opportunity) or view three (loss of reward) may be correct. All interpreters believe that Jesus mentioned this pruning in order to encourage His disciples to abide in Him. If they did they would bear much fruit.³

15:7 Here the second use of "abide" is obviously in view, namely, its use as a synonym for fellowship rather than salvation. Jesus

¹Harrison, p. 1107.

²McGee, 4:466. Paragraph division omitted.

³See also John A. Tucker, "The Inevitability of Fruitbearing: An Exegesis of John 15:6 — Part I," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 15:44 (April 2011):51-68.

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 that any disciple may make. Really it is a blanket promise to grant any request that an abiding disciple may make. An abiding disciple will ask for only those things that are in harmony with, or subject to, God's will—like 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.

"This astounding command and promise ... is not without conditions and limitations. It involves such intimate union and harmony with Christ that nothing will be asked out of accord with the mind of Christ and so of the Father."¹

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).² 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."³

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:259.

²See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 175-76.

³Tenney, "John," p. 152. See Helen E. Bingham, *An Irish Saint: The Life Story of Ann Preston ("Holy Ann")*, for an example of this truth worked out in the life of a believer.

15:8 The granting of petitions to abiding believers glorifies the Father, as does bearing much fruit (cf. Mark 4:20). 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.

"There are four relationships that need to be distinguished. Life *in* Christ is salvation. Life *with* Christ is fellowship. Life *by* Christ is fruit-bearing. Life *for* Christ is service. The 'fruit' is Christ manifested through us."¹

"The Father is glorified in the Son—in his obedience and perfect accomplishment of his work. It is therefore but a short step to see the glorification of the Father in the obedience and fruitfulness of those who are united to the Son."²

Fruit-bearing demonstrates that a believer is one of Jesus' disciples, as does continuance in Jesus' word (8:31-32) and love for fellow disciples (13:35; 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 outward evidence of being a believer in 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 a disciple really does possess eternal life.

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 of that verse Jesus was talking about false teachers, not all believers.

¹Pink, 3:14.

²Barrett, p. 475.

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). We observed the same pattern in Jesus' teaching about the good shepherd in chapter 10. 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 (model) 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: to abide in His love by keeping His commandments.

"Alas, how many err on this point. We are living in an age wherein lawlessness abounds. Insubordination is rife on every hand. In many a place even professing Christians will no longer tolerate the word 'commandments.' Those who would urge the duty of obedience to the Lord, are regarded as enemies of the faith, seeking to bring Christians into bondage. Satan is very subtle, but we are not ignorant of his devices. He seeks to persuade sinners that they *must* keep God's commandments in order to be saved. He tries to make saints believe that they *must not* keep God's commandment, otherwise they will be putting themselves 'under law,' beneath a yoke grievous to be borne. But let these specious [misleading] lies of the Devil be tested by Scripture, and their falsity will soon appear [cf.

13:34; 14:15; Matt. 28:20; Rom. 7:22-25; 13:10; 1 Cor. 9:21]."¹

15:11 The disciple's faithfulness is the product of loving obedience, and 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).²

"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)."³

McGee described the results of abiding in Christ, in verses 7, 8, and 11, as being "prayer effectual," "fruit perpetual," and "joy celestial," respectively.⁴

15:12 Jesus summarized His teaching with the command to love one another, just 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.

¹Pink, 3:15.

²See Matt Searles, "'These Things I Have Said to You': An Investigation of How Purpose Clauses Govern the Interpretation of John 14—16," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:3 (September 2017):511-24.

³Wiersbe, 1:355.

⁴McGee, 4:466.

"Though He does not say it in so many words, He [Jesus] evidently means the disciples to understand that abiding in each other by love is just as necessary to their success as their common abiding in Him by faith. Division, party strife, jealousy, will be simply fatal to their influence, and to the cause they represent."¹

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 to obey but also His example to follow.

Actually Jesus did more than lay down His life for His friends. He even died for His enemies (cf. Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 5:8-10)! However, in the context of this audience, His statement was true on its own. The most a person can do for a friend is to die for him or her.

15:14-15 "Friend" is another relative term like "abiding" and "fellowship." A person can be a casual friend, a close friend, or an intimate friend, depending on his or her love and loyalty. All believers are God's friends in one sense, but abiding believers are His special friends on a deeper level, because they seek to obey Him consistently (cf. Ps. 25:14).

"Are we doing what Jesus has commanded us to do? Obedience is essential to abiding."²

A good slave (Gr. *doulos*) also obeys his master. What then is the difference between a slave of God and an intimate friend of God? Jesus proved to His disciples that they were His friends as well as His slaves, but He pointed out that a master shares his plans with his friends but not with his slaves. He had told them what was coming and thereby was treating them as His friends. Abraham and Moses, the only Old Testament

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 423.

²McGee, 4:467.

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). Jesus also referred to Lazarus as "Our friend" (11:11).

"The friends of the king were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him, and who had the right to come to him at any time."¹

Slaves customarily receive orders without any explanations or reasons for their orders. One of the differences between friends and slaves is the degree of intimacy that they share with their Master. Jesus raised His disciples from the level of being used as tools to the position of being full 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 that 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.² 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 to attach themselves to him or her.

¹Barclay, 2:208.

²See Timothy S. Yoder, "Aristotle and C. S. Lewis on the Moral Significance of Friendship," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176:702 (April-June 2019):203-21.

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).

"Though ministers make that holy calling their own choice, Christ's choice is prior to theirs and directs and determines it."¹

"All that the elders or others can do is to recognize what God has done already."²

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 (cf. James 4:2).

In the Greek text there are two purpose clauses each introduced by *hina*: "that you would go and bear fruit," and "that whatever you ask of the Father in My name 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."³

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

¹Henry, p. 1595.

²Ironside, p. 672.

³Bailey, "John," p. 186.

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 [15:17-27] will take us to the battlefield where we experience the hatred of the lost world."¹

"He [Jesus] had just declared that His disciples are His *friends*; now He turns to describe His and their *enemies*. He had set before the apostles the proofs of His *love* for them; now He warns them of the world's *hatred*."²

15:17 Again Jesus repeated the absolute importance of His disciples loving one another (cf. 13:34; 15:10, 12, 14; Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:2-3, 32; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8). This was not only a repetition for emphasis, but it set the stage for Jesus' teaching on the world's opposition that follows.

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 generally. The conditional sentence in the Greek text ("If the world hates you ...") 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., an 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 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.

"It is as truly the nature of the world to hate as it is the nature of the Christians to love. Because the Christians are in Christ, hatred of them is hatred

¹Wiersbe, 1:359.

²Pink, 3:25.

of Christ, and hatred of Christ is hatred of the Father who sent him. The unpopularity of Christians in the world is due ultimately to the attitude of the world to God."¹

"The inexperienced Christian supposes that the hatred of the world against him is a reproach. He thinks that he is to blame for it. He imagines that if only he were kinder, more gentle, more humble, more Christlike, the enmity of unbelievers would be overcome. This is a great mistake. The truth is, the more Christlike we are the more shall we be antagonized and shunned. The most conclusive proof of this is found in the treatment which our blessed Saviour received when He was in the world."²

15:19 Believers are aliens in and not of the world because Jesus has called them to fulfill His plans and purposes, rather than simply living for themselves (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). The world does not hate believers because they are superior, but because they are servants of the Lord whom it has rejected.

15:20 Jesus reminded the disciples of the principle that He had mentioned ("a slave is not greater than his master") when He washed their feet (13:16). At that time 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 would treat the servants' master. 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 (e.g., NEB). Some in the world did indeed

¹Barrett, p. 479.

²Pink, 3:26-27.

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 hinge on who He is, not on who the witnesses are. Obviously we can aggravate and provoke persecution by our inept or sinful conduct, but Jesus was explaining the basic theological reason for the opposition that 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 rightly evaluate the Messenger whom God had sent. Jesus stated that the haters would also reject His disciples, because they likewise would not know God, who was sending 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 by 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 Jesus' words and works constituted rejection of God the Father. To hate Jesus amounted to hating God. This is another strong implication of Jesus' deity.

"Men cannot treat the Father in one way and the Son in another."¹

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

¹Harrison, p. 1108.

Psalm 69:4. David experienced hatred for no reason. How much more would the Son of David experience it.

"In many ways, the remark of John 15:24 summarizes the book of signs [chs. 2—12] in John's Gospel."¹

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 when He came on the day of Pentecost. After that, the disciples would also testify, similarly empowered by the same Spirit. The basis of their testimony would be their long association with, and their 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 crux of the conflict would continue to be who Jesus was.

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 proceeded from the Father (cf. 14:26).² It refers to all three members of the Trinity, and it reveals something of their functional relationships to one another. "The beginning" is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, when the disciples first accompanied Him.

"The use of the latter preposition (*para*) in this place seems therefore to shew [*sic*] decisively that the reference here is to the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit, and not to the eternal Procession."³

¹Bock, p. 510.

²See 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.

³Westcott, p. 225.

7. The clarification of the future 16:1-24

Jesus proceeded to review things that He had just told His disciples, but He also now gave them more information. 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, specifically the new relationships that would arise as a result of His departure.

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. This is also the method that John employed in writing his first epistle.

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 and fall) in their discipleship after His departure, when the events that followed might take them completely by surprise (cf. Matt. 5:10-12). Even though they did not understand everything that Jesus told them immediately, they would remember these things and understand them more fully later (cf. 14:20, 25-26).

"The word 'offended' ["be led into sin"] presents the idea of stumbling because of an obstacle in the path rather than because of an inner tendency to defection."¹

¹Harrison, p. 1109.

"The greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy."¹

Apostasy, from the Greek *apostasis*, meaning "to stand away from," is a word that sometimes 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).

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 would come from the Jews, because most of them were themselves Jews (Acts 2:11, 14, 22).

"No man could hate like a religious Jew of the apostolic age: he was renowned for his diabolic capacity of hating. Even a Roman historian, Tacitus, commemorates the 'hostile odium' of the Jewish race against all mankind ..."²

Unfortunately, Christians have persecuted the Jews too. Jesus also hinted that some of His disciples would die as martyrs (cf. Acts 7:59; 9:1-4; 12:2). Church history indicates that all the Eleven were martyred, though there is some division of opinion about the death of John. Worse yet, those who would kill the disciples would not do so believing themselves to be criminals, or that they were guilty for taking their lives, but thinking that

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 530.

²A. B. Bruce, p. 429.

they were glorifying God by doing so (cf. 12:10; Acts 9:1-2; 22:5, 19; 26:9-11).

"The world that is most opposed to Christ, Antichrist itself, is to be found not in heathendom, but in Christendom; not among the irreligious and the skeptical, but among those who account themselves the peculiar people of God."¹

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).

16:3 The opponents of the disciples would persecute them because they had not come to know the Father or the Son. Theirs would be a sin of blameworthy ignorance.

16:4 "Their hour" 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 His 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 actually strengthen their faith in Jesus, rather than weakening it.

Jesus had not revealed the extent of the opposition that His disciples would face earlier, because He was with them, and because He had been 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.

¹Ibid. "Christendom" refers to the group that is comprised of all those who claim to be Christians, whether they are genuine believers or only professing Christians.

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 now had little interest in where He was going. What concerned them was the sorrow that His departure produced in them. Peter and Thomas had previously asked Jesus where He was going (13:36; 14:5), but Jesus evidently had not regarded those questions as expressing genuine interest in Himself but in themselves. He apparently regarded them as superficial protests against His departure.¹

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 ("the Helper") 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 the Spirit's 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 the land of Israel hearing His teachings firsthand and seeing 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.

"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

¹C. H. Dodd, pp. 411-13, n. 1; Beasley-Murray, p. 279.

building, seeking to win the lost. The Holy Spirit works through the people in whom He lives."¹

16:8 The Spirit's coming would result in heightened conviction among unbelievers concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.² Note the tenses implied in these nouns: past sin, present righteousness, and future judgment. Before Pentecost 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. *elegxei*) 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.³

"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 seems to have been derived from the use of the term in extrabiblical literature, whereas the biblical writers used *elegxo* primarily to describe correction, not prosecution or conviction."⁴

Wherever the Greek preposition *peri* ("regarding") occurs after *elegxei* ("convict"), as it does 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

¹Wiersbe, 1:362.

²See Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:218-21; and 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.

³Cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*elenchos*," by F. Büchsel, 2(1964):473-74.

⁴Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):208. For the legal idea, see Paul Enns, "The Upper Room Discourse: The Consummation of Christ's Instruction" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 296-97; or Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, pp. 564-65.

of guilt before God upon them (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Ps. 51:4).¹ This sense of guilt is an indispensable prerequisite for salvation.

The title *paraclete* (i.e., one called alongside to help, cf. 15:26) is an appropriate one for the Holy Spirit. He acts like a prosecuting attorney by pointing to the guilt of those whom Jesus accused with His teaching. Earlier Jesus had spoken of the Helper 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" (Gr. *hoti*) in this verse and the following two verses. Was Jesus identifying the cause for the conviction in each case, or was He identifying the specific subject of conviction? Normally *hoti* introduces a causal clause and that is evidently what Jesus intended here. However, He could have meant both things.² This may be another instance of a 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 that they will believe in Jesus. He may convict them of the individual sins that 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.

"The man today, whoever he is, if he is rejecting Jesus Christ, is, in the sight of God, the greatest sinner."³

¹Tenney, "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.

²Alford, 1:867.

³McGee, 4:473.

"A court can convict a man of murder, but only the Spirit can convict him of unbelief."¹

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 right conduct and standing before God. The world does not have that. Righteousness also can refer to the righteousness that people profess to have, which 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 filthy 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 false 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—through crucifixion and death—with the result that His disciples would see Him no longer. Jesus had convicted those whom 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.

Jesus' reference to the disciples' future inability to see Him (His absence) implies the need for them to become the instruments through whom the Spirit would exercise this ministry. Furthermore, Jesus' ascension would testify 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, which 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

¹Tenney, "John," p. 157.

would be compelling proofs that would change the minds of many.

The Spirit would do this because God had already judged Satan (by divine decree in heaven) and would soon judge him on earth at the Cross (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."¹

The explanation of verses 8 through 11 above is based on the belief that Jesus meant that the Spirit would do a subjective work of convicting the hearts of unbelievers. However, some interpreters have concluded that Jesus was referring to the objective conviction that the Spirit's presence after Pentecost would produce.² They believe that these verses do not describe what the Spirit does, but the consequences of His being present. If the world had not sinned by rejecting Jesus, the Spirit would not have come. It is the Spirit's presence on the earth that establishes Christ's righteousness, the evidence of which is that Christ has gone to the Father. And the Spirit's presence testifies to the judgment of the "ruler of this world," since the Spirit would not be here if Christ had not judged Satan and the world on the Cross and then ascended to heaven. I do not prefer this explanation. Verses 8 through 11 seem to describe the Spirit's subjective ministry to

¹Wiersbe, 1:362.

²E.g., Pink, 3:50-54.

unbelievers, and verse 13 describes His subjective ministry to believers.

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 that the Spirit is completely equal 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 teaching and the Spirit's teaching was the Father.

Specifically, the Spirit would reveal things still future ("what is to come"). While this revelation would include yet unknown facts about the future, the expression covers all that would be ahead for the disciples following Jesus' separation from them. This would include the full significance of Jesus' passion (cf. 14:26) as well as all the revelation now contained in the New Testament.¹

"The promise must therefore refer to the main features of the new Christian dispensation. The Spirit would guide them to that new economy in which they would no longer have the visible example and help and counsel of their Master. It is not a promise that they should be able to predict the future."²

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 actually be taking what the Father had given the Son to teach

¹See Harrison, p. 1110.

²Dods, 1:836.

and do and explain 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."¹

Many of the later New Testament writings, written by some of these same apostles plus others, expounded on the teachings of Jesus.

Notice that it is not the Spirit's function to attract attention to Himself or to promote Himself. As with 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.

"I listened to a man on a radio program saying, 'We are having a Holy Ghost revival; the Holy Ghost is working; the Holy Ghost is doing this and that.' The minute he said all those things, I knew the Holy Ghost was not working. Why? Because the Lord Jesus made it very clear that the Holy Ghost will not speak of Himself. Then how can you tell when the Holy Spirit is working? He will glorify Christ. My friend, when in a meeting or a Bible study you suddenly get a glimpse of the Lord Jesus and He becomes wonderful, very real, and meaningful to you, that is the working of the Holy Spirit."²

To summarize, 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).

¹Blum, p. 328.

²McGee, 4:474.

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 first to His imminent departure in death and second to 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 long. 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.

Another view is that Jesus was using "see" in two different ways in this verse. In the first case, He meant "see" in the physical sense, and in the second, He meant "see" in the spiritual sense.¹

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 saying that He was leaving (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"?

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 emphatic declaration indicated.

Jesus' departure would mean great sorrow for His disciples but great joy for the world. This was the situation when Jesus died on the cross. Later the disciples' grief would turn to joy. This

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 437.

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 the time of 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 anguish.

16:22 Jesus applied the illustration to His disciples. Their grief 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 that they would encounter (cf. Isa. 66:14).

16:23 The context indicates that the day in view ("that day") is the time when the disciples' joy had become full (v. 24). That would be after Jesus' resurrection and ascension (cf. Luke 24:50-53). 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 (cf. Acts 1:14).

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 with no great distinction in mind.

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 access that Jesus now provided for them to the Father would assure an even warmer response to their prayers than Old Testament saints received.

"They had not yet realized that it was through Christ and on the lines of His work all God's activity towards man and all man's prayer to God were to proceed."¹

Jesus urged His disciples a second time 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).

"The joy the world gives is at the mercy of the world. The joy which Christ gives is independent of anything the world can do."²

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" 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,

¹Dods, 1:838.

²Barclay, 2:232.

cryptically. The Greek phrase *en paroimias* ("in figures of speech") 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 in order 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 following His 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 yet ready to understand some things.

16:26-27 After Jesus' ascension, the disciples would ask the Father in Jesus' name (cf. 14:13-14, 26; 16:23-24). The Father would grant their request—particularly for understanding of Jesus' former teachings—because the Father loved them in a special sense, because they had loved His Son and had believed on Jesus. This was 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, in addition to 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 "The promise of plain speech is now adumbrated [reported] in a terse utterance which is at once a summary of Johannine Christology and the heart of this Gospel."¹

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' entire mission from the Incarnation to the Ascension.

"No phrase could express more completely unity of essence than the true original of these words (*exelthon ek* ["I came forth from"])."²

16:29-30 The disciples now felt that Jesus had plainly answered their questions about where He was going (cf. v. 19). This revelation helped them to believe ("know") that Jesus knew what He was talking about ("You know all things") when He taught them about God and His ways. It also helped them to 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 may have thought they did. Jesus had just told them that they would not fully understand His meaning 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."³

16:31-32 Jesus questioned the assertion that the disciples now fully believed because of what He had just explained: "Do you now believe?" 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

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 287.

²Westcott, p. 235.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 631.

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 ("now here") because Judas was even then planning with the religious leaders for His arrest. Jesus' confidence in His Father comes through in that He found consolation in the strong hope 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 in a sense abandoned Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). However, that too was only temporary. The Father remained with Jesus throughout all His trials, and only judged Him when He judged sin, which Jesus took on Himself as our Substitute (2 Cor. 5:21) while on the cross.

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 alludes back to the vine-and-branches intimacy that Jesus revealed in chapter 15.

The disciples' relationship with the world would result in turmoil ("tribulation") because of the opposition that would come against 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 ("I have overcome") the world on the cross, namely, through His death (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" 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 and to and through believers 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. Despite this, it is still possible for us to be more peaceful than distressed as we appropriate and believe the promise that Jesus has already won the victory (v. 11; cf. Rom. 8:37).

"... if Jesus had not foretold the weakness of the disciples, when they realized afterwards how they had failed Him and forsaken Him and abandoned Him, it might well have driven them to utter and absolute despair. But He warned them before it happened."¹

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 through 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.²

¹Barclay, 2:237-38.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 551.

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,¹ though He may have prayed it somewhere else in Jerusalem. Westcott believed that He prayed it in the temple court.²

"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."³

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."⁴

John Mitchell identified the key words in the three sections that follow as glory (vv. 1-5), kept (vv. 6-19, and one (vv. 20-26). He also noted four great doctrines in this chapter: salvation (vv. 1-5), preservation (vv. 11-16), sanctification (vv. 17-19), and glorification (vv. 20-26).⁵

1. Jesus' requests for Himself 17:1-5

17:1 "Jesus spoke these things" (Gr. *tauta elalesen Iesous*) clearly connects what follows with what Jesus had just been saying

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:513; Alford, 1:874.

²Westcott, p. 237.

³Wiersbe, 1:367.

⁴Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 634.

⁵Mitchell, p. 322.

to His disciples (cf. 14:25; 16:1, 4, 25, 33). The disciples heard what Jesus prayed.¹ Raising 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). This posture symbolized Jesus' elevation of His heart to God, His reverence for God, and His confidence in God.² Perhaps John also included the detail of Jesus raising His eyes toward heaven in order to help the reader visualize His continuing submission to His Father.

"Jesus utters this prayer aloud for the simple reason that he wants his disciples to hear his communication with the Father."³

The title Father was, of course, Jesus' common way of referring to God's relationship to Himself and His affection for God (11:41; 12:27; cf. vv. 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). "The hour" in view was the hour (the time for) 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 this imminent 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."⁴

Jesus asked His Father to glorify Him so that He could glorify the Father. To glorify in this context means to clothe in splendor (cf. v. 5). The only way that this could happen was for Jesus to endure the Cross. Thus this petition—the only personal petition in this prayer—is a testimony to Jesus' commitment to do the Father's will, even to the point of dying on the cross. His request for glory, therefore, was unselfish. It amounted to a request for the reversal of the conditions, of

¹Dods, 1:840.

²Pink, 3:93-94.

³Lenski, p. 1114.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 554-5.

lost and fallen humanity, 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.

More immediately, the Father glorified the Son in several ways: by sending an angel to strengthen Him in Gethsemane, through Pilate's testimony as to Jesus' innocence, the salvation of the thief on the cross, the tearing of the temple veil, and the confession of the centurion that Jesus was the Son of God.¹

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 five times in this prayer as those whom the Father had given Him (vv. 2, 6 [twice], 9, 24).

17:3 Jesus proceeded to define the essence of eternal life. Eternal life is essentially to know (Gr. *ginoskosin*, cf. Gen. 4:1 LXX; Matt. 1:25) God experientially through faith in Jesus Christ, His Son (cf. 3:5; Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14; Heb. 8:11).

"What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of [not about] God. ... What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God."²

"What, then, does the activity of knowing God involve? ... knowing God involves, first, listening to God's word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second,

¹Pink, 3:97.

²Packer, p. 29. Cf. Jer. 9:23-24; Hos. 6:6; Phil. 3:10.

noting God's nature and character, as His word and works reveal it; third, accepting His invitations, and doing what He commands; fourth, recognising [*sic*], and rejoicing in, the love that He has shown in thus approaching one and drawing one into this divine fellowship."¹

This is "the great New Testament definition of eternal life."² Jesus described eternal life 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."³

Jesus described the Father here as "the only true God." This does not mean that Jesus was acknowledging that the Father was God and that He (Jesus) was not God, which Unitarians believe. Rather it means that Jesus was acknowledging that there is only one true God in contrast to the many idols and so-called gods. Jesus had claimed equality with the Father many times earlier in his earthly ministry (e.g., 10:30, 38; et al.).

¹Ibid., p. 32.

²Barclay, 2:243.

³Tenney, "John," p. 162.

God is knowable 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 it introduces us into a different quality of living.¹

"It is worthy of note that this is the *only* place in the New Testament where our Lord called Himself 'Jesus Christ.' In so doing He affirmed that He, *Jesus* the Son of man, and Son of God was the only true *Christ* (Messiah): thereby He repudiated every false notion of the Messiah, as in the previous clause He had excluded every false god [cf. 1 John 5:1]."²

Another view is that the use of the name Jesus Christ here indicates that John was giving the substance of what the Lord prayed in his own words in this chapter.³

17:4-5 Jesus had glorified the Father by all that He had done in His incarnation. He had accomplished the work that the Father had given Him to do (cf. Luke 2:49; Heb. 10:7; John 19:30). Jesus probably was including His death, resurrection, and ascension, to which He referred proleptically (in advance) here (cf. 19:30). Jesus' crucifixion was a foregone certainty because of His commitment to do the Father's will (Phil. 2:8).

"There is only one way to glorify God, and that is to obey God."⁴

Now Jesus 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 of heavenly glory in which He existed with His Father before His incarnation and before the world existed.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 637.

²Pink, 3:103.

³Dods, 1:841.

⁴Barclay, 2:241.

This request presupposes Jesus' preexistence with the Father and His equality with the Father (10:30). Really Jesus requested His own re-glorification: a return to His original status with all the authority, powers, splendor, and privileges of deity. But more may be involved in this glorification:

"The glory of Christ, and of the Father in Christ, was to be realized by the continuance and completion of that which He had begun in men."¹

2. Jesus' requests for the Eleven 17:6-19

Jesus' glorification depended on the well-being 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 He expressed the reasons that 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)."²

Most of all, in view of their weaknesses, His disciples 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 the men whom God had given to Him out of the world (cf. 6:37; 15:19; Ps. 22:22), not as those who had chosen to follow Him. This viewpoint accounts for Jesus' confidence as He anticipated their future. They had belonged to God ("were Yours"), so the Father could give them to the Son, and God would therefore protect them. Jesus had

¹Westcott, p. 241.

²Blum, p. 331.

revealed God to them. The name of God summarizes everything about Him (cf. Exod. 3:13-15; Isa. 52:6). Revealing the name of God to people means revealing His essential nature to them. The Eleven had followed 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 Jesus' utterances (Gr. *rhemata*) were God's words. Commendably, they accepted ("received") Jesus' teachings even though they did not understand them fully, and what they did understand 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 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."¹

"It is one of the most uplifting things in the world to think that Jesus put His trust and confidence in men like ourselves. We too must never be daunted by human weakness or by the small beginning. We too must go forward with Jesus' confident belief in God and in men. If we believe in God and in men we will never be pessimists, because with these two beliefs the possibilities of life are infinite."²

17:9-10 Because the Eleven had believed on Him, Jesus made His request for them, not for the world, at this point. Jesus did not pray for the world, because the world has set itself outside the purposes of God.³

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 641.

²Barclay, 2:249.

³Barrett, p. 506.

Elsewhere Jesus did pray for the world (i.e., unbelievers; Luke 23:34), but in this instance Jesus prayed specifically for his believing disciples. The basis for Jesus' 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's concern. This is another claim of equality with the Father. Jesus had been glorified through the faith of the Eleven, but He received no glory 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 ("I am no longer going to be in the world") and return to the Father ("I am coming to You"). They needed the Father's added grace because they would no longer have the Son's encouraging presence with them as they continued to live 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 it is a reminder of both aspects of God's nature. It balances the aspects of ultimate purity with intimate paternity and so prepares for what lies ahead for the disciples, namely, the need for loving sanctification (vv. 17-19). The Father's holiness also serves as a model for the loving 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 His 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).¹ However, the Greek 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.² Some commentators argued that both ideas were in Jesus' mind.³ The context favors the second view. Loyalty

¹F. F. Bruce, p. 332.

²Lindars, p. 524.

³E.g., Brown, 2:759.

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 purpose of God in 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, if they remained loyal to Jesus' revelations. Though not stated here, the Scriptures are the basis for the unity of believers with one another and with God.

"It is sometimes said that this prayer of our Lord's has not been answered, because Christians are so scattered and divided. This, however, is not true. The unity of which He here speaks is the unity of life—family unity; and all believers are one in this sense."¹

17:12 Jesus had kept these disciples loyal to God, and He had guarded them from external attacks while He was with them. The only exception was Judas Iscariot, who was 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 rather it proved Scripture trustworthy. Jesus did not include Judas in His requests for the Eleven.

The term son of destruction (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 destructive character, and he would end in destruction. But the second idea seems to be stronger in the context. Destruction in the New Testament usually refers to eschatological damnation (cf. Matt. 7:13; Acts 8:20; Rom.

¹Ironside, p. 752.

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 destruction occurs with regard to 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). The Antichrist will appear and carry out his work during the Tribulation, which 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 so that they might share the fullness of His joy after He had departed from them (cf. 15:11; 16:22, 24).

"It is blessed to mark how solicitous the Saviour was over the happiness of His people. ... A miserable Christian is therefore a self-contradiction. A joyless Christian is one who is out of communion with the Father: other objects have engaged his heart, and in consequence he walks not in the light of His countenance. What is the remedy? To confess our sins to God; to put away everything which hinders our communion with Him; to make regular use of the means which He has graciously provided for the maintenance of our joy—the word, prayer, meditation, the daily occupation of the heart with Christ, dwelling constantly on the glorious future that awaits us, proclaiming to others the unsearchable riches of Christ."¹

"Now I am coming to You" may mean: Now I am addressing You in prayer. So perhaps both thoughts were in Jesus' mind.²

¹Pink, 3:128.

²Ibid., 3:126.

I tend to prefer the first explanation because of what Jesus proceeded to pray.

17:14 The revelations and teachings that Jesus had given the Eleven would be the basis for their remaining loyal, safe, and joyful even though the world hated them—because they were no longer of the world just as the world hated Jesus because He was not of the world. The idea is not so much that the disciples' outlook was different from the world's but that their origin and character were different because they had believed in Jesus.¹ 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 mind (cf. 11:42).

17:15-16 Jesus was not asking the Father to remove the Eleven from the hostile world even though He was about to leave it. He was petitioning the Father to keep them loyal to Himself while they continued to live in it. Jesus repeated the thought of verse 14b in verse 16 in order to reiterate the disciples' essential distinction from the world. It was, therefore, protection from the evil (Gr. *ek tou pōnerou*) 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). However, both ideas may have been in Jesus' mind.² Even though Satan now stands condemned, he still rules the world by his influence and deception (1 John 5:19).

Throughout church history Christians have sought relief from the world's hatred by withdrawing from it in various 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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 646.

²Pink, 3:131.

remain loyal to God while actively serving as His ambassadors to the unsaved in a fallen world. Our sense of mission and our sense of identity should override our desire for comfort.

"It was Jesus' insistence that it was in the hurly-burly and the rough and tumble of life that a man must live out his Christianity."¹

"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."²

"Three of the only prayers *not* granted to saints, recorded in Scripture, are the prayers, of Moses, Elijah, Jonah *to be* 'taken out of the world.'³

The request for sanctification 17:17-19

17:17 To sanctify (Gr. *hagiazō*) 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.⁴ 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). That "word" 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 word of God is not only 'true,' but 'truth,' and has a transforming virtue."⁵

The way that Jesus asked the Father to sanctify the disciples was by using His word. This means that it is essential for

¹Barclay, 2:252.

²Blum, pp. 332-3.

³Bishop Ryle, quoted by Pink, 3:130-31.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 566.

⁵Westcott, p. 245.

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 rules it, and the lies that he propagates throughout the deceived world.

"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."¹

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.

"Christianity was never meant to withdraw a man from life; it was meant to equip him better for life. Christianity does not offer us release from problems; it offers us a way to solve our problems. Christianity does not offer us an easy peace; it offers us a triumphant warfare. Christianity does not offer us a life in which troubles are escaped and evaded; it offers us a life in which troubles are faced and conquered. ... The Christian must never desire to abandon the world; he must always desire to win the world."²

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

¹Wiersbe, 1:370.

²Barclay, 2:252.

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 that they could achieve their mission, just as the Eleven needed sanctification.

17:19 Jesus did not mean that He intended to make Himself more holy than He already was, since that 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, in order 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 ("their word").

"As parents provide for their children's children yet unborn, so did the Lord Jesus remember future believers, as well as those of the first generation."¹

¹Pink, 3:142.

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 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: "that they also may be in Us" (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, that is, that Jesus is 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."¹

This verse is a favorite of promoters of the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement seeks to unite the world's Christian churches in one all-embracing church. However, as the content and context of this verse clarify,

¹Tenney, "Topics from ...," p. 46.

Jesus was not speaking about institutional unity but personal unity among genuine believers (cf. Eph. 2:15). 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. 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 that they share in unity with one another, which the Father and the Son also share with one another. Another view is that the glory in view here 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 ("know") 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 like the Father indwelt Him ("I in them and You in Me"). 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 ("see," 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 ("My glory ... before the foundation of the world"). His humiliation in the Incarnation

was only temporary. This is probably a reference to Jesus' moral glory, whereas the glory He referred to in verse 5 was His eternal glory, and the glory in verse 22 was His acquired glory.¹

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' "desire" or will (Gr. *thelo*) was identical with the Father's will (cf. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38), we can be confident that the Father will grant this request.

"The ordinary language of prayer breaks down because Jesus is speaking, as it were, within the Godhead."²

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).³

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 His 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 that the Father's love would remain in them. It would abide in them because Jesus Himself would remain in them. Probably *en* ("in") here means both in and among.⁴

¹Mitchell, p. 322.

²Barrett, p. 514.

³See John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

⁴Barrett, p. 515.

"... in this Prayer the Lord Jesus *renders an account* of His work to the Father, and this in *seven* particulars: First, He had glorified the Father on earth (17:4). Second, He had finished the work which had been given Him to do (17:4). Third, He had manifested the Father's name unto His own (17:6[, 26]). Fourth, He had given them the Father's words (17:8, 14). Fifth, He had kept them as a shepherd keeps his sheep (17:12). Sixth, He had sent them forth into the world (17:18). Seventh, He had given them the glory which the Father had bestowed upon Him (17:22)—mark the 'I have' in each verse [in the AV]."¹

"Seven things Christ asked the Father for the whole company of His redeemed. First, He prayed for their *preservation*: 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me' (17:11). Second, for their *jubilation*: 'that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves' (17:13). Third, for their *emancipation* from evil: 'that thou shouldst keep them from the evil' (17:15). Fourth for their *sanctification*: 'sanctify them by thy truth' (17:17). Fifth, for their *unification*: 'that they all may be one' (17:21). Sixth, for their *association* with Himself: 'that they all, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am' (17:24). Seventh, for their *gratification* [italics added]: 'that they may *behold my glory*' (17:24).²

"A careful analysis of the Prayer reveals the fact that just as the Lord urged the one petition which He made for Himself by *seven* pleas, so He supported the *seven* petitions for His people by *seven* pleas. ... It is also to be observed that in this Prayer believers are contemplated in a *sevenfold* relation to the world. ... There are *seven* 'gifts' referred to in this chapter: four of which are bestowed upon the Mediator, and three upon His people."³

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:

¹Pink, 3:125.

²Ibid., 3:139-40.

³Ibid., 3:140-41. Paragraph divisions omitted.

Jesus asked for Himself: glorification (vv. 1, 5), in order 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 protection (from evil; 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).

McGee summarized what this prayer says about believers and the world as follows: (1) they are given to Christ out of the world (v. 6), (2) left in the world (v. 11), (3) not of the world (v. 14), (4) hated by the world (v. 14), (5) kept from the evil one (v. 15), (6) sent into the world (v. 18), and (7) manifested in unity before the world (v. 23).¹

He also summarized Christ's requests for His own: (1) preservation (v. 11), (2) joy—fullness of the Spirit (v. 13), (3) deliverance from evil (v. 15), (4) to be set apart (sanctified, v. 17), (5) unity (v. 21), (6) fellowship with Christ (v. 24), and (7) satisfaction—behold His glory (v. 24).²

This section of Jesus' ministry began with a call for present humility (13:1-12), and it 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

¹McGee, 4:482.

²Ibid.

that John wanted to make in view of his purposes for writing. What these emphases were will become clear as we consider what he included.

John emphasized three things in his account of Jesus' Passion: (1) The voluntariness of Christ's sufferings (cf. 18:4, 8, 11; 36; 19:28, 30). (2) The fulfillment of a divine plan in His sufferings (cf. 18:4, 9, 11, 19:11, 24, 28). (3) The majesty that shone through His sufferings (cf. 18:6, 20-23, 37; 19:11, 26-27, 36-37).¹

"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)."²

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 may have spoken in the upper room. The Kidron Valley formed the eastern boundary of Jerusalem. The Kidron ("Cedars") 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 simply mentioned Gethsemane as being 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 entering and leaving Gethsemane suggest that it may have been a walled garden (cf. v. 13).

"The present Gethsemane is only some seventy steps square, and though its old gnarled olives cannot be those (if such there were) of the time of Jesus, since all trees in that valley—those also which stretched their shadows over Jesus—were hewn down in the Roman siege, they may have

¹Westcott, p. 249. See pp. 249-50 for other comparisons with the Synoptic evangelists' accounts of Jesus' Passion.

²Wiersbe, 1:372.

sprung from the old roots, or from the odd kernels."¹

"The traditional site, which may be the true one, dates from the time of Constantine, when 'the faithful were eager to offer their prayers there' (Euseb. 'Onom.' s. v.)."²

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).

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."³

18:3 Only John mentioned the presence of Roman soldiers in the crowd that came to arrest Jesus. 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.⁴ 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. This fortress stood just north of the temple. Normally these Roman troops resided in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, which was the

¹Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:533.

²Westcott, p. 251.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 656. See Wiersbe, 1:372, for contrasts between what happened in the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 577.

Roman provincial capital. Herod the Great had built a beautiful city with an extraordinary harbor there.¹

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 in order to find Jesus. Apparently they thought that 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 these officials because His hour had not yet come (10:40; 11:54), but now His hour had come (17:1).

18:5-6 Perhaps John chose not to record the fact that Judas identified Jesus by kissing Him in order to strengthen the force of Jesus' question "Whom are you seeking?" John mentioned Judas' presence, nonetheless, since he was a primary figure in Jesus' arrest. John stressed Jesus' complete control of the situation: Jesus identified Himself as the person being sought. John did not identify Jesus as being betrayed with a kiss.

Jesus responded with the clause, "I am He" (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).

When Jesus identified Himself the temple guards momentarily drew back and fell to the ground, 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 drew back and fell because, being shocked, they

¹See Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 15:8:5; and 15:9:6.

could not believe that the man that they had come out to arrest was virtually surrendering to them. On other occasions when Jesus' hearers understood that He was claiming to be God, they tried to stone Him. Rather than having to hunt down a fleeing peasant, the soldiers found a commanding leader who confronted them boldly.¹ Another possibility is that they "drew back and fell" because they were uncertain about how He would respond to them.² A third explanation is that this was a miracle that Jesus performed.³ A fourth view is that, since it was customary for rabbis to kiss their disciples first—but here Judas kissed Jesus first—this insult to Jesus' person so shocked the soldiers that they fell back.⁴ A fifth view follows:

"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"⁵

"They didn't fall forward to worship Him. They fell backward in fear and in absolute dismay."⁶

"The mere speech of Jesus (perhaps because expressed in language proper to God himself—see on 8.24) is sufficient to repel his adversaries."⁷

Still another explanation is that the soldiers fell back as "a result of the superhuman dignity of His person and the

¹See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:543.

²Bock, p. 368.

³Lenski, pp. 1180-82.

⁴C. S. Mann, *Mark*, p. 596.

⁵Harris, p. 182.

⁶McGee, 4:484.

⁷Barrett, p. 520.

majestic calmness of His reply."¹ It is interesting that Saul of Tarsus had a similar reaction when he saw Jesus in a vision on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:4; 26:14).

"It was the glorious effulgence of the majesty of Christ which overpowered them."²

18:7-9 Jesus seems to have been more intent on protecting His disciples than on making a claim to be God (cf. 10:11). Being the commanding leader that He was, Jesus first 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.

"A difficulty arises as to the reconciliation of the incidents described in this passage [vv. 5-8] with the narrative of the betrayal in the Synoptists. In the Synoptists the arrest follows close upon the kiss of Judas, which St John does not mention (Matt. xxvi. 50; Mark xiv. 45 f., yet see Luke xxii. 48 ff.). It is very difficult to believe that the kiss either preceded v. 4, or came after v. 8. Perhaps it is simplest to suppose that the unexpected appearance of the Lord outside the enclosure discomposed the plan of Judas, who had expected to find the whole party resting within the garden, and that for the moment he failed to give the appointed sign, and remained awestricken in the crowd (v. 5). This being so, the event of v. 6 followed, and afterwards Judas, taking courage, came up to Christ (Matt. xxvi. 49 f.; Mark xiv. 45), who then repelled him (Luke xxii. 48) and again addressed the hesitating multitude. Others suppose, with somewhat less probability, as it seems (but see Matt. xxvi. 49, note), that the kiss of Judas immediately preceded the first question, *Whom seek ye?* and that, touched by his Master's reproof (Luke xxii. 48), he fell back into the crowd.

¹Alford, 1:884.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1067.

Either view presents an intelligible whole; but the phrase in *v. 5* (*was standing*) is more appropriate to the attitude of one who hesitates to do that which he has purposed to do, than of one who has been already repulsed."¹

The repetition of the soldiers' question and Jesus' answer underlines Jesus independence and authority.

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).

"It was forbidden to carry weapons on a feast-day."²

Nevertheless, the disciples had two swords (or knives) in their possession (Luke 22:38). They were apparently anticipating trouble in Jerusalem (cf. 11:16).

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 Jesus referred was the symbol of His lot in life (cf. Matt. 20:22-23), which in this case involved 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).

¹Westcott, p. 251. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid., p. 254.

"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."¹

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 or defeated. 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 appearances before Caiaphas, next, and then before the Sanhedrin (v. 24).

JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIALS	
Before Annas	John 18:12-14, 19-24
Before Caiaphas	Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65
Before the Sanhedrin	Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71
JESUS' CIVIL TRIALS	
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38
Before Herod Antipas	Luke 23:6-12
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39—19:16

¹Wiersbe, 1:374.

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 then he 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 cohort of 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 like a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). 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.¹

Both high priests evidently occupied the same building. One high priest 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. Annas 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.² 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, who was Annas' son-in-law. The Romans had placed him in 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).

¹See the map "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 20:1:9.

THE HIGH PRIESTS OF ISRAEL CA. A.D. 6-36
<p>Annas (c. A.D. 6-15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)
<p>Eleazar (ca. A.D. 16-17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Annas whose name does not appear in the New Testament
<p>Caiaphas (ca. A.D. 18-36)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son-in-law of Annas • Official high priest during Jesus' earthly ministry (Matt. 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49-50) • With Annas tried Peter and John (Acts 4:6)

18:14 John doubtless identified Caiaphas the way he did here in order to remind his readers of Caiaphas' prediction of Jesus' substitute sacrifice (11:50), not just to mention his name. 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.

"Annas exercised his power through those who were like him."¹

2. The entrance of two disciples into the high priest's 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)

Like the other evangelists, John alternated his account of the events surrounding Jesus' religious trial: He described what was happening in the

¹Westcott, p. 255.

courtyard (vv. 15-18), then what was happening inside the building (vv. 19-24), and finally what happened outside again (vv. 25-27). This literary technique highlights the contrast between Jesus with Peter.

18:15-16 Evidently Peter and another disciple had followed the arresting party from Gethsemane back into Jerusalem to the high priest's palace (Gr. *aule*, "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)"¹

Furthermore, 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.² The correct identification of the other disciple is not essential to a correct interpretation of the events, however.

18:17 The slave woman, who was also the doorkeeper, recognized the other disciple as one of Jesus' disciples (v. 16). She asked Peter if he was not one of "this Man's disciples" too, expecting

¹Tenney, "John," p. 172.

²Cf. Frans Neiryck, *Evangelica: Gospel Studies—Etudes d'Evangile. Collected Essays*, pp. 335-64.

a negative reply, as the Greek text makes clear. Her question reflected some disdain for Jesus.

"She made it easy for Peter to say no."¹

Peter succumbed to the pressure of the moment and denied his association with Jesus (13:37). Peter denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples ("I am not"), not that Jesus was the Messiah. Perhaps what he had done to Malchus made him more eager to blend into his surroundings.

"St John, who remained closest to the Lord, was unmolested: St Peter, who mingled with the indifferent crowd, fell."²

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. The detail that the fire was a charcoal (Gr. *anthrakia*) fire 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 around it.

"His [Peter's] fall reads a lesson to all who, without seeking counsel of God or disregarding counsel given, enter on undertakings beyond their strength."³

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 questioning and informal inquiry (cf. v. 24). He probably asked Jesus about His disciples in order to ascertain the size of His following, since one of the religious leaders' chief concerns was the power of Jesus' popularity. Annas'

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:287.

²Westcott, p. 256.

³A. B. Bruce, p. 487.

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 revolutionary.

18:20-21 Jesus affirmed that He had always taught openly. 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.¹ 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 "struck," refers to 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 struck Him was not treating Him fairly. This was a case of police brutality. Jesus had shown no disrespect for Annas.²

"The truth is always objectionable to those who are concerned to establish a case at all costs. It is easier and more effective to answer it with blows than with arguments."³

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

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 670.

²See Larna L. Berg, "The Illegalities of Jesus' Religious and Civil Trials," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):330-42.

³Barrett, p. 529.

residence (or palace). Caiaphas had to interview Jesus in order to legally bring charges against Him before the Sanhedrin, since Caiaphas was the current official high priest. John noted that Jesus remained bound like a criminal, even though He had done nothing to deserve 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' three-part religious trial because the previously written Synoptic Gospels contained adequate accounts of them. Maybe John considered the meeting of the Sanhedrin, which he had described in 11:47-53, as Jesus' official condemnation.¹

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, like the other disciple, was one of Jesus' disciples (cf. Matt. 10:33; Luke 12:9). The person who voiced the question was another slave woman (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."²

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.

This third accuser also identified Peter as a Galilean, though John did not mention that (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59). His question "Did I not see you in the garden with

¹For a list of the violations of custom in Jesus' Jewish trials, see Westcott, pp. 262-63.

²Brown, 2:842.

Him?" expected a positive answer, in contrast to the former two questions that expected a negative answer. This question posed the greatest threat to Peter's security.

"Peter was in dire peril now of arrest himself for [his] attempt to kill [Malchus]."¹

Peter responded by uttering his most passionate denial of the three. Immediately a rooster crowed (for the second time, Mark 14:72) fulfilling the prediction that Jesus had spoken just hours earlier (13:38). John 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 remorse (cf. Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62). The effect is that the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction receives the emphasis.

"After the third watch [12:00 midnight to 3:00 a.m.] the guard was changed and to mark the changing of the guard there was a trumpet call at 3 a.m. That trumpet call was called in Latin *gallicinium* and in Greek *alektorophonia*, which both mean *cockcrow*. It may well be that Jesus said to Peter: 'Before the trumpet sounds the cockcrow you will deny me three times.'"²

The encouraging record of Peter's appointment to leadership in ministry for Jesus follows later in chapter 21.

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), but also His universal kingship.³ John apparently assumed that his readers knew of the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' passion. The other

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:290.

²Barclay, 2:268-69.

³See Mavis M. Leung, "The Roman Empire and John's Passion Narrative in Light of Jewish Royal Messianism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):426-42.

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).¹ The interview proceeded as Pilate asked four questions: "What accusation are you bringing against this Man?" (18:29), "You are the King of the Jews?" (18:33), "Do you wish that I release for you 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.²

18:28 "They" refers to the Jewish authorities (cf. Matt. 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1). They brought Jesus from Caiaphas, who was the head of the Sanhedrin that had passed sentence on Jesus, into the Praetorium (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 pass 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 rebellion against Rome.

The word Praetorium is Latin (*praetorium*). It identified either the headquarters of the commanding officer of a Roman military camp, or a Roman military governor's headquarters.³ Pilate was this kind of governor. The Gospels use the generic term governor, though technically Pilate was the prefect of Judea. The historian Tacitus identified him as a procurator.⁴

Pilate's normal headquarters were at Caesarea on the Mediterranean seacoast, which was the capital of the Roman

¹Tenney, "John," p. 174.

²For 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.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 587.

⁴Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44:4.

province of Judea. However, during the Jewish feasts Pilate came to Jerusalem with Roman troops in order to discourage uprisings of the Jews against Rome. He also had headquarters in Jerusalem, either in Herod the Great's former 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.¹ However, most modern commentators believed Pilate probably interviewed Jesus in Herod's former palace.² I favor the Antonia Fortress as the scene of Jesus' trial before Pilate and the Hasmonean palace as the scene of His trial before Herod Antipas. Luke described Pilate as sending Jesus to Herod (Luke 23:7), and he described Herod as sending Jesus back to Pilate (Luke 23:11). It seems to me that these terms better describe two places separated by some distance than two places within one structure.

It is not clear just when Jesus first appeared before Pilate on this particular 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, which began at 3:00 a.m. and ended at 6:00 a.m. Probably it is just the normal use of the word early, which would not necessarily require a time before 6:00 a.m. It would have been early in any case, perhaps between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. Roman officials customarily began their work around sunrise and often finished their day's official business by 10:00 or 11:00 a.m.³ John wrote that Jesus was still in Pilate's presence later 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).⁴

¹Westcott, pp. 258, 268; Bishop, p. 10.

²See, e.g., *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Praetorium," p. 881; Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:566; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:290; and Barrett, p. 531.

³A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p. 45.

⁴Mishnah *Oholoth* 18:7, 9. See also Dan Duncan, "Avodah Zarah, Makkoth, and Kerithoth," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):52-54.

This was because the Gentiles did not take precautions to guarantee kosher (i.e., proper) food like the Jews did. Specifically, Gentiles might have yeast in their homes, which would have made participation in the Passover Feast unlawful for any Jew who entered a Gentile home just before Passover (cf. Exod. 12:19; 13:7).¹ The Jews considered themselves defiled if they entered a dwelling from which all leaven had not been scrupulously removed.²

"... 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."³

These Jews' superficial commitment to the Mosaic Law resulted in it becoming more difficult for them to truly obey that Law. Ironically their great attention to ritual purity separated them from Jesus, the pure Son of God. 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. 13:1, 27).⁴ 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 week-long festival that followed it, which included the Feast of

¹F. F. Bruce, p. 349.

²Westcott, p. 258.

³Tasker, pp. 200-1. Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 328; and Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:565.

⁴Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 684-95, discussed this issue quite fully.

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 forfeit by entering a Gentile residence. Part of the feast was the offering of two peace offerings, called "the Chagigah"—one on Nisan 14 and the other on Nisan 15, the latter being the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jewish law was very strict that no one who was defiled could offer the Chagigah.¹ It was this second Chagigah, not the offering of the paschal lamb on Nisan 14, which the Jews who refused to enter Pilate's Praetorium wanted to be qualified to offer.²

18:29 Pilate evidently addressed the Jews who had assembled outside his headquarters, or perhaps in its courtyard, from a balcony or overlook. He wanted to know their formal charge ("accusation") against Jesus. Pilate probably knew something of Jesus' arrest, since Roman soldiers had participated in it (vv. 3, 12). Not only that, but 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.

"St John appears to emphasize the fact the Pilate 'went forth without' his own praetorium, as if it were symbolic of the whole proceeding."³

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 sufficiently with those charges.

They hesitated to bring the charge of blasphemy against Jesus, because Pilate might have dismissed it as unworthy of his consideration, since this was a strictly Jewish matter (cf. Acts 18:12-16). They evidently did not accuse Him of treason,

¹Mishnah *Pesahim* 6:3.

²Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 218, 252-53, 255.

³Westcott, p. 259.

either, because this too would have incited His many followers, and they would have had difficulty proving such a charge. Consequently they did not name the charge, but they assumed it was serious, and implied that Pilate should trust them and "rubber stamp" their decision.

"They want no retrial of Jesus under a Roman judge; they want Pilate to accept their verdict and on the strength of this verdict to order the execution of Jesus."¹

"If the Lord Jesus were really opposing the authority and rights of the Emperor, why had not the Roman power taken the initiative? Where were the Gentile witnesses against Him?"²

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 decision to let the Jews settle Jesus' case, since it meant 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 [v. 29]. 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."³

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.

18:31 Since the Jews did not charge Jesus formally, there was nothing Pilate could do except hand Him back to them for discipline in their courts. The Jews' response explained why that was an unacceptable alternative: "We are not permitted

¹Lenski, p. 1215.

²Pink, 3:196.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 676.

to put anyone to death." The Jews did stone fellow Jews (cf. Acts 6:11; 7:58-60), but the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus crucified.¹

"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."²

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 Jewish leaders probably also wanted Jesus crucified 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)."³

"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] ..."⁴

¹See *ibid.*, pp. 695-97, for a fuller explanation of the Jews' right to inflict the death penalty; and Barrett, pp. 533-35, for further discussion.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 591.

³Tenney, "John," p. 175.

⁴Blum, p. 337.

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. He took up the case, rather than simply rubber stamping the Jew's condemnation of Jesus, and proceeded with an actual Roman trial. 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 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).

Jim Bishop interpreted Jesus' question as follows: "Did you, as a Roman governor, observe me acting as king of the Jews or have others told you about my spiritual kingship?"¹

Jesus asked Pilate His question in order 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. But if Pilate was merely echoing the Sanhedrin's charge, Jesus would need to answer differently. If Pilate meant: Are You a political king conspiring against Caesar? the answer would be no. If he meant: Are You the messianic King of Israel? the answer would be yes. The object of interrogation, Jesus, became the interrogator temporarily. The fact that Jesus questioned Pilate at all was pure grace, in that it allowed Pilate to explain his motivation—and possibly to reduce his guilt.

¹Bishop, p. 276.

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, "I am not a Jew, am I?" sarcastically denied that Jewish matters such as Jesus' kingship were of any interest to him personally.

"The gulf between Jew and Gentile yawns wide here."¹

Ironically, Jesus was Pilate's King.² Pilate's comment about Jesus' own nation handing Him over to him confirmed John's introductory statement that Jesus came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him (1:11).

"This answer of Pilate conveyed the full proof of the *guilt of Israel*. In the mouth of him who represented the power of the world at that time, the thing was established, that Israel had disclaimed their King and sold themselves into the hand of another."³

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 Caesar's kingdom by waging war against it. 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.⁴ This should be clear from Jesus' other references to His kingdom as being earthly. His point was that He and His kingdom were not a present threat to Rome (cf. 18:10-11). It was non-threatening because God had postponed (delayed) the earthly messianic

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:293.

²Cf. P. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 129-30.

³J. G. Bellett, quoted by Pink, 3:199.

⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 331. See also Gaebelein, *The Annotated ...*, 3:1:238.

kingdom due to Israel's unbelief, though Jesus did not explain this to Pilate.

Jesus' earthly kingdom is "not of this realm" (Gr. *ouk enteuthen*, lit. not from this place) in another sense: It will come down from heaven to the earth rather than originating from the earth (Dan. 2:44-45). 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 Caesar's kingdom that Jesus was making. But 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 His kingship. Jesus had defined His kingdom negatively (v. 36). Now He defined His mission as a king positively.

The main reason that 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 produced 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.¹

"Jesus lays hold of Pilate's heart. The hour of grace has come for Pilate, the blessed hour when the King of grace draws his heart, yet a fatal hour if that King's grace is spurned."²

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.

¹Tenney, "John," p. 177.

²Lenski, p. 1234.

"The question of Pilate does not deal with absolute Truth—the Truth as one—of which the Lord had spoken (*e aletheia*), but simply with truth in any particular case (*aletheia*)."¹

Undoubtedly, Pilate's experience as a Roman official to whom others constantly lied, and his personal desire to use truth and falsehood to accomplish his own ends, accounted for his cynicism. The very idea that someone would aim his whole life at revealing truth was, from his perspective, both foolish and improbable.

Other views of Pilate's statement interpret it as despairing, impatient, or sincere. However, the context seems to imply that it was flippant and scornful. Pilate turned away from the One who not only claimed to reveal the truth but was in fact "the Truth" in Person, plus the Way and the Life—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): "I find no grounds at all for charges in His case." 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.

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, at least not in the normal sense, but simply an idealist. This witness to

¹Westcott, p. 261.

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."¹

Why did Pilate refer to the custom of releasing a prisoner 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 select, 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. Pilate's own ill-advised question set him 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 rebel (Gr. *lestes*, lit. one who seizes plunder). Barabbas seems 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 occupation of Israel with violence. However here they

¹Blum, p. 338.

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 it must have also been obvious to Pilate. Evidently Barabbas had a popular following among the people, like Jesus did, but for different reasons.

The release of a proven enemy of Rome, which John did not record, exposed 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 set in motion by Pilate's discovery that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (vv. 7-14). John omitted Pilate's handwashing ritual (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, the Jews would be satisfied (cf. vv. 4-6; Luke 23:16). Perhaps Pilate 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."¹

There were three forms of flogging that the Romans administered. The lightest of these, the *fustigatio*, was a light whipping that only mischief-makers experienced. The second, the *flagellatio*, was a severe flogging that criminals who were guilty of more serious crimes received. The third, the *verberatio*, was the most brutal. The worst criminals, including

¹Lenski, p. 1243.

those sentenced to crucifixion, underwent this last type of scourging.¹ Evidently Jesus received the first or second of these floggings at this time, namely, before His sentencing by Pilate. He received the third type after His sentencing (v. 16; cf. Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).²

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.³ Some Roman coins pictured various emperors wearing such wreath crowns that appeared to radiate glory from their heads.⁴ However the palm fronds, when turned inward instead of outward on such wreath 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).

Likewise the reddish purple cloak—perhaps a Roman 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.⁵ The soldiers also struck Jesus in the face with the palms of their hands (cf. 18:22), contradicting their pretended verbal respect with violent brutality.

The Roman soldiers viewed Jesus as a pretender to the throne of Israel, and they 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 presumption. The Jews who followed Jesus would have felt outraged and hurt by Jesus' treatment. The believing reader sees the irony

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 597.

²See David A. Croteau, "Is the Two-Floggings Hypothesis a Viable Option? A Reconstruction of the Order of the Floggings of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63:4 (December 2020):663-74. He concluded that it is.

³H. St. J. Hart, "The Crown of Thorns in John 19, 2-5," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1952):71-74; Beasley-Murray, p. 336.

⁴The article by Hart, cited above, contains photographs of such radiate crowns and palm thorns (plate 2).

⁵D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 573.

in the situation because Jesus really was the King of the Jews (cf. Isa. 50:6; 52:14—53:6).

"One question springs from the heart on reading this—How could it be! Where is the lauded Roman justice in this scourging of a bound prisoner of whom the judge says, 'I find no fault in him!' Why is an uncondemned one given into the rude hands of Roman soldiers for them to mock and smite at their pleasure? Where is the cool judgment of Pilate, that a little while ago refused to take action lest injustice be done? Why is Jesus treated in a way wholly unparalleled so far as we know?"¹

19:4-5 Jesus received the abuse that John just described inside the Praetorium: Pilate's headquarters. 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.

"First, Judas declared 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed *the innocent* blood' (Matt. 27:4). Second, Pilate declared, 'I find *no fault* in him' (John 18 [*sic* 19]:4). Third, of Herod Pilate said, 'No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, *nothing* worthy of death is done unto him' (Luke 23:15). Fourth, Pilate's wife entreated, 'Have thou nothing to do with that *just* man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream *because of him.*' (Matt. 27:19). Fifth, the dying thief affirmed, 'We receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man *hath done nothing amiss*' (Luke 23:41). Sixth, the Roman centurion who glorified God, said, 'Certainly this was a *righteous* man' (Luke 23:47). Seventh, those who stood with the centurion acknowledged, 'Truly this was *the son of God*' (Matt. 27:54)!"²

¹Malachi Taylor, quoted by Pink, 3:207-8.

²Pink, 3:210.

Undoubtedly roars of laughter were mingled with gasps of horror as the Jews looked at the Man who had done them nothing but good. Pilate called to 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 urged his readers to behold Him whom God had predicted would die voluntarily as a sacrifice for humankind's sins as the Lamb of God (cf. 1:29, 36).

"This exclamatory introduction of Jesus in mock coronation robes to the mob was clearly intended to excite pity and to show how absurd the charge of the Sanhedrin was that such a pitiable figure should be guilty of treason. Pilate failed utterly in this effort and did not dream that he was calling attention to the greatest figure of history, the Man of the ages."¹

19:6 If Pilate 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 were very much in control."²

Pilate's reply reflected his disgust with the Jewish leaders. It was really an expression of frustration and exasperation with them. They had brought Jesus to him for a decision, he had

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:297.

²Wiersbe, 1:381.

given it, and now they refused to accept it. Pilate knew that the Jews could not crucify Jesus without his permission.

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.

"A careful comparison of the Gospel records reveals the fact that the Jews preferred [pressed] just seven indictments against Christ. First, they charged Him with threatening to destroy the temple (Matt. 26:61); second, with being a 'malefactor' ([criminal;] John 18:13 [*sic* 30]); third, with 'perverting the nation' (Luke 23:2); fourth, with 'forbidding to give tribute to Caesar' (Luke 23:2); fifth, with stirring up all the people (Luke 23:5); sixth, with being 'a king' (Luke 23:2); seventh, with making Himself the Son of God (John 19:7). This sevenfold indictment witnessed to the *completeness* of their rejection of Him!"¹

Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, the Jewish leaders announced, which constituted blasphemy in any case but Jesus' case. 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 a fully conscious and deliberate denial of the evidence that He was deity, not simply a political Messiah.

"The Jews condemned God's Son because he was God's Son."²

¹Pink, 3:213.

²Lenski, p. 1258.

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 (partially divine). They also 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 the very powers that the Greeks and Romans attributed to these divine beings. Consequently Pilate may now have begun to fear that Jesus would take some type of revenge on him for the unjust treatment that he 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."¹

19:9 This explains why Pilate asked Jesus where He had come from. Jesus did not answer him. Jesus' silence undoubtedly increased Pilate's uneasiness. Jesus had earlier refused to answer questions from Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod (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

¹Tenney, "John," p. 177.

shown that he had no real interest in the truth (cf. 8:25). He only wanted to do what was personally expedient.

Besides, the answer to this question in Jesus' case was quite complex. Pilate had shown little patience with Jesus' explanation about His other-worldly kingdom. He would hardly have been more receptive now to what Jesus might say about His other-worldly origin. The decision Pilate faced was clear-cut. Should he release this innocent Man or not? The question of Jesus' origin was irrelevant.

"This was the sixth question Pilate asked Christ, and it is deeply interesting to follow his changing moods as he put them. First, he had asked 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' (18:33)—asked, most probably, in the spirit of sarcasm. Second, 'Am I a Jew?' (18:35)—asked in the spirit of haughty contempt. Third, 'What hast thou done?' (18:35)—a pompous display of his authority. Fourth, 'Art thou a king then?' (18:37)—indicating his growing perplexity. Fifth, 'What is truth?' (18:38)—asked out of contemptuous pity. Sixth, 'Whence art thou?' ... First, we think that Pilate was genuinely puzzled and perplexed. ... [Second,] Pilate hoped that *here* was away out of his difficulty. If Christ were really from Heaven, then obviously he could not think of crucifying Him."¹

19:10 Pilate did not appreciate Jesus' silence and the superior attitude that it implied. Consequently Pilate threatened Him by reminding Him of his authority (Gr. *exousia*) to take or spare Jesus' life. This was Pilate's seventh and last question of Jesus, which he probably asked in a spirit of sarcasm and resentment combined.²

¹Pink, 3:213-14. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid., 3:216.

"Carefully analyzed his words can only mean—I am above the law: innocent or guilty, I can do with you as I please."¹

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). Probably the higher authority over Pilate that came to Pilate's mind was Caesar, because he immediately sought to set Jesus 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)"²

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.³ 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 by His statement He viewed the act of handing Him over as a blameworthy 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 another person (singular) delivering Him to Pilate.

Both Pilate and Caiaphas were guilty of treating Jesus horribly. However, Caiaphas was guilty of a greater sin, since Caiaphas had received greater power from God than Pilate had. God had given Caiaphas the authority to lead God's people as Israel's

¹Ibid., 3:217.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 600.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 705; Blum, p. 338; Tenney, "John," p. 177; Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 601-2; Beasley-Murray, p. 340.

high priest. Pilate had only received authority (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 free someone who claimed to be a king 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*) was originally a badge of honor that was frequently given to provincial governors. It meant that the honoree was a loyal supporter of the emperor.¹ Later this title 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 second 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."² 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.³

The Jewish leaders presented themselves as loyal subjects of Caesar, which was far from the truth. However, ironically, they

¹Westcott, p. 271.

²Tacitus, *Annals* 6:8.

³Cf. Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 602, 607.

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 inclined Pilate to decide to execute Jesus. Again self-interest, rather than commitment to justice, influenced his decision (cf. v. 1). Pilate brought Jesus out again where the Jews could see Him, and he took his seat for Jesus' formal sentencing.

"It is striking to note that the trial of Christ before Pilate was in *seven* stages. This is seen by noting carefully the following scriptures, which speak of the Governor passing in and out of the judgment-hall. The first stage was on the outside: 18:28-32. The second on the inside: 18:33-37. Third, on the outside: 18:38-40. Fourth, inside: 19:1-3. Fifth, outside: 19:4-7. Sixth, inside: 19:8-11. Seventh, outside: 19:12-16."¹

The judgment seat (Gr. *bema*, cf. Rom. 14:10; 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 markings on them that indicate that soldiers played games there.² However, Barrett claimed that, "The buildings and pavement in question belong to the second century and have nothing to do with the events of the gospel."³ John gave the Aramaic (popular Hebrew) name of The Pavement as *gabbatha*, meaning either "height," or more probably, "open space." He may have done this because Gabbatha may have been a site in Jerusalem that was well known to his Gentile readers by its Aramaic name when he wrote. Another view is that *gabbatha* derives from

¹Pink, 3:223-24.

²*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Gabbatha," by D. J. Wieand, 2:373.

³Barrett, p. 545.

gab baitha, and meant "the ridge (or back) of the house" (i.e., the temple).¹

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 has 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.² 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 to the Passover day (cf. 18:28; Luke 22:1).³ 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 in order to encourage the reader to connect Jesus with the Passover lamb. Secondly, 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 this was a special Sabbath since it fell during Passover week. Similar early references to the Sabbath, followed by a later explanation of the significance of that reference, are in 5:9 and 16-18.

Mark wrote: "Now it was the third hour when they crucified Him" (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?

¹Westcott, p. 272.

²C. 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, p. 272; Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects ...*, p. 70.

³Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 14:2:1; 17:9:3.

One explanation is that John used the Roman method of reckoning time, whereas Mark and the other Synoptic writers used the Jewish method.¹ 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 appears in a few legal documents.² Nevertheless this seems to be the best explanation.

Another explanation is that a scribe miscopied the Greek numerals, and inadvertently substituted "sixth" for "third".³ 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.⁴ 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, which began the day with sunrise, while John used a Judean method that began it with sunset.⁵

Before passing sentence on Jesus, Pilate presented Him to the Jews. 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. As Jewish

¹E.g., Westcott, p. 282; Tasker, p. 209.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 708.

³Barrett, p. 545.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 605; Tenney, "John," p. 178; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 708-9; *A Dictionary of the Bible*, "Numbers, Hours, Years, and Dates," by W. M. Ramsay, extra volume:479.

⁵Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects ...*, pp. 77-90.

Caiaphas had earlier unintentionally announced a prophecy about Jesus (11:49-50), so now Gentile Pilate did as well.

"Unlike the presentation of Jesus in 19:4-6, this [presentation] was not intended to ridicule Jesus. Since that occasion, Pilate had been moved by Jesus and defeated in his attempt to rescue him. Now he makes the moment of *his* decision the moment of decision *for the Jews*. They have a final and crucial opportunity of declaring their mind on Jesus and recanting, if they will, on their unjust and bitter accusations of him."¹

19:15 The Jewish mob, led by their leaders, shouted their rejection of their King. They went even further than that and demanded 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 they were rejecting Yahweh's sovereignty over their nation (cf. Judg. 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:7).² The chief priests probably went to this extreme in order to persuade Pilate to grant their request—and in order to crucify Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:25).

"The chief priests ... were Sadducees, who had no Messianic hope like that of the Pharisees. So to carry their point against Jesus they renounce the principle of the theocracy that God was their King (1 Sam. 12:12)."³

The Jewish hierarchy had accused Jesus of blaspheming, but now these men were themselves guilty of blasphemy (cf. 1:11). Such an extreme, hostile, and total rejection helps us understand why God turned from Israel—temporarily—to continue His dealings with humankind through the church (cf. Rom. 9—11).

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 342.

²See Westcott, pp. 272-73.

³Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:300.

"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."¹

19:16 Pilate's action of handing Jesus over constituted his sentence against Jesus. By the words "to them" John evidently meant that Pilate handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers in order to satisfy the demands of the Jews. He omitted any reference to the most brutal and sometimes lethal form of scourging (the *verberatio*), which the Roman soldiers now gave Jesus as the 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!"²

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 through the person of their representative: 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)"³

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 710.

²Wiersbe, 1:379.

³Ibid., 1:381.

"Pilate was blackmailed into assenting to the death of Christ, because his previous mistakes had made it impossible for him to defy the Jews and to keep his post. Somehow one cannot help being sorry for Pilate. He wanted to do the right thing; but he had not the courage to defy the Jews and to do it. Pilate crucified Jesus in order to keep his job."¹

"Nowhere in Scripture, perhaps, is there a more striking and vivid demonstration of the sovereignty of God than Pilate's treatment of the Lord Jesus. First, Pilate was *assured* of His *innocency* [*sic*], acknowledging, no less than seven times, 'I find *no* fault in him.' Second, Pilate *desired* to release Him: 'Pilate therefore *willing* to release Jesus' (Luke 23:20); 'I will let him go' (Luke 23:22); 'Pilate *sought* to release him' (John 19:12); 'Pilate was *determined* to let him go' (Acts 3:13), all prove that unmistakably. Third, Pilate was *urged*, most earnestly by none other than his own wife, *not to sentence* Him (Matt. 27:19). Fourth, he actually *endeavored* to bring about His acquittal: he bade the Jews themselves judge Christ ([John] 18:31); he sent Him to Herod, only for Christ to be returned (Luke 23:7); he sought to induce the Jews to have him convict Barabbas in His stead (19:39 [*sic* 18:39-40; Luke 23:18-20]). Yet in spite of all, Pilate *did* give sentence that Christ should be crucified!" [cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28].²

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), His sixth cry before His death (v. 30), and the piercing of His side (v. 34).

¹Barclay, 2:280. See *ibid.*, 2:276-80, for a summary of Pilate's previous unwise dealings with the Jews.

²Pink, 3:205.

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 to Golgotha. Normally an execution squad consisted of four legionnaires plus a centurion (cf. v. 23).¹ John did not comment 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 either their entire cross or only the crossbeam (Lat. *patibulum*).² This was common procedure in crucifixions, as John's original readers undoubtedly knew. Jesus evidently carried the crossbeam.³

"When everything was ready, the 'trees' were placed on the right shoulder of each of the three criminals. This was the crosspiece only; the upright part of the cross was always left standing at the place of execution and was used many times. The crosspiece was of cypress, about three inches by five inches and about six feet long. It weighed perhaps thirty pounds, and was fashioned roughly with an adze [an ax-like tool] by the executioner. In the bottom of the crosspiece, at the center, was an oblong mortise [recess] so that the crosspiece would fit over the upright piece. The sign would be nailed here and the spikes would lock both pieces of the cross together. Each man shouldered his tree, and this too was done as ritually prescribed. The prisoner's wrists were bound together with rope which permitted a distance of about six inches between hands. As the crossbeam was placed on the right shoulder, the two hands curled over the opposite sides

¹Tenney, "John," p. 180.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 711.

³Bock, p. 535.

of the beam, which jutted about thirty inches in front of the condemned, and about forty-two inches behind him, diagonally to the left. If, in his agony of anticipation, the hands slipped off the beam, the short rope between wrists kept it from sliding to the street in front of the soldier marching behind."¹

All the Gospel writers identified the place of Jesus' crucifixion as "the Place of a Skull." All but Luke gave its Aramaic title, namely, *golgota* ("skull") the transliteration of which is Golgotha. "Calvary" is the transliteration of the Latin *calvaria* meaning "place of a skull." Why the place bore this name remains a mystery, though it may have been a common place for executions. The place probably received its name from its appearance. There is a tradition that it was the place where Adam's skull was buried.² 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 excruciating form of death that humiliated the sufferer as well as torturing him. Its purpose was to discourage others from rebelling against Rome. John's original readers would have been only too familiar with it, which probably accounts for his lack of a detailed description.

"It was so brutal that no Roman citizen could be crucified [*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

¹Bishop, pp. 300-301. Paragraph division omitted.

²Barrett, p. 548.

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."¹

"Crucifixion was probably the most diabolical form of death ever invented."²

"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."³

All the Gospel writers mentioned the two other men who were 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, as was Barabbas (cf. 18:40). John may have mentioned them in order to remind his readers of the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7 and 12.⁴ Their mention also prepares the reader to understand John's recording 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 on Jesus' cross because it underlines not only the Jews' deliberate and conscious repudiation of Jesus but also His true identity.

19:19-20 Normally the judge of a person sentenced to crucifixion would order that a placard (Lat. *titulus*) that bore an inscription 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 they passed

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 610. Cf. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion*.

²Tenney, "John," p. 181. For an extended description of crucifixion, see pp. 180-81.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 713.

⁴However see D. J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, pp. 154-55.

him. The soldiers would then attach the sign to the criminal's cross for the same purpose.¹

The Gospels all report slightly different inscriptions. Probably what Pilate really wrote was the sum of all these variations and the Gospel writers each just quoted a part of the whole. Perhaps some or all of the evangelists paraphrased the inscription. 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.²

Aramaic was the common language spoken by the Jews in the land of Israel. Latin was the official language that the Romans, including the soldiers, spoke. Greek was the *lingua franca* (common language) of the Greek Empire that Alexander the Great had founded, which included Israel. Pilate continued to insult the Jewish hierarchy, for forcing his hand, by identifying Jesus as he did. However, his trilingual notice was God's sovereign way of declaring to the whole world who His Son really was: the Jewish king who would one day rule the world.

Clearly Pilate regarded Jesus as guilty of stirring up trouble for Rome, which the political charge that the Jews had brought against Him, rather than the religious charge of claiming to be the Son of God (18:33). By identifying Jesus as the Jews' king and then crucifying Him, Pilate was boasting about Rome's superiority over the Jews, and he was showing off his authority.

- 19:21-22 The chief priest's modification 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 let stand was the exact truth. He had unconsciously become God's herald of His redemptive purpose.

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 610.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:590-91.

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 after the criminal had died.¹ 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.² 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. It was more like a long tee-shirt. Since Jesus' tunic had been woven in 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 this prophecy found literal fulfillment in this event. People continued to carry out God's foreordained plan of salvation though unknowingly. 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."³

"... the sinful first Adam was clothed by God; the sinless last Adam was unclothed by wicked men."⁴

"It seems very unlikely that there is an allusion to Joseph, with his coat, his brothers (prefiguring the disciples), and his two fellow-prisoners."⁵

¹Tenney, "John," p. 181; Beasley-Murray, p. 347.

²See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:625.

³Blum, p. 339.

⁴Pink, 3:233.

⁵Barrett, p. 550.

5. Jesus' provision for His mother 19:25-27

John is the only evangelist who recorded this incident.

19:25 The four women who were standing by the cross contrast with the four soldiers. Morris assumed that the four women were believers and that the four soldiers were unbelievers.¹ While the soldiers behaved callously and profited immediately from Jesus' death, the women waited faithfully and patiently for God's will to unfold. It was apparently common for friends and relatives, as well as enemies, to stand at a short distance ("nearby," v. 26) around the crosses of crucified criminals.² Only John mentioned that Jesus' mother was present at His crucifixion.

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 refer to his own mother, either, by name (Salome), or as the mother of Zebedee's sons. John never named himself, or his brother James, or any other member of his family. He evidently wanted to play down his mother's identity, as well as his own, since he did not directly mention them. By referring to Jesus' mother John set the scene for Jesus' action in verses 26-27. John was Jesus'

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 717.

²E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, pp. 111, 179, footnote 1.

cousin on his mother's side. As such, he was a logical person to assume responsibility for Mary's welfare. Judging from their apparent absence at His cross, Jesus' physical half-brothers may not have become believers until after His resurrection.

19:26-27 Jesus addressed His mother by saying, "Woman" (Gr. *gynai*, cf. 2:4). This was an affectionate and respectful way of speaking to her. Perhaps Jesus was alluding to Genesis 3:15: "I make enemies Of you and the woman, And of your offspring and her Descendant; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."¹ Mary's grief must have been extremely great (cf. 2:38). Even as He hung dying an excruciatingly painful death, Jesus compassionately made provision for His mother.

"Here also is an example of how disciples relate to one another with care that is not limited by biological connections."²

"Absolute consecration to Jesus is the strongest bond between human hearts."³

The language that Jesus used was legal and quite similar to the terms used commonly in adoption proceedings.⁴ His action indicates that He was the person responsible for His mother, implying that Joseph was no longer alive and that He was her oldest son. Most Bible scholars assume that Joseph had died by now. Jesus' act also placed Mary under John's authority, which is a position that some Roman Catholics have found very uncomfortable in view of their doctrine of Mary's supremacy.

This was Jesus' third recorded saying from the cross.

¹R. I. Humberd, *The Virgin Birth*, pp. 13-14.

²Bock, p. 537.

³Darby, 3:561.

⁴Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 616.

JESUS' WORDS ON THE CROSS				
	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
"Father, forgive them.; for they do not know what they are doing."			23:34	
"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."			23:43	
"Woman, behold your son!" and "Behold, your mother!"				19:26-27
"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"	27:46	15:34		
"I am thirsty."				19:28
"It is finished!"				19:30
"Father, into your hands I entrust 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, which the other evangelists did mention (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 that recurs in this Gospel. Perhaps he did not want to detract attention from the person of Jesus. He also omitted Jesus' heart-rending lament 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 judgment on the Son did not ultimately nullify their essential unity.

19:28 John wrote that all things necessary for the fulfillment of the Scriptures that predicted God's provision of redemption had already been accomplished (Gr. *teleiothe*). John was speaking

proleptically again (cf. 12:23; 17:1, 4); his writing anticipated what would happen next. Obviously Jesus still had to die.

As the moment of His death drew nearer, Jesus said that He was thirsty. This authenticated His true humanity, which the Gnostics and Docetists of John's day denied. A man in Jesus' physical condition would at this point be suffering the tortures of dehydration. It is paradoxical that the "Water of Life" should confess thirst (cf. 4:4-14; 7:38-39). The obvious answer to this 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."¹

"By accepting the physical refreshment offered Him, the Lord once more indicated the completion of the work of His Passion. For, as He would not enter on it with His senses and physical consciousness lulled by narcotised [*sic*] wine, so He would not pass out of it with senses and physical consciousness dulled by the absolute failure of life-power. Hence He took what for the moment restored the physical balance, needful for thought and word. And so He immediately passed on to 'taste death for every man.'"²

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 sour wine to drink, which Psalm 69:21 predicted. Thus John stressed that Jesus' death not only fulfilled God's will, but also this prophetic Scripture.

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 351.

²Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:608-9.

19:29 It may have been customary to offer sour wine (Gr. *oxos*) to the victims of crucifixion, since John mentioned a jar full of it as standing there near the cross. Another possibility is that the soldiers had brought this wine to the crucifixion for their own refreshment. Only John mentioned that the soldiers put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop, which they brought up to His mouth. Hyssop was readily available, since it grew out of many rocky crevices like 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).

Jesus was probably not very high above ground level as He hung on the cross, contrary to many famous paintings (cf. 3:14). Some interpreters believe that the soldiers gave Jesus the drink out of compassion.¹ Others believe that the soldiers were really giving Jesus something that would increase His sufferings.

19:30 Jesus' reception of the sour wine did not relieve His torment, though it did moisten His parched throat so that He could speak. It also fulfilled Scripture (Ps. 32:4; 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.²

Jesus cried out with a loud voice (Mark 15:37): "It is finished!" (Gr. *tetelestai*). He probably shouted this with an exclamation of triumph. 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 (in advance), that He had fulfilled God's will for Him (cf. 17:4). The use of the Greek perfect tense here signified, proleptically, that Jesus had

¹E.g., Westcott, p. 277.

²Tenney, "John," p. 184.

finished His work of providing redemption completely, and that it presently stood finished. Nothing more needed, or ever needs, to be done in order to finish it. This finished work of Jesus Christ is the basis for our salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10).

"Papyri receipts for taxes have been recovered with the word *tetelestai* written across them, meaning 'paid in full.'"¹

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 four evangelists presented Jesus as giving up His life of His own accord. No one took it from Him (cf. 10:10, 14, 17-18). He did this voluntarily, and in harmony with His Father's will (cf. 8:29; 14:31).

"... He 'bowed his head'; the plain intimation is that, up to this point, His head had been *held erect*. It was no impotent sufferer who hung there in a swoon. Had *that* been the case, His head had lolled helplessly on His chest, and He would have had no occasion to 'bow' it."²

John did not record Jesus' final utterance from the cross (Luke 23:46). He evidently ended his account of Jesus' death as he did in order to stress the completion of the work of redemption, which Jesus triumphantly announced with His sixth saying. John also stressed Jesus' divine sovereign control over His own destiny, all the while staying in submission to His Father's will.

"The death of Christ may be viewed from five main viewpoints. From the standpoint of *God* the Cross was a *propitiation* (Rom. 3:25-26), where full satisfaction was made to His holiness and justice. From the standpoint of *the Saviour*, it was a *sacrifice*

¹Blum, p. 340.

²Pink, 3:246.

(Eph. 5:2), an *offering* (Heb. 9:14), an act of *obedience* (Phil. 2:8). From the standpoint of *believers*, it was a *substitution*, the Just suffering for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). From the standpoint of *Satan* it was a *triumph* and a *defeat*: a triumph, in that he bruised the heel of the woman's Seed (Gen. 3:15); a defeat, in that through His death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). From the standpoint of *the world* it was a brutal *murder* (Acts 3:15). It is with this last-mentioned aspect of the death of Christ that our present passage principally treats."¹

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 special 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 an instrument of execution overnight. Such a person was under God's curse (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; Josh. 8:29). To allow someone to remain overnight on a Passover Sabbath would be especially inappropriate.

Normally the Romans left victims of crucifixion hanging until they died, which sometimes took several days.² 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

¹Ibid., 3:220.

²Bishop, p. 308.

reason, they would smash their legs, breaking the bones with an iron mallet. This prevented the victims from using their legs to push themselves up in order to keep their chest cavities open, allowing them to breathe. Death by asphyxiation, loss of blood, and shock would soon follow.¹ Archaeologists have found the remains of a victim of crucifixion with his legs smashed in Israel.²

"Thus the 'breaking of the bones' was a sort of increase of punishment, by way of compensation for its shortening by the final stroke that followed."³

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.

"The punishment was abolished, together with crucifixion, by the first Christian emperor Constantine (Lipsius, III. 14)."⁴

19:34 Whatever moved one of the soldiers 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.

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.⁵ Apparently the soldier pierced Jesus' side before His blood congealed into a solid. This eyewitness testimony

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 622.

²N. Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970):38-59.

³Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:613.

⁴Westcott, p. 279.

⁵See A. F. Sava, "The Wound in the Side of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19 (1957):343-46.

stresses the fact that Jesus really did die and that He was a genuine man (cf. 1:14).

"The dead do not bleed, ordinarily, but the right auricle of the human heart holds liquid blood after death, and the outer sac holds a serum called hydro-pericardium."¹

By the end of the first century, when John probably 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.² Muhammad's knowledge of Christianity came through docetic sources.³

Some interpreters have suspected that John was alluding to the Lord's Supper and baptism when he mentioned this blood and water.⁴ 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 or atonement and cleansing that metaphorically flow from Jesus' death,⁵ or the cleansing of the sinner and the expiation of his sins.⁶ Again it would be hard to prove or disprove that this was in John's mind from what he wrote. Still others view it as referring to the Holy Spirit. However, these are at best interpretations that rest on similarities. Others have seen a fulfillment of Psalm 69:20 here: "Disgrace has broken my heart." Yet John did not make this connection, and Jesus did not die literally of a broken heart.

Several hymn writers have, nevertheless, developed this symbolism. For example, Fanny Crosby wrote, "Jesus, keep me near the cross. There a precious fountain, free to all, a healing

¹Bishop, pp. 324-25.

²*Koran*, Sura 4:156.

³F. F. Bruce, p. 382, footnote 38.

⁴E.g., Brown, 2:946-53; cf. Westcott, p. 279.

⁵E.g., Dodd, p. 428; cf. Gaebelein, *The Annotated ...*, 3:1:241; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 725; Harrison, p. 1118.

⁶Darby, 3:562.

stream, flows from Calv'ry's mountain."¹ Other non-literal interpretations see the water as an allusion to Exodus 17:6. Augustus Toplady wrote, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power."² I do not mean to denigrate these worthy hymns. I am simply pointing out that they go beyond the teaching of this passage.

19:35 Lest the reader miss the point of verse 34, John explained that he had personally seen what he narrated, and that he was telling the truth. 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 probable 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 most probable since its fulfillment was

¹Fanny Crosby, "Near the Cross."

²Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages."

more literal, though admittedly it involves the Passover typology.

This quotation in verse 36 has spawned the theory that Jesus died at the same time that the Jews were killing 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.¹ 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.

TIMELINE OF JESUS' PASSION			
Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
April 1	April 2	April 3	
6:00 a.m. ²	6:00 a.m.	6:00 a.m.	Jesus before Pilate
9:00 a.m.	9:00 a.m.	9:00 a.m.	Jesus crucified
Noon	Noon	Noon	Darkness until 3:00
3:00 p.m.	3:00 p.m.	3:00 p.m.	Jesus died

¹See Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects ...*, pp. 81-90.

²All times indicated are approximate.

		Passover lams killed	
14 Nisan	15 Nisan	16 Nisan	
6:00 p.m.	6:00 p.m.	6:00 p.m.	Jesus buried
		Passover lams eaten	
		The Last Supper	
9:00 p.m.	9:00 p.m.	Geth- semane	
Midnight	Midnight	Jesus arrested	

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 at Him whom they pierced when He returns at His second coming (cf. Rev. 1:7). As we have seen, 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 in regard to Jesus' burial. The Synoptics tell us that he was a rich God-fearing 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 came out publicly 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.¹ Family members could not claim the bodies of people who had undergone crucifixion as punishment for sedition (inciting rebellion against Rome).² Thus Jesus' corpse would normally 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 caused Joseph to face up to his responsibility to take a stand for Jesus.

19:39 Only John mentioned that Nicodemus also played a part in burying Jesus (cf. 3:1-15). He also was 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 ("myrrh and aloes") 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 apparently divided their responsibilities with Joseph securing Pilate's permission and Nicodemus preparing the spices.

Myrrh was a fragrant resin that the Jews turned into powder and then mixed with aloes, which was powdered sandalwood.³ The purpose of covering a corpse with this aromatic powder was to dry it out and to lessen the foul odor that the process of decay caused.⁴ Obviously these men, as well as all of Jesus' disciples, did not expect Him to rise from the dead.

¹Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 5:1:14.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 629.

³*Ibid.*, p. 630.

⁴See Alford, 1:904.

19:40 The Egyptians removed some internal parts of the body before embalming, and the pagans typically burned human corpses. The burial custom of the Jews was to place the corpse on a long sheet with the feet at one end of the sheet. Next, they would cover the corpse with thick layers of spices. 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.¹ 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 ("wrappings," Gr. *othonia*). Their work had to be hasty, because sunset was approaching quickly and all work had to cease when the Sabbath began at sunset on Friday.

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). One writer believed the custom was to wrap the body in long, bandage-like strips rather than in a shroud.² However, this Greek word does not necessarily mean narrow strips of cloth. It can describe one or more large pieces of cloth.³ 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. The shroud of Turin is such a piece of cloth, though whether it was the real burial cloth of Jesus is the subject of considerable controversy.

"It is an almost melodramatic irony that, when Jesus died, his burial was arranged—not by Peter, or John, or the others who, only last night, had beat their breasts at dinner and argued about who love him the most—but by a Sadducee [Joseph of

¹See my note at 11:44; and Westcott, p. 281.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 730.

³Brown, 2:942.

Arimathea], a Pharisee [Nicodemus], and a pagan [Pontius Pilate]."¹

"The elite of Jerusalem could never forgive these men [Joseph and Nicodemus] for assisting a scoundrel who had been crucified."²

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, several examples of which are observable in Israel today. Matthew noted that the garden and its tomb belonged to Joseph (Matt. 27:60). John's mention of the garden anticipates his later reference to a gardener (20:15). His reference to the tomb being new and unused sets the stage for the Resurrection—at which no other corpse would be 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."³

"Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden and away from the tree of life. But Jesus, the second Adam, dies on a tree to redeem man and re-open paradise (cf. Rev 2:7)."⁴

The site was probably not the Garden Tomb near Gordon's Calvary, though many Christians prefer this site, mainly because of its location just outside the present wall of Jerusalem and its proximity to a hill that resembles a skull.⁵ Jesus' tomb would have been closer to the crucifixion site than the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now covers. Jesus' tomb

¹Bishop, p. 326.

²Ibid.

³Tasker, p. 219.

⁴Wilkin, "The Gospel ...," 1:472.

⁵E. g., Lenski, p. 1330.

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 described similar circumstances 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 hasty 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).

"While we now recognize that all four Evangelists are theologians in their own right, the Fourth Evangelist has labored more than all to bring to the clear light of day the theological significance of the passion narrative handed on to the churches."¹

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."²

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 361.

²Wiersbe, 1:387.

"The Gospel of John associated the resurrection directly with the theme of eternal life [cf. vv. 30-31]."¹

John also 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 the Passion ended with His death.

"For John, as for all the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus was the immutable [unchanging] 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]."²

"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 condition. (3) As a result, their condition is transformed (Mary, mission; the disciples, gladness; Thomas, faith)."³

"With Mary, the emphasis is on love; with the ten, the emphasis is on hope; and with Thomas, the emphasis is on faith."⁴

1. The discovery of Peter and John 20:1-10 (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 the angel sitting on the stone (Matt. 28:2-3). He also did not include the appearance of two angels to the women who visited

¹Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, p. 63.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 631-32.

³R. Kysar, *John*, p. 299.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:387.

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).¹

20:1 The first day of the week was Sunday. It is interesting that all four 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 in order to associate Easter more clearly with a new beginning.² John may have mentioned the darkness of the night to associate darkness with Mary's limited perception and understanding then (cf. 13:30).³ 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, but John mentioned only Mary Magdalene.⁴

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 Salome	Mary the mother of James Joanna and others	

¹See Westcott, pp. 287-88, for other unique features of John's account of the Resurrection, and for a table of the possible order and time of the events that took place on the first Easter Sunday.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 635.

³Ibid.

⁴See Zane C. Hodges, "The Women and the Empty Tomb," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):301-9.

Mary Magdalene evidently came at first with the other women (cf. v. 2; Prov. 8:17). 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, but he did not record that she entered 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 what she had seen to Peter and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved," who was probably John himself (cf. 13:23; et al.). Mary first assumed that some people had stolen Jesus' body ("they have taken the Lord from the tomb"). 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.

A decree of Emperor Claudius, who reigned shortly after this event (A.D. 41-54), made it a capital offense to destroy tombs, remove bodies, or displace the sealing stone or other stones.¹ Mary's reference to "the Lord" could not have been as full of meaning now as it was after His resurrection appearances. Here Mary perhaps used the title only in great respect.

20:3-4 The detail of the other disciple (John) outrunning Peter to the tomb was probably mentioned just to confirm that this was an eyewitness report. It also shows that these disciples had not removed Jesus' body. There is no basis in the text for allegorizing these two men and making them stand for the Gentile church and the Jewish church, as some theologians have done.²

20:5 John saw (Gr. *blepei*, cf. v. 1) the linen wrappings (*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

¹See C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background, Selected Documents*, p. 15.

²E.g., Bultmann, p. 685.

undoubtedly taken the expensive cloth with which Joseph and Nicodemus had prepared it for burial. John may have at first assumed that Jesus' body was still there, especially if the light was bad at that early hour. Perhaps John did not go into the tomb because he did not want to violate its sanctity or incur ritual defilement.

20:6-7 When Peter arrived at the tomb, moments later, he entered in, probably because he wanted to know exactly how things stood regardless of the consequences. He also looked at (Gr. *theorei*, beheld intently) not only the linen burial clothes (Gr. *ta othonia*), but also the face-cloth that had covered Jesus' head (Gr. *soudarion*, cf. 11:44). Evidently John could not see this from his vantage point outside the tomb. The distance of the face-cloth from the other wrappings, and the care with which someone had positioned it, were unusual. Jesus was obviously not there, but someone had been there.

That person who had folded up the face-cloth had apparently been the resurrected Jesus, or perhaps one of the angels. A grave robber would not have taken the time to fold the head covering neatly but would have left it lying in a heap. Neither would friends who might have removed the body done this. They would have hurried away from the tomb as quickly as possible in order to avoid being apprehended by the guards. 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.

Why did the grave clothes lie as they had been before the body of Jesus exited them, and why had the face-cloth been carefully folded and laid aside? One explanation is that these were deliberately given as two different witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.¹ Or this may just have been the accurate detailed account of an eyewitness.

20:8 Encouraged by Peter's boldness, John also walked into the tomb. There he saw (Gr. *eiden*, perceived intelligently) this evidence of Jesus' disappearance and believed what it implied.

¹Lenski, p. 1343.

He believed that Jesus was alive. In this chapter John carefully recorded that the disciples who saw the resurrected Jesus believed on Him (cf. vv. 16, 20, 25, 29). The writer did not explain what John 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 they 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). Neither of them confessed their belief to others at that time (v. 9; cf. vv. 10-18).

Jesus had passed through the grave clothes and through the rocky tomb. The angel had opened the tomb in order to admit the disciples, not to release Jesus (Matt. 28:2).

20:9 John's faith rested on the evidence that he had seen.¹ 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."²

¹See Zane C. Hodges, "Form-Criticism and the Resurrection Accounts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:496 (October-December 1967):339-48.

²Wiersbe, 1:387.

The Scriptures attribute Christ's resurrection to each of the members of the Trinity. All three played a part in it: the Father (Rom. 6:4), the Son (John 10:17), and the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

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 own homes" suggests 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 (cf. Acts 12:12).

2. The discovery of Mary Magdalene 20:11-18 (cf. Mark 16:9-11)

"Someone has called this story the greatest recognition scene in all literature."¹

This is the first of four of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances that John included in his Gospel. 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 the chart below is that it places the post-resurrection appearances that the New Testament writers mentioned in general chronological order.

JESUS' POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

Easter morning

- to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10-18)
- to other women (Matt. 28:9-10)
- to Peter (Lue 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)

¹Barclay, 2:312.

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)

In addition to these appearances, after His ascension the Lord also appeared to Stephen (Acts 7:56), to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:4-5), and to John on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1).

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. John presented her as lingering there after Peter and John departed. The other women had evidently left the tomb by the time this incident took place. Mary was still grieving over Jesus' death and weeping over the missing body of Jesus. She had not yet realized what John did. She then peered into the tomb for the second time (cf. Mark 16:5).

"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.'"¹

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-sized angels who were sitting at either end of the place where Jesus' body had been lying. The presence and positions of the two angels were of more consequence. It is interesting that cherubim stood at either end of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:17-19).

This is the only place in Scripture where angels are described as sitting. Evidently Mary had seen the angels earlier (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-7). Their white clothing 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 understand 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 also account for her failing at first to recognize Jesus. She apparently backed out of the tomb, turned around, and saw (Gr. *theorei*, cf. v. 6) Jesus standing

¹Wiersbe, 1:389.

outside it. She looked at 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 dying (John 19:25), and she went to His tomb early on Sunday morning (20:1)."¹

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 that the angels 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 you think Jesus was? or: Which Messiah are you looking for?

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. Or He may have supernaturally blocked their perception of Him. Instead of answering, Mary asked this apparent gardener for Jesus' body, and she promised to assume care of it. Her request revealed her devotion to Jesus. She thought that the gardener had removed the body for some

¹Blum, p. 342.

reason. Her "Sir" (Gr. *kyrie*) here obviously was a courteous address, not a confession of faith.

"It has been well said that the question where Jesus obtained his clothes for his different appearances during the forty days is as foolish as the one where the angels obtained their white garments."¹

20:16 Mary recognized Jesus when He called her by name (cf. 10:3-4).

"The Shepherd had called his sheep by name, and the sheep heard and joyfully responded (John 10:3)."²

Mary responded by calling Jesus by the name that she had undoubtedly used to address Him numerous times before: "Rabboni!" John accommodated his readers by translating the Aramaic word. This title probably did not verbalize 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, in her emotions, to the height of joy—in one brief second.

"Never was there a one-word utterance more charged with emotion than this."³

"The men were quicker to grasp, *intellectually*, the meaning of the empty tomb, but Mary was the more devoted, and this Christ rewarded. Mary exemplifies the case of those whose hearts seek Christ, but whose minds are ill-informed. It is the *heart* God ever looks at. We may know much truth intellectually, but unless the heart is absorbed

¹Lenski, p. 1356.

²Beasley-Murray, p. 375.

³Tasker, p. 221.

with Christ, He will not reveal Himself to such an one in the intimacies of love and communion."¹

20:17 Jesus' next words help us to understand that Mary also embraced Jesus. Mary probably lowered herself before Jesus and embraced His lower legs (cf. Matt. 28:9). The Greek word translated "clinging" (*aptesthai*), means "to grasp tightly."

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."

One view is that Jesus' second statement connects with what follows it, rather than with what precedes it.² 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).³ 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*) 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.⁴ However, it is very unusual for the preposition for (Gr. *gar*) to link a prohibition and an imperative.⁵ 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 onto Jesus because He had not yet ascended to the Father. But it was later appropriate for Thomas to touch Jesus (v. 27).

¹Pink, 3:279.

²S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, p. 356.

³E.g., Barclay, 2:314-15.

⁴M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*, pp. 159-60, §476.

⁵Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 642.

Therefore, Jesus must have ascended to the Father and returned between His appearances to Mary and Thomas.¹ Yet there is no biblical evidence that Jesus ascended to the Father and returned from Him between these two appearances. Not only that, 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. Specifically, Jesus was contrasting His passing presence, in His post-resurrection state, with His permanent presence through the Spirit. 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.²

This view puts more emphasis on Jesus' exaltation in His passion than the New Testament writers did themselves, including John. Besides, 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.

The best explanation seems to be that Mary was holding onto Jesus as though she would never let Him go (cf. Matt. 28:9). As Barrett put it, "... she is trying to recapture the past."³

"She clasps him as her own, never, never to lose him again."⁴

Jesus either told her to stop doing that or, if He knew she was about to do it, He was telling 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

¹Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:118; 5:262-63; 7:20.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:312; Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 314.

³Barrett, *The Gospel ...*, p. 565.

⁴Lenski, p. 1360.

other work to do first. Only in heaven would it be possible for loving believers such as Mary to maintain intimate contact with Jesus forever.¹ This view makes good sense of the text and harmonizes with Jesus' invitation to Thomas (v. 27). Thomas needed to touch Jesus in order to strengthen his faith. Mary needed to release Him because she had no reason to fear losing Him. This view is very similar to view four above.

"He bade the disciples touch him, for the confirmation of their faith. She must believe him, and adore him, but must not expect to be familiar with him as formerly. He forbids her to dote upon his bodily presence, and leads her to the spiritual communion which she should have with him after he was ascended to his Father."²

The message that Mary was to carry to the disciples was that Jesus was going to ascend 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. Whereas the Resurrection was the fulfillment of one aspect of Jesus' ministry, it was the beginning of another. Jesus' return to His Father was the climax of events following His resurrection.

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 (cf. Matt. 17:27). 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 "My brothers" here. This is the first time in the Gospels that Jesus called his disciples His brothers.

¹Cf. Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 644-45; Tenney, "John," p. 191; Blum, p. 342; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 742-43; Wiersbe, 1:390; Beasley-Murray, p. 376; Bock, pp. 544-45; Gaebelien, *The Annotated ...*, 3:1:243.

²Henry, p. 1626.

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 ("I have seen the Lord"), 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 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 took his readers directly from the events of Easter morning to what occurred 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.'"¹

"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."²

Apparently the Eleven—except Thomas—were present at this time (cf. Mark 16:14; John 20:24). 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. 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 the Rabbi's disciples as well. Contrast their boldness following Jesus' ascension just a few weeks later.

John implied that Jesus appeared miraculously, since the disciples had shut (Gr. *kekleismenon*, i.e., "locked" NIV) the doors (plural; cf. v. 26). Jesus' resurrection body had passed through grave clothes and a rocky tomb. Now it passed through the walls of this structure.

"It seems to have been the normal condition of His fleshly Body to be visible to mortal eyes:—of His risen Body, not to be. But both these He could suspend when He pleased, without affecting the substance or truth of either."³

Jesus' greeting was common enough (i.e., Heb. *shalom 'alekem*). However He had previously promised His disciples His peace (14:27; 16:33). Consequently He was imparting peace rather than just wishing peace on them. This seems clear because Jesus repeated His benediction two more times (vv.

¹Wiersbe, 1:391.

²Ibid., 1:392.

³Alford, 1:909.

21, 26). "Shalom" summarized the fullness of God's blessing, not just the end of hostility (cf. Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7).

"Never had that 'common word' [Shalom] been so filled with meaning as when Jesus uttered it on Easter evening ... His '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. 'Shalom!' accordingly is supremely the Easter greeting. Not surprisingly it is included, along with 'grace,' in the greeting of *every* epistle of Paul in the NT."¹

20:20 Evidently Jesus showed the disciples His hands and His side—with His scars—in order 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) Jesus as He 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."²

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)."³

Clearly Jesus' resurrection body resembled His former body, but perhaps His beatings and crucifixion had so scarred Him that even His closest friends could hardly recognize Him (cf.

¹Beasley-Murray, pp. 378-79.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 647.

³Tasker, p. 222.

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 (ghostly).

Does Jesus' glorified body today retain the scars that these disciples witnessed?

"It is best not to pronounce on matters unknown to us. If Jesus wished to retain his wounds he certainly could do so, and they certainly would always appear as the evidence in his very body of his glorious work of redemption."¹

20:21 Jesus repeated His benediction (v. 19). He then commissioned His disciples for their mission from then on.²

"... the Lord *first* said 'Peace be unto you' *before* 'I send you.' We are constantly disposed to look for peace as the earned reward of service: what a travesty! and how worthless! Such 'Peace' is but a transient self-complacency which cannot deceive any one but the self-deluded hypocrite. The truth is that peace is the *preparation* for service ..."³

Jesus 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 ("I also send you"), 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. However, John never referred to the disciples as apostles in this Gospel. 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

¹Lenski, p. 1368.

²See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

³Pink, 3:285.

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 four separate occasions. The first recorded commission chronologically was evidently the one in John 20:21-23. The second was the one recorded in Mark 16:15-16. 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. The reader of the Gospels can scarcely escape its crucial importance. Each Gospel closes with a commission from the risen Lord. 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:¹ First, they simply cast it in different terminology (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:20). Second, 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 (in Luke 24:46-48 and 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

¹See Barrett, *The Gospel ...*, p. 568.

than just preaching the gospel, baptizing, teaching, and planting churches. I believe this understanding is correct.

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 continuation of His example (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 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 in order to complete the mission. Our mission does not replace Jesus' mission, however. He carries out His present mission through us. We must consider all the versions of the Great Commission that Jesus gave in order to understand our mission correctly, not just this one.

"... 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."¹

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 in order to carry out such a task. But what did Jesus really do next? There are several views:

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 649.

One view is that Jesus gave these disciples a temporary infusion of His Spirit.¹ The act of breathing on them recalls the Creation, in which God breathed His life into Adam (Gen. 2:7; cf. Ezek. 37:9). Thus Jesus may have been suggesting that He was doing a new creative work by filling these men with His Holy Spirit.² Later Jesus explained that the Spirit would come upon these disciples again (Acts 1:8). This present act of Jesus, then, may have 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 give the Spirit (7:39; chs. 14—16) and the importance in Acts of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15). Also, opponents of this view claim that 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, which 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*) here 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.³ 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

¹Blum, p. 343; cf. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries ...*, 2:205; Alford, 1:910; Jamieson, et al., p. 1077; Lenski, p. 1374; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 747-48.

²Barrett, *The Gospel ...*, p. 570. Cf. B. B. Findlay, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:938.

³Dods, 1:865; G. Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, p. 11.

stressing the quality of the noun. In this case that would be the holiness of the Spirit.

Some modern scholars view this verse as John's account of Pentecost.¹ However, this view does not take seriously the chronological sequence of events that these books present. 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 memorable introduction to the Spirit, who would come upon them later. It was a demonstration of what Jesus would do after He returned to the Father, and which He did do on Pentecost. He was not imparting the Spirit to them in any sense here.² This interpretation accounts for Thomas not receiving the Spirit before Pentecost. It also explains why this event may have had no permanently changing effect on the disciples comparable to that of Pentecost. Evidently there was only one coming of the Spirit on these disciples, and that happened on Pentecost. This view seems to me to be most defensible, and I prefer it, though view one above is also possible.

Another view is that this gift, to the whole group of believers present, was the necessary condition for the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This was a quickening, and what happened on Pentecost was an endowing. This was the action of the risen Christ, and the other was the action of the ascended Christ. This gift prepared and enabled them to receive the other gift.³

Still another view is that this impartation of the Spirit resulted in His indwelling the disciples and empowered them from this time on. The last events recorded by Luke and John, and in the first chapter of Acts, supposedly prove that the disciples were changed men after this "breathing" and before Pentecost.

¹E.g., Beasley-Murray, pp. 380-82.

²E.g., Harris, p. 201; Tenney, "John," p. 193; Harrison, p. 1120; Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 651-55; idem, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, pp. 140-44; Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 320.

³Westcott, pp. 294-95.

What happened on Pentecost was a baptism of power, not the coming of the Spirit to permanently indwell the disciples.¹ Even though this "breathing" experience may have resulted in the disciples gaining joy, unity, peace, and insight into Scripture, the Book of Acts credits Pentecost, not this present experience, as being the event when the Spirit came upon believers uniquely.

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 representatives.

If people ("any" or "anyone," plural Gr. *tinon*) believed the gospel, the disciples were given the authority to tell these new 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,

¹Pink, 3:286-87.

too, applies to all succeeding generations of Jesus' disciples—since Jesus was still talking about the disciples' mission.

"How can you and I remit sins? By telling the gospel!"¹

"... 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."²

"When Christ enjoins the apostles to forgive sins, He does not convey to them what is peculiar to Himself. It belongs to *Him* to forgive sins—He only enjoins them, in His name, to *proclaim* the forgiveness of sins."³

This resurrection appearance has a 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 part (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 both 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 gloomy and pessimistic, follower of

¹McGee, 4:499.

²Tenney, "John," p. 193. Cf. Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:314-15.

³John Calvin, quoted by Pink, 3:288. Cf. Harrison, p. 1120.

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.¹ The Greek text clarifies that the other disciples kept saying (Gr. *elegon*, imperfect tense) that Jesus was alive. They evidently sought Thomas out and shared the good news with him (cf. Gal. 6:1).

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. Nails had pierced Jesus' hands and feet (cf. Ps. 22:16; Luke 24:39). Sometimes the Romans only bound the victim's hands and feet with cords.

"Thomas made one mistake. He withdrew from the Christian fellowship. He sought loneliness rather than togetherness. And because he was not there with his fellow Christians he missed the first coming of Jesus. We miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from the Christian fellowship, and when we try to be alone. Things can happen to us within the fellowship of Christ's Church which will not happen to us when we are alone. When sorrow comes to us, and when sadness envelops us, we often tend to shut ourselves up and to refuse to meet people. That is the very time when, in spite of our sorrow, we should seek the fellowship of Christ's people, for it is there that we are likeliest of all to meet Him face to face."²

Thomas' final belief 20:26-29

20:26 John located this post-resurrection appearance on the eighth day after Easter Sunday, namely, the following Sunday. The eight days (Gr. *hemeras okto*) evidently included both Sundays. Perhaps John identified the day because, by the time

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 752.

²Barclay, 2:321.

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). However, Sunday worship has its roots in tradition rather than commandment.

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 done a week earlier (v. 19). He also repeated His benediction (v. 21). Perhaps Jesus did these things because He knew that the disciples had told Thomas that He had appeared this way and said these things. Thus repeating the miraculous appearance 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 if he was to believe that Jesus was alive. Jesus knew what Thomas had said, even though He had not been physically present when Thomas had said it. This is a further implication of Jesus' deity. The purpose of this test was not just to satisfy Thomas' curiosity, however. It was also to bring him to faith that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah.

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 (master) 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."¹

Now Thomas believed like 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 [in the Gospels, i.e., as "God"]. 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 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."²

20:29 Jesus did not object to what Thomas had said; it was perfectly true (cf. Acts 10:26; 14:15; Rev. 22:8-9). Jesus was indeed Thomas' Lord and God. We could translate Jesus' first sentence either as a question or as a statement. It confirmed the reality of Thomas' belief in either case, and it set up the beatitude that followed (cf. 13:17), which is the last of the Lord's beatitudes.

"Blessed" (Gr. *makarios*) does more than just describe the person in view as happy. It also declares him or her acceptable to and favored by 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.

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 659.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 753.

1:8-9). Those were the people whom Jesus had in view when He made His second statement. This beatitude does not make believers who live after Jesus' ascension superior to those who saw Him in the flesh. But it does guarantee their blessing by God.

"He [Jesus] would have those who must believe without seeing, understand that they have no cause to envy those who had an opportunity of seeing, and who believed only after they saw."¹

"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."²

"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."³

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 his account of Jesus' ministry. This explanation constitutes a preliminary conclusion to the book.

¹A. B. Bruce, p. 513.

²Tenney, "John," p. 195.

³Idem, "Topics from ...," p. 357.

20:30 "So then" 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, so that people may believe and so enjoy eternal life (v. 31). There were many other evidences ("signs") of Jesus' deity that John could have presented. However, he chose those that he recorded here in order to lead his readers to the type of faith that Thomas had just articulated and that Jesus had 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? Some interpreters have concluded that he meant other post-resurrection signs, since John wrote that Jesus performed them "in the presence of the disciples."¹ Most interpreters believe that John meant the same kind of signs as the seven miracles that he featured, the significance of which Jesus usually explained in the context (chs. 2—12). These, too, were done in the presence of Jesus' disciples.

A SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN SIGNS IN JOHN				
Sign	Significance	Belief	Unbelief	Ref.
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

¹Pink, 3:302.

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 rulers	11:1-16

Morgan regarded John's Gospel as recording 16 signs, eight in the realm of works (the seven charted above plus Christ's resurrection) and eight in the realm of words (the seven "I am" claims charted above, under my comments on 6:35, plus "before Abraham was born, I AM" in 8:58).¹

20:31

This verse unites many of the most important themes in the fourth Gospel. It summarizes John's theology as well as spelling out his purpose. 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 most people less than two hours. This document can also deepen and establish the faith of any believer, and John undoubtedly wrote what he did in order to accomplish that end as well.

The implication of this primary evangelistic purpose is that John meant unbelievers when he wrote "you." Did he have a particular group of unbelievers in mind, or was he addressing any unbelieving reader? Some commentators have tried to identify a particular audience from statements in the text. Yet

¹Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 33,

it seems more probable that John wrote for a general audience, since he did not identify his intended audience specifically.

John's presentation of Jesus as "the Christ" (the title of God's specially anointed Servant, in Psalm 2:2) and as "the Son of God" (the title of God's own Son made King, in 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7) is certainly clear. These titles summarize the identity of Jesus, which John stressed throughout this Gospel.

"There cannot be any doubt but that John conceived of Jesus as the very incarnation of God."¹

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 that they might receive salvation and experience the life of God fully (cf. 10:10).

"... that very assent itself ... is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding."²

"That implies more than intellectual conviction. That is belief as volitional surrender to the thing of which the mind is convinced. ... Intellectual conviction is not saving faith; but apart from it there can be no saving faith. We must have the facts, and grasp them intellectually, and then yield to them."³

This divine life affects the whole person, not just the intellect. Even more than this, it affects him or her forever, not just during that person's present lifetime.

John's clear purpose statement concludes the body of this Gospel. I regard 20:31 as the key verse in the book.

¹Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 756.

²Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 3:2:8.

³Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 13.

V. EPILOGUE CH. 21

This Gospel began with a theological prologue (1:1-18), and it ends with a practical epilogue. John concluded his narrative, which is 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 it 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 appear again 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."¹

The structure of this chapter is similar to the rest of this Gospel's structure. John first narrated an event (vv. 1-14), and then he related Jesus' teaching that grew out of 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 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.

¹Blum, p. 344. Cf. Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 665-68.

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 now obviously a believer (20:28). His naming perhaps suggests 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 in order to remind the readers of Jesus' early signs that happened in Cana (2:1-11; 4:46-54), since Jesus was about to perform another miracle.

The sons of Zebedee were James and John, though John had not identified them this way before. Perhaps this was John's way of hinting at his own presence, as an eyewitness of what followed, 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.¹ However, there is no basis for this conclusion in the text. After all, when Peter later learned that Jesus was standing on the shore, he jumped right into the water to get to Jesus as quickly as he could (v. 7).

Probably Peter's words simply expressed his intention to do some fishing, not to go back to his former vocation.² He probably found it very difficult to sit around doing nothing

¹E.g., Hoskyns, p. 552.

²F. F. Bruce, p. 399; Westcott, p. 300.

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 he probably enjoyed doing and presumably did well. Alternatively, he may have been returning to his former vocation temporarily in order to earn some money so that he could feed his family.¹

Another view is that Peter was operating in the flesh when he decided to go fishing. Jesus had told His disciples that he would meet them at a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16), but they went out on the sea instead. He had called them to fish for men, not for fish.² I do not prefer this interpretation.

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 nighttime, which were popular times 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) ..."³

¹Beasley-Murray, p. 399.

²Pink, 3:307-8.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 670.

In view of Jesus' commission, these disciples' activity may seem inappropriate, even if it was not rebellious. Should they have been preaching rather than fishing? Fishing contrasts with their behavior following Pentecost, when they began to carry out their mission zealously and joyfully. Therefore John's reference to nighttime may again have symbolic overtones (cf. 13:30).

21:4 Similarly, 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 appreciate that yet. Jesus' instruction would change the course of their lives forever. Likewise, Jesus being on the shore, and the disciples on the sea, may suggest His present separation from His servants: Him being unseen in heaven, and they being on the earth.

The disciples could not recognize Jesus as He stood on the beach, even though He was within shouting distance from where they were fishing (v. 8). This may have been due to the twilight, fog, 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*). "Children" expressed the disciples' relationship to Jesus. "Lads" captures the spirit of His word (cf. 1 John 2:13, 18).¹ It was "the common term of address to men at work."² The form of Jesus' question in the Greek text assumed a negative answer. He knew that they had caught nothing. Why did Jesus ask them this question, since He knew the answer? He probably did so in order to elicit a confession of failure from them, so that they would clearly see that what would follow would be Jesus' work and not theirs. Jesus' words could have been understood as a question from someone who wanted to buy what they had: fish.

One can sense the discouragement and mild embarrassment in the disciples' answer: "No." Jesus was in the process of teaching these men about their personal inadequacy, even in

¹R. F. Weymouth, *The New Testament in Modern Speech*, p. 268.

²Dods, 1:868.

the type of work that they knew best and had most experience with. It was important that they admit their failure.

21:6 Their nets had been hanging over the left side of the fishing boat. The unknown Person on the shore now promised that if they would cast the net on the right-hand side they would find some fish. Such a suggestion must have seemed ridiculous to these seasoned fishermen. The idea that such an insignificant change would accomplish anything was laughable. Yet, amazingly, the disciples followed Jesus' orders. Perhaps it was the authoritativeness of Jesus' command that explains their compliance.

Why did the disciples follow Jesus' orders? 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).¹ That had been the time when Jesus first called these same 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 advice giver on the shore this dark morning most of them 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 their catch was so great. This is the only miracle that Jesus performed after His resurrection, according to the Gospel evangelists.²

Barclay offered a less miraculous explanation. He believed that Jesus saw a shoal of fish, from His position on the shore, that the disciples could not see, from their position in the boat.³

¹See Pink, 3:317, for a comparison of these two miracles.

²See *ibid*, 3:306, for a comparison of Jesus' first and last miracles in John's Gospel.

³Barclay, 2:326-27.

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. In fact their obedience to His word, even though they did not yet know that 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 likely he remembered that a few years earlier Jesus had performed a similar miracle (Luke 5:1-11). True to the pictures that we have of them in the New Testament, John exhibited quick insight and Peter quick action.

"And what a lesson is here again for the Lord's servants: when He grants success to our labours, when the Gospel-net in our hands gathers fishes, let us not forget to own 'It is the *Lord!*'"¹

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. That his action was thoughtful, rather than impulsive, is clear from the fact that he put his outer garment on before jumping overboard.

Fishermen usually worked in their light undergarments (Gr. *chiton*, long tee-shirts, not underwear). Peter evidently put on his outer garment (Gr. *ependytes*) so that 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.

¹Pink, 3:311.

He was again demonstrating his characteristic extravagant loyalty to his Lord (cf. 20:6).

21:8 The other disciples behaved more calmly. John was one of these whom Peter left to struggle with the net full of fish. His record of the distance (lit. about 200 cubits, or 100 yards), and the labor ("dragging the net full of fish") involved in this task, strengthens 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. The traditional site of this event is Tabgha, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee between Capernaum and Gennesaret.

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 and cooked one fish (Gr. *opsarion*, singular) for them even 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 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.

"I believe our Lord's object was to show the disciples that the secret of success was to work at His command, and to act with implicit obedience to His word."¹

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. Another interpretation sees Peter pulling the fish ashore by himself:

"What six men had been unable to do in their own strength [cf. v. 6], one man now did when he went to his work from the feet of Christ! ... The place of strength is still at the feet of the Saviour, and strength will be imparted exactly in proportion as we are in conscious fellowship with Him and drawing from His infinite fullness."²

There have been many allegorical explanations of the meaning of the 153 fish.³ Most of these are much too involved to explain here.⁴ Many of these involve gematria. Gematria is the discipline of deriving a word or words from the Hebrew letters, or in this case the Greek letters, that also represent numbers in their respective languages.

One of the more credible explanations of the 153 fish is as follows: Jesus formerly told His disciples that they would become fishers of men, which is 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 was not torn may symbolize the capability of the gospel to "catch" many people without

¹Ibid., 3:313.

²Ibid., 3:314.

³See Dods, 1:869, or Barclay, 2:329-30, for a few.

⁴See the commentaries, or for a brief overview, Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 672-73; or Bock, p. 552.

failing.¹ Arno Gaebelein claimed, without documentation, that the number of known nations in the world in Jesus' time was 153. He believed that this symbolizes the fact that people from all the nations of the world will be gathered into Christ's kingdom.²

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, acting 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 kind offered at 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

¹F. F. Bruce, pp. 401-2.

²Gaebelein, *The Annotated ...*, 3:1:245.

for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize 'the soul' that He neglects the body."¹

Apparently these disciples longed to ask Jesus if the Person standing with them was truly He, but they did not dare to 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 scarred His form that He scarcely resembled the Jesus that they had known. Or was His resurrection body so different that He looked like a stranger? We will have to wait to see Him for ourselves to get answers to these questions. In spite of everything, the disciples, "knowing that it was the Lord" from undeniable evidence, could only conclude that the One who stood among them really was Jesus.

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 and sets off this incident as distinct.

John said that this was the third post-resurrection appearance to the disciples (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

¹Wiersbe, 1:397.

complement 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 this 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 often done before, for example, in the upper room (chs. 13—17). The following conversation may have taken place as Jesus and Peter walked along the beach—with John within earshot close behind (cf. vv. 20-21). It seems, however, that the other six disciples also heard Jesus.

Jesus began by addressing Peter as Simon son of Jonas (John). In the Gospels, Jesus addressed Peter this way on only the most significant occasions. These were Peter's call to follow Jesus (1:42), his confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 16:17), and while 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.

"The mention of St Peter's natural descent here ["son of John"] (comp. i. 42; Matt. xvi. 17) appears to direct attention in the first place to the

man in the fulness [*sic*] of his natural character, as distinguished from the apostle."¹

Jesus used a word for love (Gr. *agapas*) in His question that many scholars have understood to refer to total commitment to another person. Other equally competent scholars, however, do not believe it had this strong meaning.² 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.³ Generally he treated synonyms as having essentially the same meaning. 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). Also, he used three different Greek words to describe fish in this passage: *prosphagion*, *ichthus*, and *opsarion*.

However, many expositors have concluded that Jesus was making a distinction between the meanings of the synonyms for love that He used here.⁴ 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?"⁵

¹Westcott, p. 302.

²E.g., R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 38-42.

³Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 676-77; Tenney, "John," p. 201; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 770.

⁴E.g., K. L. McKay, "Style and Significance in the Language of John 21:15-17," *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985):319-33; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 4:1:60-63; and Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 227.

⁵Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 768.

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,¹ 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 claimed 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). Yet 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 three denials. Those who view *philo* and *agapao* as essentially synonymous understand Peter as professing that he really did love Jesus. Peter wisely appealed for proof of his love to Jesus' knowledge ("You know that I love You"), not to his own former behavior.

"Experience had taught St Peter to distrust his own judgment of himself. Even when the fact is one of immediate consciousness he rests his assertion on the Lord's direct insight."²

"Peter had learned much since his fall. The loud protestations of that former hour have vanished, a deep humility bows Peter's soul. He does not now venture to make comparisons, and by

¹Stephen J. Smith, "Phonology, Fish, and the Form *Touton*: A New Approach to an Old Crux in John 21:15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62:4 (December 2019):739-48.

²Westcott, p. 303.

dropping all comparison with others silently takes back the proud comparison he once made."¹

Jesus responded graciously by giving Peter a command, not criticism. He told Peter to tend (Gr. *boske*, feed) His lambs (Gr. *arnia*). Three more pairs of synonyms, in addition to *agapao* and *philo*, occur in this passage. Some have argued for a gradation in their meaning.² *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).

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, which is an essentially evangelistic ministry (Matt. 4:19). Now He was broadening this calling to include being a shepherd of sheep, which is a pastoral ministry (that includes evangelizing).

21:16-17 Jesus proceeded to ask Peter essentially the same question two more times. Peter gave virtually the same answer each time. Peter was hurt after Jesus' third question because Jesus asked the same question a third time. This is the reason for Peter's pain that the text gives. Some commentators suggested that Peter was also grieved because this time Jesus used the same word for love that Peter had used (Gr. *philo*).³

"In His first question the Lord challenged the *superiority* of Peter's love. In His second question the Lord challenged whether Peter had *any love* at all. Here, in His third question the Lord now challenges even his *affection!* Most searching was

¹Lenski, p. 1420.

²E.g., Alford, 1:918.

³E.g., Westcott, p. 303.

this! But it had the desired effect. The Lord wounds only that He may heal."¹

Morris 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 different nuances of meaning.²

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, also near a charcoal fire, three times. The Great Physician was restoring Peter's soul. Jesus had previously restored Peter to fellowship with Himself (Luke 24:34). Peter's eagerness to get to Jesus (v. 7) is evidence of that.

"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)."³

"We may know much, and do much, and talk much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God for want of love, and at last go down to the Pit [i.e., the Grave]. Do we *love* Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than

¹Pink, 3:324.

²Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 770.

³Ibid., p. 772.

painted wax-figures: there is no life where there is no love."¹

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 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.

Throughout this interchange Jesus consistently referred to the sheep as His ("My") sheep, not Peter's sheep. Not only that, Jesus described Peter's ministry in terms of acts, not in terms of an office. Years later Peter wrote to elders urging them to apply these same attitudes in their pastoral ministries (1 Pet. 5:1-4).²

Jesus may have been giving Peter the same commission three times only in different words (vv. 15, 16, 17). However the differences may be significant.

"The first portrayed here is the simplest and humblest [v. 15]. The little ones in Christ's flock need support, which they cannot obtain of themselves; this the apostle is charged to give them. ... The lambs require to be fed; the sheep require to be guided [v. 16]. The watchful care and rule to be exercised over the maturer Christians calls for greater skill and tenderness than the feeding of the young and simple. ... The mature no less than the young Christians require their appropriate sustenance [v. 17]. Provision

¹Bishop Ryle, quoted by Pink, 3:323.

²C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John*, pp. 165-66.

must be made for their support as well as for their guidance. And this is the last and most difficult part of the pastor's office."¹

Perhaps Jesus repeated His first question verbatim in order to help Peter lift himself to a higher plane.²

"It is only those who truly *love* Christ that are fitted to minister to His flock! The work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response so discouraging, the criticisms so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce, that only the 'love of Christ'—His for us and ours for Him—can 'constrain' to such work."³

Some Roman Catholic scholars have used this passage to support their view that Peter was the first pope. Some of them 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 revelation, in the New Testament, does not exalt Peter to a place of authoritative rule over other under-shepherds (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). 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.

21:18-19 Jesus then gave the last of the many important statements that He introduced with a strong affirmation. It was a prediction of the type of death that Peter would die. Peter had just said to Jesus, "You know all things" (v. 17), and now Jesus demonstrated that He did.

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.⁴ This stretching took place when the Roman

¹Westcott, p. 303. Paragraph divisions omitted.

²McGee, 4:504.

³Pink, 3:325-26.

⁴Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2:226-27; Barrett, *The Gospel ...*, p. 585.

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.¹

"The crucifixion of St Peter at Rome is attested by Tertullian ('Scorp.' 15) and later writers. Origen further stated that he was crucified with his head downwards at his own request (Euseb. 'H. E.' III. 1)."²

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.

"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."³

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) also wrote that Peter died by martyrdom (1 Clement 5:4; 6:1).⁴ According to church tradition, Peter asked for crucifixion upside down because he felt unworthy to suffer as Jesus had.⁵ There is little corroborating support for this tradition, however. Traditionally, Peter died in Rome about A.D. 67.

¹Beasley-Murray, pp. 408-9.

²Westcott, p. 304.

³Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, p. 60. This book deals with this episode in Peter's life most helpfully, especially for Christian leaders.

⁴*Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers*, 1:11.

⁵*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 2:25; 3:1.

"... I do not quarrel with the notion that he died there; but I cannot be persuaded that he was bishop, especially for a long time."¹

Jesus then repeated His original command to 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."²

Does Jesus prediction mean 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., Phil. 3:11, 20-21; 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). One writer 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.³ If John wrote this Gospel late in the first century, as seems likely, Peter would probably have died before the first readers read this story.

21:20-21 Why did John identify himself as he did in these verses? Perhaps he did so because 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 may be that this description also reminds the reader of John's intimacy with

¹Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 4:6:15.

²Blum, p. 345.

³Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 113-14.

Peter. This helps us to understand Peter's question about Jesus' will for John. Peter evidently wanted to know what would happen to his young friend, since he himself was going to suffer crucifixion.

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 reasons as altruistic as Peter presumably had (cf. 1 Pet. 4:15). Some interpreters view Peter's question as fleshly.¹

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, Peter 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 main business, even of the chief under-shepherds, is not to make others follow Christ, but to follow Him themselves."²

"... following Christ means following Him in spite of circumstances [vv. 18-19] and without comparisons [vv. 20-22] ..."³

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 an early 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.

¹E.g., Pink, 3:330.

²A. B. Bruce, p. 528.

³Mark Bailey, *To Follow Him*, p. 112.

"This verse makes an epilogue to the story, which also points its application to the readers. They too must cease to indulge in wild speculations about the Beloved Disciple and attend to their own discipleship. For indeed that is John's object in creating this character in the first place. His reticence about him has a definite purpose. It is his hope that each reader will be so drawn by the Gospel to believe in Jesus and to follow him, that he will discover *himself* in the true discipleship of the Beloved Disciple."¹

"My friend, there are a lot of things that you won't know. There are many things that you don't need to know. There are things that are not your business to know. The important thing is to follow *Him*."²

John clarified what Jesus actually said in order to squelch the rumor that was evidently circulating when he wrote this Gospel. This 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. This was not 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."³

"The author's explanation of Jesus' announcement may be taken as evidence that the disciple was still living at the time this Gospel was

¹Lindars, p. 640.

²McGee, 4:505.

³Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 775.

written and that he was the source of its content. Obviously, if he had died early, the rumor would have had no credence."¹

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 (cf. Rev. 22:20).

C. THE WRITER'S POSTSCRIPT 21:24-25

Some commentators refer to this ending as a colophon. 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, and date and place of writing. However, this ending 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 partial, 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.² "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 (cf. 20:30-31).

The identity of the "we" is less clear. They could be scribes 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.³ Others believe that they were influential men in his church, though not necessarily in Ephesus.⁴ Another view is that this is a deliberately indefinite reference.⁵ Probably John himself wrote

¹Tenney, "John," p. 203.

²See Thomas D. Lea, "The Reliability of History in John's Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:3 (September 1996):387-402.

³E.g., Westcott, p. 306.

⁴E.g., Bultmann, pp. 717-18.

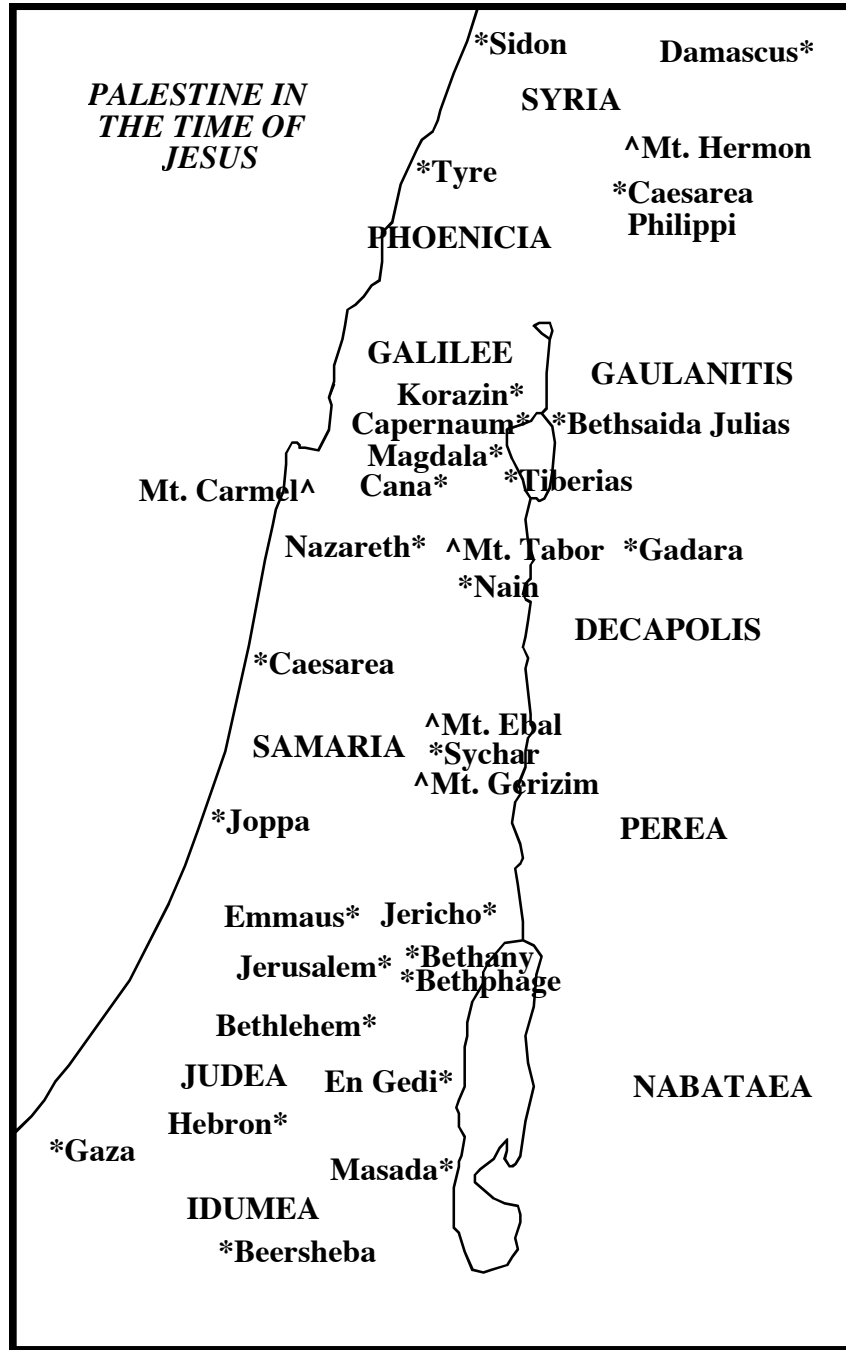
⁵C. H. Dodd, "Note on John 21, 24," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS4 (1953):212-13.

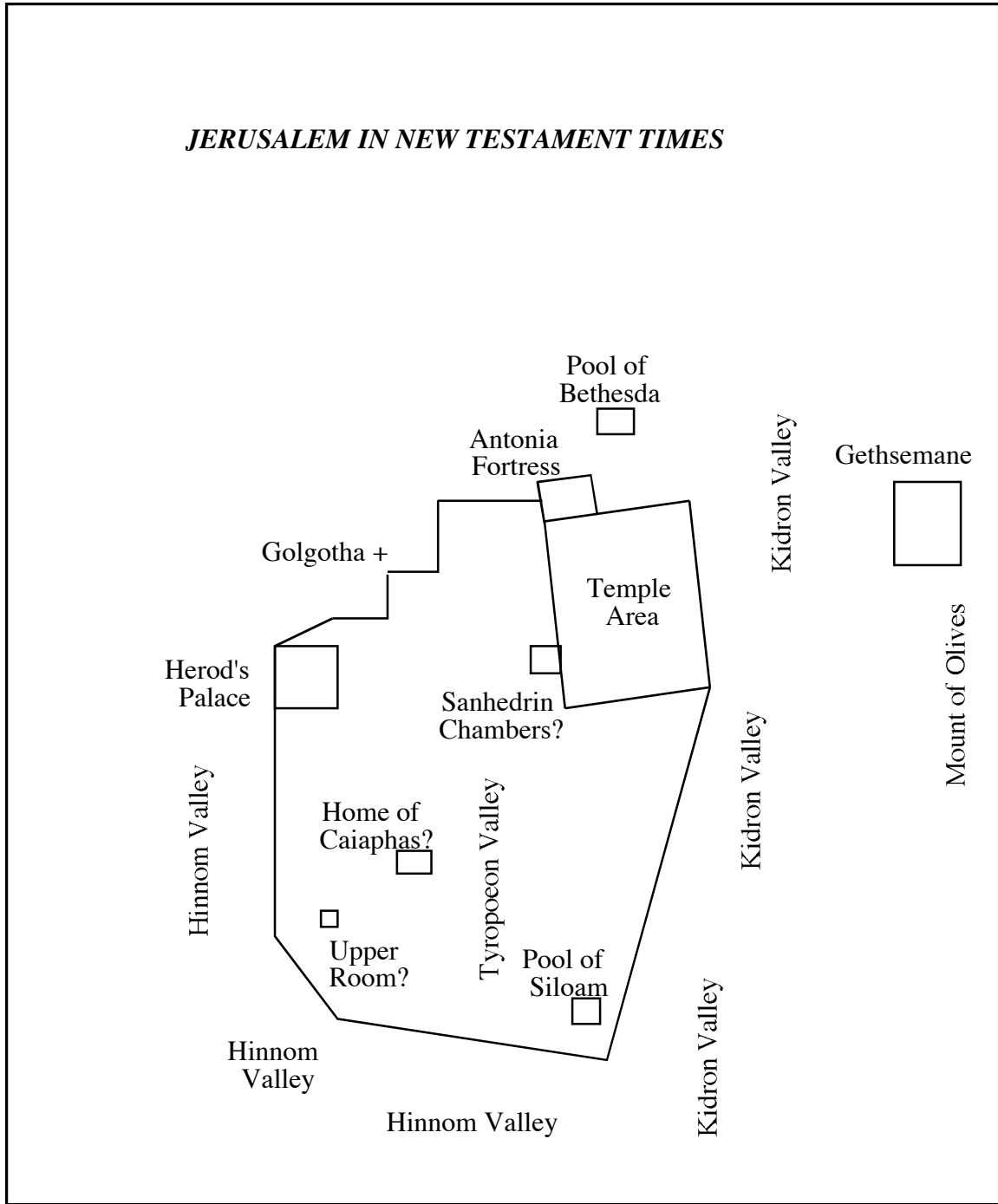
this statement in the plural like authoritative people sometimes do. It would then be an editorial we (cf. 1:14; 3:2, 11; 20:2; 1 John 1:2, 4, 5, 6, 7; 3 John 12). Since the next verse returns to the first person, this option seems most probable to me.

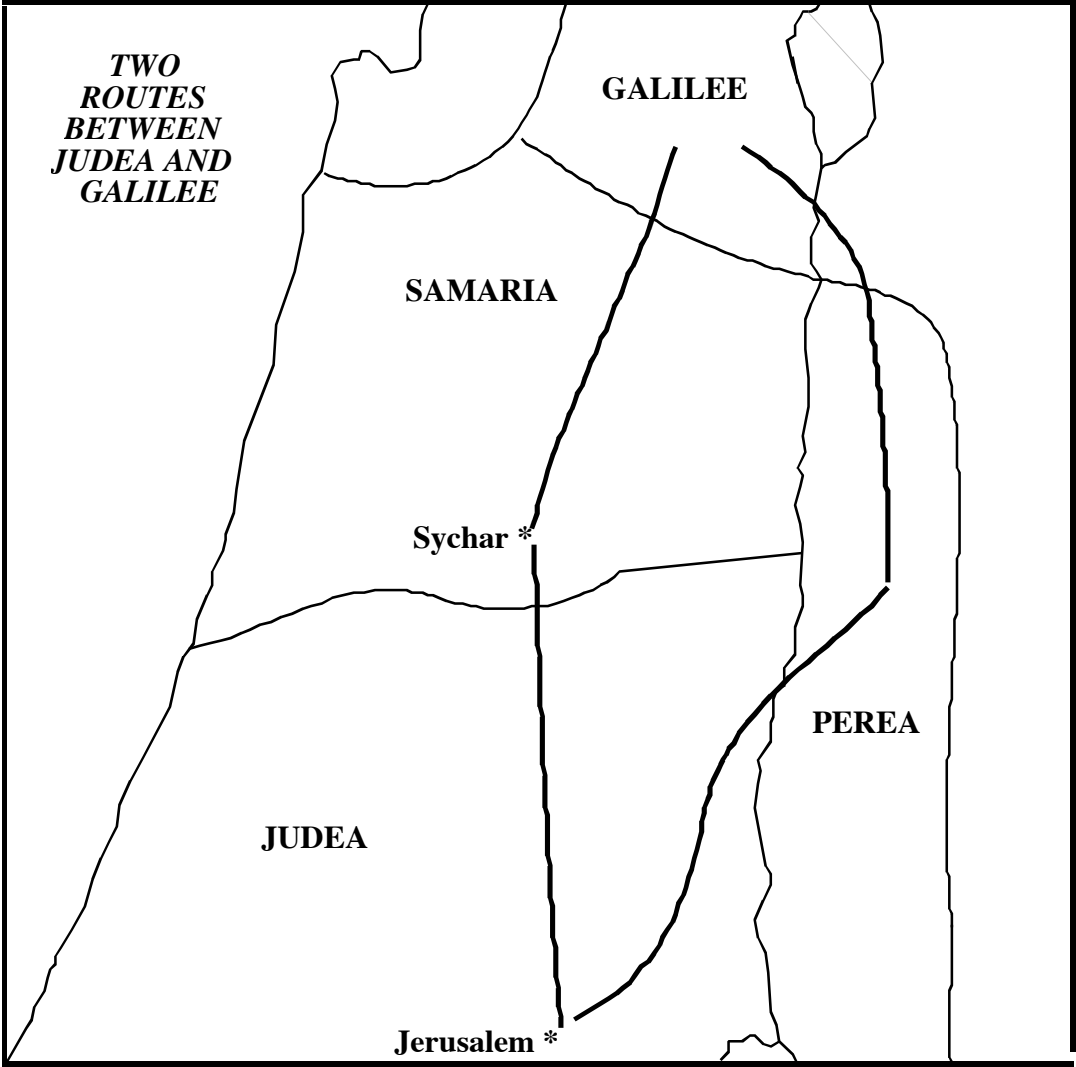
21:25 This final verse, along with the one preceding it, returns to the broad perspective with which this Gospel began in its prologue (1:1-18). The prologue presented the Word humbling Himself and entering the world through the Incarnation. This verse presents the world as not able to contain all that could be written about what the Word disclosed. 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.

"At the beginning of the story we stand in the presence of the bewildering eternities, and at the close we are thus brought in amazement to a recognition of the infinitudes which have been condensed in the life and activities of a Person on whom we may look, to whom we may listen, and yet who forever defies any to say all that is to be said concerning Him."¹

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 449.







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