

Gospel of John Study Guide

The Gospel of John is one where style and theology are intimately wedded. There are six (6) unique features in John's Gospel¹. Each of these will be discussed as we explore this fourth Gospel.

1. Poetic forms
2. Misunderstandings
3. Twofold meanings
4. Irony
5. Inclusions and transitions
6. Parenthetical notes²

Background and Setting

The generally agreed timeframe for the Gospel of John is between 80 and 110 AD. This was a time of severe persecution for Early Christians as the Roman Emperor Nero was blaming the Christians for the burning of Rome (54-68 AD) and the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) had stepped up the persecutions resulting in the worst ever seen in Church history.

This was a time of brutal, antagonistic persecution, being betrayed by family and falsely accused by fellow Jews. The Early Christians were beginning to lose faith in what they expected to be the imminent return of Christ leading some to return back to Judaism and the Law to please the Pharisees in an effort to gain a better standing in their synagogue and in the community.

Intention and Theme

This Gospel is considered the last Gospel to be written and Orthodoxy considers it to be the work of the same disciple who was referred to as "...ον ηγαπα ο Ιησους." In Orthodox liturgical worship the Gospel of John is the first Gospel in the Altar Bible and is the first one to be read in the Church's lectionary at the Divine Liturgy on Easter night.

Also, the Gospel of John is the earliest known extant text discovered, called the P⁵² manuscript, dated to between 110-150 CE and contains fragments of passages from John 18:31-33 and 37-38.

The gospel of John the Evangelist is very different from the synoptic gospels as it presents a picture of the humanity of Jesus deeper than the Synoptics. Dr Campbell Morgan writes about this saying,

It is very arresting that John uses that name for our Lord more than any other writer...we find that Mark calls our Lord, "Jesus" only thirteen times. Luke calls Him "Jesus" eighty-eight times. Matthew calls Him "Jesus" one hundred and fifty-one times. John calls Him "Jesus" two hundred and forty-seven times. That is quite mechanical, but it is revealing. In other words, all through this Gospel, John is keeping us face to face with the human Jesus, Jesus as He was known³.

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels where the Messianic Secret is highly visible, in John's Gospel, Jesus' reveals His divinity quite clearly and is portrayed as always aware of His intimate relationship with God, and He is



¹ Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament, Doubleday, 1997

² In his book, John: The Gospel of Wisdom, Michael Card refers to these parenthetical notations as "whispers" as if John is beside us while we read his Gospel using these parenthetical statements to fill in gaps of missing background information or a "missing piece of the puzzle."

³ *The Gospel According to John*, Dr. Campbell Morgan from lectures given from 1909-1931.

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quite willing to tell people who He is. The clearest example of this is that rather than expound on Jesus' lineage or birth story, John wastes no time in his prologue introducing the reader to His divinity by defining Him as the Word of God, coexistent at creation. Subsequent dialogues and monologues expand on this through "I AM" statements connecting Jesus with the same God Yahweh who was revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. These statements by Jesus challenge people's concept of a Davidic Messiah as they clearly identify Jesus with God Himself, in a special and unique way that certainly would (and did) bring charges of blasphemy⁴.

In this way the intent of John's gospel is clear from the beginning, to reveal Jesus as fully human i.e. "*Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God who became flesh*", and fully divine i.e. "*who was in the beginning with God, Who is God, the One through Whom all things were made.*"

John's Gospel is also *evangelistic*, identifying Jesus as the Redeemer who condescended from heaven to become the Θεάνθρωπος (God-Man) and reestablish God's covenant with His people, take on our sin, and grant us redemption we could not obtain through works of the Law.

Orthodoxy considers the Gospel of Saint John as a 'theological gospel' for those who were already present in the Church and or being initiated into the life of the Church through the sacramental mysteries of baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist. As such the Orthodox Church has granted unto John the title of Theologian. A title which only two other persons hold in the Orthodox Church⁵.

Structural Divisions of the Gospel of John

The gospel of Saint John can be divided into four parts.

- 1) Prologue: 1:1-18** (Logos Hymn: The Word with God; Believers become Children of God; The Word becomes Flesh; The Son Reveals the Father)
- 2) The Book of Signs: 1:19—12** Here John provides a record of Jesus' miracles (signs) and provides detailed 'commentary' signifying Him as Messiah (Christ) and Lord, the Living Word and Son of God, revealing Himself to the disciples and the world. It includes the 7 Signs Water into Wine at Wedding at Cana; Healing of at the Pool of Bethesda; Feeding 5000 & Bread of Life Discourse; Walking on the Water; Healing of the Man Born Blind; healing of the centurion's son and the Raising of Lazarus. This section also includes other important events such as the Cleansing of the Temple Dialogue with Nicodemus; Samaritan Woman at the Well, conflicts with the Pharisees and Jewish Leadership, The Book of Signs ends with Jesus' anointing, His entry into Jerusalem and the climax of His conflicts with the Jewish religious authorities.
- 3) The Book of Glory: 13—20:31** Anointing at Bethany, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and Jesus Predicting His death (12). Washing the Disciples' Feet and A New Commandment (13), Farewell Discourses and the Coming of the Holy Spirit (14-17), Betrayal, Arrest, & Peter's Denial, Hearings & Trials, Crucifixion, Death & Burial (18-19) Resurrection Appearances (20)
- 4) Epilogue 21:1-25** (*Another Resurrection Appearance at the Sea of Tiberias/Galilee*). The final chapter of the book is traditionally considered to be an addition following the first ending of the gospel, to affirm the reinstatement of the apostle Peter to the leadership of the apostolic community after his three denials of the Lord at the time of His passion. It may have been a necessary inclusion to offset a

⁴ The Four Gospels in Canonical Perspective, Mark A. Matson, " Leaven: Vol. 12: Issue. 1, Article 5, 2004

⁵ The other Theologians are St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. Symeon the New Theologian.

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certain lack of confidence in Saint Peter by some members of the Church. This section also includes the post-resurrection appearance of Christ to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

Who was St. John?

St. John the Apostle, also known as St. John the Evangelist, St. John the Divine, or (by the Holy Fathers of the Church) St. John the Theologian, was one of the original twelve apostles chosen by Christ and has been traditionally taken to be the author of the fourth gospel.

In the Bible, John was the son of Zebedee⁶, a Galilean fisherman, and Salome. John and his brother James were among the first disciples called by Jesus. His mother was among those women who ministered to the circle of disciples. James and John were called Boanerges⁷, or “sons of thunder,” by Jesus⁸, perhaps because of some character trait such as the zeal exemplified in Mark 9:38 and Luke 9:54, when John and James wanted to call down fire from heaven to punish the Samaritan towns that did not accept Jesus. John and his brother, together with St. Peter, formed an inner nucleus of disciples⁹. While tradition holds that this same John who was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” he is never identified by name in the Gospels and is therefore not clear from the text. Tradition also holds that St. John died at 99 years of age and that his last words were the command of Christ and the words that St. John uttered throughout his life; “*This command I give to you, love one another.*”

In Church Iconography he is always present in images of the four evangelists and of the apostles as a group. In the East he is most often pictured as an old man with a high forehead and a white or grizzled beard. Symbolically he is typically



represented as an eagle (Greek iconography) or as a lion (Russian iconography). On rare occasions his form is a mix of symbolism as in the case of the 11th century manuscript which portrays St. John with a human body and the head of an eagle.

The representation of an eagle goes back at least to Jerome’s Commentary on Matthew¹⁰, which states that the eagle signifies “*John the Evangelist who, having taken up eagle’s wings and hastening toward higher*

matters, discusses the Word of God.”



In some Western art John’s attribute may instead be a cup or chalice with a snake in it. This refers to a story¹¹ in which a pagan priest challenges John to drink a cup of poison without being harmed. John not only survives but resurrects two men who had died from the very poison given to him (See fig. x). The

⁶ Matt 4:21 and 10:2

⁷ The term comes from Mark 3:17, who explains that the name βοανηργές (Boanerges) means υιοι βροντης

⁸ Mark 3:13-19

⁹ Transfiguration event, Matt 17:1 and the Garden of Gethsemane, Matt 26:36-37

¹⁰ Homily 55

¹¹ This story comes from *The Golden Legend*, a 13-century text by Jacobus Voragine chronicling the miracles of St. John.

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cup is also partly a reference to the words of Christ in Matthew 20:23, “You all will drink my cup” – that is, the death that he will endure on the Cross.

Authorship

Orthodoxy, along with the majority of Biblical scholars, generally agrees that the apostle John was the author of this Gospel and agree that the writer identified as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, is the accepted author of the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles of First, Second, and Third John.

Robert Tomson Fortna, in his book, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* speaks of the ἀπορίεις of the Gospel of John which he defines as tensions, doublets, interruptions, and even inconsistencies. These ἀπορίεις have led to two main ideas regarding the origins of John’s Gospel. Some Biblical scholars such Rudolf Schnakenberg and Raymond Brown posit that there was a single base document (Grundschrift) which underwent several revisions to eventually end up as the Gospel of John that we know today. Others, like Rudolf Bultmann¹² believe there were three (3) distinct primary sources for the Gospel of John, a signs source, a discourse source, and a passion source, the combination of which while bringing different accounts together created disruptions in the flow of the Gospel.

Others feel that although John did author the majority of his Gospel there are sections which seem to be added or revised for the purposes of aligning John’s message with the emerging liturgical and sacramental Christian community. This is based on the idea that there was a Johannine school that later edited this Gospel from previously known fragments. Centuries of investigation into the content and style of the writing do not yield any viable textual or archeological evidence for this claim. It is widely accepted that John was clearly educated and possessed a knowledge of the details of the historicity, topography, customs and settings, and his quoting of private conversations between Jesus and the Disciples would have been difficult to forge. The details and accuracy of the cultural feast days and festivals would have prevented a non-witness from explaining secondhand the details provided. The language and structure have unique fingerprints, present in 1 John and 2 John and Revelation¹³, that also cannot be explained by the “school” theory.

To add to this claim of sole authorship, the Early Apostolic Fathers asserted the authenticity of John as the author. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, France knew Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, personally, who was a disciple of John the Apostle and other apostles. Drawing from sources which include Polycarp and his community, Irenaeus affirms that John, the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ chest during the Last Supper, published a Gospel¹⁴.

Although the writer never directly refers to himself by name, he was well known to his colleagues. As the Gospels were written during a period of persecution, authorship was most probably omitted to protect the early church leaders and remaining Apostles, but Orthodoxy believes that since John’s purpose was to write about Christ for His Glory, humility prevented him from directly identifying himself to his readers.

¹² Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Westminster Press, 1971

¹³ There is debate regarding the authorship by John of the Book of Revelation that was presumably written while John was on the Island of Patmos. This is debated even within the Orthodox Church based on some stylistic and grammatical differences between Revelation and the Gospel of John.

¹⁴ *Against Heresies* [3.1.1](#); see also Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 5.8.4

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Canonicity and Acceptance

It is widely accepted that the four Gospels, along with some of the Epistles, were circulating among the “Church at large.” While not all churches may have had all four, and certainly they may not have used all four equally, there is good reason to believe that the Gospels by the end of the first century, most, if not all, of the Gospels in the Church canon were circulating broadly among the churches. The “apostolic origin” and “canonical acceptance” of the Gospel of John were without a controversy or doubt and accepted by the early church as Scripture. Many of the Early Church Fathers, in addition to Polycarp and Irenaeus, identified John as the author, such Eusebius, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Origen.

It is thought that Marcion provided the first impetus toward the formal development of a canon in the church. Marcion (ca. 140 C.E.) championed only one Gospel, that of Luke (excised of some material), together with the letters of Paul. This rejection of the other Gospels is believed to have encouraged the Church to formulate a Scriptural canon.

There were several controversies with respect to the Gospel of John in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Some of this opposition was a reaction against Montanism, which used the Fourth Gospel’s idea of the Paraclete to develop its ideas of continuing prophetic activity. But perhaps a more common problem was the perceived difference between the Fourth Gospel and the other three Gospels leading the Early Church Fathers to defend the Gospel of John as authentic¹⁵.

By the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr has established that the four gospels be read in worship alongside the collection of Old Testament books¹⁶. By the time of Irenaeus there is evidence of a nearly complete NT corpus.

Symbolism and Tension in the Gospel of John

Another unique feature in John’s Gospel is his use of symbolism and literary difficulties in his narratives.

SYMBOLS are widely used in Orthodox theology and practice. Before speaking of John’s use of symbols we should discuss the characteristics of a symbol.

- Symbols point beyond themselves to something else and are integral to that which they point and invite us to participate. The example here is a flag.
- Symbols open up levels of reality which otherwise we could not imagine or anticipate. The example here is art.

¹⁵ Matson makes an important observation concerning the term “gospel.” He states that “*the Early Church did not use the plural term “Gospels.” Instead, it spoke of the Gospel (singular) being manifest in four forms. So, the common designation of the Gospels as “the Gospel according to Mark,” “the Gospel according to Matthew,” etc., is an important one. It shows the essential view that together, and only together, these four writings make up the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each is only part of the whole, and the Gospel is not complete without all four witnesses to it. Given this deliberately “inclusive” approach to the Gospels in the Early Church, one can and should speak of the inspiration of the Gospel as much in reference to its acknowledgment of the multiplicity of expression (i.e. four witnesses, four writings) as in the actual material contained in each one. For it would truly be correct to say that without all four Gospels we would have a deficient Gospel. If the Gospel depends on four witnesses, each with a different voice, then the activity of the Spirit in inspiration must also embrace the collection and evaluation of which writings contain the necessary perspectives and which are extraneous to a proper estimation of Jesus’ life and teaching.*”

¹⁶ See 1st Apology, 47.3

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- Symbols unlock dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to a reality or realities of which we are unaware. The example here is a play.

In her work *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel. The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, Dorothy A Lee, professor of New Testament Theology at Trinity College in Melbourne Australia identifies six (6) of these “symbols” present in John’s gospel; birth, water, signs, raising of Lazarus, bread, and light¹⁷. She sees that the way John develops a relationship or interplay between symbol and narrative expresses a complex interplay or form and meaning. In each encounter with Jesus the characters gradually develop and move beyond a materialistic and literal response to achieve a symbolic understanding of who the Person of Christ is and His ministry.

She points out that this “interplay” between symbol and narrative is established using a definite literary structure consisting of five (5) stages. 1) a sign, image or feast is established at the beginning of the narrative, 2) an individual or group misunderstands the image/sign through literal interpretation, 3) struggle of the main character(s) to acquire a proper understanding as they move towards symbolic interpretation, 4) a definitive response which invokes acceptance or rejection, and 5) conclusion with a statement of faith or rejection.

TENSION

The Role of Women in the Gospel of John

In Feminist Liberation theology the Gospel of John is considered to be a Feminist Gospel. This is due in part to several prominent portrayals of the interactions of Jesus with women during His ministry, specifically;

- The Wedding of Cana and the Theotokos
- The Samaritan women
- The Woman accused of adultery
- Mary and Martha and the raising of Lazarus
- The anointing of Jesus by Mary
- Mary Magdalene

While John does not present Christ as an agent of social change and reform, His treatment of women is seen as neutral, meaning that John paints a picture of Christ as one who does not denigrate nor elevate women in comparison to men but maintains the idea of equality of men and women as the “*image and likeness of God*”. Thus, John presents women in a way in which *their true potential is realized and integrated into the ministry of Jesus*¹⁸.

Chapter 1

- 1) **Prologue: 1:1-18** (Logos Hymn: The Word with God; Believers become Children of God; The Word becomes Flesh; The Son Reveals the Father)

¹⁷ The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel. The Interplay of Form and Meaning, Dorothy A. Lee, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Sheffield JSOT Press, 1994.

¹⁸ S. J. Nortje, The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel, Neotestamentica, Vol. 20, 1986

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In their book “Beginnings and Endings,” in *The Written Gospel*¹⁹, the authors tell us that the most ancient writings begin with an *“introduction where the author would give some indication of the purpose or contents of the book...genres of literature – history, biography, scientific, medical, or technical works begin with a formal preface, indicating the author’s purpose or method.”*

When we look at the four Gospels, we see this. Mark begins with *“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”* Matthew begins with *“...the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah^[b] the son of David, the son of Abraham.”* And Luke begins with *“an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”* starting with the birth of Jesus. In each of these three Gospels the reader is given an introduction to the humanity of Christ. In the Gospel of John we are given a clear and concise picture of His divinity; *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* John’s prologue guides the reader to see the invisible (God) made visible entering into human history. The prologue of John functions, therefore, serves as the cornerstone for the entire gospel, the lens through which the gospel should be read.

Before we encounter Jesus in His ministry in Jerusalem or throughout the Jewish lands, we meet Him in His divinity. The opening line of the prologue provides a clear theological foundation of the Person of Jesus Christ as well His purpose.

1:1-3 εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος ουτος ην εν αρχη προς τον θεον ³παντα δι αυτου εγενετο και χωρις αυτου εγενετο ουδε εν ο γεγονεν

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In these opening verses John’s immediately identifies Jesus, not only as the Christ, but as One who was with the Father at the beginning. It is noteworthy that John’s prologue starts with the Son (the Word) and not the Father. St. John Chrysostom comments on this saying;

“What can be the reason that he has neglected the first cause, and spoken to us at once concerning the second? ... but we confess that the Father is from none, and that the Son is begotten of the Father. Yes, it may be said, but why then does he leave the Father, and speak concerning the Son? Why? Because the former was manifest to all, if not as Father, at least as God; but the Only-Begotten was not known; and therefore with reason did he immediately from the very beginning hasten to implant the knowledge of Him in those who knew Him not.

Jesus as the (Λόγος) Word of God

Looking back into Genesis 1 we read verses 1:2 through 1:26 each of which begin with *“God spoke...”* Orthodoxy interprets this as meaning that the world was created by the spoken word of God, thus the universe and everything in was “spoken” it into existence. Through John’s opening verse the reader is connected with this opening of Genesis indicating that that name of this spoken Word was Jesus who, as the second Person of the Trinity was the One who made all things.

Much Ado about an Article

One controversy that arises out of this first verse comes from the apparent lack of an article before the Greek word “God,” *και θεος ην ο λογος*. While the Greek language has definite articles, “the”, it does not

¹⁹ Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner, *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005*

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have indefinite articles, “a” or “an.” In certain instances, when the Greek omits a definite article, it may be appropriate to insert an indefinite article for the sake of the English translation. This has caused some scholars to argue that this verse (John 1:1) should be translated as “*the word was a god*,” rather than “*the word was God*.” This would then lead to understanding Christ as not equal or of the same essence of the Father, and at the very least a “lesser god.” However the insertion of the indefinite article is not always appropriate to a proper translation and this verse is a prime example. John’s reference in the beginning of verse 1:1, *λογος ην προς τον θεον*, is to the One True God without beginning. If John meant for the reader to understand Jesus as a lesser god, he would have used an alternate grammatical construction such as the adjective *τις*, in the second part of the verse which would indicate a “certain other” god^{20 21}.

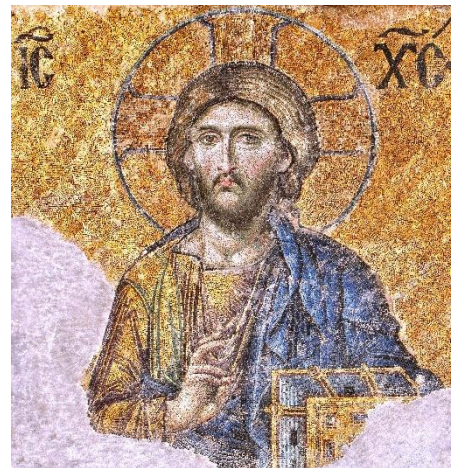
The Early Church used this statement by John as a core part of their defense against the heresy of Arianism which stated that “*there was a time when He [the Son of God] was not*”, and also made clear that the *ουσία* [‘being’] of the Son in relation to the Father was identical and hence entirely ‘other’ from that of the natural created world.

1:4-5 εν αυτω ζωη ην και η ζωη ην το φως των ανθρωπων ⁵ και το φως εν τη σκοτια φαινει και η σκοτια αυτο ου κατελαβεν.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

While verse 1-3 are direct theological statements about the nature of Christ, these next two verses are our first encounter with double meanings and symbolism in John’s Gospel, specifically the terms “light and dark.” Through these two verses we learn several important characteristics of Christ.

- a) **εν αυτω ζωη ην** As the spoken Word of God Who was active in Creation Jesus is He Who grants life to all that God the Father wills.
- b) **η ζωη ην το φως των ανθρωπων** This “Life” has entered the world. And this Life is also the Light which make the Father known to the world, as the divine Word of God. In one of the hymns we sing during the Nativity Feast we state this very fact,

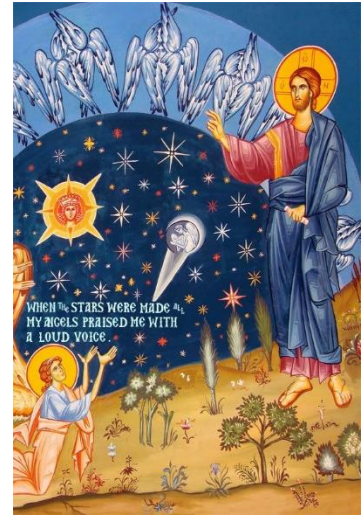


²⁰ For a more thorough explanation of the function and use of the Greek article and meaning of its absence, see ‘*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*’, by Daniel Wallace.

²¹ For examples of this use of *τις*, see the verses Luke 8:27, Luke 1:5, and Luke 11:1

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O Christ our God, has shone to the world the Light of wisdom! For by it, those who worshipped the stars, were taught by a star to adore You, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know You, the Orient from on High. O Lord, glory to You.



c) **το φως εν τη σκοτια φαινει** Σκοτία (darkness) here is the negation and opposite of the φως (light). Darkness, when used in the Bible, commonly denotes ignorance, guilt, or misery²². Additionally the word “darkness,” as the *element in which* the light shines, should be understood not as the *individual subject* of darkness²³, but, as a totality of all Mankind represented by the term **των ανθρώπων** which, since the Fall, has been lost the Divine truth, and has become corrupt in understanding and will. God’s people, His creation, no longer knows or recognizes its Creator, He Who made all things (Παντοκράτωρ) and is therefore in darkness. This φως is also the light that has continuously shined throughout all the history of Creation.

d) **και η σκοτια αυτο ου κατελαβεν** This has been translated into English several ways;

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (KJV)

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (NIV)

And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not seize it. (NASB)

In the first translation, *the darkness comprehended it not* is not an appropriate translation of the Greek word κατέλαβαν. This is a compound word composed of κατα and λαμβάνω. Λαμβάνω means to receive or grasp while the prefix κατα intensifies the root so that the meaning is to seize or apprehend. Since there is no indication of understanding or comprehension in this definition, we therefore know that the first translation is incorrect. Although the word for understand is similar – καταλαβαίνω.

Comprehend can also mean to receive but this also does not fit the intent. The darkness could not “receive” His light as Man’s sin was so great as to not appreciate the value of Jesus’ teachings and therefore many rejected him. Sin always blinds the mind to the beauty and excellency of the character of the Lord Jesus. It darkens the mind and the heart against receiving His love.

The second translation, *the darkness has not overcome it*, was understood to mean that the darkness did not conquer the light. Thus Theophylact²⁴ says: ἡ σκοτία ... ἐδίωξε τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ’ εὗρεν ἀκαταμάχητον καὶ ἀήττητον. (the darkness tries to expel the Light but it found it could not conquer [the Light] as it was unconquerable)

While some modern interpreters support this rendering by John 12:35, where Christ says, “Walk while ye have the light.” This however is an incomplete translation as light does not banish the darkness, meaning that the darkness of sin still remained after Christ’s departure. And clearly the darkness (of sin) did not overpower the Light that came into the world.”

²² See Isaiah 9:1-2 and Matthew 4:16

²³ See Ephesians 5:8

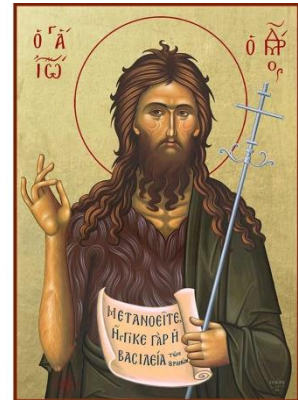
²⁴ **Theophylactus of Ochrid** (ca. 1050/60-ca. 1108) was a Byzantine biblical scholars and exegete. He completed extensive biblical commentaries on the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the New Testament Epistles.

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The third translation, *the darkness did not seize it*, is the closest to the intent of what John wants to convey to the reader. Recall that during the time that this Gospel was written was a time of great persecution which, as we mentioned, caused many Christians to lose faith, especially since they were expecting the imminent return of the Messiah who would rescue them from the Romans. This translation of “seize” for *κατέλαβαν* is meant to solidify that Jesus is One with God, the God who never abandons His people and that the “darkness” of Man can never seize or capture the One True God and that the evils that men were doing would never extinguish the “*Light that has been from the beginning.*” And in fact, it is Christ, through His death and resurrection that Satan, the ultimate darkness, has been bound.

ἔγενετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ ἰωάννης ὁὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι’ αὐτοῦ ὁὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς ἀλλ’ ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.



Now we see John transition from the theological to the historical as he identifies the person of John the Baptist and clarifies his relationship to the Person of Christ. Each of the other Gospels tell us that John the Baptist was baptizing people prior to Christ beginning of His ministry on earth²⁵ and this same John was preaching that the coming of “*one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*” In John’s Gospel we are given additional information, specifically that John the Baptist was a) sent by God to prepare the way for Christ and to witness that this Christ who comes is the Light and the Way of Man’s salvation. Therefore, the Orthodox Church refers to him as the Προδρόμος (Forerunner) and why in Orthodox iconography he is shown holding a scroll with this witness; *Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* John the author of the Gospel wanted to be sure that the reader understand that John the Baptist’s was not starting a new movement (*He himself was not the light*) nor was Jesus’ ministry an extension of the Baptist’s ministry, but that John was merely a witness to Christ and His purpose (*he came only as a witness to the light*).

The Bible foretold of John the Baptist’s coming and thus many people believed him to be the messiah in the spiritual power of Elijah²⁶ The Bible offered three prophecies of John the Baptist

Isaiah 40:3-5 “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a path for our God.*” Matthew, in his Gospel confirms this,²⁷ “*In those days John the Baptist came preaching . . . For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness.’*”

Malachi 3:1 (430 B.C.) “*I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.*” Again in Matthew we have confirmation of this

²⁵ Matt 3:1-3

²⁶ Matt 17:10 - 13

²⁷ Matt 3:1-3

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prophesy from Jesus who said²⁸; “For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You” (Matthew 11:7,10).

Malachi 4:5 (430 B.C.) “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Luke 1:17 helps to relate the person of John to “Elijah.”

“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Just as Elijah did, John preached that God’s people should turn from their sins and come back to God. And, like Elijah, John was a powerful preacher who, in the spirit of Elijah, spoke with great boldness²⁹.

Thus, John’s main purpose for these verses was to show that “Jesus was the Christ” and that John the Baptist was not the Messiah. This is emphasized by John, in verse 8, when he repeats the statement that “he [John] came only as a witness to the light.”

⁹ ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχομένον εἰς τὸν κόσμον ¹⁰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω ¹¹ εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτοῦ οὐ παρέλαβον

⁹The true light that illumines everyone **was** coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Note the John begins verse 9 with «ἦν» to make clear that Jesus and not John the Baptist is this “light of Truth.” Thus, the translation of *was coming into the world* must not be understood as Jesus following John since Jesus was already present when John was preaching. John does this to emphasize the point that Jesus, as the light of Truth, has been and is ever present.

John again repeats the fact that Christ was together with the Father at the Creation of the world and that His own creation does not recognize the Creator who now walks among them. John emphasizes this in the next sentence which begins with εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, meaning that Jesus came among God’s chosen people, His own, and that οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτοῦ would not receive Him into their own. This is especially ironic in that in the first part of these verses John point out that the True Light of Christ shines in everyone so that that which was created in the image of God should naturally recognize the Creator.

However even though John states that some did not receive Jesus or His teachings, later in John’s Gospel will see that Jesus does not punish those who will not listen to Him, nor threatened hell to those who do not abide by His commands. St. John Chrysostom answers this saying,

“Because being exceedingly Good, He cares even for those who obey Him not, and withdraws not from them who start back and flee from Him. But when we had rejected the first way of His beneficence and had refused to come by the path of persuasion and kind treatment, then He brought in upon us the other way, that of correction and punishments; most bitter indeed, but still necessary, when the former is disregarded³⁰.”

²⁸ Matt 11:7-10

²⁹ Mark 6:17-18

³⁰ Homily 10, Gospel of John, John Chrysostom

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¹² ὅσοι δε ελαβον αυτον εδωκεν αυτοις εξουσιαν τεκνα θεου γενεσθαι τοις πιστευουσιν εις το ονομα αυτου ¹³ οι ουκ εξ αιματων ουδε εκ θεληματος σαρκος ουδε εκ θεληματος ανδρος αλλ εκ θεου.

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, He gave the εξουσιαν to become children of God. ¹³ Children born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh or a husband's will, but born of God.

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What is Given to those who believe in his name?

John writes in verse 12 that Christ *εδωκεν αυτοις εξουσιαν*. But how should *εξουσιαν* be properly translated; as right, power, or authority? In Ancient Greek the term *εξουσια* can denote several things.

- a) an ability to perform an action
- b) the right to do something as granted by a higher authority
- c) the freedom to do something

To some extent this is how *εξουσια* differs from *δυναμις*, since *εξουσια* must derive from some external power or authority. Used in the New Testament *εξουσια* signifies the absolute possibility of action, which is proper to God, who is the source of Law and of authority. Thus, this verse can be translated to mean that through Jesus, the community of believers, i.e. the Church, is given the right, the authority and the power to be called and to operate as children of God.

So then why then did John say He [Christ] gave them “*power to become children of God*” and not “*He made them sons of God.*” St John Chrysostom states the reason as,

“To show that we need much zeal to keep the image of sonship impressed on us at Baptism, all through without spot or stain; and at the same time to show that no one shall be able to take this power from us, unless we are the first to deprive ourselves of it...At the same time too he wishes to show, that not even does grace come upon man irrespectively, but upon those who desire and take pains for it. For it lies in the power of these to become (His) children since if they do not themselves first make the choice, the gift does not come upon them, nor have any effect.”

οι ουκ εξ αιματων Not of bloods - The Greek word here is plural. In Jewish tradition blood is regarded as the basis of the physical life transmitted by generation. The Jews place great importance on being the descendants of Abraham³¹ and counted that as proof of the favor of God upon his chosen people. In this passage John corrects this notion noting that it is not because men are descended from patriarchy (blood line) that entitles them to the favor of God. The law of Christ’s kingdom requires one to be “born of God” by regeneration, not through the rite of “circumcision³².”

¹⁴και ο λογος σαρχ εγενετο και εσκηνωσεν εν ημιν και εθεασαμεθα την δοξαν αυτου δοξαν ως μονογενους παρα πατρος πληρης χαριτος και αληθειας

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the Word became flesh. In verse 1:1 John affirms the divinity of Christ with the statement “*and the Word was God.*” In this verse John now affirms the humanity of Christ. The fullness of these sentences affirms the union of the Infinite and the finite.” This statement is important since it defends against the heresies of the Eutychian³³ and Gnosticism. The Word *became* flesh makes clear that Christ, as the Logos, did not merely *assume* a bodily form, nor that the incarnate Word is separate from God the Father.

and made his dwelling among us. The verb *εσκηνωσεν* can be translated either “tented” or “tabernacled.” Clearly the reference here is to the Tabernacle referenced in the Old Testament which

³¹ Genesis 17:4-5

³² Romans 2:28-29

³³ Eutyches was a 4th century monk who affirmed that Christ had only one nature - a confused mixture of human and divine. His view was officially deemed heretical by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

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was the seat of the Divine Presence in the wilderness, where God became incarnate in order to dwell among His Chosen **people**³⁴.

full of grace and truth. While the English sentence structure can be misleading, these words do not refer to the “Father,” or to “the glory,” but to “Christ, the Word.” They represent a Hebrew formula, expressing a divine attribute, and the passage relates to the revelation of the divine nature to Moses³⁵

With verses 1:15-18 John (Evangelist) returns to the testimony (*μαρτυρει*) of John the Baptist to ensure the reader understands that Jesus is the Messiah and not John the Baptist. The words “*οτι πρωτος μου ην*” ([He] was before me) also repeats the fact that even though Jesus came “after” John in His public ministry and in His human nature, His divine nature he had existed long before John had a being - from eternity. (ref. verse 10)

The expression “out of His fullness” can be understood in the words from Colossians 1:18-20.

“And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things He may have preeminence. For God was well pleased to have His fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross....”

In Alexander MacLaren’s Expositions of Holy Scripture he provides a vivid explanation of the juxtaposition of verses 16 and 17.

“Law in all forms, whether it be the Mosaic Law, or whether it be the law of our own country, or whether it be the laws written upon men’s consciences. These all partake of the one characteristic, that they help nothing to the fulfilment of their own behests, and that they are barbed with threatenings of retribution. What we have in Christ is not law, but grace. Law, as I said, has no heart; the meaning of the Gospel is the unveiling of the heart of God. Law commands and demands; it says: ‘This shalt thou do, or else-’; and it has nothing more that it can say. What is the use of standing beside a lame man, and pointing to a shining summit, and saying to him, ‘Get up there, and you will breathe a purer atmosphere’? There is no help for any soul in law. Men are not perishing because they do not know what they ought to do. Grace is love giving. Law demands, grace bestows. Law comes saying ‘Do this,’ and our consciences respond to the imperativeness of the obligation. But grace comes and says, ‘I will help thee to do it.’ Law is God requiring; grace is God bestowing.”

“...εκεινος εξηγησατο”

In verse 18 we encounter the Greek word *εξηγησατο* from the verb *εξηγέομαι*. This is a compound word made up of *ἐκ*, to go forth, and *ἡγέομαι*, to lead the way. This word was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to someone who could interpret, translate or provide exegesis of oracles, dreams, omens, or sacred rites. The word thus came to mean a spiritual director. Here John is using this same meaning to convey that it is only through Christ, who is *εις τον κολπον του Πατρος*, that the Father can be revealed and that the fullness of the Truth can be known.

Closing Comments on the Prologue

This prologue is an example of what is referred to as a *spiral movement*. An idea or person(s) comes to the forefront, recedes, and reappears later on for development and further definition and clarification. For example, in John 1:1 the Word is presented to the reader, is withdrawn, and again presented to us in

³⁴ Exodus 33:7-11 and Exodus 36

³⁵ Exodus 34:6

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John 1:14. The Creation comes next in John 1:3, disappears, and returns again in John 1:10. Then ‘the Light’ is introduced in John 1:5, withdrawn, and reproduced in John 1:10-11. Next the rejection of the Word is put before us in John 1:5, removed, and again put before us in John 1:10-11. Lastly, the testimony of John is mentioned in John 1:6-7, repeated in John 1:15, taken up again in John 1:19, and will be developed through the next two sections of the chapter.



The Book of Signs: 1:19—12:50

In a pattern of separate days, John the Evangelist begins a gradual revelation of who Jesus is. He begins with the testimony of John the Baptist who must now answer to the Jewish priests and Levites³⁶ who were sent to find out why John was baptizing and by what authority.

While the process of “baptism” was not new it was more of a Mikvah or a ritual bathing³⁷. Before the revelation at Sinai, all Jews were commanded to immerse themselves in preparation for coming face to face with God. Even today Jewish law requires that one immerse in a mikveh as part of the process of conversion to Judaism. According to Jewish custom immersion in the *mikvah* has offered a gateway to purity ever since the creation of man. The *Midrash* relates that after being banished from Eden, Adam sat in a river that flowed from the garden. This was an integral part of his teshuvah or repentance, to return to his original perfection.

Thus, the Jewish priests and Levites were not concerned with the act of baptism but the fact the John was baptizing Jews in the same manner and for the same reason that converts were being “baptized.” As this particular baptism had reference to a Messianic kingdom (since baptizing with water was an outward sign of the spiritual blessings to be conferred on them by the Messiah), many were of the opinion that John the Baptist was the Messiah.³⁸ In fact, John the Baptist himself was of a priestly family.³⁹ In this way the question of the Jewish spiritual court was justified and it is not totally warranted that their actions be seen, as stated by Chrysostom, as *malicious*⁴⁰, but as the authoritative position of the Jewish court. (Luke 1:5);

Their questions (verses 1:19-21) occur in three parts.

The asking of his name, ου τις ει. This is the equivalent of asking for his credentials and by what authority he is performing this action of baptizing. It is not improbable that they wished that he might be the long-expected Christ and were prepared to regard him as such. John readily confessed that he was not the Messiah, ουκ ειμι εγω ο χριστος.

³⁶ Levites were commissioned to *teach* (2 Chronicles 35:3; Nehemiah 8:7-9) as well as serve in the Temple. As teachers they were similar to the Scribes and were sent along with the priests as the mark of an eyewitness.

³⁷ Ezekiel 36:25

³⁸ Luke 3:15

³⁹ Luke 1:5

⁴⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 16 on the Gospel of John, “*But when [John the Baptist] said that he was not one of these either, after that, in their perplexity, they cast aside the mask, and without any disguise show clearly their treacherous intention...*”

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The asking of whether he is the prophet Elijah returned⁴¹. Scripture spoke of the expectation of who expected that the very Prophet Elijah⁴² would come in person before the Messiah should appear as referred to in Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I send you *Elias the Tishbite before the day of the Lord come.*” However once again John answers in the negative saying *και απεκριθη ου (I am not.)*

The asking of whether he is a prophet. Moses had assured the Jews that God would raise up a prophet to rescue them, “The Lord your God will raise up unto you a Prophet of your brethren like me, unto Him shall you harken”⁴³. At this time of history, the Jews were expecting the Messiah to return and free them from the Roman oppressors. It was not only Elijah, but also possibly Jeremiah, or any other of the old prophets raised from the dead.⁴⁴ John’s answer to this final question was also, “no.”

Having been sent by the Sanhedrin⁴⁵, the supreme Jewish council, the priests had a right to judge persons claiming a commission from God, through the action of baptizing and gathering disciples. In desperation for some type of answer the priests ask John to say something about himself that they can report back to the supreme council. Up to this point John had given them only a negative answer, and told them who he was not since the questions were of a yes or no nature. The question in verse 22 now switches to a firm request for a detailed answer and the conjunction “ου” magnifies the force of the question, “So then tell us, what do you say about yourself?”

Here again John the Baptist answers negatively by quoting two prophetic verses from Isaiah 40:3, “*I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’*” John identifies himself not as the prophet prophesied but merely as a voice, the Forerunner of the Messianic King.

The Evangelist now introduces, by name, the Pharisees, who ask John specifically about the institution of this new rite, “*Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?*”

The Pharisees were very tenacious of rites, customs, traditions and ceremonies which they believed that they were lawful.⁴⁶ While they did believe that these rites could be added to, they held that it could only be done by the authority of an accepted prophet or the Messiah. Since the Pharisees saw John’s “baptizing” of Jews as an addition to the existing rite the Pharisees saw it within their rights, as part of the Sanhedrin to question his authority to institute a new rite.

Note that John’s response to the Pharisee’s inquiry does not answer their question but only verifies what they already know, “I baptize with water; not as Messiah, or Elijah, or a resurrected prophet, not as making proselytes to the faith of Abraham’s sons, but because the Messiah has come. His baptism with water inaugurated the Messianic kingdom, preparing the people to receive the Lord. John’s words, “*Whom ye know not*” spoke to the fact that Jesus was not yet declared publicly to be the Christ. Though it

⁴¹ There appears here an apparent contradiction to the words of Jesus concerning John, when Jesus says “*This is Elias which was to come.*” (Matt 11:14). However, it is generally understood that while He was referring to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5, His purpose was to inform His disciples that John was Elijah *in spirit*, and that his prediction was accomplished in his performance of baptisms, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah.

⁴² Elias in Greek Septuagint

⁴³ Deuteronomy 18:15

⁴⁴ Matt 16:14

⁴⁵ [Sanhedrin](#) (Greek Συνέδριον) meaning “council” refers to any of several official Jewish councils in Palestine under Roman rule, to which various political, religious, and judicial functions have been attributed. This term was used to designate the supreme Jewish legislative and judicial court. While the Great Sanhedrin, met in Jerusalem there were also local or provincial sanhedrins of lesser jurisdiction and authority. Most scholars agree that the composition of the Sanhedrin involves the participation of the two major parties of the day, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

⁴⁶ Mark 7:3-4

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is probable that He was then among the multitude, yet he was not yet recognized as the Messiah. In this regard, Chrysostom sees it reasonable *“that Christ should mingle among the people as one of the many, because everywhere He taught men not to be puffed up and boastful.”*

John’s statement that He (Christ) stands in your midst (**μεσος υμων**) is recognized in the Divine Liturgy before the reading of the Creed. When there are multiple priests serving just prior to the announcement, *“The doors, the doors!”* the priests greet one another saying *“Ο Χριστος μεθ’ ημων”* (Christ is among us)

With the words **ουκ οιδατε** John is indicating that while the people do not know the Christ whom John described in his opening prologue, they would come to experience Him; who he was and whence He came. (reference verse 1:10)

Verse 1:27 *“...the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”* Jewish teaching is that all manner of service that a slave renders to his master, a disciple must render to his teacher, except for the untying and removing of his shoe. John’s words here speak to his understanding of the glory of Jesus when he considers himself unworthy to perform a task he is not even required to do.

Verse 1:29 It is believed that John’s comment that *“These things were done in Bethany”*⁴⁷ indicate that he was not baptizing in the wilderness, but somewhere near to Jerusalem⁴⁸.

This next day, as was previously mentioned, is the continuation of the revelation of who Jesus is. Some believe this meeting of Jesus and John happened after Jesus’ temptation in the desert. Here John gives us a further explanation of who Jesus is referring to Him as “Lamb of God” and “He who came to take away the sins of the world.”

Lamb of God

In verse 1:32 John the Baptist proclaims *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* The use of the term Lamb of God to describe Jesus has led to wide variations in theological interpretation. One connection is to the Hebrew **תמיד (Tamid)** which is the Lamb of the Daily Sacrifices.⁴⁹ The lamb to be sacrificed was to be physically unblemished. Many scholars have tied the *Tamid* “Lamb” to Christ in three distinct ways.

1. The concept of “perfection
2. the sacrificial lamb
3. providing access to God

While Orthodoxy would agree with Christ as “perfect” i.e. without sin, and certainly would see His death and resurrection as reestablishing Mankind’s connection with God, Orthodoxy does not support the idea

⁴⁷ Some texts refer to this place as Bethabara. This comes from the influence of Origen, who while finding “Bethany” in “almost all the early manuscripts,” was not being able to find a place named Bethany and concluded that it must be Bethabara of which he heard, and which had a local tradition that John had baptized there. This idea was generally supported by other Church Fathers.

⁴⁸ Mark 1:5

⁴⁹ *Tamid* is an abbreviated form for *olat tamid* (“daily burnt-offering”) and refers to the daily sacrifices as set out in the Mosaic laws in Exodus 29:38–42 and Numbers 28:1–8. Chapter 4 of the *Tamid* describes in detail how the lamb was slaughtered and prepared for the sacrifice among which was the standard of perfection.

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of “sacrificial” from which the Protestant theology of atonement, specifically expiation and propitiation was developed⁵⁰.

Additionally, the radical nature of John’s statement, “*Who takes away the sins of the world.*” must be viewed through the lens of John the Baptist’s era. Our modern tendency is to see Christ’s act through the lens of the New Testament and His suffering on the cross. However, the Jews of the first century expected that the Messiah would redeem Israel and not the whole world.

Verse John’s account of the baptism of Jesus is much abbreviated from the other Gospel writers as John does not even directly mention that John the Baptist was the one who baptized Christ. In keeping with the intent of his prologue, John is primarily concerned about revealing the Personhood and divinity of Jesus as the Christ and thus only recounts the act of the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ and testifies that “*ουτος εστιν ο υιος του θεου*” (this is the Son of God).

Further, John wants to make clear that Jesus’ divinity was eternally present with the Father. This point is brought out in the Meyer’s commentary⁵¹ (and is in congruence with Orthodox theology):

“We are not to suppose that the Holy Spirit was given to Him now for the first time and was added consciously to His divine-human life as a new and third element. **The text speaks not of a receiving, but of a manifestation⁵² of the Spirit**, as seen by John, which in this form visibly came down and remained over Him, in order to point Him out to the Baptist the Messiah who, according to Hebrew prophecy (Isaiah 11:2; Isaiah 42:1), was to possess the fulness of the Spirit. **The purpose of this divine *σημεϊον* was not, therefore (as Matthew and Mark indeed represent it), to impart the Spirit to Jesus, but simply for the sake of the Baptist, to divinely indicate to him who was to make Him known in Israel, that the incarnate Logos must long before then have possessed the powers of the Spirit in all their fullness** (John 3:34)

Calling of the Disciples – verses 1:35-51

This section is divided into two episodes that occur over the next two days. (verses 1:35-42)

Episode 1 - verses 1:35-42

John the Baptist repeats his introduction of Jesus as the *Lamb of God* (verse 1:29) to two of his disciples who then follow Jesus after hearing Him speak.

Jesus responds to them with τι ζητετε (What do you seek?), not “*Whom* do you seek?” Jesus was aware it was Him they were seeking, so it might be better to translate Jesus’ words as “*What do you seek from Me?*” By this question He wanted to touch their heart for He knew that they were seeking something, and He thus gives them the opportunity of communicating that desire. It was an invitation to state their wishes, and to express their feelings with respect to the Messiah and their own salvation.

The disciples respond with “*Rabbi,*” where are you staying?” The title “*Rabbi*” was a new title which had not been used long before the Christian era, and possibly arose during the times of the Rabbinical schools

⁵⁰ Expiation is a purification or washing of sin, often associated with blood, while propitiation is substitutionary atonement meaning that the wrath of God is appeased when a substitute is punished or sacrificed in place of the offenders. Source: *Religion of the Apostles: Orthodox Christianity in the 1st Century*, Fr. Stephen de Young, 2021

⁵¹ The Meyer’s Commentary (written by Heinrich Meyer, a German Protestant) refers to Meyer’s 21-volume commentary, *The Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* which is considered one of the best New Testament commentaries published in English in the early 19th century.

⁵² Here the Orthodox would use the term “revealed.” See commentary on John 3:16, Orthodox Study Bible.

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of Hillel and Shammai. From the Hebrew root meaning "great" it was applied to a teacher or master in the Jewish schools and would correspond today with the title "Doctor." As it occurs here for the first time John translates it with *διδάσκαλε*, Teacher.⁵³ And Jesus does not refuse the title (ref John 13:13).

The disciples response with *"Where do You dwell?"* signifying their desire to be with Jesus and to be instructed by Him in a more private setting to more fully to listen to His teachings. Jesus' answer encourages them to, *"Come and see"* (verse 39). This also indicates their leaving John the Baptist as their teacher. Our lesson here is that we should also "desire to be with Christ;" to seek every opportunity of communion with him, and *to abide in Him*. (verse 15:9-10).

The manner in which the Evangelist introduces Andrew, as 'Simon Peter's brother, provides evidence as to the date and purpose of the Gospel. The Evangelist has up until now not mentioned his name and seems to take for granted that his readers knew about Peter, and knew him better than they did Andrew. That presupposes a considerable familiarity with the incidents of the Gospel story and is in harmony with the theory that this fourth Gospel is the latest of the four.

When Jesus meets Simon Peter He says, *"συ κληθηση κηφας"*⁵⁴, I will call you Cephas. Some scholars have translated this as the Greek word κεφαλῆς (head) in support of Peter as the head of the Church. However, the Evangelist immediately follows this with *"ο ερμηνευεται πετρος"* indicating to the reader that Cephas is in fact is the Greek word πετράς meaning "rock." Jesus will use this word "rock" throughout the Gospel when referring to Peter. (ref Matt 16:18, *"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."*)

Episode 2 verses 1:43-51

The next day Philip is added as another disciple but in this case Jesus invites him to "Follow me." Philip comments to Nathanael⁵⁵ provide additional information about Jesus' connection with the Old Testament prophecies, *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

Nathanael's response to Philip's comment about Jesus is not, "Can the Messiah come out of Nazareth," but "Can there any good thing come?" The question reveals the opinion that Nazareth seemed to have. We have some evidence of this reputation in Matthew where Christ *"left them and preferred to dwell at Capernaum"* (Matthew 4:13) and again in chapter 13, *"He could do very little among them, 'because of their unbelief'"* (Matthew 13:58). Additionally Nathanael most likely *had considered the writings of the Prophets more than Philip, for he had heard from the Scriptures, that Christ must come from Bethlehem, the village in which David was*⁵⁶. Philip however insists that Nathanael *"Come and see."*

Nathanael does go to see Jesus who then commends Nathanael for his candid disposition and honest desire to inquire into whether this is truly the Messiah saying, Here truly is an Israelite in whom *δολος ουκ εστιν*⁵⁷ (there is no guile).

⁵³ Note once again John's translation of a Hebrew term for the Gentile reader. The term is used only in the New Testament.

⁵⁴ Chaldean כִּפְיָא, a rock

⁵⁵ Nathanael נַתְנָאֵל is a Hebrew name, that is translated in Greek word Theodoros, Gift of God.

⁵⁶ Chrysostom, Homily 20 on the Gospel of John

⁵⁷ Δολος is literally translated as bait. Figuratively it refers to deceit (*treachery*) for baiting people so as to exploit their naive or undiscerning abilities for their own purposes.

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The dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael (verses 1:48-49) results in Nathanael's acceptance of Jesus as "...the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Chrysostom explains this realization saying,

"And [Jesus] did not merely show to him His foreknowledge but instructed him also in another way. For He brought him to a recollection of what they then had said; "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And it was most especially on this account that Nathanael received Him, because when he had uttered these words, He did not condemn, but praised and approved him. Therefore he was assured that this was indeed the Christ, both from His foreknowledge, and from His having exactly searched out his sentiments, which was the act of One who would show that He knew what was in his mind."

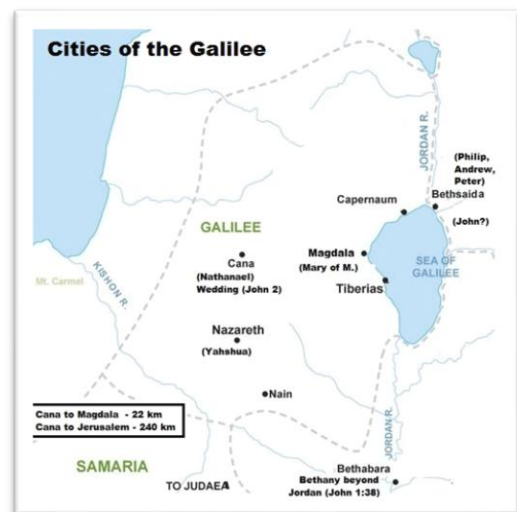
Chapter 3

Jesus attends a wedding in Cana

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

John records this event as occurring on the third day, the first being John the Baptist's encounter with Jesus, the second was the calling of Andrew and Simon, and the third, the calling of Phillip and Nathanael on the way to Galilee.⁵⁸

He notes that the Theotokos was already present at the wedding, prior to the arrival of Jesus and His disciples which makes it probable that she was either related or well known to the bridal party. This has led some to conclude that she was involved in the preparations leading to her feeling the need to tell Jesus of the lack of wine. With Jesus and His disciples being invited it is also probable that Jesus was also known to the bridal party especially due to Cana's close geographical location to Nazareth (6km or 4 miles).



Wedding ceremonies in ancient times, just as today, were followed by celebratory feasts and in the case of Jewish tradition normally lasted seven days. Guests in attendance were usually connected in a social manner and depending on the wealth of the family, entire towns could be invited. As it was common for a teacher or Rabbi to be part of the wedding, it is also possible that Jesus's invitation was connected to his growing recognition as a public teacher and would explain the attendance of his disciples, since they would have accompanied their teacher.

"They have no wine."

In the 3rd verse John records that *Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine."*⁵⁹ This is not a request or command for Jesus to do anything but merely Jesus' mother informing Jesus of the situation.

⁵⁸ The actual location of Cana remains uncertain, with at least three possible candidates. However, tradition, records from the Crusades, Jerome and Josephus, places the first of Jesus' miracles or signs at Khirbet Qana, which is located about nine miles north of Nazareth.

⁵⁹ Note that John, throughout his Gospel refers to the Theotokos only as His mother and not by her name.

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This can be seen as similar to the words of Mary and Martha informing Jesus of the sickness of their brother Lazarus; *“Lord, the one you love is sick⁶⁰.”*

Regarding the reason behind this statement from Jesus’ mother, Chrysostom notes that *“It is worthwhile to enquire whence it came into His mother’s mind to imagine anything great of her Son; for He had as yet done no miracle, since the Evangelist says, This being the beginning of the miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.”*

As was stated earlier, up until this time it is thought that Jesus lived normally among the people, not yet manifesting His glory. However, with the revelations of John and the other disciples, the Theotokos *“took confidence, and called Him, saying they wanted wine, for they have no wine.”*

Chrysostom believes that as part of the wedding festival preparations she felt some degree of responsibility for the smooth conduct of the wedding festival and *“desired both to do a favor for the bridal party, and through her Son to render herself more conspicuous; perhaps too she had some human feelings.”*

What to make of Jesus’ response?

Jesus’ enigmatic response to his mother’s statement has been the source of controversy and varying opinions of what Jesus meant by this statement. There exists here two separate responses: a) *τι εμοι και σοι γυναι* and b) *ουπω ηκει η ωρα μου*. The first part being Jesus’ response to His mother’s statement and the second being the reason for the manner of His response to His mother.

Scholarly commentary has taken three general opinions.

- a) A blunt and harsh rebuke of her comment indicating the beginning of His separation from her
- b) A stern, but respectful address from which Jesus responded with the miracle of wine
- c) A symbolic reference to the later full manifestation of His Glory and purpose.

1. *Chrysostom’s commentary is reflective of the first opinion,*⁶¹

“Therefore, He answered somewhat vehemently, saying, Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come...and she, because she had borne Him, claimed, according to the custom of other mothers, to direct Him in all things, when she ought to have revered and worshipped Him. This then was the reason why He answered as He did on that occasion. For consider what a thing it was, that when all the people high and low were standing round Him, when the multitude was intent on hearing Him, and His doctrine had begun to be set forth, she should come into the midst and take Him away from the work of exhortation, and converse with Him apart...and...draw Him outside merely to herself. This is why He said, Who is My mother and My brethren? Not to insult her who had borne Him, (away with the thought!) but to procure her the greatest benefit, and not to let her think meanly of Him. And since it was probable that if these words had been addressed to her by her Son, she would not readily have chosen even then to be convinced, but would in all cases have claimed the superiority as being His mother, therefore He replied as He did to them who spoke to Him...”

Support for Mary having known of Jesus’ ability to perform the miracle is based on Luke’s writing that at Jesus’ birth the shepherds revealed to Mary what the angels had revealed to them, that the Christ who is Lord and savior was born from her and that Mary *“treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”*

⁶⁰ John 11:3

⁶¹ Chrysostom, Homily 21 on the Gospel of John

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2. *The English theologian Francis Crawford Burkitt and Fr. Thomas Forsyth Torrance⁶² offer the second opinion,*

“We might translate it thus, What have I and thou to do with that? It seems difficult to me to believe that the phrase can be intended by the Evangelist to mean anything else than, “Never mind, don’t be worried⁶³.”

“There is no occasion whatever for assuming that He rebuked her for this. He may have thought that it was not His turn, the His “hour” had not yet come. Yet as she brought the matter to His attention, He told her not to trouble about it and the He would see that the supply was kept up...Why should He rebuke His mother for her liberal conception of His loving-kindness and the trust she puts in His willingness to relieve human distress.”

To further support this opinion, it has been claimed that Jesus’ use of the word “*γυναί*” (*woman*) is not offensive nor harsh since it was in ordinary usage among the Jews. Citing evidence for this is Jesus’ use of the term to both the Canaanite woman in Matt 15:28 and the crippled woman in Luke 13:12, as well as when Jesus addressed His mother while on the cross. *“Woman, behold your son...”*

3. *The Pulpit commentary responds to the third opinion.*

The “hour” for Christ to tell the world all that Mary knew had not come. The hour of the full revelation of his Messianic claims had not come, nor did it come in the temple, or by the lake, or in the feast day; not till the awful moment of rejection, when death was hovering over him, and the blow was about to fall, did he say, “The hour has come” (John 17:1), the hour of his greatest glory. The hour would come when rivers of living water would be supplied to all those who come to him; when the blood he would shed would be a Divine stream, clear as crystal, for the refreshment of all nations, when at another marriage supper of a saved humanity the precious blood should be an ample supply of costly wine for all the world. Moreover, the link at the present moment between our Lord and his mother must begin to shade into something more spiritual.”

As for the second part of Jesus’ statement, *“my hour is not yet come,”* reflects either that Jesus was not ready to reveal Himself by working miracles publicly or to show His mother that she was not to prescribe the time to him when He should reveal His glory. John shows us here that for things in this life we are to submit our desires to the Divine will, and to wait God’s leisure.

The Miracle of the Wine

Regardless of the reason for Jesus’ address to His mother, after that John tells us that Jesus did perform His first public miracle. Several questions need to be addressed about the details of this miracle.

- a) What is the reason for six jars and why stone and not clay?
- b) Why were the jars there?

⁶² Burkitt (1864 – 1935) was Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and Fr. Torrence (1913-2017) was a Scottish Protestant theologian and professor of Dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh

⁶³ In fact Torrence goes so far as to soften “*γυναί*” as “*Lady*.”

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- c) Why so much wine?
- d) Why did Jesus not just refill the wine vessels and instead turn water into wine?
- e) Why does the Gospel writer tell us that the servants filled the jars “to the brim?”

a) Much has been made of Jewish numerology and the desire to draw significance from numbers in both the Old and New Testament. Here some scholars and Father of the Church have equated the six jars with the imperfection of Man since it is one less than seven, the Jewish number of completion and or perfection or the six ages of the world up to the time of Jesus⁶⁴. In this particular case there is valid theological connection that can be made as it would take away from the importance of the miracle which is the association of Christ with the bridegroom of the feast.



Examples of typical stone jars of the period

We are then told that, “*nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.*” Six jars multiplied by twenty or thirty gallons would yield anywhere from 120-180 gallons of wine.

Although this seems to be an exorbitant amount of wine, one must remember that the Jewish wedding feast would occur over the span of seven days with most of the town attending. As we are not told at what point Jesus and His disciples arrived it is feasible that the wine had indeed run out by the time they arrived. Jesus specifically directed the servants to use water jars rather than the vessels in which the wine was contained. One reason for this might have been to prevent any suspicion that the miracle was in any way derived from any of the wine that remained, and the use of water jars specifically set aside for ritual use would not have contained any contaminant.



With respect to the six (6) stone jars note that John explains to the reader the purpose of the jars saying that they were “*the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.*” We know this since the Greek word that is used is καθαρισμον which would translate to purification. It was during this time, and in Orthodox Judaism today, that the bride, about three days prior to her wedding, would perform the מקווה (mikvah) to achieve ritual purity. Note also that John specifically mentions that the jars were made of stone and not clay. Stone vessels were used, since according to the Law of Moses stone would not become impure, unlike clay pottery (Leviticus 6:28, 11:33-36). While Levitical Law does not implicitly state that the use of stone for ritual purification is allowed, the Mishnah does reference their use for ceremonial rituals.

Chrysostom asks now an interesting question. “And why was it, that He did not perform the miracle before they filled the jars, which would have been more marvelous by far? For it is one thing

⁶⁴ St Augustine in his Tractates on the Gospel of John saw this time of Jesus’ arrival as the sixth age, from the time of John the Baptist to the End of the World.

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to change given matter to a different quality, and another to create matter out of nothing. The latter would indeed have been more wonderful but would not have seemed so credible to the many. And therefore, He often purposely lessens the greatness of His miracles, that it may be the more readily received."

The response of the servants to Jesus' command of "Fill the jars with water" is to fill them to the brim (εως αυω). "Up to the brim" is not necessarily meant to indicate the abundant supply of wine that will occur through the miracle, but more to let the reader know that no room was left for adding anything to the water so that the fullness of the miracle could be displayed.

The reaction and comment of the head of the feast in verse 10 is both literal and allegorical.

"Then he (master of the feast) called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the lesser wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'"

Note that the master of the feast does not address Jesus but the bridegroom of the wedding supporting the idea that Jesus' hour to manifest His glory had not yet come.

As for the symbolism of this first of Jesus' signs, scholars see several metaphors both in the Old and New Testaments.

The Wedding Banquet – the wedding and the feast mirrors the Old Testament image of an expression of God's relationship to Israel (Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:4-5; Hosea 2:19-20). In the New Testament we see a linking of the wedding banquet to the messianic age (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:9).

Wine – in a Jewish context wine represents the essence of goodness. The Torah, Jerusalem, Israel, the Messiah, the righteous—all are compared to wine whereas the wicked are compared to vinegar. In Psalms, Israel is likened to a vine brought from Egypt and planted in the Holy Land, where it took deep root, spread out, and prospered. In the Orthodox marriage service, the wife is described as "a fruitful vine by the sides of thy house."⁶⁵ (Ps. 128:3).

The literal interpretation of verse 10 is the master of the feast proclaiming his delight in not only having now enough wine but also wine of the best quality. The allegorical meaning is a reference to the wine of the Messianic banquet where Jesus "will drink anew in the kingdom of God."⁶⁶

An abundance of wine - the abundance of wine is characteristic of the messianic era as foretold by the prophets of Israel, such as Isaiah and Joel⁶⁷. The Fathers of the Church see the transformation of the wine and the abundance as prefiguring the Eucharist which Christ will institute later in the Eucharist.⁶⁸



A final note regarding the inclusion of this particular miracle into the Gospel. Some reject the authenticity of this first miracle due to its seemingly trivial setting in proportion to the salvific importance of Christ's other miracles, not to mention the excess of the miracle which seems to be performed for no other reason than to maintain the joyous nature of the wedding feast.

The Orthodox Church does accept this miracle as authentic seeing not only Jesus acting out of kindness and compassion but purposefully manifesting His glory *to His disciples* and thus strengthening their belief

⁶⁵ Psalms 80:9-11 and 128:3

⁶⁶ Mark 14:25

⁶⁷ Isa 25:6 and Joel 3:18

⁶⁸ Matt 26:27-28 and John 6:53-56

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in Him as Messiah and God. It is not meant to convince unbelievers. The Orthodox Church is fully willing to accept Jesus' active participation, together with His mother, His disciples and the wedding party thus declaring marriage an honorable institution. Near the end of Orthodox Wedding service, we here that echoed when the priest says, "O God our God, Who was present in Cana of Galilee and blessed the marriage there, do You also bless these Your servants who by Your Providence are united in community."⁶⁹

Jesus Rejects Business as Usual

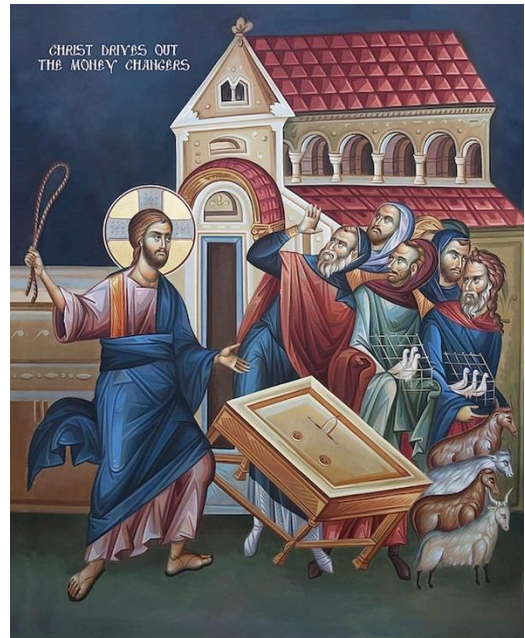
Jesus now proceeds with His disciples to the Jerusalem as it is the time of Passover. As he approaches the temple, He notices the moneychangers at their usual spots.

The moneychangers had a particular role that was required under Mosaic law. Jews and visitors from other nations were required to pay a temple tax.⁷⁰ Since foreign coins could not be accepted in God's temple (due to having pagan images), the money changers exchanged those foreign coins for Jewish currency, shekels. These same moneychangers were also responsible for selling animals as a sin offering by the priests of the temple. However, like tax collectors of the time, the moneychangers charged an exorbitant rate thus extorting money from their own people.

So here we have Jesus not criticizing the payment of the temple tax⁷¹ but to greed and extortion that was occurring at the steps of His Father's House.

In the evangelist's account of Jesus' cleansing of the temple we several notable differences.

- a) The timing of this event. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels place this event as occurring after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem before His Passion, John place it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry⁷².
- b) The details of Jesus fashioning a whip
- c) John does not mention Jesus saying, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"
- d) The Evangelist indicates a sequence for the cleansing.



These differences have generated two main differences of scholarly opinion, one in regard to whether this cleansing event occurred twice and second, how to address Jesus' seemingly violent behavior.

Two Events or One?

⁶⁹ An article which provides more interesting details is *A Wedding at Cana*, Professor Alfred O'Rahilly, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 67, No. 788 (Feb 1939)

⁷⁰ Temple tax was required for the upkeep and maintenance of the temple (Exodus 30:11-16) and was collected during the Jewish festivals of Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. This amounted to a half-shekel or a διδραχμα (two drachma)

⁷¹ Jesus in fact instructs His disciples to pay the temple tax. Matthew 17:24-27

⁷² Ref. Matt 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, and Luke 19:45-46

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Concerning the number of times this event occurred there are three possibilities.

- a) Jesus never cleansed the Jewish temple and this event is meant to signify a spiritual metaphor and not a historical event.
- b) Jesus cleared the temple once and for some reason, John placed the event out of chronological order.
- c) Jesus cleared the temple twice—once near the beginning of his ministry, as recorded in John and about three years later, as recorded the Synoptics.

In Scenario a) Origen denied this as a historical event, interpreting it as metaphorical, where the Temple is the soul of a person freed from earthly things thanks to Jesus. This is supported through the metaphor created by St Paul in 1 Corinthians where he speaks about our bodies being the “*temple of God*” and the “*Holy Spirit dwelling within us*”⁷³.

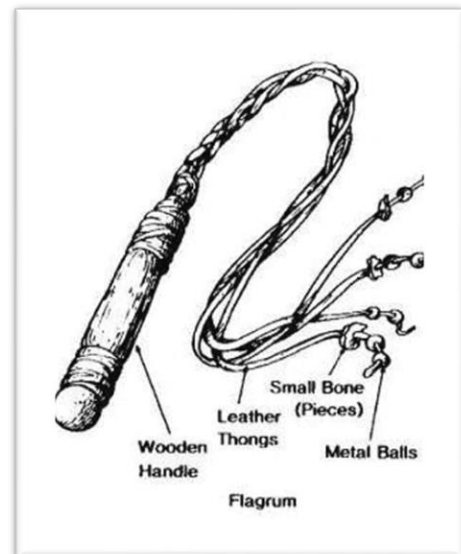
Scenario b) is supported from the idea that there was only one temple cleansing and John’s placement, rather than “chronological” is “theological” to match the purpose and theme of his Gospel. However, there is no Biblical or scholarly evidence for this hypothesis.

Scenario c) is the belief of many of the Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas and most modern scholars who support two Temple cleansings. One thought is the difference in the statements of Jesus that the Synoptics and the Evangelist record. The Synoptics read, “*My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers’*” which has a harsher tone than John’s record of Jesus saying, “*Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market*” indicating Jesus’ escalating anger at the continuation of this corrupt process.

A Violent Response or Something Else?

Standing above all of these differences, though, is the more disquieting notion of an angry, violent, whip cracking Messiah. Theologians and scholars have long debated how to view the actions of Jesus and does this pericope in the Gospels paint Him as a revolutionary who accepts violence as appropriate or at the very least a Zealot sympathizer.

Some have cited this passage as a “key witness for the representation of Jesus as a political revolutionary.”⁷⁴ One argument goes so far as to say that “*Jesus could not have single-handedly accomplished this cleansing and was supported by the aid of an excited crowd...and that the resistance was overcome by force with the help of His disciples and other sympathizers.*”^{75 76}



⁷³ 1 Cor 3:16-17

⁷⁴ Examples include Jean Lasserre, *War and the Gospels*, 1962 and S. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study for the Political factor in Primitive Christianity*, 1967.

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ An excellent reference for the opposing viewpoint that Jesus was not a revolutionary and was not concerned with political matter is the book by Martin Hengel entitled *Victory over Violence: Jesus and the revolutionists*, Fortress Press, 1973.

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Some of the basis for this is in the names of some the disciples that Jesus called. “The sons of Thunder, who asked Jesus if they could “*call down fire from heaven*” to destroy the Samaritan village (Luke 9:54). Judas of Iscariot, which some believe is the Greek form of the word Sicarii, a group, who like the Zealots of the 1st century, opposed the Roman occupation through violence. And Simon who was called the Zealot⁷⁷ (from the Greek ζηλος). The Zealots also sought to overthrow the Romans through force and were finally defeated after a failed military revolt in 66 AD when the Romans destroyed the Temple. There is no evidence to support that this Simon (different from Simon Peter) was a member of the Zealots. Also the term “zealot” could refer to the disciple’s zeal for Jesus’ teachings and His mission. In fact, this is how zeal is used in the temple cleansing account in John 2:17, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

He made a whip...

Only in John do we read of Jesus actually making the whip He used for the cleansing. The word used in Greek is φραγελλιον which is a Greek transliteration of the Roman word flagellum. This, because it is the same term used to describe the scourging of Jesus at His trial.⁷⁸ This particular whip was exceedingly brutal and was specifically designed to inflict a serious degree of pain and damage. Some manuscripts from the 3rd and 4th century have even been found to have the Greek adverb ως (similar to) before φραγελλιον in an attempt to soften the harsh image, however scholarly research indicates that the original manuscript did not contain the adverb, ως.

John does indicate that the whip that was made was φραγελλιον **ΕΚ ΣΧΟΙΝΙΩΝ** which would indicate that the whip was only made of cord and did not resemble the whip used by the Romans for punishment. Since John mentions that Jesus fashioned (ποίησας) the whip on site He would most likely used materials that were readily available such as ropes and reeds and not the intricate device of the Romans. Additionally Judaic law prohibited weapons in the temple area so that Jesus’ action, especially at a major feast, would not have been tolerated by either the Jewish or roman leadership.

Whom did Jesus Strike?

Regardless of the type of whip Jesus used, this does still leave the question of Him seeming to deliberately attack people in stark contrast to the message He had given during His ministry regarding treatment of others. Scholarship is divided on this point as one group sees Jesus using the whip on both the animals and the people while another group sees only the animals being subject to the whip and the people only receiving a verbal rebuke.

In the Synoptics the language is simple and straightforward, εξεβαλεν **παντας** τους πωλουντας και αγοραζοντας (He drove out **all** the sellers and buyers) and without reference to any animals we must assume that Jesus directed His anger at the people. However nowhere in the Synoptic accounts do we read about Jesus fashioning or using a whip.

So the question here is, can we determine what Jesus’ actions were when using the whip? John’s Gospel is unique in that he presents a three-part sequence for the “cleansing event”⁷⁹.

First [Jesus] drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle

Second He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables

⁷⁷ Matt 10:4, Mark 3:18

⁷⁸ Matt 27:26

⁷⁹ This sequence was proposed by Cosmas Indicopleustes (547 AD) in his writing entitled *A Christian Topography*.

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Third Verbal rebuking of those who sold doves saying, “Get these out of here!

By highlighting distinct actions on the part of Jesus, John seemed to indicate that each action is unique and separate from the other actions. In the first action John states that,

...παντας εξεβαλεν εκ του ιερου τα τε προβατα και τους βοας

...all [Jesus] drove out from the temple the sheep and the cattle

A simplistic reading here would translate παντας as “all” referring inclusively to both animals and people since παντας is in the masculine form but seems to refer to both masculine and neuter objects⁸⁰.

Another note is John’s use of the grammatical construction τε...και in which the verb would only qualify the objects that are inclusive of this form, that is the sheep and the cattle. This, combined with the next sequence, *He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables*, indicates a secondary action, which Jesus would presumably not need to use the whip. Since it is very probable that a whip was required to effectively move large animals from the area, the use of a rope or reed whip is highly probable and not overly harmful to the animals. The third sequence has Jesus verbally rebuking the sellers of the doves so a whip certainly would not be necessary for the doves⁸¹.

What makes these passages difficult to accurately translate is that Greek grammatical construction allows for several possibilities so that an explanation often must be generated from the context of the story and the individuals involved.

In this case, based on the totality of Jesus’ ministry we do not find any acts of violence perpetrated on people by Jesus. In each instance when the disciples call for an act of a violent nature, they are rebuked by Jesus⁸².

Finally, it would be severely out of character for Jesus to engage in violence against His creation, especially when we consider that when asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus replied,

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*⁸³

The Orthodox Stance on Acts of Violence

So can the Orthodox Church support Christian participation in acts of violence, specifically war. Many of the Holy Fathers were fully against the idea of Christians participating in any form of military duty, although some held that Christians should participate in military duty, noting that many of the Church’s saints were soldiers. However, the Church has always upheld that clergy are not allowed to take up arms in any military activity.

For the Orthodox Church there is no ethical reason for waging war in the writings of the Greek Fathers. The Fathers of the Church thought of war as the lesser of greater evils, but none the less evil, thus the

⁸⁰ This is not unusual in Greek grammar since the masculine form is used when referring to mixed groups of people, i.e. men and women, or objects.

⁸¹ For a more complete examination of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple with a focus on the Greek construction refer to the article, *The Messianic Whippersnapper: Did Jesus Use a Whip on People in the Temple*, N. Clayton Croy, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 128, No. 3, Fall 2009.

⁸² Some examples are Matt 26:52, Luke 9:55, and Luke 22:49

⁸³ Matt 22:37-40

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concept of "just war" is not present in the writings of the Greek Fathers and that position stands until today.

Patriarch Bartholomew, in his **address while in Serbia on October, 1999**, echoes this when he stated,

"War and violence are never means used by God in order to achieve a result. They are for the most part machinations of the devil used to achieve unlawful ends. We say "for the most part" because, as is well known, in a few specific cases the Orthodox Church forgives an armed defense against oppression and violence. However, as a rule, peaceful resolution of differences and peaceful cooperation are more pleasing to God and more beneficial to humankind."

Show Us a Sign

Another difference in John's Temple Cleansing account is that John is unique in the questioning of Jesus regarding His authority to commit such an act. The Jewish leadership asks Him, *"By what sign (σημεία) can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"*

In the four Gospels Jesus was asked on six (6) separate occasions to either perform a sign or to indicate by a sign His authority for doing what He did⁸⁴. A sign was seen as something that points to another reality⁸⁵. When scribes and Pharisees ask for a sign from Jesus, they are asking him to show that He is in fact the Messiah that was prophesied⁸⁶.

Some scholars, such as Morgan, see in the Pharisees' request for a sign the idea that the Cleansing of the Temple is the second sign⁸⁷. However, Jesus' response was not the performance of a sign but of a challenge to *"destroy this temple..."*

The connection of Messianic claims with signs is not surprising, for it was generally expected that the Messiah, when he came, would authenticate his claims by means of signs.⁸⁸ Many people throughout the Old Testament had made claims regarding their ability to perform miracles and signs but were not the anticipated Messiah. Equally God gave to several of His prophets signs by which they could show that their actions were from God. Moses had his rod as a sign that he was sent by God. God gave Samuel signs that showed him to be a prophet (1 Sam 10:1-7). Elijah the prophet was given seven signs, one of which was his act of resurrecting the woman's son (1 Kings 17:17) saying to Elijah, *"Now by this [sign] I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth."*

Near the end of his Gospel, John tells his readers that *"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book."* He then goes on to explain why he records the signs Jesus performed, *"...so you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God."*

The object of signs for the evangelist is to show the reader that the sign is not only meant a proof of Messiahship but more importantly, to lead them to faith in Jesus as Son of God, which is the central point of his prologue, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father."*

⁸⁴ Mark 8:11-12, Matt 16:1-4, Luke 11:16 and 23:8, and John 4:48 and 6:30

⁸⁵ In Orthodoxy we would use the term "symbol" to refer to what is described here as a sign.

⁸⁶ For a detailed review of John the evangelist's use of the term "signs" see Donald Guthrie, ["The Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel,"](#) Vox Evangelica 5 (1967).

⁸⁷ Ibid 3, page 50

⁸⁸ Further support of the special emphasis John gives to Messianic claims is the fact that only in his gospel is the Hebrew form of the word 'Messiah' found, (verse 1:41) and once by the Samaritan woman (verse 4:25).

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B. F. Westcott, in his book, *The Gospel according to St. John*, agrees saying that “the glory of the sign must be sought not only in the miraculous element, but also in connection with the circumstances as a revelation of the insight, the sympathy, the sovereignty of the Son of Man, who was the Word Incarnate.”

Destroy this Temple...

Unlike Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees and Sadducees demand for a sign after the miracle of the loaves and fishes where He states that “no sign will be given” here Jesus answers their question with His ultimate sign, “*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*” thus pointing to his death and resurrection. Their response, “*It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and you will raise it in three days?*” clearly shows that Jesus’ answer is unintelligible to the Jews who asked Him for a sign, as well as His disciples.

As with other verses in John’s Gospel, here in verse 19 there is both a literal and symbolic meaning.

In the literal context we need to analyze the word **λυσάτε** in Jesus’ response, “*λυσάτε τον ναον τούτον...*” The tense is **orist** which does not indicate when the action takes place or how long it would last). The voice is **active** which indicates that the subject (Jesus) *performs* the action, instead of receiving it), and its mood is **imperative** meaning that it is a command.

The **orist** voice indicates that Jesus determines the timing of His Passion (refer back to Jesus’s statement to His mother, “My hour has not yet come.”)

The **active** voice of Jesus’ answer indicates that He is fully aware of His divinity as He is predicting not only His death but also His conquering of death; His resurrection. Others have performed resurrection (passive voice) but Jesus Himself will resurrect from the dead. This refutes the heresy of Adoptionism⁸⁹ which states that Jesus received His divinity from the Father at some later time.

The **imperative** form shows that Jesus is not saying to the Jews “*you are permitted to destroy this temple*” (i.e. kill Jesus) but is *a challenge* to His opposition which is already beginning to show itself and will eventually put Him to death.

In the symbolic context the “temple” represents the *decay of the old temple religion*, and the “rebuilding” of the temple as *the new spiritual kingdom* soon to be established by Christ. By putting Jesus to death, the Jewish leaders destroyed itself as the house of God, while the resurrection was the setting up of God’s spiritual house.

“*Ότε ουν ηγερθη εκ νεκρων εμνησθησαν οι μαθηται αυτου ... επιστευσαν τη γραφη και τω λογω ω ειπεν ο Ιησους.*” John 2:22

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

In his work, *The Analyzed Bible vol. 4 (The Gospel According to John)* Dr. Campbell Morgan makes the observation that the word **πιστευω** is used by the Gospel writers,

⁸⁹ Adoptionism denies the eternal pre-existence of Christ, instead views Jesus as a human who received His divinity, i.e was adopted as God's Son, when He was resurrected, signaling the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Adoptionism was a belief of the Ebionites, early Jewish Christians, who believed that Jesus was chosen by God on account of his sinless devotion to His will.

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“to sometimes signify, not so much to believe, as to apprehend aright. In this sense, it is once and again employed by this writer in particular. It is not intimated here, that the disciples did not, before this time, believe the Scriptures, or their Master’s word: but that they did not, till now, rightly apprehend the meaning of either, in relation to this subject.”

Chrysostom also comments on the disciple’s quandary over what Jesus said, saying

“There were two things that hindered them [disciples] for the time, one the fact of the Resurrection, the other, the greater question whether He was God that dwelt within; of both which things He spoke darkly when He said, Destroy this Temple, and I will rear it up in three days. And this St. Paul declares to be no small proof of His Godhead, when he writes, ‘Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the Resurrection from the dead’⁹⁰.”

In verse 23, John extends this need for a sign to the people at the Festival writing “...many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in His name” thus implying that their faith was dependent upon the seeing signs, without understanding of their deeper meaning. It was the impulsive response of the moment. Similar to the Parable of the Sower, some of these people are the seed falling on rocky ground for “they hear the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time⁹¹.” Jesus’ response will be similar to what he said to Nathaniel, “You believe because I [showed you a sign], but you will see greater things than that.”

Strong or Weak Faith

A comment is appropriate here regarding what Martin Luther refers to as Starckgleubiger (strong faith) and Schwachgleubiger (weak or “milk” faith). Luther argues that both positions have their good and their problems. Often times people are quick to condemn those of a weaker faith thus failing into the sin of pride in their own self-perceived piety. One example he uses from Scripture is when Peter walked on the water towards Jesus. When his faith was strong he was able to walk on the water but when he start to weaken in his faith he almost drowned and Jesus immediately saved him. Luther also points out that many who were seen as strong in their faith also had moments that could be construed as weakness.

- In Acts 9, Paul demonstrates his strong faith when he openly preaches in the synagogues of Damascus the Jesus is the Son of God, but then allows himself to be lowered over the wall in a basket to escape the Jews who sought to kill him.
- In 356 AD, Bishop Athanasius permitted the monks of his church of St. Theonas in Alexandria to save him from the soldiers who stormed the church because there were others there to administer his office.

From this we must be cautious not to assert that all who flee from dangerous situations or demonstrate a faith that seems weak are not see as righteous or worthy to God. While Orthodoxy would not go as far as Luther and develop specific cases of when a weakness of faith is permissible⁹², we do acknowledge that Scripture recognizes that people differ in their spiritual strength and faith and react differently to different situations.

St Paul admonishes us of this judgmental behavior when he said to the Corinthians “to those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, we say no! And the parts that we think are less honorable

⁹⁰ Romans 1:4

⁹¹ Matt 13:20

⁹² *On Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plaque*. Martin Luther, Writings on Death

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we treat with special honor....God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body.” And to the Romans saying “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling...”⁹³

Chapter 3

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.

Who is Nicodemus?

The mysterious figure of Nicodemus appears only in the Gospel of John and not in any of the Synoptics. **Νικόδημος**, (Nicodemus) is a frequent name among both the Jews and the Greeks. We know very little of him beyond the statements in John’s Gospel, mainly that he was a Pharisee (ανθρωπος εκ των φαρισαιων) and a member of the ruling council (αρχων των ιουδαιων)⁹⁴. He appears three times in John’s Gospel.

1. He seeks out Jesus at night (verse 3:2)
2. He defends Jesus at his mock trial and receives a stern rebuke from his fellow pharisees (verse 7:45-52)
3. He is part of the company with Joseph of Arimathea bearing a large quantity of burial spices. (verse 19:38-42)

In this dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus we see three of the six features particular to John’s Gospel, twofold meanings, misunderstandings, and irony.

Twofold Meaning – Reality and Symbolism of Night

We are told that Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night (ηλθεν ... νυκτος) which carries, once again, a literal and symbolic inference. Literally, Nicodemus, by the nature of his position in the Jewish Council comes to Jesus by night most likely out of fear, as he was a ruler in the Jewish leadership, and thus desired to avoid the hostility of the Sanhedrin who was beginning to oppose Jesus. Recall that this event seems to occur after the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for the Temple cleansing.

Symbolically in both the Old and New Testament “night” represents several things, darkness (literal and symbolic), ignorance, secrecy, fear, an absence of God, and death.

The Evangelist feels that “*night*” is so important he will purposely repeat this detail later at Jesus’ burial saying, “*He was accompanied by Nicodemus...who had visited Jesus at night*⁹⁵” John will use the symbolism of *night* five (5) additional times in his Gospel to help drive home the point that was presented in his prologue, that Mankind was in darkness and that God sent His only Begotten Son into the world so

⁹³ 1 Cor 12:22 and Romans 15:1

⁹⁴ There is a [Gospel of Nicodemus](#) (also known as the Acts of Pilate) which is dated to around the 4th century and contains details of the trial of Jesus and accounts of His resurrection. It is believed that this was written to help support belief in Christ’s resurrection. The text is one source from which we obtain the name of the soldier who speared Christ, Longinus and the names of the robbers who were crucified with Christ, Dismas and Gestas.

⁹⁵ John 19:39

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that the “true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world” Nicodemus comes at night mirroring the interior darkness and confusion of his mind.⁹⁶

1. Jesus speaking ... "the night comes, when no man can work" (John 9:4)
2. Jesus speaking ... "but if a man walk in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him" (John 11:10)
3. Judas Iscariot... "having received the bread went immediately out: and it was night" (John 13:30)
4. "There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred-pound weight" (John 19:39).
5. the disciples go fishing... "and that night they caught nothing" (John 21:3)

Misunderstandings - What is Nicodemus' purpose?

The way the character of Nicodemus is presented lends to possible misunderstandings by the reader.

On one hand is he a representative of the Jewish leadership of the time, more concerned about the Law and signs to point to the Messiah rather than faith? Nicodemus' statement "*Rabbi, we know You are a teacher...come from God*" (απο θεου εληλυθας⁹⁷) is not quite the titles used by the apostles, Andrew calling Jesus the Messiah and Nathaniel's use of the title "Son of God. Nicodemus' address of Jesus as Rabbi was a customary title of respect for a teacher of the Law. His use of the term "*we know*" (οιδαμεν οτι απο θεου εληλυθας διδασκαλος) indicates his connection with the Sanhedrin and that the Jewish leadership, at this time, did at least consider Jesus to be a divinely commissioned teacher based their impressions of Him by the signs they had witnessed. Here Jesus' responses (3:3, 3:5, and 3:10) could be seen as a response not to Nicodemus alone but to what he is a member of, that is, a faith based on signs. But does this differ from the faith of the apostles whose faith in many instances in the Gospel is also based on the miracles and signs they witness?

Or was Nicodemus among those Jews who were sympathetic to Jesus, and are open to a transition in their faith?⁹⁸ There is nothing in the text to suggest that Nicodemus sought Jesus out for anything other than honorable motives. Especially since we know that later it was Nicodemus who defends Jesus at His trial and along with Joseph of Arimathea recovers Jesus' body from the cross⁹⁹. Here Chrysostom see Jesus' answer to Nicodemus not as enigmatic or condescending but engages him noting that "*He refrained from saying, 'I need not the help of others, but do all things with power, for I am the very Son of God, and have the same power as My Father, because this would have been too hard for His hearer.'*"

Regardless of these two viewpoints, John's Gospel is never conclusive about any complete transition Nicodemus had in his faith journey. This is evidenced by his statement at Jesus' trial, "*Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?*"¹⁰⁰ Nicodemus demonstrates his Pharisaical tendencies by expressing concern over a point of the Law rather than

⁹⁶ The Gospel According to John, Lawrence Farley, Conciliar Press, 2006

⁹⁷ From the Greek verb ερχομαι

⁹⁸ John 12:42

⁹⁹ John 19:39

¹⁰⁰ John 7:51

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recognizing who Jesus is. But Nicodemus did seek Jesus out to determine more exactly whether Jesus perhaps was the awaited Messiah unlike the lawyer who purposely sought to test Jesus (Luke 10:25).

John's presentation of Nicodemus does not offer the reader definitive "proof" either way to indicate either a progression in his faith or remaining as one of the "Jews" opposed or indifferent to Christ. Nicodemus seems to remain *tertium quid*¹⁰¹.

Irony

Lastly the irony in the account of Nicodemus is present when John identifies Nicodemus as "a leader of the Jews" and later records the Pharisees reply to the soldiers as "*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No!*" when clearly Nicodemus is one¹⁰².

So what is then the purpose of John presenting to us Nicodemus? Nicodemus' purpose can thus be as stated by Joulette Bassler.¹⁰³ That to be ambiguous or marginal in faith cannot lead to illumination out of darkness. This is the key difference between the disciples and Nicodemus and other like him, that true discipleship requires the full commitment. This is the meaning then of Jesus' statement to Nicodemus, "...no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born from above." Nicodemus' connection with the "darkness of the Jews and the world" make him unable to grasp the spiritual meaning evident in his response of "*How can someone be born when they are old?*"

Orthodox Understanding of "born again"

Jesus' response to Nicodemus, "*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again*" is one of the fundamental principles of Protestant Evangelicalism and has become embedded in mainstream American Christian culture. In fact, we often hear of people being born again in baptism 2, 3 or even 4 times, certainly in conflict with our Creedal statement of "one baptism for the remission of sins." So, two questions emerge for Orthodox Christians, a) what is the Kingdom of God? and b) what does it mean to be born again?

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God first needs to be understood as not merely a place to go upon successful completion of Last Judgement but a present reality, *here and now*. The Kingdom of God is a *present and personal experience* of God's energy, leading to a transformation into what Orthodoxy would call "acquiring a Christ-like φρόνιμα.

When in Mark¹⁰⁴ the rich man asked Christ "*What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?*" Christ held out the possibility of becoming "perfect" (τέλειος) telling him to "*sell all you have, give to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven.*" This required a disconnecting from worldly desires and was something to be done in the "now."

Born Again

¹⁰¹ *Tertium quid* refers to someone or something that is undefined but is related to two definite or known things.

¹⁰² John 7:48-49

¹⁰³ *Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the 4th Gospel*, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 108, 1989

¹⁰⁴ Mark 10:21

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This term requires a recovery from its current Evangelical definition back to its original meaning. That begins by looking at the word John uses in verse 3:3, which in the Greek is *ανωθεν*,¹⁰⁵ the root of which can be translated as *again* or *from above*.

Ανω can indicate repetition, i.e. again. Nicodemus' response to Jesus' reply of "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" could show that he interpreted this as *again* as his response referred to a literal birth *again* from the womb. However, the Holy Fathers of the Church see Jesus' clarifying response to Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are *born of water and the Spirit*" yielding the translation as "born from above...in water and Spirit" with a focus on the regenerative aspect of baptism.

Irenaeus of Lyons taught,

*"inasmuch as man, with respect to that formation which, was after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the **washing of regeneration**, [the Lord] said to him [upon whom He had conferred sight], after He had smeared his eyes with the clay, "Go to Siloam, and wash;" thus restoring to him both [his perfect] confirmation, and **that regeneration which takes place by means of washing**"¹⁰⁶.*

Basil the Great understood "born again" in the sense of one life ending (life under the pagan gods) and another life beginning (life under Christ), writing

*First, it is necessary that the **old way of life** be terminated, and this is impossible unless a man is **born again**, as the Lord has said. **Regeneration**, as its very name reveals, is a beginning of a **second life**.*¹⁰⁷

The Two-Fold Requirement of Baptism

In verse 3:3 John provides for the Church a two-fold process for baptism as instituted by Christ, "born of water" and "born of the Spirit."

Early initiation of candidates to Christianity followed this two-fold pattern of John, although, in the Gospel, they were not necessarily done in the order of baptism of water followed by receipt of the Holy Spirit. In some cases the initiates received the Holy Spirit prior to baptism (Acts 10:44), in other cases the Holy Spirit came after the laying on of hands following the baptism (19:5-6) and in still others the Holy Spirit worked in and through the baptism (1 Cor 12:12-13).¹⁰⁸



Critical is the Evangelist's connection of baptism with water *and* the activity of the Holy Spirit so that baptism is seen as the material sign of the work of the Holy Spirit while not confining the activity of the Holy Spirit to only baptism (3:5-8).

Although the oldest catechetical documents, such as the [Didache](#), specifically mandated that candidates be baptized *into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in living water*, the catechisms of the early

¹⁰⁵ The root of "ανωθεν" is ανω which means *above, in a higher place, heavenly things*.

¹⁰⁶ Against the Heresies 5.15.3

¹⁰⁷ On the Holy Spirit, chapter 35

¹⁰⁸ Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community, Craig Koester, 2003, pg. 185

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Fathers of the Church such as Tertullian and St Cyril of Jerusalem mandated the two-fold aspect of baptism¹⁰⁹.

*“After we have issued from the **font**, we are thoroughly anointed with a **blessed unction...**”*

Tertullian in [On Baptism \(§7\)](#)

*“For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Ghost, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise after **Holy Baptism** and the **Mystical Chrism**, having put on the whole armor of the Holy Spirit.”*

Cyril of Jerusalem, Lecture 21.4

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Christ speaks of entering the Kingdom of God through both the literal baptism of water such as John the Baptist was performing, and that Jesus would also perform.¹¹⁰ However Jesus was also speaking of a “baptism of the Spirit that leads to personal transformation or in the words of the Fathers of the Church, regeneration (in Greek παλιγγενεσία).

Today these two elements of baptism, literal and spiritual, are echoed in the Orthodox baptism when the priest declares the baptismal waters to be

Literal *“a water of redemption, water of sanctification, a cleansing of flesh and spirit, a loosing of bonds, a forgiveness of sins,*

Spiritual *“an illumination of soul, a washing of regeneration, a renewal of the spirit, a gift of sonship, a garment of incorruption, and a fountain of life....”*

So that they who receive this baptism will *“in every work and word, being acceptable before You, and become a child and heir of Your heavenly Kingdom.”*

In Protestantism, *baptism in water* is still practiced, however the second part, *baptism in Spirit* has lost its sacramental nature and now is symbolic.

Verse 3:13 ***No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man***

Upon His rebuke of Nicodemus’ inability to receive Jesus’ teachings (verse 3:10) Jesus speaks to Nicodemus in the manner in which he would recognize, as a member of the Sanhedrin. First in verse 3:13 where Nicodemus would have recognized the connection of this verse to Proverbs 30:4

Verse 1 The words of Agur¹¹¹, the son of Jakeh, the prophecy; the words of the man concerning, "God is with me; yea, God is with me, and I will be able."

Verse 4 Who ascended to heaven and descended? Who gathered wind in his fists? Who wrapped the waters in a garment? Who established all the ends of the earth? What is his name and what is the name of his son, if you know?

Here now is the answer to the question posed by Agur. Although many like Moses and Elijah ascended into heaven they did not descend from heaven, but now standing before Nicodemus is the One who had

¹⁰⁹ Although some will say that Acts 2:38 alludes to the two-fold formula of baptism.

¹¹⁰ John 3:22

¹¹¹ In Rabbinical Literature Agur is interpreted as epithets of Solomon. Agur means to compile and thus denotes the one who first gathered these prophecies together."

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been in heaven with God, (John 1:18) and could tell him its eternal truths. He [Christ] had that knowledge which a man could obtain only by ascending to heaven, and He came down from heaven with it.

Verse 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

Once again Jesus speaks to Nicodemus from Hebrew Scriptures when He speaks of God, through Moses, saving the Israelites in the wilderness who were being bitten by the poisonous serpents, causing disease and death by instructing Moses to

“Make a snake and put it up on a pole so that anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived¹¹².

The serpent of bronze lifted up by Moses, in which the Israelites saw their means of healing and recovery given by God through faith in Him. Jesus now proclaims Himself as the medium of healing and of life to a diseased and poisoned world foreshadowing the time when He will be lifted up on the cross granting those who believe in Him eternal life.



Note that the Orthodox bishop’s staff differs from the Catholic bishop’s staff which resembles a shepherd’s staff indicative of him as the shepherd of his flock. In Orthodoxy the bishop’s staff represents both the staff Moses used to save the Israelites in the wilderness and the reality of what the risen Christ is for Mankind.



Verse 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (μονογενη) , that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.



Tune in to any sports event or protest march and you are sure to see someone holding a sign or banner with this verse. This verse is heard so often that it’s become a cliché reducing Christian theology to the idea that salvation is as easy as acknowledging Christ, believe, and you’re assured of eternal life. However, the previous dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus shows that there is much more that is required of us.

Since for Orthodox, belief must be accompanied by action, Orthodoxy rejects the non-denominational anthem of “once saved, always saved.” This is why this section of the Gospel is read over several days during the Feast period of Holy Cross where Christ states *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me¹¹³.”* The “cross” involves daily struggle (in Greek ασκησις), self-denial, with the purpose of strengthening our intimate connection with God through the Sacramental life of His Church.

¹¹² Numbers 21:8-9

¹¹³ Matt. 8:34. This is also said at the conclusion of the Orthodox baptismal service when the cross is placed on the candidate’s neck.

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These actions are the evidence of the regeneration which was spoken of earlier. At our baptism, as we process around the font, we sing the words of St. Paul *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ”* ¹¹⁴ affirming that “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16:16).

The last part of this verse *“all who believe in Him (πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον)”* was also difficult for Nicodemus, as a member of the Jewish ruling class, to hear as it went beyond the limits that the Jews set for the kingdom of God. Now John tells us that salvation is open to all of humanity.

Verse 3:17-18 Is Jesus the Judge of the world?

There has certainly been debate with regards to Jesus’ status as the judge of the world. The Gospels seem to contain conflicting information.

Jesus Does Not Judge

John 3:17 - *For God did not send his Son into the world to judge (ινα κρινη) the world, but to save the world through him.*

John 8:15 - *You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.*

John 12:47 - *If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.*

Jesus is the Judge

John 5:30 - By myself I can do nothing; *I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just*, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

John 5:22-23 - Moreover, *the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son*, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

John 9:39 - Jesus said *“For judgment I have come into this world*, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Matt 25:31-32- *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

The difference here is best understood not in the direct reading of the statements by Jesus but more of an understanding of the time and period that each of these statements apply. Chrysostom explains this saying,

“There are...two Advents [παρουσία] of Christ, that which has been, and that which is to be; and the two are not for the same purpose. The first came to pass not that He might search into our actions, but that He might forgive [αφη]. The object of the second will be not to remit, but to enquire [εξετάση]...His former coming was for judgment, according to the rule of justice. Why? Because before His coming there were the prophets, and moreover a written Law, and doctrine, ...and many other things which might have set men right, and it followed that for all these things He would demand account [ευθύνας], but, because He is merciful, He for a while pardons instead of making enquiry.” ¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Galatians 3:27

¹¹⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 28 on Gospel of John, § 20-25

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St Paul will repeat this theme in his letter to the Hebrews:

*“...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him”.*¹¹⁶

In verses 3:18-21 John will repeat two themes, judgement and Christ as the light as he had stated in chapter 1.

In verses 3:22-30 we see in John the Baptist’s words a concluding or “recession” of the existing covenant of God and his announcement of the dawning of the new covenant, “procession” in the Person of Jesus the Christ. John immediately silences any sense of rivalry or competition between himself and Jesus in verse 27 and 28 by stating,

“A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of Him.’”

Here John reminds his followers that the ultimate authority is from heaven, whether to preach, minister, shepherd or purify (i.e. baptize). The Baptist starts with himself saying, as he did to the Pharisees in chapter 1), “I am not the Messiah..” but only the voice calling out to steer¹¹⁷ those to the way of the Lord.” He follows this in verses 29 and 30 with the language of the “bridegroom” to refer to Christ using the language of the Old Testament where the figure of the bride and bridegroom suggested the relationship between Yahweh and His people clearly connecting Jesus to God.¹¹⁸

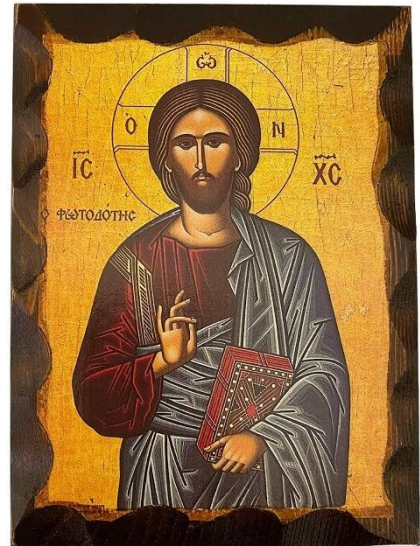
John refers to himself as “the friend who attends the Bridegroom” who has now found Him making his joy complete. The final recessional statement by John the Baptist, “He must become greater; I must become less.” This statement in no way implies a dismissal of the content of the work performed by John the Baptist but an acknowledgement of the limitation of his ministry. John, in his Gospel, also makes clear Jesus’ divinity by using the word ερχομενος twice in verse 31.

Note that this form of ερχομαι is grammatically present voice meaning that Jesus is the *One who came, the One who is coming, and the One who will come.*

In the same verse John the Baptist also declares the supreme authority of Jesus stating that He is επανω παντων (above all) which includes the whole realm of Man.

The closing verse, 3:32-36 point to the ultimate significance of Jesus as the Son of God which is salvation and judgement.

*“Since life eternal is in the Son the believer possesses that life when he is united with Him in faith. By the same token, to reject the Son is to cut oneself off from the life and such disobedience puts one under the wrath of God...hints of denial of the future life in the perfected kingdom of God.”*¹¹⁹



¹¹⁶ Hebrews 9:28

¹¹⁷ The word used in John 1:23 is ευθυνατε. The root being ευθύνω which is to steer the helm of a ship

¹¹⁸ This language can be found in Ezekiel, Malachi, Hosea, and poetically in the Song of Solomon.

¹¹⁹ World Biblical Commentary, Volume 36, George Beasley-Murray, 1999

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Verse 32 does seem however to lend misunderstanding when John states that “...no one accepts His [Jesus’] testimony since His disciples have accepted it and certainly John the Baptist has.

Chrysostom addresses this saying that “*Yet He had disciples, and many besides gave heed to His words. How then says John, No man? He says no man, instead of few men, for had he meant no man at all, how could he have added, ‘He that has received His testimony, has set to his seal that God is true. Here he touches his own disciples, as not being likely for a time to be firm believers.’*”

Chapter 4 Jesus and the Woman from Samaria and the [Healing of the Royal Official’s Son](#)

Jesus and the Woman from Samaria 4:1-42

This section relates the events and discussion of Jesus with a woman from Samaria, His resulting conversation with His disciples, and the conversion of the Samaritans. Here we can see four parts;

1. Verses 1-4 - [The journey of Jesus through Samaria](#)
2. Verse 5-26 – [Jesus’ conversation with the woman](#)
3. Verses 27-38 - [Jesus’s resulting conversation with His disciples](#)
4. Verses 39-42 [The Conversion of the Samaritans](#)

An overall view of these events demonstrates a link with chapter 2 through the image of water. At the Wedding in Cana there was the contrast between the water of purification (Old Covenant) and the wine of the new Kingdom of God (New Covenant). Here there is a similar contrast between the water of Jacob’s well (Old Covenant) and the living water offered by Jesus (New Covenant).

The 5th Sunday of the Pascha season is observed by the Orthodox Church as the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman.

PART 1 VERSES 1-4 The journey of Jesus through Samaria

John opens his account of the story by saying that Jesus having learned that the Pharisees were increasing concerned regarding His popularity over John the Baptist, decided to leave Judea and return to Galilee. Based on the conflict that arose from the Cleansing of the Temple, Jesus was aware that this news of “*everyone is going to Him.*” (verse 3:26) would bring increased conflict should He encounter the Pharisees again. We can thus surmise Jesus’ desire to avoid this conflict by returning to a place that would reduce the chance of conflict. Meyer¹²⁰ notes that “*To surrender Himself to them before the time, before His hour arrived, and the vocation of which He was conscious had been fulfilled, was opposed to His consciousness of the divine arrangements and the object of His mission.*”

John supports this when he writes that “**εδει** δε αυτον **διερχεσθαι** δια της Σαμαρειας.” The εδει is the imperfect form of the word δει translated as “it is necessary” and the prefix of δι before the verb ερχεσθαι means “to cross through an area or place” indicating that Jesus was taking the most



¹²⁰ Ibid, 17

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direct route back to Galilee. However, this was not the usual route of travel for the Jews (ref the route in RED) as they sought to avoid any contact with the Samaritans¹²¹.

PART 2 VERSES 7-26 Jesus' conversation with the woman

In this second part of the event of Jesus and the Samaritan woman there are several key points that can be recognized by the reader of John's Gospel.

1. The ongoing rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans.
2. The process by which Jesus advances the spiritual growth of the Samaritan woman.
3. The differing images of the Samaritan women's response as interpreted by Biblical commentators.
4. The Samaritan woman's closing response to the words of Jesus as compared to Nicodemus.

1. Why the Rivalry Between the Jews and Samaritans? ¹²²

The 1st Book of Kings chronicles the division of the nation of Israel into two nations or kingdoms in the 9th century in the days of Rehoboam with Israel to the north, and Judah to the south. King Omri of the Northern Kingdom bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer and named it Samaria and it became the capital city of the northern kingdom with Jeroboam as her king ([1 Kings 16:24](#)). The animosity between the Jewish inhabitants of Judah and Israelites began very soon after the division, as Rehoboam assembled an army to make war against Israel to reunite the kingdom.

Immediately after the division, Jeroboam changed the worship of the Israelites by setting up idols in the cities of Dan and Bethel longer so that the inhabitants of the north no longer traveled to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and worship.

Later, after Israel's fall to the Assyrians, they began to intermarry with the Assyrians, contrary to [Deuteronomy 7:3-5](#) leading the Jews to refer to the Samaritans in a derogatory way such as "dogs" or "half-breeds."

The Samaritans were also a continuous source of difficulty to the Jews who rebuilt Jerusalem after returning from Babylonian captivity (See [Ezra 4](#) and [Nehemiah 4](#)).

Samaritan-Jewish conflicts continued up to the time of Jesus' birth, with both Jewish and Samaritan being taught that it was sinful to have any contact with the other and Jews we instructed to avoid the impure land of the Samaritans¹²³. Today the Samaritan population numbers about 700 and still live near Mt. Gerizim.



¹²¹ Jesus' going to Samaria appears to be in conflict with Jesus, prohibition to His disciples that they "*Do not...enter any town of the Samaritans.*" (Matt 10:5) Here Jesus is not excluding the Samaritans from salvation, but recognizes that sending His apostles at this early stage of their spiritual development (ref Matt 8:26) coupled with enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews would have made their conversion difficult and potentially a stumbling block at this time.

¹²² Source material from The Gospel according to John, Raymond Brown, Anchor Bible Series Vol. 29, 1966

¹²³ This animosity is evident in John 8:48 when the Pharisees answer Jesus by saying, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed?"

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Faith of the Samaritans¹²⁴

The Samaritans, together with the Judaism consider the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) as valid but reject all other books of the Old Testament. While Jews view the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as the most sacred location in their faith, the Samaritans regard Mount Gerizim as the true location of God's Holy Place as it was blessed by God.¹²⁵ For the Samaritans, the Apocalypse, called "the day of vengeance", will be the end of days, when a prophet similar to Moses called the Taheb (Samaritan equivalent of the Jewish Messiah) will emerge from the tribe of Joseph and bring about the return of all the Israelites, following which the dead will be resurrected. The Taheb will then discover the tent of Moses' Tabernacle on Mount Gerizim and will be buried next to Joseph when he dies. The following hymn which is read during the Samaritan service on the Day of Atonement and reveals the eschatological nature of the Samaritan belief.

"My word shall instruct thee in the memorial of the Taheb and his government. When he is born in peace, his majesty shall shine forth in the heavens and the earth, and his star in the midst of its heavens. When this Taheb grows up, his righteousness shall be revealed. The Lord shall call him and teach him his laws. He shall give him a scripture and clothe him with prophecy.... They shall come and believe in him, and in Moses and his law. The Jews also shall say: 'Let us come to his teaching. Cursed be Ezra and his words which he wrote in his wickedness. Mount Garizim is holy: there is not its like among the mountains. There the Taheb shall rejoice and answer in his heart of wisdom: 'Blessed be Israel with his seed! There is none like him among the peoples.' Oh! that mine eye had seen this Taheb and his majesty!"

VERSES 5-6 Jesus Rests at the Well of Jacob



¹²⁴ For a more complete reading on the Samaritan Doctrine of the Messiah see the article by A. Cowley, The Samaritan Doctrine of the Messiah, Expositor, 1895.

¹²⁵ Deut 11:29

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John relates that Jesus came to the town of Sychar. Many scholars have argued that Sychar and Shechem are one in the same and refer to the plot of land Jacob bought from Hamor the father of Shechem (Gen 33:19). Other, like the historians Eusebius and Jerome, as early as the 4th century, saw these as close in proximity but different places. While Jacob's Well is only mentioned here in John's Gospel, there exists up



to today a well in the region of Sychar near Mt. Gezim where there are also many springs¹²⁶. Jewish, Samaritan, Christian and Muslim traditions all associate the well with Jacob. A cross-shaped church was built over the well in 380 AD and in 1860 the Greek Orthodox acquired the church and named it St Photini after St. Photini, the name given by the Orthodox Church to the Samaritan woman that Jesus spoke with.

John's comment that Jesus grew weary speaks to the reality that "the Word [truly] became flesh" and experienced the limitations of human life.

One also notes the double meaning that John provides when in verse 4:6 he states that Jesus "καθεζετο ουτως επι τη πηγη" (πηγη translating as "spring" while later in verse 11 the Samaritan woman refers to it as a φρεαρ which translates as a well or pit. A spring is a source of living and flowing water, a well contains only stagnant water. This is another contrast between the Old Testament – stagnant and only temporary sustenance and the Source of live giving and abundant living water which Jesus as the Son of God offers.

2. The process by which Jesus advances the spiritual growth of the Samaritan woman.

There are seven exchanges in the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman which takes on an escalating nature. It begins with a very human request, "Will you give me a drink" and ends with Jesus' revelation of His divinity, "I am He."

This approach is reminiscent to how Jesus engaged with Zacchaeus when He said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."¹²⁷ and Nicodemus in chapter 3 of John. Beginning from a very human level, through a simple request, Jesus is able to draw the person in and slowly reveal His glory and His mission. We can examine this escalation in St. John Chrysostom's homilies.

First exchange. Jesus asks for a drink and the answer she gives, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Her address is without title, cautiously deliberate, and not the response we would expect but indicates that she recognizes Jesus as a Jew (according to Chrysostom through Jesus' dress and dialect). She questions Jesus' willingness to have this "association" with her¹²⁸.

¹²⁶ In John 3:23 mentions John the Baptist baptizing in Aenon near Salim which is located only 3 miles east of Shechem.

¹²⁷ Luke 19:5-6

¹²⁸ John's parenthetical commentary, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans," helps to explain her response since the word (used only once in the Gospels) by John is συγχρωνται which has been translated several ways. The safest translation however is from the meaning of the root verb χράομαι which is "to use." The addition of the συ at the beginning indicates "together" so that the word συγχρωνται would refer to the woman's astonishment that

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Second Exchange. The woman stays now to listen and Jesus, recognizing that *“she is worthy to hear and not to be overlooked”*¹²⁹ reveals Himself as “Living Water.” Her answer to this demonstrates that her understanding was not yet of a spiritual nature and more grounded in a literal interpretation. Her next response shows the beginning of an understanding of who Jesus is when she asks Him, *“Are you greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well...”*

Third Exchange. Jesus responds to this not by *“depreciating the Patriarch Jacob* by saying *Yes, I am greater*, but by showing the *“excellence of the other”* (i.e. living water) so that her response is belief and desire to obtain this “living water,” although at this point in her development she still considers this living water to be a material thing. Chrysostom praises her remaining in dialogue with Christ calling it an earnest desire to learn something profitable by abiding by Christ of whom she does not yet fully know, but also recognizes in her answer (and her first use of a title of respect – Κύριε, Lord) that she had *“gained a clearer insight, but not yet fully perceiving the whole.”* Christ recognizing that she still had not comprehended what He was telling her did not say *“If you believe in Me you shall not thirst, for she would not have understood His saying, not knowing who it could be that spoke to her, nor concerning what kind of thirst He spoke.”*

Fourth Exchange. Jesus now strikes at the heart of her inability to comprehend spiritual matters by exposing that which binds her to material things and asks her to *“Go, call your husband...”* Her response is not to rebuff Jesus for asking such a personal question but to *“meekly receive His reproof answering with “I have no husband.”*

Fifth Exchange. Now Jesus increases her spiritual growth through a simple statement of facts without being contemptuous or bitter for *“if she was to have that well of water springing up in her, there must first be moral investigation and correction.”*¹³⁰ The woman once again uses a title of respect – Κύριε, but carefully responds by saying to Jesus, *““Lord, I perceive (θεωρω¹³¹) that you are a prophet.”* Chrysostom sees her response as an elevation of her mind since she no longer questioned Jesus’ appearance but now engages Him in doctrinal matters asking where is proper worship, Mt. Gerizim or Jerusalem?

Sixth Exchange. *“What then does Christ? He does not resolve the question, (for to answer simply to men’s words was not His care, for it was needless,) but leads the woman on to the greater height, and does not converse with her on these matters, until she has confessed that He was a Prophet, so that afterwards she might hear His Word with abundant belief; for having been persuaded of this, she could no longer doubt concerning what should be said to her... and having taken away from both places priority in dignity [Mt. Gerizim or Jerusalem], rouses her soul by showing that neither Jews nor Samaritans possessed anything great in comparison with that which was to be given; and then He introduces the difference.”*¹³² And although Jesus *“...numbers Himself among Jews¹³³,...He commends the Old Covenant, and shows that it is the root of blessings, and that He is throughout not opposed to the Law.”*

Jesus would consider “using” or “sharing” the same vessel for drinking as Samaritans were considered unclean by the Jews.

¹²⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 31 on the Gospel of John

¹³⁰ Ibid 2, pg 75

¹³¹ θεωρω is used to describe someone who is not an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at something with interest and for a purpose with the intent to discern and gain knowledge of. This Greek word is where we get the English term “theatre,” i.e. where people concentrate on the meaning of an action (performance).

¹³² Ibid, 125

¹³³ *“We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* John 4:22

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Seventh Exchange. The woman's response to this, "I know the Messiah comes" completes her spiritual elevation. Chrysostom notes that she said this "from an impartial judgment and a simple mind, as is plain from what she did afterwards; for she both heard and believed, and netted others also, and in every circumstance we may observe the carefulness and faith of the woman." Now Jesus can say to her, "I, the one speaking to you—I am He."

3. The differing images of the Samaritan women's response as interpreted by Biblical commentators¹³⁴.

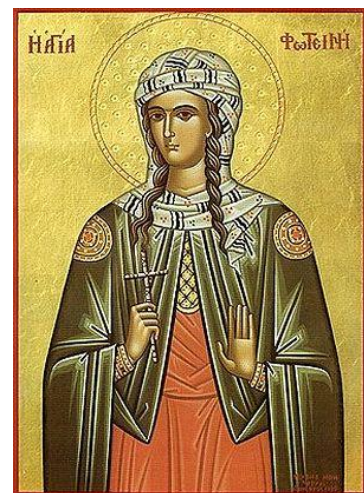
The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and specifically her responses to Jesus have been interpreted in two radically different ways. The Early Fathers of the Church such as Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Palamas and Augustine see her responses as polite, intelligent, discerning and eager to be taught, even though being hindered by a lack of understanding in spiritual matters. In contrast to this some of the later Protestant Reformers such as Calvin, John Gill, and Wolfgang Mauslein see her as contemptuous, disdainful and mocking in her tone as well as not being receptive to the words of Jesus.

While both the Church fathers and the Reformers agree that this story reveals the Samaritan woman as a model of how the soul of Man converts to Christ, a comparison of these two commentaries exposes the differing theologies regarding the state of Man and the source of divine illumination.

With regards to the state of Man, the Church fathers stress the goodness and reason-endowed nature of the woman who is created in the image and likeness of God. Both Chrysostom and Gregory describe the woman who comes to the well as "intelligent and understanding" and "worthy to hear and not be overlooked" while Calvin and Mauslein stress the Augustinian view of Man as having lost the goodness of God's image and resides in a depraved, carnal state. This is evident in Calvin's statement that she was "a woman who did not at all deserve that [Jesus] should speak a word to her." Throughout the entire dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman the Church fathers see the Samaritan woman as eager to learn in a humble manner totally opposite from how the Jewish leadership treated Jesus and would continue to treat Him, while the Reformers see her as brash, prideful, and mocking in each of her responses to Jesus.

With regards to how a person is illumined, the Church fathers emphasize the women's "knowledge and meditation on divinely inspired Scripture" and that "when [she] heard these extraordinary and divine words from Christ...like the soul betrothed to God in the Song of Songs was stirred up by the voice of the immortal Bridegroom." For them, this event with the Samaritan woman reveals that illumination came when she comes to know who Jesus is, while for the Reformers illumination came when she comes to know who *she* is. (this is evident in the way these late Reformers emphasize the portion of the story in which Christ forces her to confront her sinful life).

Another significant difference is that for the Church fathers and the Early Reformers is it vital that a person must, of their own free will, accept the Grace of God which the Father holds out to us.



¹³⁴ An excellent article that provides an extensive exegesis of this contrast is given in Changing Images of the Samaritan Woman in Early Reformed Commentaries on John by Craig Farmer, Church History, Vol 65, No. 3, 1966

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“All indeed depends on God, but not in such a way that our free will be hindered.... It is both up to us and up to Him. For we must first choose the things that are good, and when we have chosen, then He brings in His own part. He does not anticipate our acts of will, lest our free will should suffer indignity; but when we have chosen, then He brings great assistance¹³⁵.”

Contrast this with Calvin’s statement that seemingly denies her exercise of free will,

“When [Jesus] perceived that jeers and scoff were her only reply to what he had said, he applied an appropriate remedy to this disease, by striking the woman's conscience with a conviction of her sin. And it is also a remarkable proof of his compassion that, when the woman was unwilling of her own accord to come to him, He draws her, as it were, against her will.”

4. The Samaritan woman’s closing response to the words of Jesus as compared to Nicodemus.

In contrast to the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus which remains unresolved since John does not reveal any complete transition Nicodemus had in his faith journey. However, when Jesus completes His dialogue with the Samaritan woman John tells us that “leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’”¹³⁶ While Calvin seems her action as merely “a trumpet or bell to invite others to Christ,” St. Gregory of Palamas states that,

“She immediately became a chosen bearer of the Good Tidings...and led them to faith in Him whom she had seen. She did not speak this way because she harbored doubts, but because she believed that others to would find fuller assurance by seeing the Lord...by abandoning her water pot she teaches the to value the benefit of the Lord’s teaching more highly than earthly necessities.”

It is through this action that the Church designates the Samaritan woman as an apostle since she not only proclaims the truth of Christ, but she has allowed herself to know Christ personally.

PART 3 VERSES 27-38 Jesus’ Conversation with His Disciples

In this third part of the story of the Samaritan woman, John now focuses on three (3) distinct but related conversations between Jesus and His disciples so as to increase their spiritual understanding.

1. What is my food? (verses 27-34) In the continuing theme of misunderstandings, Nicodemus and baptism and the Samaritan woman and living water, so now the disciples misunderstand what Jesus means about food. The difference here is that while Nicodemus and the Samaritan women did not grasp what Jesus was offering to them, the disciples are unable to grasp what Jesus Himself lived by.¹³⁷

The theme, like the earlier conversation, “*Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty...*” where the woman wanted Jesus to provide water to sustain her physical needs, is repeated in the disciple’s insistence that Jesus should eat to sustain His human needs, “*Rabbi, eat something.*” As He did with the Samaritan woman, Jesus’ response is corrective, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.*”

¹³⁵ Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews 12.3

¹³⁶ John 4:28

¹³⁷ Ibid 115, pg. 63

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In chapter 6 John will return to the theme of what Jesus offers to humanity,¹³⁸ but here He speaks of His purpose which is to do the will of the Father. But what is the will of the Father?

2. The Harvest is Ready! (verse 35) In the next verse Jesus answers this question with through the language of sowing, reaping and harvest.

“Behold, He again by familiar words leads them up to the consideration of greater matters; for when He spoke of food, He signified nothing else than the salvation of the men who should come to Him; and again, the field and the harvest signify the very same thing, the multitude of souls prepared for the reception of the preaching.” Chrysostom, Homily 34, Gospel of John

Some Biblical scholars have attempted to connect Jesus’ response, *“Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest?’”* with an Old Testament saying from Proverbs, but no such connection can be produced, and it is thought that this is merely a colloquial expression of the area. Even so, it cannot be taken as a general saying since the distance between seed-time and harvest differs according to the different kinds of grain in question. If Jesus was applying this in a prophetic sense, meaning that what the prophets (of the Old Testament) has sown His disciples would now reap, then clearly the timing does not allow any connection with the 4 months.

What makes the most sense here is that Jesus, paralleling the present reality of an “earthly” harvest that is four months away, is making a direct connection between His previous statement, *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work”* **and** the “spiritual” harvest now at hand. This is evident in Jesus’ remark immediately following when He says *“...open your eyes and look at the fields! They are white for harvest.”*

Jesus is telling the disciples to literally lift their eyes and *“behold the crowd of Samaritans advancing.”*¹³⁹ The white (λευκα) in verse 35, can be seen as

1. *metaphorical* representing the readiness of the Samaritan’s willingness to accept the salvation Jesus offers (Chrysostom)
2. *allegorical* in that grain, when ripe, turns from a green to a white or light color, indicating that it is time for the harvest (Samaritans) to be gathered in (Barnes and Chrysostom)
3. *literal* in that the approaching Samaritans were wearing white (Beasley-Murray).

3. Sowing and Reaping (verses 36-39) The ones who reap the harvest are those who have ministered to people, throughout human history, leading them to Christ and their “wages” is the joy of having such “fruit” to harvest. This joy is fulfilled in the realization that those who are gathered in the harvest (καρπον) are granted the great gift of eternal life from the Lord of the Harvest¹⁴⁰ in His Messianic Kingdom. With the use of the word ομου¹⁴¹ in the last part of verse 36, *“ινα και ο σπειρων ομου χαρη και ο θεριζων,”* John illustrates the point that the sower and the reaper “do not just share this joy (χαρη) in common but simultaneously (both at the same time).

¹³⁸ After the multiplication of the loaves when He says to His disciples again, *“Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life...I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”* John 6:27, 35

¹³⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 34, § 2

¹⁴⁰ Matt 9:38

¹⁴¹ “ομου” means together or at the same place and time. Reference the usage in the Creed to represent the same idea for the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, ομο-ουσιον.

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This has led to some differing opinions regarding who is the sower (σπειρων). Chrysostom and Westcott agree that Christ should not be interpreted as the sower here since *“The Prophets are they that sowed but they reaped not”*¹⁴² while the typical Protestant reading is that Christ is the Sower. The Protestant interpretation is based on an exegesis of the Greek words ο σπειρων and ο θεριζων which are present voice and singular indicating they refer to the parties in real (present) time, that is Jesus, His disciples and the advancing Samaritans. For Chrysostom, John is telling his readers that [Christ] *shows moreover that He sent [prophets] also, and that there was a very intimate [and simultaneous] connection between the New Covenant and the Old, and all this He effects at once by this expression.*

In Jesus’ second saying (verse 37), *“...One sows and another reaps,”* there is again the desire to connect it with the Old Testament, however its usage is opposite to how it is used in the Old Testament. There, the usage typically has a negative connotation or is reflective of the bitterness of human disappointment.¹⁴³ Jesus, however, uses it here to make the point that both the sower and the reaper play different but equal roles in the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. Joseph Benson in his commentary notes that Jesus *“does not imply any discontent in the persons who sow without reaping, as it seems to do in common uses; for the sower and the reaper are represented as rejoicing together in the rewards of their spiritual husbandry.”*¹⁴⁴

PART 4 VERSES 39-42 The Conversion of the Samaritans

The Samaritans of the town come now to meet with the Jesus that the Samaritan woman has testified to them saying, “He told me everything I ever did.” Here the Samaritan woman can be compared to John the Baptist as she testifies before her people about the Messiah which she has come to accept. John relates that the Samaritans believed in Him (εις αυτον), through His word (δια τον λογον) that was the witness of the Samaritan woman (της γυναικος μαρτυρουσης). Note that no mention is made of miracles, for there was no need of miracles among these Samaritans as was the case earlier when people believed in Him after seeing the signs He performed at the Passover Festival in Jerusalem (2:23).

The witness of the Samaritan woman was sufficient for the townspeople to come and meet the Messiah they had anticipated would come and desiring to learn more, bade Jesus to stay for an extended time but He stayed only two days. In the final verse (42) John reveals true faith as he relates that πολλῶ πλείους, a far larger number than had believed owing to the woman’s report now believed διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ, on account of what they heard from Jesus Himself. This is a faith approved by John, because it is based not on miracles but on the word of Christ and is at the heart of the Orthodox ideal of belief, not one based on testimony but rather based on a personal experience with the living Savior.

In contrast to how the Jewish leadership responded to the words and teachings of Christ, Chrysostom counts the Samaritans admirable on two counts¹⁴⁵,

- 1) because they believed, and because they did so without signs.
- 2) because they did so sincerely. Though they had heard the woman say doubtfully, Is not this the Christ? They did not also say, we too suspect, or, we think, but, we know, and not merely, we know,

¹⁴² Ibid 135, § 1

¹⁴³ Deut. 28:30 and Micah 6:15

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Benson (1749–1821) was an English Methodist minister, theologian and a contemporary of John Wesley. He was known for his 5-volume commentary on the Old and New Testament.

¹⁴⁵ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Homily 35

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but, we know that this is of a truth the Savior of the world. They acknowledged Christ not as one of the many, but as the Savior.

Closing note of observation This episode with the Samaritans offers an important lesson for Christians today who both sow and reap in the vineyard of the Lord, that being, Jesus' willingness to engage with the Samaritans, even when weary. Pastor Albert Barnes expresses this nicely when he writes.¹⁴⁶

What evils may follow from neglecting to do our duty! How easily might Jesus have alleged, if he had been like many of his professed disciples, that he was weary, that he was hungry, that it was esteemed improper to converse with a woman alone, that she was an abandoned character, and there could be little hope of doing her good! How many consciences of ministers and Christians would have been satisfied with reasoning like this? Yet Jesus, in spite of his fatigue and thirst, and all the difficulties of the case, seriously set about seeking the conversion of this woman. And behold what a glorious result! The city was moved, and a great harvest was found ready to be gathered in! "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

The Second Sign – Jesus heals the Royal Official's Son

John now picks up the story from the opening verses of chapter 4 stating that Jesus continues on His original mission which was to return back once more to Galilee (John 4:3). Once again as John adds a parenthetical statement to point out that it is Jesus Himself and not the Gospel writer that makes the statement regarding the fact that a "prophet has no honor in his own country." Scholars have debated about where John is referring with regards to "His own country."

Where is Jesus' hometown?

Galilee. The idea here is that Jesus had left Galilee to substantiate His Messianic claim in Jerusalem, and this having been accomplished, He returns with His credentials to His own country. (Meyer, Barnes) This is supported by verse 4:45 where unlike Samaria where they believed without signs or miracles, "They [Galileans] had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there." The difficulty here is that the beginning of verse 4:45 indicates that the Galileans welcomed Jesus.

¹⁴⁶ Albert Barnes, American theologian and Presbyterian minister. Barnes is best known for his extensive Bible commentary and notes on the Old and New Testaments, published in a total of 14 volumes in the 1830s. Barnes was an abolitionist and excoriated slavery as evil and immoral, calling for it to be dealt with from the pulpit "as other sins and wrongs are" (see his book, *The Duty of the Church at Large on the Subject of Slavery*)

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Nazareth. Here the idea is that this is where the Synoptic Gospels locate Jesus' home, (Luke 4:23 and Matt 13:54-58) and Nazareth is what is written on the inscription that was placed on the Jesus' cross. (John 19:19) Add to this the statement made by Nathaniel, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" (John 1:46). Cyril, Calvin and Bengel take this view as does Chrysostom, although he specifically mentions Capernaum which is located within 20 miles of Nazareth.

Judea. Origen, Campbell, and Westcott propose that Judaea is being referred to here as it as the "home of the Prophets." Judea was also listed as the country of His birth and registration (Luke 2:4) Moreover, Judaea fits in with Jesus' statement since He had not only met with little honor in Judaea but He had been forced to retreat from it. Also, no Apostle had been found there.



The Royal Official Beseeches Jesus

First Appeal – Verses 4:46-47

In a somewhat similar progression to the miracle of the water into wine at Cana we have the miracle of the healing of the official's son. At the wedding, Jesus initially refuses to perform the miracle but eventually relents, similar to the exchange that will transpire between Jesus and the officer. A significant difference is that in this second miracle or sign (verse 4:54) will not be performed within the physical proximity of Jesus, but from afar.

While it is believed that this man was an official in the court of Herod¹⁴⁷ there is no information offered to confirm this. What is pertinent is that the officer, due to his high position, could have summoned Jesus to accomplish his request but instead went to see Jesus personally (*απηλθεν προς αυτον*) to make his request. It is highly plausible that the official heard of the miracle that Jesus performed at Cana and at Jerusalem and thus sought Jesus out with the hope that He would likewise perform for his son a miracle of healing.

In the official's statement to Jesus, "*και ηρωτα αυτον...*" (verse 4:47) the verb *ερωτάω* has the connotation of an earnest request that requires special attention; to beseech.¹⁴⁸ This is the same verb used in Luke's account of the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:3) and the same level of intensity of request (*παρακαλέω*) in Matthew's account (Matt 8:5)

Chrysostom makes the comparison between these two events specifically regarding the attitude of both men towards Jesus. Both are recognized as having high positions and can command Jesus to perform the healing but instead both personally beseech Jesus to heal.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ The term John uses here is βασιλικος which can be translated "king" can also be used in the sense of courtier, or a civil or military officer in the service of a king.

¹⁴⁸ See Luke 4:38 and Matt. 15:23

¹⁴⁹ While historical scholarship has seen the event of the Royal Official in John and the Centurion in Matthew and Luke as separate events, modern scholarship tends to see these as independent accounts of the same event. A discussion of this is offered by Rudolf Schnackenburg in his work, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1979.

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Jesus' Response to the Official's First Plea – Verse 4:48

Three observations are worthy of note in Jesus' response to the official's first plea.

- a) The seeming harshness of Jesus' rebuke to the official
 - b) The switch from a singular address to a plural address
 - c) Jesus' refusal to be present for the healing
- a) Chrysostom helps us to understand Jesus's seemingly uncaring remark in the face of such an urgent and heartfelt plea, *"Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe."* (verse 4:48) by leading us to the central difference. He notes the contrast in Jesus' response to each man. To the centurion Jesus praises the faith of the centurion, *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."* (Matt 8:10), while He laments the fact that the royal official presses Jesus to be present at the healing, *"Lord, come down before my child dies."* (John 4:49)
- b) Jesus responds to the request of the royal official by addressing the official in the singular (προς αυτον) but then switches to the plural (ιδητε ου μη πιστευσητε) thus extending His comments to the entire crowd¹⁵⁰. This being done to drive home the point that these Galileans, like the Judeans, believed because of the signs they had witnessed. (John 20:29). John emphasizes this craving for seeing (ιδητε) signs and wonders (σημεια και τερατα) through Jesus' response. (See also 1 Corinthians 1:22)
- c) The Rev. Whitelaw speaks to this deeper purpose of Jesus' refusal to perform the healing in person,

*The petitioner [royal official] by this request indicates the reality and extent of his faith, since he is satisfied the healing of the child is within the Savior's power, but also its feebleness and defect inasmuch as he regards Christ's presence as necessary for the performance of the miracle. Jesus therefore discerning both the strength and the weakness of the man's faith and says unto him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders..."*¹⁵¹

Second Appeal – Verses 4:49

In the continuing pattern of the Samaritan woman, the official sees Jesus' response to his request in a purely literal fashion and takes it either as a rejection of his request or as a condemnation of himself,¹⁵² as evidenced by his more eager and urgent plea *"Lord, come down before my child dies."*

Chrysostom now contrasts the faith exhibited by each man. In seemingly superstitious fashion, the royal official persists in wanting Jesus to be present for the healing *"Lord, come down before my child dies,"* while the centurion only asks Jesus to speak, saying, *"But just say the word, and my servant will be healed."*

Campbell, in a humorous way, plays out the possible thoughts of the officer revealing his weak faith after hearing Jesus' condemnation.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Gospel of St. John. An Exposition Exegetical and Homiletical, Rev. Thomas Whitelaw, Dutton & Co., 1888 (pg. 114 §47). This "delay" in Jesus' coming will present itself again in the resurrection of Lazarus, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* (John 11:21)

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 147

¹⁵² Ibid, 147, §49

¹⁵³ Ibid 3, pgs 83,84

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“So out of the anguish of his heart he said, ‘Sir, come down before my son dies.’ It was as though he had said, ‘Whether I want to see signs or wonders does not count. I want my boy healed and that can only be if Thou art there.’”

Jesus’ Response to the Officer’s Second Plea – Verse 4:50

In similar fashion to Jesus’ subsequent fulfillment of the miracle at the wedding, He does relent and cures the official’s child, but John wants the reader to understand that performing miracles and healings was not the primary purpose of why He, God the Word, condescended to become Man. Christ’s miracles were not performed to create wonder and astonishment but “...for God’s glory so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”¹⁵⁴ Just as Jesus had done with the Samaritan woman, He laid bare the chief obstacle, i.e. lack of faith, that hindered them from realizing who Jesus Christ was to them and what He was offering to humanity. Faith based on miracles is elementary, but Christ does not reject it but sees it as *valuable to lead up to a more advanced and spiritual form.*¹⁵⁵ Before healing the official’s son Jesus needed to heal the man by strengthening his weak faith which considered “presence” as indispensable to the working of a miracle. Chrysostom highlights this when he writes, “For miracles are not for the faithful, but for the unbelieving and the grosser sort.”¹⁵⁶ Whitelaw states it in another equal and revealing manner.

“It is doubtful if faith is rightly grounded when it rests exclusively on the external transaction of the cross, detached from the living Person of the glorified redeemer.”¹⁵⁷

Once again Campbell offers a humorous translation of Jesus’ answer “Go, your son will live.”

“Observe what He meant. He gave him no sign and did not do what he asked Him to do, which would have satisfied his feeling that there was a necessity for something spectacular. Jesus replied practically, ‘I am not coming. I am not going to act in the way you think necessary, but I will give you the help you seek.’ [Jesus] created an opportunity for the exercise of a faith with lacked a sign, saying in effect, ‘I will not give you a sign, I will give you a word. You will get your sign after your faith operates.’”

The Official Confirms and Believes – verses 4:50-53

This closing dialogue reveals *three* specific miracles that occur, a) the healing of the son, b) the healing of the man (i.e. the perfection of the official’s faith), and c) the conversion of his family.

Healing of the son. After Jesus says to the official, “Go, your son lives” (verse 4:50) the official departs and enroute he meets his servants and asks, *την ωραν εν η κομψοτερον εσχεν*, specifically “*what time did [my son] begin to get better*, the implication in Greek being that he expected that his son was in the process of becoming better. *It was only upon* receiving the answer from his servants that the “*fever left the boy*” at the precise time that Jesus said his “*son will live.*” Chrysostom’s commentary helps explain John’s desire to show that Jesus, as God and Master of Creation (1:3), accomplished the healing immediately,

*“Not in a common way or through chance was the child freed from danger, but all at once, so that what took place was seen not as the consequence not of nature, but the *επεργείας* (working) of Christ. For*

¹⁵⁴ John 11:4

¹⁵⁵ John 10:38, John 14:11, and pg. 116, Gospel of St. John, Rev. Thomas Whitelaw

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 142

¹⁵⁷ Ibid 147, pg 116

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when he had reached the very gates of death, as his father showed by saying, Come down, before my child dies; he was all at once freed from the disease.” Chrysostom, Homily 35, page 339

Healing of the man. Unlike the Samaritan woman, where enlightenment and realization came from Jesus’ continuing dialogue, Chrysostom notes that the official’s *maturity of faith* comes much later when he verifies the miracle personally.

And unlike the centurion who when Jesus offered to come to his son “*so that we might learn the rightmindedness of the man...because in [this] case faith had been perfected, and therefore [Jesus] undertook to go, the nobleman’s [faith] was imperfect.*”

John validates this imperfect faith through the second part of verse 50 and verses 51 and 52 which state that, “*the man took Jesus at his word and departed.*” John credits the official with having faith that the healing would occur (επιστευσεν) but his need to confirm it, demonstrating a faith not yet mature.

“At that time then, owing to his emotion, the nobleman gave no great heed to the words, or to those only which related to his son, yet he would afterwards recollect what had been said, and draw from thence the greatest advantage.” Chrysostom, Homily 35

Another clue to his imperfect faith is that the Greek word John used for his “departing” is εμπορευετο (root – πορεύομαι) which means *to engage upon a journey with an emphasis on reaching a particular destination*. By this John is telling the reader that the official did not casually depart from Jesus confident in the healing but set off with the specific purpose of confirming the accomplishment of the healing. In verse 4:51 the detail of the official’s servants meeting him along the way indicate that “*the servants hastened probably to acquaint their master with the good news and to prevent Christ’s coming as it was no longer necessary.*”¹⁵⁸

The faith possessed by the nobleman, like that of the Galileans generally was the product of temporary excitement than of deep-rooted conviction. They welcomed Christ as a miracle worker and followed Him for the sensation of beholding His spectacular displays...It was also doubtful if his faith, any more than theirs, would continue of Christ should cease to excite by means of wonders.

*This faith has its modern counterpart in that belief which is born of excitement and rests on feelings rather than on understanding and conviction.*¹⁵⁹ (ref the Parable of the Sower – Matt 13:18-23)

Conversion of his family. This is the earliest mention of “household faith” (cf. Acts 10:44; Acts 16:15, 34). While some scholars believe that the healing of the son of this official and the centurion are one and the same with the Synoptics (ref footnote 146), the reference to the conversion of the entire family only appears in John. Regardless John wants to illustrate that sickness is often the means to a greater good. God does not willingly grieve or afflict the children but here we see that the sickness of the son resulted in the perfected faith of the man thus leading to the salvation of the entire family. God often takes away earthly blessings that he may impart rich spiritual mercies.

Chapter 5 The Healing at the Pool and Authority and Witness of the Son

¹⁵⁸ Ibid 147, 115 and also Chrysostom Homily 35, §3

¹⁵⁹ Ibid 147, pg. 117

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This chapter opens with Jesus returning to Jerusalem at the time of a “Feast of the Jews. This is interesting that Jesus is returning to Jerusalem in light of John’s earlier comment in chapter 4 where states that “*He departed from Judea*” taking the quickest route back to Galilee. (verses 4:3-4) However, as happened in Jesus’ previous encounter in Jerusalem (verse 2:13), He will once again encounter hostility and rejection but this time of a much more severe nature. Jesus’ defense to the Pharisees’ question of why He would violate the Sabbath Laws contains His public admission of “*making himself equal with God.*” John records this as the reason that the Pharisees ἐζητοῦν αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνειν *with the verb having the direct connotation to kill in any way whatever manner so as to put out of the way.*

Thus, this chapter can be divided into two sections, Section 1 being the fulfillment of the 3rd sign (verses 1-9) and [Section 2](#), the conflict and controversy that results between Jesus and the Pharisees (verses 10-47)

SECTION 1 The first section of this chapter, *The Healing of the Lame Man at the Pool of Bethesda*, is read in the Orthodox Church on the 4th Sunday of Pascha.

Verse 5:1 “...*Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.*” The specific Feast is not mentioned however speculation is aligned against two strong possibilities.

a) **Passover.** This is supported by Irenaeus, Luther, and Bultmann. The thought is that since this was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts with a clearly religious character it would have been Jesus’ obligation as a pious Jew to attend, and that this is the Feast John mentions in the preceding narrative (4:45). This opinion is also based on the literal interpretation of John 4:35 where Jesus refers to the time to the harvest being four months away which aligns with the chronology of the Passover. In verse 5:1 Bultmann sees ἡν εορτη των ιουδαιων as a later correction seeing η εορτη as correct in the original text. This is because the term “η εορτη” would in of itself refer to the Feast of Feasts (Passover) as opposed to just “εορτη.”¹⁶⁰

b) **Pentecost (Shavuot).** This is supported by Chrysostom, Cyril, Erasmus and Calvin. Chrysostom argues, “*What feast? Methinks that of Pentecost for continually at the feasts He frequents the City, partly that He might appear to feast with them, partly that He might attract the multitude that was free from guile; for during these days especially, the more simply disposed ran together more than at other times.*”

Verse 5:2 “*Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.*”

The Sheep Gate is only mentioned in John’s Gospel and is not mentioned elsewhere in the bible, in either the Old Testament or the Synoptics, nor in other historical records such as Josephus. Campbell, in his commentary notes that there is nothing in the Greek (προβατικη) which specifically indicates either gate or market, there is good evidence that one of the gates of Jerusalem was called the sheep-gate from which sheep and oxen were brought into the city for the Jewish sacrifices.¹⁶¹

The pool (κολυμβηθρα) does have the connotation of a place to swim or bathe. While it is possible that this pool could have been used for the Jewish ceremonial act of cleansing, i.e. mikvah, pools of water such as this one were well known as places of healing among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Asclepeions, named after the god Asclepius, functioned as healing centers whereby the god’s mercy

¹⁶⁰ Bultmann, pg, 240

¹⁶¹ See Nehemiah 3:32; Nehemiah 12:39

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would extend to those in need. John translates the Aramaic name of the pool in Greek as βηθεσδα which could translate as “house of mercy” or “house of overflowing water.”

Πεντε Στοας This Greek word translates to a "porch, portico, or covered colonnade" and refers to a covered place surrounding a building, in which people can walk or sit in hot or wet weather. Here it probably means that there were five covered places from which the sick could remain as they waited to have access to the healing waters.

The Elusive 4th Verse - Does it Belong to John's Original Gospel?

Another controversial topic among scholars is the presence, or in some cases absence, of the ending of verse 5:3 and verse 5:4;

“...and they waited for the moving of the waters. 4. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.”

While it appears in the KJV, other bible translations omit this verse and refer to a footnote that mentions the questionable nature of this verse. These verses are also not present in the 4th and 5th century Codex Sinaiticus or Codex Vaticanus.

The early church fathers such as Tertullian and Chrysostom do not quote the verse as it appears in any known manuscripts nor refer to an actual verse in John about an angel stirring the water but do display a familiarity with the tradition of an angel stirring the water as shown below.

“An angel, by his intervention, was wont to stir the pool at Bethsaida. They who were complaining of ill-health used to watch for him; for whoever had been the first to descend into them, after his washing, ceased to complain,” Tertullian, On Baptism, Chapter 5

And an Angel came down and troubled the water, and endued it with a healing power, that the Jews might learn that much more could the Lord of Angels heal the diseases of the soul. Yet as here it was not simply the nature of the water that healed, (for then this would have always taken place,) but water joined to the operation of the Angel.” Chrysostom, Homily 36

One reason given for the absence of verse 5:4 was that it was purposely suppressed by the Early Church due to the uneasiness, not necessarily with God sending a healing angel, as this has precedence in the Old Testament, but with conflicting notion of a loving God extending His healing grace only the first person who was able to get into the waters.

Early Christian writings do not bear this out as there is evidence of suppressing or denying angelic activity in the world, and in fact the early Christian writers seem to highlight the role of angels.

“God committed the care of men and of all things under heaven to angels whom He appointed over them.” Justin Martyr

As a final parenthesis to the healing powers of the “pool” it is worth noting that there is a natural explanation for the phenomenon of the “*movement of the waters.*” Examples include the Virgin's Fountain in Jerusalem, and El Fuwarah and Wady Kelt between Jerusalem. The Virgins Fountain and El Fuwarah “*rise several times per hour preceded by rumbling and gurgling after*



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*which the water rapidly fills the pool finally subsiding after a few minutes.”*¹⁶² In America there are many well known warm springs which offered beneficial healing effects such as Warm Springs in Georgia (frequented by President Roosevelt) and Bath City in Mt. Clemens Michigan (frequented by Henry Ford, Babe Ruth, and Mae West).

The Healing of the Paralytic – Biblical Treatment of the Disabled

Verses 5:5 *“One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.*

The end of verse 3 (*Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed*) and the beginning of verse 4 present another controversial area of the Bible, that is, how the Bible depicts people with disabilities and, more important, how the Church treats those with disabilities.

Some take a simplistic approach that sees the historic Church as separating those with disabilities from the community of believers. They isolate passages that portray them as beggars since the assumption is that they cannot fend for themselves and are in need of our healing. In the Synoptics and in John’s Gospel Jesus’ healings are presented mainly as a personal encounter with a specific individual for a greater purpose than the healing.¹⁶³ This has caused some to see the Bible as,

“...directly challenging the dignity and status [of the disabled] as potentially valued members of their society. The Bible continually portrays them as objects of divine action. When they are being healed...they serve as marvelous plot-devices that show of the power of God or the anointed one.”

*Concepts of purity, divine origin of disability, and objectification for theological and literary purposes all work together to paint a negative picture of the possibilities and powers of the disabled.”*¹⁶⁴

Historical Views of the Disabled.

Statements such as these, while well meaning and understandable when viewed through the lens of today’s societal standards, do not take into account the multi-layered approach that the Bible narrates to us, as well as the progressive nature and accomplishments of the Church Fathers. Before examining this, it would be helpful to first review the attitudes of the ancient world in which the people of the Bible and Jesus operated in.

Ancient Greece and Rome¹⁶⁵

Greeks and Romans prized a strong body and mind as the ideal and demonstrated this through their many statues. This approach was partly religious in that beauty and wholeness were regarded as a mark of divine favor but also practical since a muscular, flexible and agile body is certainly an advantage for the city in times of war. *A human being was considered to be of value in view of his or her potential to contribute both materially and through acquired virtue to the good of family and society.*¹⁶⁶ Conversely disability was seen either negatively as disfavor from the gods or evil, or positively as a gift from the gods such as clairvoyance for someone born blind. This harshness is evident in the writing of the Ancient Greeks such as Plato who recommended that “the maximum number of superior adults should mate with

¹⁶² Dr. E.W.G. Masterson, The Pool of Bethesda, The Biblical World, Feb 1905 Vol. 25, No. 2

¹⁶³ Exceptions to this include Mark 1:34 and Luke 7:21 where Jesus was said to “have healed many who had various diseases.”

¹⁶⁴ Disabilities and Illnesses in the Bible. A Feminist Perspective, C.R. Fontaine, pgs 286-300, Sheffield Academic Press

¹⁶⁵ The Discourse of Disability in Ancient Greece, Walter Penrose Jr., Classical World, Vol. 108 No. 4, 2015

¹⁶⁶ Disability in the Christian Tradition, Brian Bock and John Swinton, 2012, (pg. 25)

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others of equal value while the number of inferior adults, for example, those who are too old or too weak, should be kept to a minimum.” Spartans, with their extreme norms of masculinity demonstrated a marked prejudice towards the disabled but did reward those who were capable despite their impairments. Those disabled due to war or conflict, such as soldiers were treated more respectfully and in a much more positive light.

This reverence for an unblemished body extended to the children of Ancient Greece. In his book, *The Republic*, Plato writes that parents whose children are “born deficient, should dispose of them properly in secret so that no one knows what has become of them.” This viewpoint extended to Early Rome as evidenced by notations in the Twelve Tables of Roman Law which granted authority to the father to exile or kill his children who had disabilities. However, by 30 BC this authority was severely curtailed by Roman Law and there is documented evidence of disabled members being part of the Roman family.

Judaism

In the Old Testament the view of disabilities is much more complex and can be understood several ways.

- *Disability is literal* and is seen as a curse due to disobedience, unbelief, and ignorance, the idea being that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions or as an expression of God's anger for a person's disobedient behavior. (Lev 26:14-16, 1 Chronicles 26:19-23)
- *Disability could be a metaphor* used to link the individual's disability with Israel's disobedience towards God. (Isaiah 42:18-20)
- *Disability could be used in a symbolic way.* Hearing impairment symbolizes spiritual stubbornness or willful refusal to hear and obey the word of God (Jer. 5:21; Ez. 12:2). Israel is portrayed as a servant with ears, but not hearing and obeying her Lord (Is 42:18-20). The prophet is presented as calling the Israelites to hear the word of God because their sins have deafened their ears (Is 43:8). Visual impairment is viewed as a symbol of ignorance, sin, and unbelief. It refers to the lack of intellectual or moral understanding (Is 29:18). Judges are warned that bribes or gifts blind the eyes of the discerning (Exodus 23:8).
- *Disability can also be seen as part of the course of human life.* Isaac goes blind in his old age, Jacob walks with a limp after his wrestling match, Moses struggles with a speech impediment, Mephibosheth, son of Saul was lame in both feet (2 Sam 9:13) and King Saul suffered from mental illness.

Generally, disability was considered a personal or family issue with the community not being required to make adjustments nor were there advocates for accommodations. Disability was a pity, a problem of the individual and his family, for which little could be done.¹⁶⁷

One of the more severe passages comes from Leviticus where the Lord tells Moses, “*Say to Aaron: ‘For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed nor a man with a crippled foot or hand.’*”¹⁶⁸

However, in the same Levitical Law it is required that a person “*shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.*” And just as Jesus commands

¹⁶⁷ Article by Faith Fogelman entitled Disability Matters within Judaism, Issue 28 of Conversations, The Journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

¹⁶⁸ One should note however that this law was targeted towards the priests within the Temple and did not apply to their other functions. Additionally, broken limbs are temporary conditions.

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us as Christians, a fundamental teaching of Judaism is “...Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, throughout the Old Testament we see the continuing theme that God loves and cares for all He has created.

New Testament

Christianity marked the turning point in this ancient world view of the disabled. The words of Christ spoken through the Gospels demonstrate this change in attitude. Many of the verses of the Beatitudes speak to this concern and hope for those who were poor in spirit, meek or mourned.

In Luke we read, “[Christ] said, ‘When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors...but invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.’”

In Mark a leper came to Christ asking to be healed. Moved with pity, Christ stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “Be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.”

In Matthew, Christ tells His disciples to tell John the Baptist that the “blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

Post New Testament – Early Church

During the time of the persecutions, Christians supported and cared for one another in imitation of what Christ did while He was on earth. During the fall of Rome it was the Christians that stayed behind to care for the sick, and the disabled.

During the time of the Early Church the Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian condemned the practice of exposing newborns born with disease or disabilities. By the 4th century formalized public care was established by the three Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Following the example of the New Testament they commend an attitude of love of humanity as a response to disability, disease and poverty. The philanthropic actions of the Greeks and the Romans were raised to an active and socially radical concern for humanity with a connection to religious life.¹⁷⁰

The social integration of the weak, the ill, the lame, and the old was seen as integral to the way of Christ and therefore of human redemption. Crucial to this was the idea that all men and women are created in the image of God. St Gregory beautifully captured this when he said,

“The kindness we show to physically disfigured people remind us that we are clothed in the same lowly body.” (Orations)

Bishop Gregory Nazianzus echoed this when he explicitly recommends the philanthropic care for the disfigured as an action of love. St Gregory neither elevates the disabled above other humans nor relegates them below the human but describes them as *“brothers and sisters before God...who share the same nature with us...and have been made in the image of God in the same way you and I have...and have been entrusted with the same pledge of the Spirit.”*¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Leviticus 19:14, 19:18 and Mark 12:31

¹⁷⁰ Ibid 163, page 29

¹⁷¹ Oration 14, St. Gregory of Nazianzus

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St Basil is considered the father of the modern hospital. From his experiences in establishing charitable services in his monasteries he built a *πτωχοτροφείον*¹⁷² (369 AD) as “*an inn for guests both those visiting us on their journey and those needing some treatments for their illness.*” By 372 AD it became known as the Basiliad and employed professional medical personnel making it the first formal institution in Western civilization devoted to the cure and care of the sick or wounded regardless of their profession, economic or social class, sex, age or race.¹⁷³

Verse 6 *When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”*

Once again John enacts the *spiral movement* which we saw in his prologue and in the account of the Samaritan woman and the Royal Officer. A character comes to the front, recedes, and reappears later for development and further definition and clarification.

The man who is lame waiting to be put into the pool is in the forefront and now there is a personal engagement with Jesus who advances into the story after which He will recede as the now healed man encounters the Pharisees.

As we are told that in verse 3 that a large number of disabled and diseased persons were present (*πληθος πολυ των ασθενουντων*) the manner in which Jesus singles out this particular man is quite deliberate evidenced by the use of the phrase, «*τουτον ιδων ο Ιησους...*» with *τουτον* placed at the beginning of the sentence indicating emphasis. Not too much should be made of John’s statement that Jesus came to know (*γνους*) since this could have merely been Jesus’ searching glance and intuitive knowledge of the history of this place as a source of potential healing. St John Chrysostom does attribute some divine knowledge and thus purpose for Jesus coming to this man “*that He might show the man’s perseverance...each year hoping to be freed from his disease, he continued in attendance, and withdrew not*” using this to admonish us for our impatience.

*“Let us be ashamed then, beloved, let us be ashamed, and groan over our excessive sloth. Thirty and eight years had that man been waiting without obtaining what he desired, and withdrew not. And he had failed not through any carelessness of his own, but through being oppressed and suffering violence from others, and not even thus did he grow dull; while we if we have persisted for ten days to pray for anything and have not obtained it, are too slothful afterwards to employ the same zeal.”*¹⁷⁴

Unlike the encounter with the Samaritan women or the royal officer where the request for healing or revelation was initiated by person who was to receive the miracle, Jesus initiates the conversation asking the man “*Θελεις υγιης γενεσθαι.*” (Do you want to be made whole?)

Verse 7 *“Sir,” the lame man replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”*

His situation is desperate as his response reveals the fact that he has no family or relations to assist him and John’s use of the word *κατακρμμένον*¹⁷⁵ in verse 6 speaks to the severity of his difficulty in raising himself up. Even more he has made several attempts without success, *one or another always preventing him; and none having the charity to say, Your case is worse than mine; do you go in now, and I will stay till*

¹⁷² Πτωχοτροφείον – compound word consisting of *πτωχο* (poor) and *τροφείον* (room)

¹⁷³ Ibid, 163, page 33

¹⁷⁴ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Homily 36

¹⁷⁵ From *κατάκειμαι* – *κατά* + *κείμαι* – to lie down or recline with *κατά* emphasizing of difficulty in getting up.

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*the next time.*¹⁷⁶ There seems to have been nothing put in place by society to empower or assist those who came for healing so that old maxim is true, Every one for himself. Nothing in the man's response indicates that he recognizes Jesus and is just hoping that He will help get him into the pool.

It is once again interesting to see the radical opposing views of the man's response as viewed by various commentators.

Dr. Campbell Morgan sees his response to Jesus as a protest as though he was saying "Why do you mean by asking me a question like that? Of course, I want to be made whole, but what chance do I have."

Dr. Alex McLaren sees his response as apathetic resulting from the many disappointments and the long years of waiting and of suffering so that there comes the weary answer, as if the man had said: "Will I be made whole? What have I been lying here all these years for?"¹⁷⁷

Chrysostom sees his response as accepting, "He uttered no blasphemous word, nor such as we hear the many use in reverses, he cursed not his day, he was not angry at the question, nor did he say, Have You come to make a mock and a jest of us, that Thou asks whether I desire to be made whole? but replied gently, and with great mildness, Yea, Lord."

Regardless, the man's response belies the same misunderstanding of what Jesus was offering as in the case of the Samaritan woman. As her response to Jesus' offering of living water, "*Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty,*" demonstrated her literal interpretation of a deeper spiritual concept, so now this man sees Jesus' offer "*to be made whole,*" (in both a physical and spiritual sense), as merely assistance so that he may enter the pool.

Some commentators, such as Patricia Bruce, point out that Jesus' question is correctly translated, "Do you want to be whole?" not "Do you want to be healed?" She argues that "*since the man's life has, for 38 years has been lived around his disability, what would be his options if he were healed? Could he find a home or employment? The question therefore also serves to prepare the man for a different way of life.*"¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸

No Call for Faith

Unlike John's development of the faith in Jesus' previous encounters here the offer to heal is not only unsolicited, but no expression of faith is required, nor does John offer any indication that the man recognizes who Jesus is. This stands in stark contrast to previous passages where "*they welcomed Him because they had seen all that He had done...*"

So the question arises of why did Jesus not require the man to exhibit faith? One interpretation is that John reports the healing not for its own sake but only as a means of producing a sabbath conflict between Jesus and the Jews. These first two sections [of chapter 5] set a judicial process in motion."¹⁷⁹

Chrysostom's position is better suited to an Orthodox perspective saying, "*It was because the man did not yet clearly know who He was; and it is not before, but after the working of miracles that He is seen so*

¹⁷⁶ Benson Commentary

¹⁷⁷ Expositions of Holy Scripture: St. John Chapters I to XIV, Alexander MacLaren, 1900

¹⁷⁸ John 5:1-18 the Healing at the Pool. Some Narrative, Socio-Historical and Ethical Issues, Neotestamentica 39.1, 2005

¹⁷⁹ John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6, E. Haenchen Fortress Publishing, 1984.

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doing. For persons who had beheld His power exerted on others would reasonably have this said to them, while of those who had not yet learned who He was, but who were to know afterwards by means of signs, it is after the miracles that faith is required.”¹⁸⁰

Verse 8,9 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

In performing this third sign or miracle, Jesus, without touching the man, issues a three-fold command, all in the imperative or command form, a) Arise! b) Pick up your mat! and c) walk! The first two commands are understandable but why the command to “pick up your mat.” If the man was made whole again, why would he now need his mat? Chrysostom answers this saying,

“[Jesus] bids him take up his bed, so as to confirm the miracle that had been wrought, and that none might suppose what was done to be illusion or a piece of acting. For he would not, unless his limbs had been firmly and thoroughly compacted, have been able to carry his bed. And this Christ often does, effectually silencing those who would fain be insolent. Just as in the case of the loaves, that no one might assert that the men had been merely satisfied, and that what was done was an illusion, He caused that there should be many relics of the loaves.”

Also, by healing the man and having him walk without any interaction with the water of the pool, Christ once again demonstrates that He is Lord of Creation.

John records that the man immediately became whole (*εὐθὺς ἐγένετο ὑγιής*), arose and walked. Here is where we can see evidence of some degree of transformation of the man’s faith since having been lame for 38 years there certainly had to be some level of trust in the words he heard Jesus command. He did not mock the commands of Jesus nor did he disobey. Dr. McLaren notes that “*here is a movement of confidence in the man’s heart; he tries to obey, and in the act of obedience the power comes to him.*”



A historical note here is that the word used by John for the man’s bedding is *κράββατος* which is of Macedonian origin. This is the type of mat that is typically represented in Orthodox icons which depict a mat or bedding. The Greek word is *σκιμπόδιον* and is more of a low bed as shown in figure A.

Verse 9,10 The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “*It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.*”

¹⁸⁰ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Homily 37

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The Prohibition of Carrying or Moving on the Sabbath¹⁸¹

The rules for Sabbath observance, then and now, are outlined in the Torah portion of the Hebrew Scripture, specifically in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. There are two types of observances or mitzvah (or mitzvot) ¹⁸² (מִצְוָה) both of which are focused on maintaining the Jewish idea of Shabbat as a day when body and soul are in true harmony.

- Mitzvah for practices of sanctification such as candle-lighting
- Mitzvah for prohibitions of “work”

The question of what is defined as “work” is broken out into the general term for work, which is *avodah*, (אבודה) and *melachah* (מלאכה) those activities which are specifically prohibited. These clarifications originated to address specific situations during the periods when the Jews were wandering through the land with their traveling sanctuary.

Melechah addresses [39 categories](#) of “Sabbath work” which are prohibited of which “carrying” something is first.

This first prohibition involved the gathering of Manna for one’s family. Exodus 16:29 states “Let no man leave his place on the seventh day,” which was seen as God telling the Jews they could not carry the Manna.

A clearer definition is in the Book of Jeremiah 17:19–27¹⁸³ where it condemns business practices that involve carrying a “load” or “burden (משא)” through the gates of Jerusalem. The prohibition only applies to the bringing of items into the gates of Jerusalem (v. 21c) and out of one’s house (v. 22a).

But is there a theological reason for this prohibition of carrying? For the Jewish teachers or rabbis *work* is any act where man demonstrates his mastery over nature with the simplest act is taking things from nature and carrying them where he needs them.

“In a sense, by not carrying, we relinquish our ownership of everything in the world. A main sign of ownership is that one may take something wherever he pleases. On the Sabbath, we give up something of this ownership. Nothing may be removed from the house. When a man leaves his house, he may carry nothing but the clothing on his back. It is God, not man, who owns all things.” ¹⁸⁴

Verse 11-13 *But he replied, “The man who made me whole said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ So, they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.*

Here we have the spiral movement as Jesus recedes and the Pharisees now come forward to engage with the now healed man.

¹⁸¹ Source: Chabad.org and TheTorah.com

¹⁸² The term “mitzvah” is derived from the Hebrew root צוה which means “to command” or “to ordain.” In common usage, mitzvah has taken on the meaning of a command to do good deed.

¹⁸³ Some rabbinic readers, however, make the case that all legislation must be anchored in the Torah (not Prophets or Writings). Thus, the passage in Jeremiah may have been understood as expounding upon the Pentateuchal requirement to abstain from labor. Jassen, A.P. 2016, *The Prohibition to Carry on Shabbat: Historical and Exegetical Development*, Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, NYU

¹⁸⁴ Source: [Orthodox Union](#) Website

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John once again displays his literary style by placing the emphasis of the man's answer to the Pharisees on Christ, «ο ποιησας με» (the One who did [the healing]. Compare with John 1:33 where John the Baptist at Christ's baptism bears witness saying «Ο πεμψας με...»

Still however, the transformation of the man's faith is not complete as John relates that the "The man who was healed had no idea who it was that healed him" and thus could not yet testify that Jesus was divine or even a prophet. As we will soon see the Pharisees concern was not for the welfare of the man nor even for the man's lack of properly observing the Law but because "*Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath.*"¹⁸⁵

Also we must not conclude that Jesus withdrew to avoid danger, but the admiration of the people for Jesus was not ready to fully reveal Himself. We can ascertain this from the fact that the danger to Jesus arose after His withdrawal and later when the healed man was questioned by the Pharisees.

Verse 14 *Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning lest something worse may happen to you."*

John relates that Jesus *ευρισκει αυτον* in the Temple. While some point to Jesus' "*habit of visiting the temple, and the penetrating glance which He casts over all the frequenters of his Father's house might then fairly be deduced from the passage*"¹⁸⁶, we cannot definitely say whether Jesus expected to find the man in the temple since the word *ευρισκω* can have both the connotation of "to find after a deliberate search" or "to find accidentally" or "to come across."

Although we do not know when how long had transpired between the healing and Jesus finding the man in the Temple, Chrysostom comments that the presence of the healed man in the temple is an *indication of his great piety*. He uses his restored power offer his thanks to God. (ref Isaiah 38:20) Equally so it could be that Jesus had restored the man's ability to do what he had wanted to do for a long time, which is to worship God in His House.

Verse 14a **See now that you sin no more! A Connection between Sin and Illness?**

Old Testament View

Biblically the Book of Deuteronomy provides the most powerful and chilling connection between sin and illness. In chapter 28, after 14 verses that express the blessing that the Lord God will bestow upon Israel if the Israelites "fully obey and carefully follow all [God's] commands," there follows 54 verses that speak of the curses that will follow disobedience. These curses include, "The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation... and will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed."

This then led to the idea that *death, misfortune, disease were not the mechanical outworking of the natural forces but they were the punishment exacted by the willful, animistic powers on the general principle of vengeance controlling human society. This confusion of thought was manifest both in the treatment of disease and in the half-physical, half-moral concept of sin.*"¹⁸⁷

In the Book of Job, we read that Job was a righteous man before God (Job 1:1) but when calamity befalls him as instigated by God's adversary (יְהוָה), his friends believe that it is because of his sins and that Job

¹⁸⁵ John 5:16

¹⁸⁶ Pulpit Commentary, The Gospel of John, 1890

¹⁸⁷ Caroline Breyfogle, the Hebrew Sense of Sin in the Pre-Exilic Period, 1912

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is responsible for the poverty and illness that has come upon him and his family. This is evident in their dialogue with Job. (Job 4:1-21 and 8:1-22)

New Testament View

Luke's Gospel presents a new view on the relationship between sin and illness and suffering through two observations¹⁸⁸

1. victims of suffering should understand their plight in the light of that of Jesus' suffering
2. people's relationship to suffering people must be understood from Jesus' relationship with ill persons and sufferers in general.

According to Scheffler this is important because *"it helps us find out whether social perception of and relationship with victims of major illnesses and sufferers attune with that of Jesus whose teachings and way of life form the point of reference in Christian ethics."*

Early Church View

The general consensus among the theologians of the Church, i.e the Holy Fathers, and contemporary scholars is that Jesus' command to the man of *μηκετι αμαρτανε* (Do not sin any longer!) implies that the man's 38-year condition had been brought about by his previous sins, as Chrysostom implies,

"Now what do we learn from this? First, that his disease had been produced by his sins." While John does not reveal what the particular sin was, *the structure of the sentence seems to point to something special and persistent in this man's habits, rather than to the general corruption of human nature.*¹⁸⁹

While not every case proves so¹⁹⁰, the Holy Fathers and saints of the Church did make a connection between sin and physical ailments. However, in their commentary we see something of a blending between the Old and New Testament views. Yes, suffering is allowed by God but is done for corrective purposes, not out of punishment but out of love and concern for the spiritual (and physical in some cases) advancement of the individual. Chrysostom continues in his homily.

"What then, says one, do all diseases proceed from sin? Not all, but most of them; and some proceed from different kinds of loose living, since gluttony, intemperance, and sloth, produce such like sufferings.

For since for the most part when the soul is diseased, we feel no pain, but if the body receive though but a little hurt, we use every exertion to free it from its infirmity, because we are sensible of the infirmity, therefore God oftentimes punishes the body for the transgressions of the soul, so that by means of the scourging of the inferior part, the better part also may receive some healing.

Chrysostom

"...not all ailments occur naturally and happen to us either from a wrong way of life, or from any other material principles, in in which cases, as we see, the art of medicine is sometimes useful, but often sickness is a punishment for sins imposed on us in order to induce conversion."

St. Basil

¹⁸⁸ Scheffler, E., (1993) Suffering in Luke's Gospel. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

¹⁹⁰ Ref, John 9:1-3 and Job

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This connection between body and soul, sin and sickness, is clear: pain tells us that something has gone wrong with the soul, that not only is the body diseased, but the soul as well. And this is precisely how the soul communicates its ills to the body, awakening a man to self-knowledge and a wish to turn to God.

St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, Christian Morality

Verse 14b ***Lest something worse may happen to you!***

Chrysostom notes that just as Jesus exposed the sinful life of the Samaritan women for the purpose of leading her to faith, so also these words to the man He has recently healed demonstrate a revelation of His divinity by showing that He knew all the transgressions that had formerly been committed by the man and by this gain his belief.

Chrysostom notes that “[Jesus] said not, ‘Behold, I have made you whole’, but ‘You are made whole; sin no more’. And again, not, lest I punish you, but, lest a worse thing come unto you; putting both expressions not personally and showing that the cure was rather of grace than of merit. For He declared not to him that he was delivered after suffering the deserved amount of punishment, but that through lovingkindness he was made whole. Had this not been the case, He would have said, Behold, you have suffered a sufficient punishment for your sins, be steadfast for the future.

While certainly some commentators see this “worse thing” as the eternal torment of the absence of the presence of God, i.e. hell, there remains in this life worse things than sickness. For both these reasons Christ saw it necessary to give this caution; for it is common for people, when sick, to promise much; when newly recovered, to perform only something; but after a while to forget all.¹⁹¹

Jesus’ command to the man demonstrates a difference in how sin is presented in John as opposed to the Synoptic Gospels. In the Synoptics sin is connected to the theme of forgiveness while in John “sin” is failing to believe in the Person of Jesus. This is thought to be the reason behind John relaying that Jesus tells the man to “not continue sinning” as the Greek grammar form is active and present voice. The connotation being that the man’s actions in the next verse (reporting to the Jewish leadership) will be viewed as “sinning” against Jesus.¹⁹²

Finally, Dr. Campbell Morgan provides a comparison of the first major events of John’s Gospel.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. The realm of creation and joy | New wine at the Wedding at Cana |
| 2. The realm of worship | The Cleansing of the Temple |
| 3. The realm of suffering and disease | The Royal Official’s Son |
| 4. The realm of morality | The Man at the Pool |

Verse 15 ***The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.***

The man answered two questions put forth by the Jewish leadership. The first spoke accusingly towards Jesus in violation of Sabbath Law, “Who told you to pick up your mat and walk?” The second spoke favorably of Jesus of His mercy towards the man, “Who had made you well?”

When asked the first question the man was not able to answer as he did not recognize Jesus, however after his encounter with Jesus in the Temple he was able to report fully to both questions.

¹⁹¹ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Homily 38

¹⁹² The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1990, pg.959

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There is the question of the man's motivation with regards to how he answered the Jewish leader's questions. Some see his motivation as coming from a sense of duty (Pulpit Commentary) and to clear himself of the charge of being seen as breaking a Sabbath rule. Others see that *"he went in the simplicity of his heart, desirous both to publish what Christ had done to his honor, and also to do good to others, who might also stand in need of his help."* (Chrysostom, Matthew Poole Commentary). Still others see *"No malice against Jesus, nor in any hope of converting His opponents. Neither of these is probable, nor is there the least evidence of either."* (Cambridge Commentary)

In any case the witness of the man is cause enough for the Jewish leadership to challenge the self-proclaimed authority of Jesus to claim authority over Torah Law, essentially asking the same question as they asked at Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, *"What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"* (John 2:18)

SECTION 2 The Authority of the Son and Witnesses to Jesus (5:17-47)

Now the full significance of this sign, the healing of the lame man will now be revealed in the following dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees. It will occur in two movements, 1) Jesus' assertion of the Authority of the Son of God and 2) the witnesses Jesus brings forth to support His claim.

Both Beasley-Murray¹⁹³ and the Jerome commentary, among others, view this section as John providing *"a defense and proclamation for Johannine disciples to the Jews who assailed the Christians for their understanding of the Sabbath and still more their beliefs about Jesus."* The second half of this section, which speaks to the witnesses offered by Jesus for His claims, serve as a continuation of the *"apologetic of Christians to Jews who wanted to know on what basis they maintained their belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah of God."*

Section 2 – Part 1 Verses 5:17-30

Verses 17-19 Jesus begins His defense against the Jewish leadership¹⁹⁴ by addressing the question of work on the Sabbath by establishing that although God rested from the work of Creation (Gen 2:1-3) this was certainly not the cessation of divine work, or in the flow of divine energy, but God was, and is, the ever-constant source of energy and life for all in heaven and earth and sea. Secondly Jesus links Himself to the ongoing work of the Father saying *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."* And through these statements, Jesus *"makes Himself equal with God."* (John 5:18)

With this statement the Jews are no longer concerned about a simple violation of Jewish Law but are now charging Jesus with the more serious crime of blasphemy.

Jesus' reply to this accusation of the Jews that Jesus *"ελεγεν τον θεον ισον εαυτον"* (He said He was equal to God) on the surface seems paradoxical. Chrysostom helps clarify this when he explains:

*"We must learn the force of the expression, that we may not fall into the greatest errors; for if one takes it separately by itself in the way in which it is obvious to take it, consider how great an absurdity will follow... What then means, Can do nothing of Himself? **That He can do nothing in opposition to the***

¹⁹³ Ibid, 117, page 80

¹⁹⁴ It should be noted that the middle portion of verse 5:16, *και εζητουσ αυτον αποκτειναι* (and they sought to kill Him) which appears in some bible versions such as KJV and the Orthodox Study Bible are not found in the earliest extant manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus, but seems to be an emphasis for verse 5:18. Also, the verb «εποιει» grammatically is imperfect form which should be translated "He was doing" which expresses a continuous action by Jesus amplifying the Jewish leaders concern that this practice had become a custom for Jesus.

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Father, nothing alien from, nothing strange to Him, which is especially the assertion of One declaring an Equality and entire agreement...It was that from this again He might show the invariableness and exactness of the Equality, for the expression imputes not weakness to Him, but even shows His great power."

This idea of Jesus being equal to the Father and of Him having two natures and two wills (verses 5:19-21) became for the Early Church a controversial issue that was ultimately resolved at the 6th Ecumenical Council decreeing that:

"Christ had two natures with two activities: as God working miracles, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven; as Man, performing the ordinary acts of daily life. Each nature exercises its own free will." Christ's divine nature had a specific task to perform and so did His human nature. Each nature performed those tasks set forth without being confused, subjected to any change or working against each other. The two distinct natures and related to them activities were mystically united in the one Divine Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

However, St John of Damascus offers additional clarification saying, *"Thus, since Christ is One and has One Person, the divinely willing in Him and the humanly willing in Him are one and the same. He wills and acts in each, not independently, but in concert."*¹⁹⁵

Monothelism (or the idea of a single "will" of Christ) was declared a heresy since the Church concluded that a "will" is an essential part of a nature. If Jesus didn't have a human will as well as the divine will, it would be very difficult to see him as fully divine and fully human.

Verse 20 When Jesus speaks of showing them *"even greater works than these..."* those works are defined immediately after when He speaks of "giving life" and "judging." These themes of life and judgement echo the words of John the Baptist to those who questioned him, *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."*¹⁹⁶

Verse 24-29 Jesus continues His dialogue but now in an eschatological framework where He continues His Oneness with God the Father, both in granting life and judgement by repeating that "as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."¹⁹⁷ The double "Amen" in verses 24 and 25 is used by John to highlight deeper spiritual truths which He came to teach. Also, the statement (verse 25), *"The hour is coming and is now"* takes the reader back to Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan women where He tell her, *"ἀλλ' ἐρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν..."*

Most of the Fathers, Tertullian, Chrysostom and John of Damascus as well as many Protestant commentators (Erasmus, Bengel, and Matthew Henry), have taken the entirety of John 5:24-29 in a literal sense, as referring to the resurrection and the final judgment.

In recognition of this literal sense of Jesus' words, these verses, from 5:24 – 29 (and verse 30), make up the Gospel reading for all Orthodox funerals to remind us of this eschatological reality of death and life.

It is important to recognize here that these verses can be misinterpreted as John paralleling Gnostic mythology as the Gnostics saw "death" as a metaphor for the state of unawakened souls held prisoner in the natural world. Those that hear the *Revealer's* voice will awaken from death. John instead, through

¹⁹⁵ On the Orthodox Faith, Book 3, Chapter 14, St John Damascus

¹⁹⁶ John 3:36

¹⁹⁷ John 5:26,27

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His Gospel, reveals the actual ontological essence of those on earth in need of salvation, both bodily and spiritually through the Person of Jesus Christ who as the true Revealer, reveals both the reality of this earthly life and the promise of the heavenly kingdom to those who “hear my word and believes in Him who sent Me...”

Verse 30 Here, Jesus repeats what He said earlier.

Verse 5:30	Verse 5:19
ου δυναμαι εγω ποιειν απ εμαυτου...στι ου ζητω το θελημα το εμον αλλα το θελημα του πεμπσαντος με Πατρος	ου δυναται ο Υιος ποιειν αφ εαυτου ουδεν εαν μη τι βλεπη τον Πατερα ποιουντα
I can do nothing on my own...because I seek to do not My own will but the will of Him who sent me.	...the Son can do nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing.

But from the Jewish perspective this seemingly indicates a lack of ability or weakness on the part of Jesus since earlier they had accused Him of “making himself equal to God.” Thus, to ensure that His words were not misinterpreted by the Jews as

“giving the idea of a sort of weakness, and of authority not altogether free; For if as though impotent He were borrowing His Power of the Father, as not having sufficient of Himself,” Jesus immediately follows with, ‘As I hear, I judge’... Thus, Jesus words here do not express weakness of operation, meaning He, but by reason of impossibility of transgressing in anything the Will of the Father, cannot act by Himself. For since One Godhead is conceived of in the Father and the Son, the Will also will be surely the Same; and neither in the Father, nor yet in the Son or the Holy Ghost will the Divine Nature be conceived of as at variance with Itself.”

St Cyril, On the Gospel According to John, BOOK II, Chapter 9

Section 2 – Part 2 Verses 5:31-47¹⁹⁸

Thus far, none of what Jesus has said to the Jewish leadership has proven His relationship with His Father or the claims that He makes as a result of this relationship. While the double Amens of verses 24 and 25 serve to emphasis His statements, they still are not proof of their validity. Jesus even acknowledges this when in verse 5:31 He states, “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.”¹⁹⁹

These proofs will now be presented in this second section where Jesus, in accordance with Deuteronomic Law²⁰⁰ brings forward witnesses to support the claims He has made in Part 1. These testimonies follow the Aristotelian *model of witnesses* of both Ancient and Recent.

1. John the Baptist who serves as a human witness
2. The works of Jesus Himself
3. The Father
4. Scripture
5. Moses

1. John the Baptist serves as a recent human witness who was well-known and respected by the Jews as a prophet, many of whom have heard him testify to the Person of Jesus. John also partially serves as an

¹⁹⁸ Source material – Alicia Myers, “Jesus Said to Them...”: The Adaptation of Juridical Rhetoric in John 5:19-47” Journal of Biblical Literature, 132, no. 2, 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Attridge (Argumentation in John 5) and Parsenius (Rhetoric and Drama) note that Jesus does incorporate some of His own testimony in verse 5:32 when He says that “I know that his testimony about me is true.”

²⁰⁰ Deut. 19:15

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ancient witness since many thought the Baptist to be the prophet Elijah returned and that John was “sent by God as a witness to the light.” (verse 5:35)

2. “The very works that I am doing testify that the Father has sent me.” These “works” which Jesus has been doing also serve as “recent” testimony since Jesus did heal the man on the Sabbath demonstrating His power over the Sabbath and that He has the power to grant life as seen in the healing of the royal officer’s son and commanding the lame man to walk and carry. This is lost on the Jews as they fail to recognize these as works done on the Father’s behalf since they do not recognize Jesus as sent by the Father.

3. Jesus then offers the witness of the “Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me.” Likewise this testimony is not recognized since Jesus accuses them with three accusations; a) never having heard his voice nor seen his form, b) nor does his word abide in you, c) nor do you believe the One he sent.

4. Jesus now presents the written testimony of Hebrew Scripture in which He accuses them of seeking in Scripture eternal life when the Source of all Life stands before them testifying to this. The term John uses for “searching” the Scriptures is *ερευνατε* which has the meaning of a thorough investigation and in a religious sense a search for the revelation of God in His commandments. The meaning is similar to the Hebrew term *שָׁרַח*.²⁰¹ There is an emphasis of this point throughout John’s Gospel referring to the fact that this is the major stumbling block for the Jews to accept Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

5. Finally Jesus bring forth the author of the Torah itself, Moses referring to him as *ο κατηγορων υμων* (your accuser). Moses, who in Jewish tradition is the intercessor, both day and night for the Hebrew nation, the advocate and paraclete is now presented as their accuser. Moses testifies to Jesus, yet their study of Scripture does not allow them to see this truth. This appeal to Scripture and Moses in particular, corresponds to rhetorical practices in the ancient world. Aristotle, for example, encouraged his students to make reference to authors of esteem and character when presenting evidence. For John, Moses’ identification as lawgiver, prophet, and ideal servant of God qualifies him to be one of these people of virtue who others aspire to imitate.²⁰²

Some see in verse 5:16-47 John’s use of the ancient Greek method of *προγυμνάσματα*²⁰³ to aid in convincing his readers to trust in His witness that Jesus is the Word and the Son of God.

Προγυμνάσματα are a series of rhetorical exercises that had their beginning in ancient Greek philosophers and consist of 14 rhetorical exercises that guide students to proper methods of debating speakers, papers, or an audience. Each of the 14 exercises build upon one another becoming more challenging as the student progresses. This style of study continued into the 17th century when it’s use fell into decline but is experiencing something of a rediscovery.

Chapter 6 The Multiplication of the Loaves and The Bread of Life Discourse (6:1-70)

²⁰¹ There are two main Hebrew words for seeking or searching and can often be found in the same verse. *שָׁקַח* Baqash and *שָׁרַח* Darash. Both translate to seek, but Darash implies a seeking to find and take hold of something:

²⁰² Myers, Alice

²⁰³ Προ – before and *γυμνάσματα* - exercises

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The Miracle of the Loaves and the Jesus' Walking on the Water are the next two signs performed by Jesus as recorded by John. The first miracle of the loaves is recorded in all four Gospels with each offering different pieces of information that work together to form an entire narrative. Matthew and Mark go even further recording a second miracle of the loaves.

While many ways have been suggested as to how to divide this chapter for our purpose, we will use the following.²⁰⁴

6:1-15	Miracle of the Distribution of the Bread and Fishes
6:16-21	Miracle of Jesus walking on the water
6:22-25	The search for Jesus
6:26-31	the Jews demand a sign and Jesus' call for a deeper understanding
6:32-58	The true meaning of Scripture and the first revelatory discourse on Jesus as the Bread of Life
	The need and demand for faith
	The murmuring of the Jews and further words on belief and unbelief
	Second revelatory discourse on Jesus as the Bread of Life come down from heaven
	The arguing of the Jews and Jesus' discourse on His Flesh and Blood
6:60-71	The defection of some, Jesus' private discussion with His disciples and the foretelling of Judas' betrayal

Verses 6:1-15 Miracle of the Distribution of the Bread and Fishes

It is not out of line to say that the details that John omits and details that he provides with respect to the Synoptic versions clearly demonstrates John's theological intentions and emphases.

Points of Contact

- Jesus makes the first move by telling the disciples to feed the crowd.
- The crowd is commanded to be seated
- The blessing or giving thanks before the meal is distributed
- The crowd was satisfied Synoptics – εχορτασθησαν and John – ενεπλησθησαν
- The feeding miracle begins from 5 loaves and 2 fishes
- The command to gather up the leftovers



Points of Departure

- In the Synoptics Jesus is said to have compassion for the great crowd and performs healings and teaching whereas in John no mention is made of healing or teaching but that the crowds came because of σημεια (signs) He was performing.
- John has Jesus going up the mountain at the beginning of the story
- Only John mentions when this occurs – *the Passover Festival was near*
- In John Philip and Andrew are named

²⁰⁴ Source: Beasley-Murray, 86 and Schnackenburg, 32

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- e) In Mark the 200 denarii seem to be sufficient to buy the required amount of food whereas in John the 200 denarii would not be sufficient
- f) John's account provides specific details about the available food αρτους κριθινους barley loafs and οψαρια which emphasizes fish of small size and cooked or preserved
- g) John's text indicates that Jesus Himself performed the distribution ελαβεν δε τους αρτους ο Ιησους και ευχαριστησας διεδωκεν
- h) In John it is Jesus who commands that the leftovers be collected *so that nothing may be lost.*
- i) The entire ending in John (verses 6:25-59) are missing from the Synoptics

These points of departure all speak to the fact that John's intention is not to provide an historical account of events but that his reader understand the Christological theology of Jesus both foreshadowed in OT events and present and active in the NT accomplishing His Father's will. John's audience would certainly have identified the parallels between Moses and Jesus in Jesus' going up the mountain (Sinai), the distribution of the bread (manna), Jesus as God who is the distributor of the bread as God the Father distributed to the Israelites, Jesus as the ἀφικόμενος (Afikomen) symbolized in the gathering of the pieces of broken bread so that nothing is lost, and the people's desire to make Jesus King having identified him as the "prophet to come as foretold by Moses (Deut. 18:18).

Chapters out of Synch?

Certain structural arrangements in chapters 4,5,6, and 7, along with John's practice of naming of some of the feasts and then leaving some unnamed has led to a disagreement regarding the true order of the original text. This stems from a seemingly awkward placement of chapter 6 with respect to chapters 4, 5 and 7. Bultmann, as one of these who sees the current textual order out of place proposes that the proper order is chapters 4,6,5,7. He bases this on,

1. a more natural transition with the ending of chapter 4, "Jesus...coming from Judea to Galilee." and the beginning of chapter 6, "Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee."
2. the upcoming Jewish festival identified in 6:4 (Passover) is what is occurring in 5:1.
3. The opening of chapter 7, (After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him) is another natural transition from 5:18 (For this reason they tried all the more to kill him...).

If we support the order that is presented by John and identify the unnamed Feast in chapter 5 as Purim, rather than Passover, then it is possible that while Jesus was in Galilee in Chapter 4 He could have made the 4 day walk back to Jerusalem which then matches the opening of chapter 5:1 (ἀνεβη ο Ιησους εις Ιερουσαλυμα). His departure from Judea to the Sea of Galilee (verse 6:1) to avoid capture by the Jews is similar to His departure stated in verse 4.4. The timing is supported by 6:4 which speaks of the Passover Feast being near (Passover follows a month after Purim). The escape back to Galilee (7:1) follows again the pattern of leaving before the Jews can capture Him. Since chapter 7 opens with μετα ταυτα (not indicating a precise time), the identification of the Feast in 7:2 as the Feast of the Tabernacles also matches the timing from chapter 6 since that feast occurs in October.

The controversial nature of this chapter stems from the dispute over whether John is presenting a completely symbolic picture of Jesus as the Messiah who was foretold in the OT or presenting a sacramental realism that speaks to John's readers who are most likely Early Christians with the tradition of celebrating a Eucharistic Meal together (e.g. Acts 2:42). The theological culture and time periods of the various Biblical commentators has resulted in arguing on one side of this debate or the other and in

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some cases a blending of the two. Before analyzing the validity of these arguments or apologies it would be helpful to

a) be familiar with the techniques of hermeneutics used by various Biblical commentators.

b) [overview the major Jewish feasts at the time of Jesus and His Apostles](#)

c) [examine how Biblical commentators have understood John's intent](#) in presenting the two signs of the Miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves, (particularly verse 6:25-58) and the purpose for the inclusion of Jesus' Walking on the Water.

a) How is the Bible Interpreted? Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics²⁰⁵ is the technique of applying principles to achieve biblical interpretation. At its core all Biblical commentators and theologians, Jews, Christians, and Muslim alike would agree that theology is "knowledge of God" or "How to think about God." How to achieve this has developed into different hermeneutical methods of approaching Scripture throughout history that align with the commentator's culture and intent. While each method has their own particularities, they each share the idea that God continues His work of revelation so that plumbing the depths of Scripture requires endless attention.

Midrash a Jewish (rabbinical) interpretive method, seeking to answer religious questions (both practical and theological) by exegeting the meaning of the words of the Torah. The Talmud commonly refers to a compilation of ancient teachings which contain the Midrash.²⁰⁶ Midrash falls into two categories, *Midrash halacha* (concerned with Biblical application of law and religious practice) and *Midrash haggadah*, (interpretation of biblical narrative, and questions of ethics or theology, that does not fall into the category of law or religious practices).

Midrash was initially a philological²⁰⁷ method of interpreting the literal meaning of biblical texts. Over time it developed into a sophisticated interpretive system that a) attempted to reconcile apparent biblical contradictions, b) established the scriptural basis of new laws, and c) enriched biblical content with new meaning. Exegesis by midrash is performed in two different hermeneutic methods. The first was primarily logically oriented, making inferences based upon similarity of content and analogy. The second rested largely upon textual scrutiny, based on the assumption that every word and letter of Scripture, however seemingly superfluous teach something not openly stated in the text.

Since Midrash approaches the abstract only by way of the concrete, this method of hermeneutics stands in opposition to the Patristic Fathers use of Greek philosophy which seeks to unify ideas into a single thread.

Christ's condemnation of the Jewish *haggada* was that this form of Scriptural explanation obscured and distorted it's meaning turning it into an end in itself, while its true purpose was that through Scripture people might be able to recognize and accept Christ.²⁰⁸ In this way the Midrash became a stumbling block even unto sin. (1 Cor. 1:23, Matt. 2:29, John 8:21-24)

²⁰⁵ Hermeneutics from the Greek ἐρμηνεία

²⁰⁶ Source: Silberman, Lou Hackett & Dimitrovsky, Haim Zalman. "[Talmud and Midrash](#)". Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021.

²⁰⁷ Philology is the study of literary texts as well as oral and written records, the establishment of their authenticity and their original form, and the determination of their meaning.

²⁰⁸ A. Schmemmann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, SVS Press, 2003, page 61

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Patristics For the Fathers of the Church all theology is mystical, inasmuch as it shows forth the divine mystery and the data of revelation. The eastern Tradition balances the personal and living experience of the divine mysteries (mysticism) and use of reason to understand and expresses critical dogmas of the Church. To this end Orthodox theologians have practiced a combination of cataphatic (positive) theology and apophatic (negative theology). This means that knowledge of God is in what we cannot say about Him (apophatic) and that there are those things that we can say about God (cataphatic).²⁰⁹ Orthodox theology applies the principles of Greek philosophy to aid in conveying the spiritual meaning of the text of Scripture. Scriptural analysis is approached from a metaphorical, allegorical, literal, and historic perspective. Patristics specifically refers to the works of the most prominent theologians of the Church from the end of the Apostolic period until the beginning of the Medieval period. Patristic theology centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ in both the Old and New Testament as interpreted and transmitted, via Tradition, by the original apostles. The use of the methods of philosophy provided a language in which to refine ideas about the God of the ancient Hebrew scriptures, and to elaborate the Trinitarian God of Christianity. It also helped to bring conceptual coherence to the ideas found in the scriptures of both religions. Finally, it provided the common intellectual discourse that allowed Christians to express the central tenets of the Christian faith to the majority culture of both the Roman and Ottoman empires.²¹⁰ Leading figures in Patristics include Ignatius, Cyril, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great and Athanasios, John Damascus, and Symeon the New Theologian.

It should be noted that after the Great Schism of 1054 AD, the theology of the Western (Catholic) Church began to focus more on the cataphatic approach and less on mysticism as they came under the influence of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, thus becoming more scholastic or reason-based.

Biblical Theology - Theology of the Reformers

Firstly and primarily the hermeneutics of the Reformers was based on the belief that Scripture is the sole authority in matters of faith and life. The Theology of the Reformers was clearly Christocentric and less Trinitarian. They believed that the allegorical and symbolic interpretations of the Patristic Fathers hid who Christ is and thus rejected the mystical and apophatic approach of Patristics. And while the Reformers believed that philosophy had a place in the theological curriculum, for the purpose of being able to speak with the *“tyrants who rule over them”* they did not believe that philosophy had any positive contribution to make to theology. The Holy Spirit was the Interpreter of Scripture in the heart of the believer. Reformer theology also differs from Systematic Theology in that the Reformers believed that “reason” cannot explain Scripture since, “the man who relies upon reason is an unbeliever whose mind is darkened...To make the Gospel reasonable is to destroy it. The surest proof for the truth of the Gospel is its rejection by human reason. No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit.”²¹¹ This type of theology was practiced by Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, Zwingli, Martin Luther, and Calvin. Biblical Theology is guided by three principles.

1. Scripture is the record of God's revelation in history, and that a text must be explained in its historical setting. By focusing on the historical development of doctrines, one can understand changes to doctrine as the historical setting progresses. One must understand what the temple

²⁰⁹ Source: Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, SVS Press, 1976, pages 8-12, 23-25

²¹⁰ Kenney, John Peter. [Patristic Philosophy](#), 1998

²¹¹ Siegbert W. Becker, [Faith and Reason in Martin Luther](#), October 1957

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meant for Solomon and Israel when it was built to understand what God is saying to us in the building of the temple.

2. Scripture is written in human language and must be interpreted according to the rules of Hebrew and Greek. God wrote Scripture in our language so that we could understand it. God spoke of Himself in such a way that it is clear to us what He says.
3. Scripture was to be taken literally. Scripture itself will clearly indicate when it is not to be taken in its absolutely literal sense.

Systematic Theology (ST) In the simplest of definitions, [Systematic Theology](#) seeks to give a *systematic presentation of all the doctrinal truths of the Christian religion*. Growing out of Scholasticism, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) a pioneer of Systematic Theology described this method saying, “*The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches and is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.*” ST seeks to examine Scriptural passages and explain their logical relations to each other as consistently and comprehensively as possible. ST generally opposes application of philosophical terms to explain Christian doctrines. Famous systematic theologians include Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Jurgen Moltmann.

b) Overview of the Major Jewish Feasts

1. **March - Purim** - celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the wicked Haman in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.
2. **April – Passover** - celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.
3. **June – Shavuot** - Hebrew meaning “weeks” and celebrates the barley harvest and the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. Also referred to as Feast of the Weeks or Pentecost since it occurs 7 weeks after Passover.
4. **September – Rosh Hashanah** - the Jewish New Year, anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, and a day of judgment and coronation of God as king.
5. **October - Yom Kippur** - holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:30).
6. **October – Sukkot** – dwelling in covered huts, commemorating God's sheltering our ancestors as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land. Also referred to as Feast of Tabernacles or Booths.
7. **December – Chanukah** - commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a group of Jewish warriors defeated the occupying mighty Greek armies.

c) Exegesis Summary of the Two Signs of Chapter 6

As was typical of John’s previous accounts of Jesus’ «σημεία» his Gospel is more than the retelling of an historical event. It must be remembered that John’s Gospel is a ‘theological gospel’ speaking to those who were already present in the Church and or being initiated into the life of the Church. John, certainly in this chapter, presents a Christology and Eschatology which recognizes Jesus not only as the expected Messiah who has come but also that He, as *One with the Father*, is the Source of eternal life.²¹² While verses 1-15 can be seen as an historical narration, the true purpose is revealed in the Bread of Life discourse (verse 32-58). This section is typically subdivided into two subsections, verses 32-51b and verses 51c-58 each having a distinct character. The “proper” exegesis of the relationship between these

²¹² John 6:47

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two sections has been much debated, to which Andre Feuillet²¹³ presents four interpretations which summarize what has been put forward by various commentators.

1. Jesus' expressions of "I am the bread of life" and "Who eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall have eternal life" are meant to be taken in a purely spiritual context, meaning "have faith in Jesus"
2. Jesus' expressions should not be taken as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist but, due to the significant amount of OT references such as manna and Passover, John reveals Jesus as the awaited Messiah and new Paschal Lamb foreshadowing His passion at Calvary.
3. A blending of 1) and 2) so that verses 32-51b should be taken in a spiritual context, i.e. have faith in Jesus, and verses 51c-58 refer to the institution of the Eucharist, i.e. "My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink."
4. The linking of the two motifs presented, that is the mystery of the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mystery of the Eucharist.

1) Multiplications and Discourse as Spiritual

Here the central focus of interpretation is dependent on the "spirit" which is released by the ascent of man and manifested and communicated, not sacramentally, but in the words of Jesus. Only a metaphorical discourse can fully reveal that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. The earliest source for a totally spiritual interpretation without any sacramental reference is the Gnostics who reject the reception of the flesh and blood humanity of Jesus. They deny His bodily (σάρξ) Incarnation and bloody (αἷμα) death on the Cross. Some of the early Church Fathers such as Clement and Origen regarded the words food, flesh, eating, bread and blood as symbols for Christ the Logos who spiritually feeds the believers. Theodore of Heraclea interpreted "flesh" as the words of Christ which could be understood by all and "blood" as doctrines that were unintelligible to the crowds Jesus spoke to. Chrysostom allowed for both a spiritual and literal interpretation saying

*"He calls Himself, the bread of life, because He maintains our life both which is and which is to be...By bread He means here either His saving doctrines and the faith which is in Him, or His own Body; for both ενδυναμώνου (fortify) the soul."*²¹⁴

This idea of a sacrament being a symbolic idea was also present in the Gnostic ritual of baptism where living, or running, water combined with the heavenly water of life offered the gift of revelation of the divine.

Augustine also understood Jesus' saying of "My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" in a spiritual sense. He saw Jesus' reference to "His flesh" as the society of the body of the [Christian] members which is the holy Church who are predestined, called, and justified in its glorified saints and its faithful.²¹⁵ This is expressed in Augustine's statement of, "*Credere ergo in eum, est manducare cibum qui permanet in vitam aeternam...Crede, et manducasti.* (To eat then that meat which endures to everlasting life, is to believe in Him...Only believe, and you have eaten already.)"²¹⁶

This greatly influenced the early Protestant Reformers such as Zwingli, Luther and Calvin who stressed that the importance of the Eucharist must remain on *virtus spiritus* (the virtue of faith). Their support of

²¹³ Source: L' Eucharistie, le Sacrifice du Calvaire et la Sacerdoce du Christ, Divinitas 29, pg. 103-149, 1985

²¹⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 46 on Gospel of John

²¹⁵ Schnackenburg, 66

²¹⁶ Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John XXV, § 12

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this is strengthened by their reading of verse 63b, “*the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.*” The Word (i.e. sermon) has priority as it is seen as the first and immediate form of Jesus’ self-revelation and summons its hearers to immediately decide for or against the faith.²¹⁷

Some modern theologians like Borgen²¹⁸ reject any Eucharistic interpretation seeing this as a post-Christian influence, while some, like Bultmann, feel that the text is not clear on whether John is referring to sacramental food or spiritual gifts.

2) Christian Midrash - Jesus as the awaited Messiah and new Paschal Lamb

This view focuses on a Christian Midrash within the typology, that is the actions of the people, and Jesus’ responses. This extends to John making no mention of Jesus’ compassion towards the people leading Him to perform healings and teaching, in contrast to the Synoptics. A Midrashic interpretation of this reading would certainly recognize the references to Moses evident in Jesus going “up the mountain (Ex 19:3,20 and 24:12), Jesus distributing the bread to the people as God the Father gave the Israelites manna²¹⁹ and verse 6:13 of the gathering of the pieces (Ex 16) with the twelve (12) baskets referring to the twelve tribes of Israel. John cements this symbolic understanding when he records the people’s reference to Jesus as the Prophet who is to come into the world (verse 14) recalling Moses telling the Israelites of Yahweh’s promise that He will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you. (Deut. 18:15). Even the last line of the John’s account, not present in the Synoptic versions, displays a comparison to Moses when John says, ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος αὐτοῦ μῶνός (Jesus withdrew up the mountain alone) as Moses went up Mt. Saini. Although lacking in a direct analogy, some have also added the miracle of Jesus’s walking on the water as another OT motif referring to the Israelites passage through the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 14:21 and Ps 77:19)

This understanding of Jesus in a Jewish eschatology (the prophesized Messiah) leads the people to a) want to make Jesus king (verse 6:15), b) ask Jesus “*What must we do to do the works God requires?*” (verse 6:28) and c) similar to the Samaritan woman’s request, ask Jesus to “*always give us this bread*” (verse 6:34). In the style of a midrash, John presents Jesus, as seen by the people, as the prophet of the last days, like Moses but greater than him as John expresses in verses 32-47 where Jesus states that “*Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven... I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*”

²¹⁷ This must be balanced against the power and significance of Jesus’ words of institution in which His words can create life and lead to a union with Christ. This sacramental command to receive His flesh and blood is willed by Jesus. Schnackenburg, pg. 68.

²¹⁸ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, 1965

²¹⁹ Others, such as Tertullian (Against Marcion) and Cyril of Alexandria, see John as linking Jesus’ miracle in the New Testament to Elijah’s similar miracle in the Old Testament connecting Jesus with both miracles. “*The feeding of the multitudes in the desert by Christ ... is also profitable in another way. We can plainly see that these new miracles are in harmony with those of ancient times. They are the acts of one and the same power. He rained manna in the desert upon the Israelites. He gave them bread from heaven. But look! He has again abundantly supplied food to those who needed food in the desert...However, such was the greatness of His miracle, that He willed the slender supply of food, not only to be enough, but even to prove superabundant; and herein He followed the ancient precedent. For in like manner, during the famine in Elijah’s time...*” [2 Kings 4:42-44](#)

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However it is this Midrash perspective that causes the crisis in faith among the people who discontentedly murmur (εγογγυζον)²²⁰ since they expect a prophet-king in the style of Moses and instead hear Jesus say that He *came down from heaven* (verse 6:42). The murmuring increases into bitter quarreling (εμαχοντο) as Jesus now refers to this “bread of life” as His flesh.²²¹ Of course, no amount of a midrash exegesis would allow the Jews to recognize Jesus identifying Himself with God the Father evident in their literal and earthly response “*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’*” (verse 6:42) It is this inability of the people to reconcile these difficult words of Jesus against a Midrashic interpretation that causes many to no longer follow Him (verse 6:66)

The “sign” of the Miracle of the Loaves as a foreshadowing of Jesus in the OT and not as a prefiguring of the Eucharist. Even though some, like Bultmann and Richter²²², capitulate to the idea that the second section has a Eucharistic character, their propose that the verses 6:51-58 leads one to “*inevitably conclude that verse 6:52b-58 have been added by an ecclesiastical editor.*”²²³

Meeks puts forth the view that the Johannine traditions about Jesus as prophet and king were partly formed in reaction to a hostile Jewish community which attributed great importance to Moses and the Sinai theophany, but were also taken up positively for the sake of the members of the Christian community who came from this Jewish group and from Samaritan circles.²²⁴

3) Verses 26-47 Revelatory Discourse on the Bread of Life to be taken in a spiritual context and verses 48-58 (the renewed Revelation of Jesus) in a Eucharistic context.

In the first part of this section (verses 26-47) we can use the same arguments as were used for number 1 above. However it is helpful to examine more deeply the misunderstanding of the people concerning what is meant by bread and what is meant by work.

BREAD Their plea to Jesus to, “*give us this bread always*” expresses their misunderstanding of Jesus’ first revelatory statement that “*He is the Bread of Life*” (verse 6:35). In this third interpretation Jesus is seen as speaking in a metaphorical sense in that the Bread of Life has the spiritual meaning that the possibility of faith is given only by God. (verses 6:44-46)²²⁵

Cyril of Alexandria, in his catechetical lectures, alludes to this spiritual interpretation when he says, “*Therefore Solomon also, pointing at this grace says in Ecclesiastes, Come here and eat thy bread with joy, (that is the spiritual bread); Come here, calling with the words of salvation and blessing) and drink thy wine with a merry heart; (that is, the spiritual wine)*”²²⁶

This “Bread that endures unto eternal life” is reflected in the Lord’s Prayer when we recite, «...τον αρτον ημων τον **επιουσιον**²²⁷δος ημιν σημερον.» While this is typically translated “give us this day our day our

²²⁰ Verse 6:41-42. Note John’s usage of same verb as in Ex. 15:24 and 16:2 to describe the Israelites murmuring (διεγόγγυζε) against Moses and Aaron. Also note the similarity of μάχομαι (6:52) and λουδορέω (Ex 17:2 and Num. 20:3).

²²¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg in his work, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1979.

²²² Georg Richter, “Zur Formgeschichte und literarischen Einheit von John 6:31-58, ZNW 60, 1969

²²³ Bultmann, pg. 219

²²⁴ Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King. Moses tradition and the Johannine Christology*, Leiden, 1967

²²⁵ Bultmann, pg. 221

²²⁶ St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, [Catechetical Lectures](#), circa 350 AD, Chapter 22, § 8

²²⁷ The Greek word επιουσιον only appears in Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3 (and in section 8 of the Didache) and is not found in any extra-Biblical texts whether academia or popular speech.

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daily bread,” the more precise translation which captures the essence of what Jesus was saying in verse 6:27 is “...give us today the bread which contains the sustenance (*ουσιον*) that sustains life, and meets the unique demands of the coming day (*επι*).”²²⁸ The word *επιουσιον* allows for an analogy to be made between the manna that God gave in the wilderness (Ex. 16:19-21) with the request for that “bread” which meets the demands of the coming day (Lord’s Prayer) since in each the amount given is just enough to sustain one for the day. If this were meant as sustenance for longer, then the term used would have been *περιουσιον* which indicates a surpassing abundance.

WORK Jesus responds to the people saying, “Do not work (*εργαζεσθε*) for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (verse 6:27) by asking Him, “*What work (εργαζωμεθα) must we do to do the works (εργα) God requires?*” Morgan observes that they looked for the moral intention since a Midrash interpretation of “work” is obedience to legal requirements, i.e. the Law.²²⁹ Jesus corrects their moral understanding through a spiritual understanding that “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” John emphasizes this contrast by opposing the pragmatic plural “εργα” characteristic of the “*piecemeal nature of man’s efforts*”²³⁰ (i.e. following the Laws given by the Torah) against the singular, unified “εργον.”²³¹ Thus, Jesus gives a radically new meaning to the [Jewish] concept of *εργαζεσθε*: a man finds his true being not in what he himself achieves, but in submission to what God works; he finds it in what, by faith, he allows to happen to himself. This “unified *εργον*” is reflected in the Lord’s Prayer when we recite, “...**Thy will be done**”.

In verses 6:48-58

In the second part of this section (verses 48-58) Jesus announces His second revelatory statement that He “is the Bread of Life” (verse 6:48) repeating what He said in verse 6:40. Here in this next section Jesus’ language becomes harder to understand evident when the Jews ask, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Their amazement and shock is emphasized through John’s use of the Greek term (*εμαχοντο*) to describe the strong reaction of the Jews (verse 6:60). Even the disciples find this a “...*hard teaching. Who can accept it?*” The eating of the Passover sacrificial meal was preserved so that subsequent generations of Jews would recall God’s act of liberating love revealed to them in the historical events of the Exodus. This is then the context of Jesus’ words...to show His disciples that their Master was in fact the new Passover Lamb and that in the future He would actually be that sacrifice. Bishop Ashby sees the possibility that John intended for his readers to apply this to their Eucharist when they gathered for it.²³²

With the Johannine use of the double Amen, the words of Jesus strike hard, “...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (verse 6:51,53,54) John opposes both a Midrashic and Gnostic interpretation asserting that to eat Jesus’ flesh and drink His blood is none other than to accept His true Humanity. The words of Jesus then are used by John to shock his readers into the truth of Jesus’ humanity as well as His divinity. The Eucharistic significance of the verses 6:51-59 is indisputable. Our Lord’s declaration that He is Himself the living bread that gives life is revealed in the Mystical Supper of the NT Church. John does not report the details of the Last Supper, but instead reveals

²²⁸ While most commentators agree with the translation as the “coming” or “next” day, some see this as referring to what is needed for the current day since the Lord’s Prayer would have most likely been a morning prayer. Very few however see as proper a spiritual translation referring to the coming age. Source: Kittel: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2, pages 590-599, 1964.

²²⁹ Morgan pg. 86

²³⁰ Bultmann, pg. 222

²³¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:3, See also Schnackenburg, pg. 39

²³² Ashby, Godfrey, Bishop (Anglican), *Body and Blood in John 6:41-65*, Neotestamentica, Vol. 36, No. ½, 2002

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the significance of and truth of these events.²³³ Many of the early Church fathers such as Ignatius, Justin and Melito of Sardis copied John's use of the term σαρξ rather σῶμα in their works to make clear the idea that Jesus took on flesh and offered His flesh for our salvation and that through the eucharistic food of His flesh and blood we are nourished by, in the words of St. Ignatius, *"the medicine of immortality, and is the antidote to prevent us from dying, causing that we should live forever in Jesus Christ."*²³⁴

St. Cyril, in his catechetical lecture, also affirmed the sacramental nature of the bread and wine saying, *"Contemplate therefore the Bread and Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving that you have been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ."*²³⁵

4) The linking of the two motifs presented, that is the mystery of the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mystery of the Eucharist.

This is the closest to the position of Orthodoxy, as expressed by the Patristic era Fathers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, Jerome and Theodore of Mopsuetia, as well as some of the Latin Fathers such as Ambrose.

Here Bishop Ashby, in concert with Feuillet, states that these verses; the mystery of Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary and the mystery of the Eucharist are "indissolubly linked." Neither should Jesus' saying of *"eat My Flesh and drink My Blood"* be spiritualized (have faith in Me) nor sacramentalised (identify with Me in your Eucharist) but *"Accept My sacrifice of Myself, offered at this Passover time as the Passover Lamb, totally, for yourselves and for the world."* For Ashby the Eucharist depends entirely upon that one sacrifice once offered meaning *"Take to yourselves as your Passover sacrifice, Me, as Messiah and Son of God."*

Ashby supports this idea through the connection of Gospel language such as John 1:29, Luke 22:19-20, and John 6:51 where he sees Jesus announcing His purpose and the Epistles recognizing that as His purpose (1 Tim. 2:6, 1 John 3:16, and Gal 2:20). In his work, *On Pascha*, (circa 190 AD) Melito of Sardis also make this link clear stating in the paschal celebration we can come to realize how it is fulfilled.

*The whole was the result of Adam's disgrace, as we remember the history of humankind in need of salvation. Yet the Messiah came and comes to us. In the murder of Christ by Israel, repeating their slaughter of the lamb, is the triumph of God, which in its proclamation is a present reality for us as we celebrate.*²³⁶

Alexander Schmemmann recognizes this link between the OT and NT traditions noting the liturgical dualism of the Early Christians.

"This is not just a co-existence of the old and the new...but rather the inevitable liturgical expression of that relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Just as the New Testament does not replace the Old, but fulfills and completes it, so also...the New

²³³ Orthodox Study Bible, Notes on 6:51-59, pg. 1436

²³⁴ St. Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, 20.2

²³⁵ St. Cyril, Catechetical Lectures, Chapter 22, § 6

²³⁶ Melito of Sardis, On Pascha, 58

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Covenant does not replace or abolish the Old but appears as its necessary fulfillment...for it is impossible to understand the work of Christ outside this [OT] revelation.

The Church is the new Israel, Judaism renewed in the Messiah (the Christ) and spread through all mankind; it is the renewed covenant of God with His people.”²³⁷

The Book of Acts provides evidence of this dualism in the Early Church by speaking of practices both in the traditions of Judaism, *continuing to pray in the Temple*, (2:46), *observing fixed hours of prayer* (3:1), and *attending the Jewish Feasts* (20:16) and exclusively Christian traditions such as *a rule of prayer* (Luke 11:1), *worshiping on the Lord’s Day* (Acts 20:7), *the Eucharistic Meal* (2:42, 2:46, 20:7) and *receipt of the Holy Spirit through Baptism* (Acts 10:47)

Verse 6:54-55 Cannibalistic Language or Something Else?

During the early 2nd century when persecution of Christians was increasing, groups who were opposed to Christianity lodged false claims that Christians were committing "secret crimes" of atheism, cannibalistic feasts and incest. In response to this, emperor Trajan ordered the governor of Bithynia and Pontus, Pliny the Younger to investigate. Pliny’s report back to Trajan which in part mentioned that,

“They [Christians] asserted that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to do some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food — but ordinary and innocent food.”

Thus through Pliny’s letter we have extra-Biblical evidence that there was no truth to the accusations and that charges of cannibalistic feasts and incest were based on a misunderstanding of the words of institution of the Eucharistic and the Christian practice of referring to one another as "brothers and sisters."

Some, in an attempt to soften the harsh words of Jesus, interpreted His words in a spiritual or symbolic sense, as was seen [above](#) in the Gnostic interpretation. This idea is mostly rejected since the two words John uses can only refer to the literal consumption of food, φαγητε (6:53) and τρωγων (6:54), both of which express *“a matter of real eating and not simply of some sort of spiritual participation.”*²³⁸ This idea is heightened by the word αληθως in the next verse (6:55), «η γαρ σαρξ μου **αληθως** εστιν βρωσις και το αιμα μου **αληθως** εστιν ποσις» indicating that Jesus’ Body and Blood are the “true” or “reliable” food which contain the nourishment that actual food and drink provide.²³⁹



Depiction of Christian Eucharistic bread
Catacomb of Callixtus, 3rd century

²³⁷ A. Schmemmann 206, pages 60, 63-64

²³⁸ Bultmann, 236, Schnackenburg, 62

²³⁹ Schnackenburg, 63

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Another argument brought forth is that the cannibalistic language in John 6:53-56 draws on the Greco-Roman polemics of factionalism.²⁴⁰

“Factionalism is a main theme of the Fourth Gospel...The charge of the cannibal in ‘our’ midst signaled for ancient audiences a recognizable Greek and Roman condemnation of domestic rebels and internal conspirators. While derived from the ritual language of early Christian Eucharistic practices, anthropophagy proved especially useful to the author because it also celebrated the very cultural idiom of factionalism²⁴¹ that defined John’s community. Ancient Jews shared the Greek and Roman ideology that condemned factionalism in the language of cannibalism. The Johannine author reevaluated the cultural taboo of cannibalism in positive terms as a means of self-definition for his community, to throw outsiders off the scent and to weed out those insiders “who did not believe.”

The Church Father’s defense against the claims of cannibalism appear in works such as Apology by Tertullian, Embassy for the Christians by Athenagoras, and First Apology by Justin Martyr. They defended the reality of Jesus’ words, that He is physically present, albeit mystically, in the Eucharist offered at Christian services and is everlasting nourishment. This is evident in Chrysostom’s Homiletic Apology 46.

We become one Body, and members of His flesh and of His bones. In order then that we may become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh. This is effected by the food which He has freely given us, desiring to show the love which He has for us. On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head...for instance, Job implied, speaking of his servants, by whom he was beloved so exceedingly, that they desired to cleave unto his flesh. (Job 31:31)

Wherefore this also Christ has done, to lead us to a closer friendship, and to show His love for us; He has given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy all their love... [Jesus] says, I feed you with My own flesh, desiring that you all be nobly born, and holding forth to you good hopes for the future. For He who gives out Himself to you here, much more will do so hereafter.

This blood causes the image of our King to be fresh within us, produces beauty unspeakable, permits not the nobleness of our souls to waste away, watering it continually, and nourishing it. The blood derived from our food becomes not at once blood, but something else; while this does not so, but straightway waters our souls, and works in them some mighty power. This blood, if rightly taken, drives away devils, and keeps them afar off from us, while it calls to us Angels and the Lord of Angels. For wherever they see the Lord’s blood, devils flee, and Angels run together...When therefore they sought food coming down from heaven, He continually told them, I came down from heaven.

Chrysostom then goes on to remind his listeners of the connection between the previous Blood Covenant which Yahweh made with His nation Israel (circumcision) and the sacrificial rites associated with that Covenant and the New Blood Covenant He has made through His Son (Eucharist) and the sacrifice made by Jesus at Calvary²⁴².

²⁴⁰ Harrill, [Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism](#) (John 6:52–66), *Journal of Biblical Literature* (JBL), no. 1, 2008, pages 133-158

²⁴¹ Factionalism - a situation in which a group forms within a larger group, especially one with slightly different ideas from the main group. Source: Cambridge Dictionary

²⁴² See also Orthodox Study Bible, Page 140

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This blood poured forth washed clean all the world. This blood cleansed the secret place, and the Holy of Holies. And if the type of it had such great power in the temple of the Hebrews, and in the midst of Egypt, when smeared on the door-posts, (Ex. 12:7) much more the reality. This blood sanctified the golden altar (Ex. 24:6, Lev. 1)); without it the high priest dared not enter into the secret place. This blood consecrated priests, (Ex. 29:21) this in types cleansed sins (Lev. 4). But if it had such power in these types, if death so shuddered at the shadow, tell me how would it not have dreaded the very reality? This blood is the salvation of our souls, by this the soul is washed, by this is beautiful, by this is inflamed, this causes our understanding to be brighter than fire, and our soul more beaming than gold; this blood was poured forth, and made heaven accessible.

Verse 6:60-70 The Result of Jesus' Revelation – Defection and Confession

The explicit nature of Jesus' words now exposes the attitudes of those who have heard Him and this includes His disciples. In verse 6:66 John can once again be seen speaking to the Early Christians at a time when the *κοινωνία* of the Christian community was being split by this high Johannine view of the Eucharist.²⁴³ John warns his readers that even those who believe that they are strong in the faith can be lead away and must “remain in His Word.”

This defection stems from two of Jesus' difficult teachings, a) the linking of His two saying “*I am the bread that came down from heaven*” with “*you [will] see the Son of Man ascend up to where he was before.*” (verse 42 and 62) and b) Jesus' harsh teaching of the necessity to “...eat my flesh and drink my blood” to gain eternal life and to be raised up at the last day. (verses 51 and 54)

Verse 6:61-62 Jesus' recognizing the impact of this «σκανδαλον»²⁴⁴ which has now overtaken the Jews, turns His attention to His disciples. His question forces them to think deeper about His identity and not to His earthly origin (verse 6:42). John's use here of the language of “coming down, “ascending”, and “Son of Man” link Jesus' previous claim of divinity and heavenly origin to Nicodemus in Chapter 3, “*No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven, the Son of Man.*”²⁴⁵ Thus Jesus' question should not be taken as an insult or rebuke towards His disciples but as an appeal to them for a faith that cannot be seen by seeking out signs, nor grasped through the works of one's own reason, but is experienced only as something effected by God. This then is the meaning behind Jesus' words “*no one has the ability to come to Me unless the Father has granted it unto them.*” (verse 65)

Jesus is preparing His disciples for the even greater insult that will take place at the Cross and the demand that they follow Him even unto the Cross.²⁴⁶

Verse 6:63 Now comes the confusing and seemingly contradictory statement by Jesus, “*...the flesh counts for nothing*” which seems to negate everything that Jesus had previously said about the necessity of partaking of His flesh unto eternal life. As was mentioned earlier (page 73) the Reformers used this as a proof statement to deny the efficacy of the Eucharist. However, in view of the importance that both the Synoptic and John's Gospels, placed on Jesus' incarnation (taking on flesh), His sacrifice, on the Cross, and His resurrection in the “flesh” this cannot be interpreted in a manner in which Jesus' flesh is “ουκ ωφελει” (without advantage or purpose). Instead, His meaning here is

²⁴³ R. Brown, 346

²⁴⁴ John 6:61

²⁴⁵ John 3:13

²⁴⁶ Bultmann, 445

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“You must hear spiritually what relates to [Jesus], for he who hears carnally is not profited, nor gathers any advantage...Now as in this passage He said spirit, instead of spiritual, so when He speaks of flesh, He meant not carnal things, but carnally hearing...For if a man receives [His words] carnally, he profits nothing. How then says He, that the flesh profits nothing? He speaks not of His own flesh, (God forbid!) but of those who received His words in a carnal manner. Do you see that the words, the flesh profits nothing, are spoken not of His own flesh, but of carnal hearing?”²⁴⁷

Verse 6:64-66 John has now divided the people surrounding Jesus into two groups, the term “Jews” being used to represent all unbelievers, those who have hardened their hearts to the words of Jesus (John 7:47-49), while the term “disciple” refers to the uncommitted or unauthentic follower of Jesus, those who have ears but still cannot hear (Mark 4:9). In part John does this in a continuing effort to strengthen the Early Christian communities who struggle with their faith in the face of persecution using two significant examples from his own history.

- a) Judas as the unnamed traitor (verses 64 and 70) who would have been well known as the most blatant example of disloyalty.
- b) The contrasting strength and commitment of faith in Peter’s confession (verses 68-69) as the primary example of loyalty.

These examples were meant to dramatize the dangers of thinking only “*in the flesh*” against “*acquiring a spiritual mind to know Jesus and His Father.*”

Verse 6:67-70 In typical Johannine style we see the crowds recede into the background as the dialogue focuses on Jesus and the Twelve disciples He has chosen. His direct question of μη²⁴⁸ και υμεις θελετε υπαγειν? (And do you not also desire to leave?) is meant to force them into a decision.

When Peter confesses “*Where shall WE go...WE have come to (πεπιστευκαμεν) believe and to (εγνωκαμεν) know that You are the Holy One of God.*”²⁴⁹ Note that he speaks in the plural, for all the disciples and the use of the double expression πεπιστευκαμεν and εγνωκαμεν emphasizes the firm foundation the Twelve have found in Jesus through their close and intimate association with Him.²⁵⁰

“A knowledge that is not theoretical or intellectual in nature but “grows out of this particular situation” and by Jesus’ revelation of Himself.”²⁵¹

Here we recall a similar response in the Gospel of Matthew where Peter declares, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” in response to Jesus’ question of, “*Who do you say I am?*” And Jesus responds similarly when He says “οτι σαρξ και αιμα ουκ απεκαλυψεν, that is, carnal understanding (flesh and blood) do not reveal the glory of Jesus but comes through the revelation given by the Father.”²⁵²

Chapter 6 ends with the harsh reminder by Jesus that contrary to Peter’s confession, not all of the Twelve “*believe and know*” the glory of Christ. According to Chrysostom Jesus, through His revelation that “One of you is a devil,” cautions the disciples that they must not think that He choose to flatter them, or that

²⁴⁷ Chrysostom, Homily 47 (John 6:63)

²⁴⁸ Note the interrogative μη would indicate the expectation of a negative response, although here it is more likely meant to encourage the disciples to stand firm.

²⁴⁹ Verse 6:68,69

²⁵⁰ See also the use of these same words in 1 John 4:16

²⁵¹ Bultmann, 448

²⁵² Matthew 16:15-17, John 6:44,45

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because they have followed Him that He shall not continue to point out their faults and misunderstandings.

As to the reason that John includes Jesus calling out Judas as a betrayer, Chrysostom points out that as much as God wants all to be saved, He will not impose Himself forcibly over the free will of Man.

*“God is not wont to make men good by compulsion and force, neither is His election and choice compulsory on those who are called, but persuasive. And that you may learn that the calling compels not, consider how many of these who have been called have come to perdition, so that it is clear that it lies in our own will also to be saved, or to perish.”*²⁵³

Chapter 7 Jesus as the Water of Life Discourse and Division Among the People (7:1-52)

When looking at the content of chapter 7 one can see how John has connected the words of Jesus with the preceding chapters as well as chapter 8 forming a unified dialogue of the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus' claims	verse		Jesus' claims	verse
springs of living water	7:37-38		spring of water welling up to eternal life.”	4:14
Light of the world	8:12		The Word was the true Light (from John's prologue)	1:9
For I have come down from heaven...	7:38		for I know where I came from...	8:14
...so the Son of Man must be lifted up	3:14-15		When you have lifted up the Son of Man...	8:28
to believe in the one [God] has sent	6:29		if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”	8:24

It is only the interruption of the passage of the adulteress woman (verses 8:1-11) that seems unconnected these dialogues.

The overriding theme common to each of these chapters is that a) Jesus, as the fulfillment of the Israel's faith demands that the people of Israel decide who they believe Jesus to be, and b) to make a judgment regarding Him as the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven.²⁵⁴

As for the particular structure of Chapter 7 it can be broken out as follows.

- **Prior to the Feast** **verses 1-13**
 - Jesus' conversation with His brothers
 - The climate of opinion in Jerusalem
- **Middle of the Feast** **verses 14-36**
 - Jesus' authority and origin
 - Pharisees seek to arrest Jesus
 - Jesus speaks of His departure and Jewish misunderstanding
- **End of the Feast** **verses 37-52**

²⁵³ Chrysostom, Homily 47 (John 6:70)

²⁵⁴ George Beasley-Murray, page 121

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- Jesus as Living Water
- Reactions from the people and the Pharisees
- The soldiers and Nicodemus' reaction to the call for Jesus' arrest

Prior to the Feast verses 1-13

Verses 7:1-9 Jesus' conversation with His brothers

Verses 7:1-2 As was mentioned prior, chapter 7 brings into undeniable focus the opposing voices of the Jewish people who struggle in their belief of who Jesus is *and* the Jewish leadership, who have hardened their hearts and their unbelief to the point of taking action to silence Jesus. The danger of this call to action, which is a result of the “*call to judgement*,” is made very clear in the opening verse of chapter 7, “*the Jews there were looking for a way to kill him.*” So what were the charges they wanted to bring against Him that warranted arrest. They included²⁵⁵,

1. Jesus deceives the people through His teaching - 7:12 and 47
2. Jesus lacks the formal education essential for a Rabbi and thus lacks authority - 7:15
3. Jesus' disregard of the Sabbath Laws demonstrated by His healings - 5:16, 7:23
4. Jesus' Messianic claims are false based on His origin - 7:52

Feast of the Tabernacle²⁵⁶

This feast, also referred to as feast of the Sukkot or Booths is one of three pilgrimage festivals during which the Jewish People were required, per Levitical Law, to go up together as a nation to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the other two being Pesach (Passover) and Shavout. This feast was given to Moses by God in the Book of Leviticus, 23:33-43. Besides the Biblical command there were several other **purposes attached to the feast of the Tabernacles.**²⁵⁷

- **Memory** – “*All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*” (Lev 23:43)
- **Eschatological Intent** – In his prophetic announcement Zechariah connects this Feast with the return of the Messiah to establish His Kingdom.

Behold! A day of the Lord is coming, and the house of Israel shall share the wealth of the peoples in your midst, O Jerusalem.... And on that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem from the east... And the Lord shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be one, and His name one... And it will come to pass that everyone left of the nations who came up against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to prostrate himself to the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of סוכות (Sukkot). (Zechariah 14)

- **The Festival of Water and Lights** - Although there was no direct Mosaic law for the libation of water, it was claimed by the Pharisees that this was of Mosaic tradition and described in the Talmud, while some believe this has a Greek influence. By the time of Jesus this water libation ceremony had

²⁵⁵ George Beasley-Murray, page 122

²⁵⁶ The word “tabernacle” is Old English derived from Latin *tabernaculum* meaning hut or booth.

²⁵⁷ Source: Jewish Encyclopedia

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become part of the tradition of the festival. Jewish priests would go down to the pool of Siloam²⁵⁸ and would fill a vessel with the water and returning to the Temple while sounding the shofar, and pour the water over the altar, along with wine [accompanying the daily morning sacrifice](#). The ceremony originally included a symbolic form of prayer for the abundance of rain in the winter season (Zechariah 14:17-18)

On the night of the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles the outer court of the Temple was brilliantly illuminated with four golden lamps, each containing 120 logs of oil, in which were burning the old girdles and garments of the priests. The illumination, was described as “*a sea of fire that lit up every corner of Jerusalem and was so bright that in any part of the city one could pick wheat from the chaff.*”

The overall ceremony refers to the passage in Isaiah:

“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2-3)

Verses 7:3-5 **The reaction of Jesus’ brothers** mirrors the same level of understanding as those Jesus has previously encountered such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan women, and those who witnessed the miracle of the loaves; they take Jesus’ actions literally and demand further signs.²⁵⁹ This very base understanding of Jesus’ mission is evident in their statement in verse 3 and 4.

“Leave Galilee and go (μεταβηθι) to Judea, so that your disciples there may discern (θεωρησωσιν) the works You do.”

“No one who wants to become publicly known acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, boldly and confidently (παρρησια) show (φανερωσον) yourself to the world (τω κοσμω).”

Here John shows that Jesus’ family (mentioned in John 2:12) were concerned with Jesus publicly proclaiming His Messiahship. This is supported in the Synoptics, e.g., Mark 3:21 and 6:4. The use of the term μεταβηθι instead of αναβηθι in verse 7:3 speaks to more than just a “going up” to Jerusalem but more of a transfer of activity, a change of place, that is from declaring Himself in Galilee to demonstrate (φανερωσον) His authority, boldly and publicly (παρρησια) to His disciples in Jerusalem (τω κοσμω). Additionally, the word θεωρησωσιν has the root of θεωρέω having the connotation of *gazing upon a performance as a spectator*. His brothers, thinking in a strictly worldly manner, want Jesus to make this public spectacle of His power as Messiah since they assume He is seeking public prestige and power (cf John 6:15). This is evident in the imperative or command form of the two words υπαγέ and μεταβηθι. For John they represent those “unbelieving”²⁶⁰ and of the “world”²⁶¹

Verses 7:6-9

²⁵⁸ This was the pool where Jesus told the blind man to wash as part of his healing (John 9:7). Various translations include Shiloh and Shelah for Siloam as occurs in Isaiah 8:6 and Nehemiah 3:15. This is not to be confused with the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:2). The Pool of Bethesda was located in northeast Jerusalem, just outside the walls, north of the Temple complex, while the Pool of Siloam was located on the opposite side of Jerusalem, near the southeast corner but within the walls of Jerusalem.

²⁵⁹ John 5:30

²⁶⁰ John 7:5

²⁶¹ Reference John 1:10,11 and 8:14,15

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Jesus rejects the worldly advice of His brothers. This was not out of fear of death (verse 7:1) but because His “καιρος εμος ουπω παρεστιν.”²⁶² His use of the word καιρός is another clear sign that whatever and whenever He acts it is the will of the Father and not of what the world wants of Him. These words harken back to the Wedding at Cana when He answered His mother in a similar way saying, “...ουπω ηκει η ωρα μου.”²⁶³ For Schnackenburg, however, this comparison is shallow as he sees that while Mary with “eyes of faith” sees the glory of Jesus even in His earthly works,” the brothers, are blind to the purpose of the signs Jesus performs, i.e. the illustration of His character as the Giver of eschatological gifts in the here and now.²⁶⁴

“I testify that its works are evil.”

Equally, Jesus telling His brothers that “*your time is always here*” could be understood superficially, as referring to the present time, the “now” so as to say,

*“It makes no difference to you when you go up. The world has no quarrel with you, for you bear no testimony against it, and so draw down upon yourselves none of its wrath. Your going will excite no tumult or opposition; it will not attract attention and will not endanger your lives.”*²⁶⁵

Rather, His words, ο δε καιρος ο υμετερος παντοτε εστιν ετοιμος, speak to the brother’s worldly ignorance of the “moment determined by God, the moment of crisis, the eschatological moment.” In their worldly view they view “freedom” as their ability to act and decide whenever they choose and therefore their actions never determine anything. Central to Judaism is the belief that every moment is a time ordained by God, given to men to act in; Adam in Paradise (Gen. 2:16), Noah (Gen. 7:1), God calling Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 12:1), the covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:9-11), and Moses (Ex. 3:10). **The question being asked now and the decision that the world is called to make, in the presence of the Word become Flesh, (John 1:14) is whether it wants to remain in death.**

Jesus continues in His accusation of His brothers by pointing out that because of their love of worldly virtues, “*the world cannot hate you,*” but does “*hate those who testify that its works are evil.*” Through this statement John invokes the opposing symbols of light and dark from chapter 3 when He spoke to Nicodemus of light and dark, belief and judgement.

This is the κρισις (judgement): Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because of their works of evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

(John 3:19-20)

And these “works of evil” do not merely mean moral corruption but speak against the world which is unable to accept and therefore turned away from the revelation given by Christ of His mission and purpose. This is what Jesus’ brothers fail to comprehend and this same condition is evident today in how we understand the Lord’s Prayer. The last petition, “*...and deliver us from evil*” has overtaken the first

²⁶² Note the use of the Greek καιρος and not ωρα. Whereas ωρα is used most often in a general sense, i.e. “It’s time to go.” or “I’ll go when I have the time,” καιρος in Classical Greek refers to a specific or opportune time or season, the “right time.” In the New Testament καιρος takes on a divine intention, a moment determined by God that is, of a time when things are brought to a crisis, the eschatological moment that has been anticipated, the time when the Messiah will visibly return from heaven. (see Mark 13:33 and 1 Timothy 6:15)

²⁶³ John 2:4

²⁶⁴ Schnackenburg Vol. 1, pg., 330,331

²⁶⁵ This is the interpretation taken by Chrysostom, Matthew Poole, Barnes, Ellicot and others

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and second petitions, “Our Father who is in heaven, we set apart Your Name as sanctified, let Your kingdom ελθετω (come) and Your will to be accomplished.” ²⁶⁶

We reduce the “evil” from which we should be delivered to a moral corruption or worldly suffering not recognizing the true “evil” is death and that our delivery is delivery from the darkness that separates us from the Light which came into the world. The final petition of the Lord’s prayer must therefore be understood together with the first two petitions. That is, deliver us from the evil which separates us from our Father, who is in heaven, to allow us to make the decision that His will, as accomplished through His Son, will redeem humanity (Adám) back to the relationship it once had with the God the Father in Paradise.

This is also recalled in the Divine Liturgy the prayer of the Anamnesis.

We remember, therefore, this command of the Savior and all that came to pass for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand of the Father and the second, glorious coming.

Verses 7:10 Jesus goes up to Jerusalem

Jesus, contrary to what He said to His brothers “τοτε και αυτος ανεβη εις την εορτην, although not publicly, but in secret. **Several interpretations for this have been presented.**

a) Ellicot and Barnes in their commentary believe that Jesus did not go to this festival.

We have seen that, even with the ordinary reading, there is no ground for the frequent objection (John 7:8), but it is really nowhere said that He went up to the feast at all. As a matter of fact, the special feast day—the day of Holy Convocation—was on the 15th of Tishri, the 14th being the preparation day. From the 16th to the 20th was what was called “The Lesser Festival,” or “The Middle of the Feast” (John 7:14), and it is at this we find Him present. (Comp. also John 7:37.)

b) The Pulpit commentary focuses on the fact that “Jesus went in secret.”

While the brethren went up to the feast, [Jesus] simply went up, towards Jerusalem - not, however, in the pilgrim caravan, but as a quiet wayfarer, blessing lepers, comforting souls, pouring forth on a favored few His truth, till he reached the certain village at the very gates of Jerusalem. A contrast between the first visit when He appeared suddenly in the temple, and cast out the money changers, or that when He cured the lame man at the pool and confronted the Pharisees. Here He went to the feast as a pilgrim!

c) Matthew Poole, Calvin, and Gill state that Jesus went to the Festival in obedience to Jewish Law

He went up to show his obedience to his Father’s commands, Exodus 23:17.

The feast of tabernacles was the same with the feast of ingathering in the end of the year, when they had gathered their labors out of the field... and all the males in Israel were to appear before the Lord, (John 7:17). Christ being born under the law, showed a punctual obedience to it; and therefore, in obedience to it, he would go up: but his wisdom dwelt with prudence; and therefore he did not go up openly, not in any crowd of company, so as a public notice could be taken of him; but secretly, to teach us that we are not so strictly tied up to ritual precepts...

d) For Schnackenburg the contradiction of Jesus’ statement to His brothers is part of John’s literary plan.

²⁶⁶ Ratzinger, J., Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life, CUA Press, 1988

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John is conscience of the contradiction and wants to show that Jesus' statement of "I am not going up" is simply a rejection of His brother's wishes but not an absolute denial of His intention to visit the Feast. Jesus is not going to the Feast to carry out His brother's request, meaning that He is not going to up to Jerusalem to demonstrate publicly His greatness in accord with the brother's desire.

Schnakenberg compares this to the Wedding at Cana saying that *"the rejection [and subsequent reversal] was only in order to exclude an inadequate understanding that He could be subject to the will of anyone other than the Father or the expectation that He had come to give earthly gifts."*

e) Chrysostom sees this as a teaching moment by Jesus given to us by John.

*The expression, when His brethren had gone up, is that of one showing that He chose not to go up with them. On which account He abode where He was, and manifested not Himself, although they in a manner urged Him to do so. But why did He, whoever spoke openly, do so now as it were in secret? The writer says not secretly, but, as it were in secret. For thus, as I have said, **He seemed to be instructing us** how to manage matters. And, apart from this, it was not the same to come among them when heated and restive, as to do so afterwards when the feast was ended. The things done by Christ after the manner of men, are not so done only to establish the Incarnation, but also to educate us for virtue.*

Verses 7:11-13 The Climate in Jerusalem

Once again John tells us of the murmuring (γογγυσμός)²⁶⁷ of the people and, as Jesus had predicted, the Jewish leadership was seeking (εζητουσιν) Him out. Here we see the same attitude of the Jews towards Jesus as they had towards Moses in the echo of the murmuring of the people after Moses' men returned from exploring the land of Canaan, after seeing great signs being performed.²⁶⁸

"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey, but we can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. The Nephilim are there. And all the Israelites grumbled (διεγογγυζον) against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword?" Numbers 13:17-14:3

Verse 12 also offers insight into two important factors with regards to the climate of the people at the festival towards Jesus.

- **They had diametrical opinions of the character of Jesus**

2. They feared the Jewish leadership

1a. Αγαθός *Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good (αγαθος) man." 7:12a*

In Greek philosophy αγαθος was associated with virtuous action within the human sphere, while in Hellenism the word acquired a religious flavor signifying those actions "pleasing to God" and "leading to salvation." Judaism, as reflected in the Septuagint, shares the idea of a religious connotation but connected to a knowledge of a personal God who reveals Himself to His people in their history. Those who do the will of God (i.e. follow the Torah (Law)) do good and are therefore good, and will receive blessing and salvation from the Lord (Ps 37:27-28). In the New Testament, αγαθος maintains the religious connotation but the "good" has shifted from the Torah as the reality and is now expressed in the living Torah who is Christ. God now becomes the source of all "good" as seen in Matt. 10:18, "ο δε

²⁶⁷ cf. 6:41 and 6:61

²⁶⁸ Lawrence Farley, The Gospel of John, Beholding the Glory, Conciliar Press, 2006

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Ιησους ειπεν αυτω τι με λεγεις αγαθον ουδεις αγαθος ει μη εις ο θεος. The humanistic concept present in Greek philosophy, Hellenism and Judaism has now radically vanished.

“For I know that αγαθον itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the αγαθον I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” Romans 7:18-19 ²⁶⁹

1b. Πλάνης *Others replied, “No, he deceives the people (πλανα τον οχλον). 7:12b*

In Classical Greek this word has the literal meaning of to “lead” or “go” astray. There is also has the connotation of deception or making contradictory statements. Philosophically, as with αγαθος, it did not necessarily contain a religious attitude, although Plato used this term when referring to the “wandering astray” of the soul. In the Old Testament (Septuagint) the word evolved to refer to a profane transgression of the revealed will of God, specifically directed towards idolatry and this transgression demands the severest of punishments.

*“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,” 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer... **That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion** against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. That prophet or dreamer has led you astray (πλανησαι) from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow.”* Deut. 13:1-6

In the New Testament the word took on an eschatological character in that it included those who deceived others to not believe in Jesus’ resurrection and was thus used as a warning to backsliding Christians to be wary of “*ψευδοχριστοι (false messiahs) and ψευδοπροφηται (false prophets) who will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive...*” (Mark 13:22)

Justin Martyr records in his *Dialogue with Trypho* that the Jews accused Jesus of “*compelling the men who lived at that time to recognize Him. But though they saw such works, they asserted it was magical art. For they dared to call Him a magician, and a λαο-πλάνον (deceiver of the people).*” ²⁷⁰

In James 1:16 we can see the combination of both αγαθος and πλάνης.

*Do not be (πλανασθε) deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. **Every (αγαθη) good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...*** ²⁷¹

2. They feared the Jewish leadership The strongest indication of the situation among the people at the festival was John’s statement in verse 7:13, “*...no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jewish leadership.*” The Pharisees maintained a close watch on the people, both their actions (1:25, 5:10) and what they were saying (3:2, 4:45, 7:32). This “fear of the Jews” and the threat of expulsion from the synagogue has been given as a reason for why the faith in Jesus does not grow and develop.²⁷² John references this threat of expulsion (αποσυναγωγος) three (3) times, 9:22, 12:42 and 16. Expulsion and or arrest was a real threat for the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem both before His crucifixion (12:42) and after (20:19)

²⁶⁹ Note the contrast when earlier in Romans 7:16 St. Paul says that “...I agree that the law is good” but the word he uses here for “good” is καλος.

²⁷⁰ Chapter 69. This same charge of sorcery and πλάνης appears in several places in the Talmud.

²⁷¹ This verse is part of the Prayer Behind the Ambon during the divine Liturgy.

²⁷² For a description of the influence the Pharisees had on the people see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* - Book XVIII, [Chapter 1 §3](#)

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[Jesus] attracted a sufficient following that certain Pharisees as well as members of the priestly establishment became concerned. In part, their concern was what we might call **religious**, insofar as he was seen to teach things antithetical to the Torah. In part, it was what we might call **political**, insofar as there developed a fear that the popularity of his movement might lead to Roman intervention. To counter these perceived threats, a coalition of Jerusalem-based elite persons entered into a probably informal agreement to pressure those who were sympathetic to Jesus to abandon those sympathies. One of the ways in which they did this was to exert their informal influence such as to exclude those who appeared sympathetic to Jesus from Jerusalem's public assembly.²⁷³

Middle of the Feast verses 14-36

Verses 7:14-15 John's focus will now shift from the signs and miracles in the previous chapters to "teaching" as evident in verse 14, "and Jesus went up to the temple courts and begin to teach." And this theme of teaching will continue through verses 15 through 25.

Evidence of an Ecclesiastical Editor - Verses 7:15-23

Recalling the analysis from chapter 6, [Chapters out of Synch?](#), some like Jerome see this as Jesus making a reference to His earlier miracle in chapter 5, while some like Bultmann feel that this is evidence of an "ecclesiastical editor." Here, in this example it is felt that there is a much smoother and realistic connection between the closing dialogue of 5:47 and 7:15-23.

Traditional Order	Proposed Order
7:14 Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.	5:46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 5:47 But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"
7:15-18 The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught...but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.	7:15-18 The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught...but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.
19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. 21 Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed.	19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. 21 Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed.

In the "**Traditional Order**" the people's reaction of amazement to Jesus' teaching and Jesus' subsequent reaction to the people (verses 7:15-18) is very probable, however Jesus' reference to Moses, the Law, and the miracle He performed seem out of place since it assumes that the people He is speaking with had knowledge of the miraculous healing of the man at the Pool.

In the "**Proposed Order**" the people's amazement to Jesus speaking about "His word" (verse 5:47), about the origin of His authority and the reference to Moses and their attitude towards the Law (verse 7:15-23) flows together very well to the miracle of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda.

However, in either scenario the case can be made that the positioning of the text is correct.

²⁷³ Jonathan Bernier, *Ἀποσυναγωγος* and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages. 2013

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While John relates that the people are amazed (εθαυμαζον) at Jesus' teaching ουτος γραμματα (without a formal education), the Jewish leadership saw Jesus, as a teacher, improper. This is because a Rabbi must

- a) must show evidence of having formally studied the Scripture and the Mishna
- b) have served as a disciple of an acknowledged rabbinical master.

Chrysostom comments on John's use of the word εθαυμαζον noting that while the people "*admired [His] teaching, they did not receive the words, but simply that they marveled. That is, were thrown into a state of astonishment, and doubted, saying, Where has this man learned these things?*" ²⁷⁴

Chrysostom's statement are echoed in verses 1:27 and 7:27

1:27 "... δε υμων εστηκεν ον υμεις **ουκ οιδατε.**" (...but among you stands one **you do not know.**

7:27 "*But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.*"

Bultmann comments that here again we see the worldly thinking of the ιουδαιοι²⁷⁵ since they "*love the sensation and excitement...and enjoy having something to argue about.*" ²⁷⁶

Verses 7:16-18 Jesus provides the answer to the Pharisee's accusations regarding Jesus' teaching authority.

"My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

Jesus comments are squarely directed against the consistent failure of the people to recognize who Jesus is and His origin. The Jews are mired in Midrashic reasoning of messianic prophecy and fail to recognize not only the source of Jesus' teaching authority but also of His origin. Jesus' statement is not a condemnation of our use of reason, for Justin²⁷⁷ says that, "*...reason direct us to refuse the guidance of those who did or taught anything wrong*", but rather a warning, as Luther states, that "*the man who relies upon reason is an unbeliever whose mind is darkened...To make the Gospel reasonable is to destroy it...No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit.*" ²⁷⁸

Jesus' statement that "*Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory...*" recalls almost verbatim His rebuke to His brothers when they told Him to "*...show yourself to the world (κοσμου).*"

Jesus is clearly aware that the Jewish leaders accuse Him of setting aside the Law of God. In response to this Jesus then does two things,

1) He declares that it is the Jewish Leadership that is breaking the Law – verses 7:19, 21-25

Invoking Moses as a witness and accuser saying, "*Moses gave you the Law but none of you keep the Law.*" ²⁷⁹

Assuming the correct positioning of the text, once again Jesus brings forth Moses as the people's accuser (ref. verse 5:45-47) saying that "*...not one of you keeps the law.*" Jesus then challenges them with the

²⁷⁴ Chrysostom, Homily on John 49 (John 7:15)

²⁷⁵ Cf 7:4 when Jesus accuses His brothers of thinking "worldly." (pg. 84)

²⁷⁶ Bultmann, pg. 295

²⁷⁷ Justin, First Apology, chapter 2

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 209

²⁷⁹ [cf page 67](#)

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accusation that they are trying to kill Him, which clearly is in violation of the Torah given by Moses. Jesus seems to be making the connection between Himself and Moses, in a manner saying that “You reject my teaching, but that is not surprising, for you reject Moses’ also.”

2) He reveals the reasoning behind His Sabbath deeds – verse 7:23

Jesus contrasts the “one miracle I performed [on the Sabbath]” against the Jews perpetual breaking of the Law by “circumcising [boys] on the Sabbath.” Jesus thus is pointing out that if circumcision which is performed on a single part of a male, is allowed on the sabbath, how much more is it to heal a man’s whole body. This has been acknowledged by more than one Jewish teacher. For example, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah²⁸⁰ (circa 90 AD) commented that,

“If one supersedes the sabbath on account of one of his members, should not he supersede the Sabbath for his whole body.”

Rabbi Eliezer saw this *superseding of the Sabbath Law* applicable only where a human life was a stake, but Jesus placed no such limitations. Jesus goes further explaining that Moses giving circumcision, which came from the patriarchs, allowed the Jews to circumcise on the Sabbath (verse 22). Jesus is revealing the true purpose of what Moses did which is to reveal the total healing of Man by Christ, which of necessity displaces the Sabbath.

Where is this man from? Verses 7:25-30

Here (and in Mark 1:5) we encounter the term *Ιεροσολυμιτων*, the Jerusalemites, those that *ον ζητουσιν αποκτειναι* (verse 7:25) as distinguished from the pilgrims, many of whom *επιστευσαν εις αυτον* (verse 7:31).

The failure of the *αρχοντες* (Jewish leaders) to arrest Jesus for His supposed crimes leads the people to wonder whether the Jewish leadership (Sanhedrin) has recognized Jesus as the Messiah (verse 7:26).

The question centers on the origin of Jesus. The commonly held Jewish notion of the coming of the Messiah is that he will be born of flesh and blood but wholly unknown until the time of Israel’s redemption²⁸¹. This idea is prevalent throughout the Synoptic Gospels²⁸² and is even repeated by Trypho, in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue, as his proof that Jesus was not the Christ.

*“Those who affirm him to have been a man, and to have been anointed by election, and then to have become Christ, appear to me to speak more plausibly than you who hold those opinions which you express. For we all expect that Christ will be a man [born] of men, and that Elijah when he comes will anoint him. But if this man appear to be Christ, he must certainly be known as man [born] of men; but from the circumstance that Elijah has not yet come, I infer that this man is not He [the Christ].”*²⁸³

For the Jews, this question about Jesus’ messiahship is then answered through one doctrinal proof, “...but we know where this man is from.” The irony of this statement is that the Jews were correct in one sense, in that their messianic prophesy was true, that Jesus’ earthly origin was known, as emphatically²⁸⁴ confirmed by Jesus Himself, “...και λεγων καμε οιδατε και οιδατε ποθεν ειμι.” But their interpretation of it was incorrect and kept them from recognizing Jesus at the Christ (i.e. Messiah). They cannot

²⁸⁰ [Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah](#) was a famous and highly regarded Mishnaic scholar of the second generation first century C.E.) and traced his pedigree for ten generations back to Ezra the Prophet.

²⁸¹ World Biblical Commentary, page 110

²⁸² As examples Matthew 24:26-27 and Mark 13:21-22

²⁸³ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, chapters 8 and 49

²⁸⁴ The use of “και” at the beginning of Jesus’ response to the people indicates the emphasis of His statement.

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comprehend His heavenly origin in His Father who is in Heaven, and thus His divine origin remains unknown to them; "...but He who sent me is true. You do not know him...I am from Him and He sent me." (verses 7:28-29)

Will We Recognize the Moshiach When He Comes?

The Jewish concept of a Moshiach or Messiah was introduced after the beginning of the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, during the age of the prophets. Although not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, the messianic concept is alluded to in the Torah through several references to "the Ancient of Days" (אֱלֹהֵי יָמֵינוּ) who will judge Mankind on His throne at the time of the [Moshiach](#)²⁸⁵.

The word Messiah, which is borrowed from the Greek Μεσσίας, is a transliteration of the Hebrew מְשִׁיחַ הַמֶּלֶךְ (Anointed King) and is pronounced Moshiach or Mashiach. While in both Jewish and Christian tradition believes that the Messiah will be descended from the house of David and that the coming of Moshiach is the completion of God's purpose in creation, the restoration of Man to God. However the term in Hebrew does not have the Christian connotation of Savior.

In his 13 principles of faith, the 12th century Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (also known as Maimonides or Rambam) offered what he saw, and has generally been accepted as, the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, of which number 12 is the belief that the Moshiach will come. The Jews of the Roman period, as well as those afterwards, believed that the Moshiach would possess the following characteristics.

- a) A great political leader descended by a pure male line from King David (Jeremiah 23,5).
- b) Well-versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments (Isaiah 11,2-5)
- c) A charismatic leader, inspiring others to follow his example
- d) A great military figure who will win battles for Israel, freeing the Jews of foreign domination and establishing a Torah-based kingdom in Israel
- e) A great judge, who makes righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33,15)

However, what was not part of the messianic prophesy was a) he will be divine, but rather that he specifically will be human, and b) the performance of signs or miracles is not a requirement since the appearance of the Moshiach is the ultimate miracle.

Another note of interest is that, like the Orthodox faith, Jews strongly discourage any predictions of when the Moshiach will come or lengthy analysis of world events in an attempt to predict His coming and do not adhere to the theology of Millennialism, Rapture, or Predestination. As Maimonides writes,

"Neither the order of the occurrence of these events nor their precise detail is among the fundamental principles of the faith . . . one should wait and believe in the general conception of the matter."

For us as Christians Jesus' words are sufficient, *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...[knows] on what day your Lord will come."*²⁸⁶

Verse 7:31 – 36

While they do not here accuse Jesus of blasphemy (ref 5:18) they do attempt to arrest Him but cannot since "His hour had not yet come." The One who sent Jesus will not allow any disruption to Jesus' work of revelation given to Him by God the Father. John's use in verse 7:31 of the term σμεια is directed to

²⁸⁵ Numbers 24:14-17, Deuteronomy 30:1-5

²⁸⁶ Matthew 24:36,42

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his Christian audience since, as was stated previously, the performance of miracles is not a required characteristic of the Jewish Messiah, although there is the Judaic anticipation that the Messiah would perform miracles in a like manner to Moses echoing the verse from Exodus (Deut. 18:15 and Hebrews 3:2-3)

Even with the debate about Jesus' origin, the growing faith among some of the people (verse 7:31) at the Feast did not go unnoticed by the Pharisees and they send officers to apprehend (πιάσωσιν) Jesus.

Chrysostom observes that John, through his statement of "because of the crowd whispering such things about him...the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him" is the true reason for the arrest and not the violation of a Sabbath Law. For Chrysostom this is "*a clear indication that the "violation of the Sabbath was a mere pretense? For here, though they had no fault to find with Him for anything said or done, they desired to take Him because of the multitude."*"²⁸⁷

ΚΑΙ ΥΠΑΓΩ... Verses 7:33-36

In an effort to silence Jesus from His public proclamations, the Pharisees seek to remove Him. The irony is that Jesus will be removed from them but in accordance with the Will of the Father (verse 7:33). What they fail to comprehend is the true significance of the judgement they bring upon themselves.

The Jews misunderstand the deeper implication of what Jesus means when He says

"I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

While this can be seen as a statement regarding the glorification and exaltation of Christ, (verse 12:23) Jesus is also telling the people that His departure is not an earthly departure to another geographic location (verse 7:35) but, according to Bultmann and Schnackenburg it is "the world in judgement."

"His departure from the world means that the world is judged, and this judgement will consist of the very fact that He is gone and therefore the time of revelation is past. They will long for revelation, but it will be too late [as] He will no longer be accessible to them." Bultmann, page 308

For unbelievers, this implies a threat that they will die in their sins (repeated in 8:21) falling wholly into the power of death. For believers Jesus' departure involves pain, but it leaves them with the certainty of faith that they will later follow Him to "where He is." Schnackenburg page 150

This is the faith that believers "*out of His fullness have all received...*" (verse 1:16) John is expressing the human condition of the fallen world and how salvation, through the belief in Him and "He who sent Me" is open to all believers but is also a calling to those who stand in unbelief that the threat of "Too Late!" is ever present.

Jesus will eventually depart from historical time but His message will be taken up by the Apostles and the community of faith so He will again and again be present in the preaching which proclaims Him. The Gospel, both in the Synoptics and John are full of these warnings to be vigilant for the coming of the Bridegroom; Luke 12:16-20, Mark 13:32-37 and of course the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).²⁸⁸

In fact, the theme of Holy Sunday, Monday and Tuesday speaks to the necessity to be watchful in the [Hymn of the Bridegroom](#).

²⁸⁷ Chrysostom, Homily on John, chapter 50

²⁸⁸ This parable is read during the Holy Unction Service on Holy Wednesday.

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Behold the Bridegroom comes in the midst of the night. And blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching. And again unworthy is he whom he shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be borne down with sleep, Lest thou be given over unto death, And lest thou be shut out from the kingdom.

End of the Feast verses 37-53

Verse 37 Now we come to the last day of the Festival which John records as the “τη **εσχατη** ημερα τη **μεγαλη** της εορτης.” But why the designation “greatest”? In Deut 16:13,15 the festival is spoken of lasting seven (7) days however an 8th day is recorded in Lev. 23:34-36. In either case there is no reference to this “last day” being the “greatest” day. The water drawing rites and the lighting of torches had already occurred (ref page 83) but there was on this day a procession of the priests seven times around the altar with water drawn from the pool of Siloam. For Chrysostom the meaning is found not in what the Jews do but what Jesus does.

*“But why has the Evangelist remarked that it was on the last day, that great day? For both the first day and the last were great, while the intermediate days they spent rather in enjoyment...But on the last day when they were returning home **He gives them supplies for their salvation**, and cries aloud, partly by this showing to us His boldness, and partly for the greatness of the multitude.”*²⁸⁹

While John does not record the people’s response certainly it is not beyond reason that Jesus standing and crying aloud (εκραξεν) during this solemn procession would have been “like a thunderclap from heaven.”²⁹⁰ This exclamation is the climatic end to Jesus’ ministry at the festival. Typically, Jesus has been presented as seated when He teaches or pronounces (John 4:6, 6:3, 8:2, Mark 4:1, Matt. 26:55) but now we have the dramatic impact of Jesus “ειστηκει” standing and proclaiming His message.

Throughout the festival He had been teaching and then debating with the Jewish leadership about His origin and His messiahship. Now, as He had done previously done with the Samaritan woman (chapter 4), the healing of the paralytic (chapter 5) and the miracle of the bread (chapter 6), Jesus again cries out to the people to comprehend His message and understand what He offers them.

Verses 37-38 John makes the clear connection between the symbolism of the water-drawing ceremony during the Festival and Jesus’ claim of being the “Living Water.” The water-drawing ceremony connects to both a remembrance of how God, through Moses, gave the people water from the rock at Horeb (Exod. 17:1-6)²⁹¹ and the hoped-for day of salvation of Israel foretold in Zechariah.

“A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem...On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem...and the Lord will be king over the whole earth.” (Zech. 14:1-9)

Thus, Jesus’ message of “*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink,*” would certainly resonate with the people at the Festival on both counts; the memory of the miracle at the rock of Horeb and the eschatological “living water.” Of course, His public pronouncement, and the people’s response²⁹² would certainly attract the critical eye of the Pharisees seeking to silence Jesus as a distractor (πλάνος) and rebel.

²⁸⁹ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Chapter 51

²⁹⁰ World Biblical Commentary, page 114

²⁹¹ Also see Psalm 78:15,16

²⁹² John 7:32, 44

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Verses 37 and 38 require a deeper exegesis of the meaning that John was relating to his audience; **a)** the source of the streams of living water, **b)** the Scripture that John refers to, and **c)** his use of the term *κοιλιας*.

a) From whom does the Living Streams of water flow?

Here is another example where the lack of punctuation in the early Scriptural texts causes an interpretive difficulty.

Depending on the placement of a period, the text of verses 37 and 38 can be read grammatically two ways, each of which can present a significantly different theological statement.

Option 1

Ο Ιησους και εκραξεν λεγων εαν τις διψα ερχεσθω προς με και πινετω **Ο ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΕΜΕ.**

Καθως ειπεν η γραφη ποταμοι εκ της κοιλιας αυτου ρευσουσιν υδατος ζωντος

Option 1 places the phrase *ο πιστευων εις εμε* as belonging to the first part of verse 37 so that Jesus is the source of the living water. Punctuated this way the translation reads,

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink, whoever believes in me. As Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from Him.”

Jesus is both the Source of living water from Whom living water will flow to those who believe.

Most modern commentators take this view, to include Schnackenburg and Bultmann.²⁹³ Parallels can be drawn from chapter 4 where Jesus is clearly the source from which the living water flows.

²⁹³ Schnackenburg, 154 and Bultmann 303

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Option 2

Ο Ιησους και εκραξεν λεγων εαν τις διψα ερχεσθω προς με και πινετω. Ο **πιστευων εις εμε** καθως ειπεν η γραφη ποταμοι εκ της κοιλιας αυτου ρευσουσιν υδατος ζωντος.

Option 2 places the phrase ο πιστευων εις εμε as belonging to verse 38 so that it is from the believer that the living water flows. Punctuated this way the translation reads,

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, As Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from him.”

In this case the living water flows from those who believe in Christ. While all of the Patristic Fathers are in agreement that Jesus is the Source of the living water, the majority of the Eastern Patristic Fathers such as Cyril, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen and Chrysostom, as well as the Western Fathers, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine see the believer as where the living waters flows²⁹⁴.

“He [John] calls that living [water] which ever works; for the grace of the Spirit, when it has entered into the mind and has been established, springs up more than any fountain, fails not, becomes not empty...He has represented its abundance by the expression, springing. And one may clearly perceive what is meant, if he will consider the wisdom of Stephen, the tongue of Peter, the vehemence of Paul...”

Chrysostom, Homily 51, Gospel of John

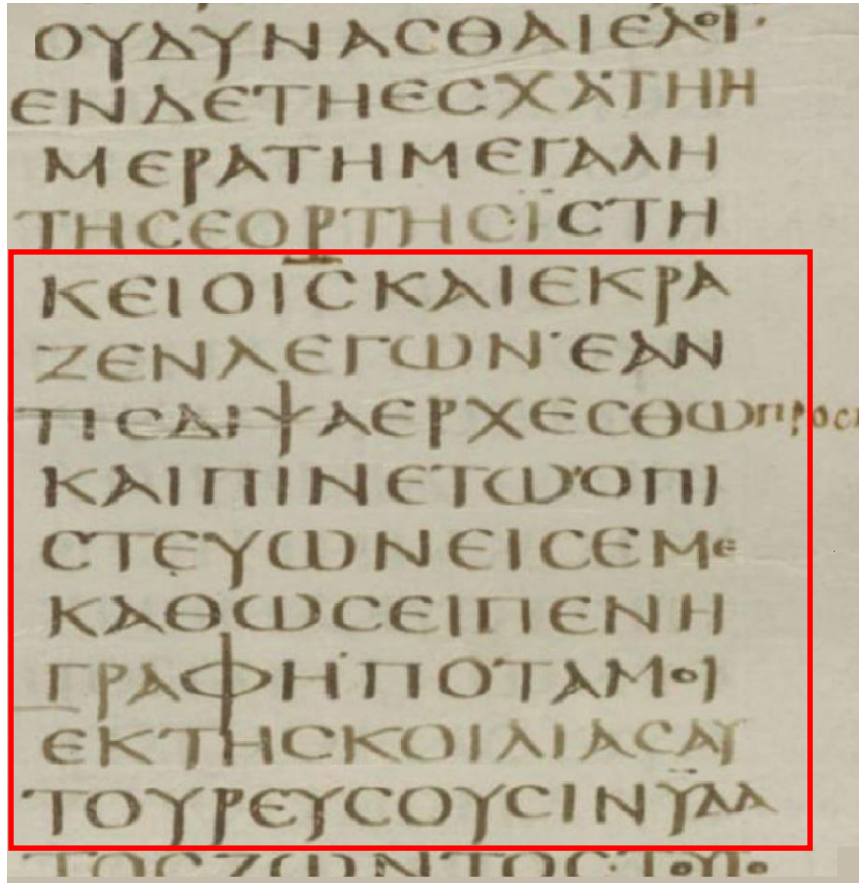
The Patristic Fathers, through the words of St. Paul, also saw Jesus as the rock from which the living water saved the people in the time of Moses.²⁹⁵

“...so that we are happy to die for the name of the good Rock, which causes living water to burst forth for the hearts of those who by Him have loved the Father of all.”

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 114

The Gnostics used Origen’s claim that the believer, having obtained this living water (which in their view is the “γνώσις” or secret knowledge), was now able to pass on this knowledge to other seekers of the truth.

b) “...as Scripture has said...”



²⁹⁴ Farley, The Gospel of John, 140

²⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 10:4

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In verse 38 John states that Jesus' living water dialogue is found in Scripture, however there is no Scriptural passage where these direct statements are found. Rather this is another example of John's literary practice of either

a) using the singular "ἡ γραφή" to refer to a combination of Scriptural passages such as Isaiah 12:3, 44:3, Zech. 14:8, Ezekiel 47:1 and Proverbs 18:4.

b) John's practice of a liberal rendering of Scriptural passages such as John 6:45.

Here John, as he does throughout his Gospel, is referring to the "theme" of the Scriptural passages rather than direct writing of Scripture²⁹⁶. John knows that his audience will relate Jesus' statements of living water to the abundant OT references to living water, that was historically salvific for the Jews and of its thematic pointing to the Messianic Age. John wants to be sure that the reader fully comprehends that the source of living water as referenced in the OT, both historic and prophetic, point directly to Jesus, as the Christ in Whom the hopes of Israel are fulfilled. The water-drawing festival which was symbolic of the blessing of the waters in the final days of the messianic age is now taken over by Jesus, Who is the giver of life and the giver of the Spirit²⁹⁷ and through Whom is set an end of the Jewish cult²⁹⁸.

c) "...εκ της κοιλίας αυτου..."

In the NT the word κοιλία typically has a negative connotation as evident in both the Gospels and in the writings of St. Paul (Matt. 15:17, Mark 7:19, 1 Cor. 6:13). In patristic writing κοιλία is often synonymous with καρδια. There is the suggestion that since John wrote his gospel long after Jesus' resurrection that his readers would connect the word κοιλία with the events at the crucifixion when the Roman soldier pierced His side with the lance "...bringing a sudden flow of blood and water."

Verse 7:39 Jesus and the receipt of the Holy Spirit

By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

With the verse John connects the "living water" with Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit that He will give after His glorification. The promise of living water is now realized as that which will be received by "ο πιστευων εις εμε" and fulfilled later in the sacramental life of the Church after Jesus ascends to His heavenly Father.

Verse 7:40-43 Is Jesus the Messiah Promised by Scripture?

²⁹⁶ Farley, 140

²⁹⁷ John 7:39

²⁹⁸ Bultmann, 305

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John records the reaction of the people to Jesus' pronouncement of Himself as the living water and of His sending of the Holy Spirit. As it was at the beginning of the Festival, their reaction is similar; both favorable and hostile leading to a $\sigma\chi\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ εν τω οχλω²⁹⁹. Unlike the earlier generic phrase "He is a good man." (verse 7:12) they describe Jesus in more precise terms. Some call Him prophet and others call Him Messiah. Still others, such as the Pharisees reject both of these titles on the basis of Jesus not meeting the [requirements of a Jewish Messiah](#). As Bultmann notes,

*Both titles refer to the eschatological bringer of salvation and the two-fold statement serves only to illustrate the uncertainty of the Messianic doctrine [of the Jews].*³⁰⁰

From Where is the Messiah to Come?

In verses 7:42,52 and 1:46 there is a controversy regarding the origin of the Messiah. Some say from Galilee, others say Nazareth and still others say Bethlehem.

Galilee

Of the three possible origins this is Biblically the most unlikely. Even though Jesus visited Galilee several times during His ministry, the low opinion of the Galilean region by the Jewish leadership, at the time of Jesus, prevented any thought of Galilee as the birthplace of the Messiah.

This was certainly supported in the scathing words of the Pharisees to Nicodemus (verse 7:52) along with several other differences.

1. Racially the area had a mixed population following the Assyrian conquest in the 8th century which spoke to their lack of purity as part of those "*consecrated to Adonai.*" (Deut. 7:6)
2. Culturally the Galileans were felt to have been overly influenced by the Hellenic culture.
3. Religiously it was felt that the Galileans were not as ritually observant of Torah Law as was the Southern Kingdom near Jerusalem.

Nazareth, lying in the proximity of Galilee, was also a possibility since Jesus spent His childhood there for Joseph, fearful of Herod's decree "*withdrew...and lived in a town called Nazareth*" (Matt2:22). This was also the title that was placed over the crucified Christ, "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." (John 19:19)

Being in the region of Galilee, however Nazareth shared in the less than favorable opinion as the origin of the Messiah, as is evident from Nathaniel's comment to Philip about Jesus, saying, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*"

In the previous verse Philip states "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote." While there are many references to Nazareth in the New Testament, there is no reference in Hebrew Scriptures to either Nazareth being the birthplace of the Messiah or even the name "Nazareth."



²⁹⁹ John 7:43

³⁰⁰ Bultmann, 305

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Partly this association comes out of the idea that Nazareth is formed from the Hebrew root נָצַר from which is also the words “Nazar” meaning to protect or guard and “Netzer” meaning a “branch.” From this second meaning comes the idea that Jesus is from Nazareth thus fulfilling Isaiah’s prophesy, “A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse [King David’s father], and a branch [netzer] from his roots will bear fruit.” (Isaiah. 11:1)

Bethlehem has the strongest potential to make a case for the birthplace of the expected Messiah as God made a covenant with King David saying,

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever³⁰¹.”

The covenant is referenced by the prophet Micah who prophesized “And you, בְּיַתְּלֵחִם אֶפְרַתָּה (Bethlehem Ephrathah³⁰²) should have been the lowest of the clans of Judah for from you [he] shall emerge for Me, to be a ruler over Israel... whence David was from...” (Micah 5:2)

David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse.³⁰³ Bethlehem was known as the City of David and Luke also records that “Joseph [and his family] went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.”³⁰⁴

In Matthew, when Herod inquired about the birthplace of the Messiah,³⁰⁵ the Magi answered “In Bethlehem of Judea” and then quoted from Micah’s prophesy.

Does John Know Jesus’ Birthplace?

John’s silence regarding his opinion about the earthly birthplace of Jesus has been interpreted differently. For Bultmann, “...the Evangelist knows nothing or wants to know nothing of the birth in Bethlehem.” For Schnackenburg and Beasley-Murray the evidence of the Gospel does not support this. Instead, they believe that the Evangelist would not have dismissed so easily an objection (by the Pharisees) that was formulated on the basis of Scripture. Rather they feel that John’s theology was not concerned with Jesus’ earthly origin but only His heavenly origin (ref. 7:28)³⁰⁶

Verse 7:44-52

After all of the “signs” that Jesus has performed, His miraculous teachings, and His presence, it was still not enough for the people to understand and belief who Jesus was and did not end the division among the people. This division, as it did earlier at the beginning of the festival (7:12-13) demonstrated that *people confronted by God in Christ, as the “Word of Revelation” are not allowed to remain neutral.*³⁰⁷

Only faith in accepting Jesus as the God and the Christ can bring a person to the knowledge of how Jesus is Himself the end of the Jewish cult and the beginning of the Messianic Age that is willed by the Father.

Verse 7:44

³⁰¹ 2 Samuel 7:12-16

³⁰² Ephrathah is another name for Bethlehem. Ref Gen. 48.7

³⁰³ 1 Samuel 17:12

³⁰⁴ Luke 2:4

³⁰⁵ Matt 2:6

³⁰⁶ Schnackenburg Vol.2, pages 158-159 and Beasley-Murray, page 118

³⁰⁷ Beasley-Murray, page 119

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This verse is the continuation of verse 7:32 when the chief priests and the Pharisees sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. Verse 7:44 is the result of that; *some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on Him* and is the transition to the next scene. The Johannian [spiral movement](#) reappears as the people recede and the focus is now on the soldiers and their interaction with the Pharisees, after which the soldiers recede and the focus shifts to Nicodemus and the Pharisees.

Verse 7:45-49 Soldiers and the Pharisees

The soldiers return from their task issued by the Jewish leadership empty-handed. Their response for failing to return with Jesus should not be seen as one of “external difficulty” meaning that the crowds prevented them from seizing Jesus or that He slipped away, but the *“impression made on them [soldiers] by Jesus and His words.* The use of the term ουδεποτε and the double use of ανθρωπος *“focuses attention on the extraordinary quality of this “Man” who by His words alone forces people to stop and think...and should not be understood as something psychologically but rather as the effect of the εξουσία (glory) of Jesus.”*³⁰⁸ And unlike the prior division among the crowd concerning Jesus here all of the soldiers (οι υπηρεται) were in agreement as to the power of Jesus and His words. Their act of defiance, as trained soldiers, to decide for themselves not to carry out their orders **and** the courage to return to their superiors and admit their unwillingness to accomplish their given task strongly speaks to the effect that Jesus had on those he encountered.

The Pharisees berate the soldiers saying that they, like the crowds, have been deceived ([πεπλανησθε](#)). In an attempt to invalidate the soldiers’ testimony concerning Jesus, the Pharisees state, “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No!” The falsity of their statement is revealed by the irony of the very next verse (classic of the Johannian style) as one of their own will contradict them.

Verse 7:50-52 Nicodemus and the Pharisees

As the soldiers recede from the text, Nicodemus again reappears (3:1-2) seemingly to defend Jesus and speak against the call for Jesus’ arrest. Nicodemus, is a recognized leader and teacher who visited Jesus addressing Him as Rabbi and acknowledging that *“...we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with Him.”* (John 3:1-2) The Pharisees biting response to Nicodemus, one of their own, is two-fold, 1) a reprimand for questioning their authority, and 2) an accusation that Nicodemus, a recognized Teacher, is ignorant of Scripture.

While Nicodemus’ statement should not be taken as proof of his belief in who Jesus is for the Evangelist does not offer anything additional here that was present in Nicodemus’ [first encounter](#) with Jesus. However, Nicodemus coming to the defense of Jesus’ legal rights does at least indicate that Jesus had made an impression upon Him, similar to the impression made on the soldiers who were ordered to seize Him.

The point being made here is that Nicodemus’ statement, *“Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”*³⁰⁹ exposes the hardness of their hearts in that they, the teachers and upholders of the Law, were not concerned with rightful application of the Law but only sought to destroy Him (5:18, 7:1) This requirement for a fair and just application of the Law is especially critical in cases involving the death penalty.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Schnackenburg Vol.2, page 159

³⁰⁹ Ex. 23:1-3, Deut. 1:16-17 and 16:18-20

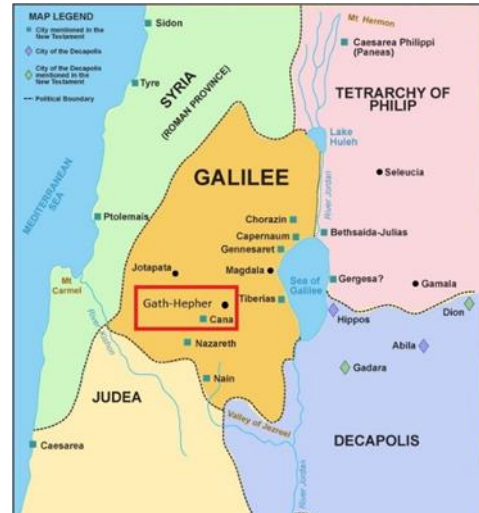
³¹⁰ Deut. 17:8-12

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The Pharisees' accusing Nicodemus of being a Galilean is not to be understood as a statement of his origin but more as a snide reaction to one who has disassociated himself from the united front of the Jewish leadership. The invoking of *being a Galilean* is more used as an insult and speaks to Jewish contempt for those from [Galilee](#).

Finally, the Pharisees statement in verse 7:52 "...ερευνησον και ιδε οτι προφητης εκ της Γαλιλαιας ουκ εγηγεραται" is also debatable. The lack of an article for the noun προφητης has been a source of difficulty in interpreting the meaning of what was meant by the Pharisees' statement.

If the text is read, "*No prophet has arisen out of Galilee*" this can be disputed since there were several prophets who scholars claim were from the region of Galilee, namely Micah, Elijah and Jonah. In truth, the only one from the actual region of Galilee was Jonah, who was from Gath Hopher, (II Kings 14:25). Micah and Elijah were from Moresheth-gath (Micah 1:1) and Gilead (I Kings 17:1) respectively, and both of these are far to the south of the region of Galilee.



If the text is read "*The prophet shall not arise out of Galilee*" which is supported by Schnackenburg and Metzger, then a proper reading is the insertion of "*ο προφητης*" so that the text read originally "*that **the** prophet is not to arise out of Galilee.*"³¹¹ This reading fits the context of this section much better since the debates throughout chapter 7 have been about whether Jesus is "The expected prophet and Messiah" foretold by Moses.

Chapter 8 Jesus as the Light of Life and Division Among the Jewish Elders (8:12-59)

Setting aside for the moment the interruption of *The Case of Adulterous Women* (verses 8:1-11) the theme for chapter 8 is a continuation of Jesus' proclamation in chapter 7. At the Festival Jesus declares that He is the "Living Water" and here in chapter 8 Jesus' proclaims that He is "the Light of the world" which has obvious connections with the [illumination displays](#) of the Festival.

With this theme of "light" the Evangelist's recalls the reader to his prologue where he stated that "in this Life is the *φως των ανθρωπων.*"³¹² Throughout John's Gospel Jesus, with His pronouncements of, "I am the bread of life" (6:35), I am the water of life (4:14, 7:38) and now "I am the light of the world (8:12), confirms what the evangelist said in his prologue, that Jesus, who is with God, is the source of Life. This pronouncement increases the divide and the hostility between Jesus and the Jewish leadership clearly evident in Jesus accusing the Pharisees more powerfully than in chapter 5,³¹³ as He accuses them of "*belonging to your father, the devil.*"

John knows that the boldness and exclusivity of this latest claim, as it did with His previous claims, would elicit a strong response from not only the Jewish leaders but also the people, to include John's readers, as they recall that "light" is a dominant theme in Judaism; a) God as the Creator of light (Gen 1:3-4), b) the

³¹¹ Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, United Bible Societies, page 219

³¹² John 1:4

³¹³ John 5:37-47

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Torah as light (Proverbs 6:23), c) the Temple menorah, and d) Man himself as a source of light (Proverbs 20:27)³¹⁴.

Also important to note is that just as in the Bread of Life discourses in chapter 6 where Jesus, not speaking in symbolic language, states that His flesh is the bread “*which I will give for the life of the world. And whoever eats this bread will live forever.*” Jesus, here in chapter 8, makes the exclusive claim that He literally is the light of the world³¹⁵. And that this light divides humanity into those who desire to live in the light and those who prefer darkness.³¹⁶

Jesus, as the [Revealer](#), reveals who is the true light, *but not the light that gives us the brightness by which we can light up those things in the world which we need and interest us, but the brightness in which [human] existence itself is illumined and comes to itself and comes to life. Jesus’ revelation speaks to Men who are not merely concerned with the individual problems of the world and their lives, but are concerned with themselves as a whole, with their own authenticity.*³¹⁷

This chapter will end with a dramatic “I AM” statement once again enforcing not only Jesus as Revealer but also linking what John stated in the opening verse of his prologue, “εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος.” [CONTINUATION LINK](#)

The Insertion of The Case of Adulterous Women - verses 8:1-11

Background

The Biblical Scholar Community is unanimous in that this passage does not belong to the original *fabric* of John’s Gospel. Metzger, states that “the evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the pericope of the adulteress is overwhelming.”³¹⁸ Aside from the literary styling differences, this pericope is omitted from all the known Greek manuscripts so that none of the Greek Patristic fathers include or cite it in their commentaries. However, there is no way to know if the absence of Greek commentary is due to being unaware of the existence of the pericope or whether it is due to the decision to pass by a controversial passage without comment.³¹⁹

The first known mention of this text is from Jerome who refers to it in his work, *Against the Pelagians*, written in 417AD, where Jerome lists a chain of Scriptural texts, taken from both the Old and New Testaments to show the universality of sin and thus to refute the Pelagian assertion that a man can be without sin if he wills.

*“None of the accusers of the woman taken in adultery were without sin. Christ wrote their names in the earth.”*³²⁰

³¹⁴ This would also have been very recognizable to the Hellenistic world who worshipped gods of light such as Apollo, Lampetia, Aurora, and Jupiter.

³¹⁵ Something He will later demonstrate at His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9)

³¹⁶ The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Prentice Hill, 1968, Pg. 965

³¹⁷ Bultmann, 342-3

³¹⁸ Metzger, page 219

³¹⁹ The first citing by a Greek Father is Euthymius Zigabenus in the 12th century

³²⁰ Jerome, *Against the Pelagians*, Book 2, § 17

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Among other Western Fathers, it is cited by Ambrose and Augustine, but not by earlier Western Fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian, and is absent from many Latin texts. The presence of asterisks or obeli (see figure x) in several of the early manuscripts would seem to indicate that the scribes were aware of the existence of the pericope.



Among the Greek Fathers, the monk Euthymius Zigabenus (12th century) is the first to provide commentary on this pericope.

*“But it is necessary to know that the things which are found from this place to that where it is said: Therefore, Jesus again spoke of these things saying, I am the light of the world: in the more exact copies, these are either not found, or marked with an obelus, because they seem illegitimate and added. And the argument for this is because Chrysostom makes no mention anywhere of this; but for us we must also declare that this, because it is not without usefulness, is the chapter on the woman taken in adultery, which is placed between these.”*³²¹

Metzger, speaking as a representative for the United Bible Society, states that this pericope is

“...obviously a piece of oral tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western church, and which was subsequently incorporated into various manuscripts at various places.”

While most manuscripts place this pericope after verse 7:52, others placed it after verse 7.36, and others after verse 7.44. Other manuscripts have it at the end of John’s gospel after verse 21:25 and some associate it with Luke’s Gospel, specifically verse 6:41.

Even with the acknowledgement that the pericope was not written by the hand of the Evangelist, Metzger feels it is none the less *“an authentic episode in the ministry of Jesus and that throughout the history of the church it has been held that, whoever wrote it, this story is authentic.”*

This authenticity has been deemed valid since this story *“is completely in character with what we know of our Lord and quite out of character with the stern discipline that came to be established in the developing Church.”*³²²

Why the Controversy?

In contrast to the previous positive commentary the absence of this pericope from early manuscripts has also been explained negatively as purposely excluded to avoid the impression that Christ had at worst sanctioned adultery, or at best remained silent. This claim is based on the grounds that,

- a) Jesus did not answer the Pharisees direct question of “...ουν τι λεγεις.” (What do You say?)
- b) Jesus did not κατακρινω (condemn) her nor does the text indicate that she received any penance for her actions
- c) Jesus’ only command to her is “και μηκετι αμαρτανε.” (...do not sin any more)

Patristic evidence that this passage was considered controversial in the Early Church is discernable from the comments by several of the Western Fathers, specifically Augustine and Ambrose.

³²¹ Euthymius Zigabenus, Pericope Adulterae

³²² Beasley-Murray, page 143

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“Certain persons of little faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given impunity in sinning, removed from their manuscripts the Lord’s act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if He who had said ‘sin no more’ had granted permission to sin.”

Augustine, De Adulterinis Conjugiis 2:6–7

“At the same time also the Gospel which has been covered, could produce extraordinary anxiety in the inexperienced, in which you have noticed an adulteress presented to Christ and also dismissed without condemnation.... How indeed could Christ err? It is not right that this should come into our mind.”

Ambrose, Defenses for David

In the Greek tradition, some argue that the silence of the Patristic Fathers does not necessarily imply that they did not know of this pericope, as part of the Gospel of John, but instead due to the rising ascetic tendencies, a moralistic prejudice caused them to omit it. Support for this can be seen in the Gospel reading for the Sunday of Pentecost which begins at verse 7:37-7:52 and then ends with verse 8:12, excluding all of 8:1-11.

Should This Passage Be Included in the Canon of Scripture? ³²³

There are many examples of texts such as apocryphal books, added verses, etc. and other material of a questionable nature character which the Church has omitted from the canon of Scripture, i.e. the Bible.

Determining the “canonicity” of a book or passage from Scripture is, at least partly, determined by a) the historical evidence and apostolic nature of the text, b) usefulness of the text among God’s people, c) the “orthodoxy of the text, and d) the Church’s obedience to and recognition of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. While it can be argued both positively and negatively in each case, the general consensus seems to be that,

“The 1300-year presence of this text, regardless of its placement in Scripture, and its public and congregational use by the Church becomes a kind of ecclesial argument, trusting in some limited capacity on the Spirit-guided decisions of the Church and, evidence of the providence of God. And in a real way the text-critical decision to show hesitancy regarding this passage is not muting providence but cooperating with it.” ³²⁴

So What is the Lesson of the Story of the Adulterous Woman?

Firstly, this pericope reveals the true purpose of the teachers and the Pharisees which was not about a true question regarding justice and mercy but about their using the adulterous woman as a pawn to force a particular response from Jesus so as to later to condemn Him.

Secondly, Jesus instructs us that we must not accuse others unless we first take the plank out of our eye, so that we can see more clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye,³²⁵ meaning that we thoroughly search our own hearts and minds before passing judgment.

Jesus, as the only sinless person, instead of condemning the woman looked ahead to His work on the cross and offered her mercy and life, both here on earth and, in His command to “go and sin no more,” eternal life. Thus, while Scripture does not forbid us from judging and admonishing sinful behavior, we must in a Christ-like manner, temper our judgement with mercy so as to not cause unnecessary division

³²³ For a concise treatment of the issue of the canonicity of the text of the Adulterous Woman see the article [Text-Criticism and the Pulpit: Should One Preach About the Woman Caught in Adultery?](#) by Timothy Miller.

³²⁴ Mickey Klink III, [Does the Passage Belong in the Bible? The Woman Caught in Adultery](#) (John 7:53-8:11), 2012

³²⁵ Luke 6:41 and Matt. 7:3

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or harm.³²⁶ Each of us must offer every possible opportunity to forgive and to reach out with the love of Christ, remembering that we all are sinners in need of the Savior.

Commentary on the Adulterous Woman -Verses 7:53-8:11

While many see this story in the class of controversial passages in the style of the Cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18) and Jesus' seeming disregard for Sabbath Law (John 5:16, Mark 3:4), this story of the adulterous woman can also be viewed as a pedagogical apothegm or dictum. The purpose being instructional rather than historical and was recorded by the Church as a reminder that the treatment of the sins of offenders must include equal amounts of discipline and mercy to receive back weak members of the community that have strayed.³²⁷

Verses 8:1-2

These verses set the scene with Jesus as the Teacher, with the typical formula, "...He sat down and began to teach them." John states the "...all the people came..." to also set the scene for the Pharisees to have an audience for their "testing" of the Teacher.

Verses 8:3-6a

Next we have a scene which have several glaring discrepancies. The Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman whom they "...εν μοιχεια κατελημμενην" apprehended in the act of adultery. John does not relate whether the woman was married or betrothed, however the punishment in either case was death (Deut. 22:22-24). However the Law prescribes that "...both of them must be taken to the gate and that they be stoned to death" and there is no mention made of the man. In this way the situation is more about testing Jesus so as to accuse Him rather than a sincere question of application of the Law.

Also, we do not know if the woman was on her way to the courts to be tried or was on the way to be executed. This becomes important in that if the woman was yet to be tried then does Jesus contradict application of Torah Law in favor of the mercy He has been preaching (Mark 10:2, Matt. 23:23). If the woman has already been judged, then Jesus' answer could be in direct violation of Jewish justice and an attack on the Law of Moses which was received from God. The accusers place Jesus squarely in a position believing that can force Him to render a decision by addressing Him as Διδασκαλε (Teacher).

Verse 8:6b

Jesus, however, does not answer their question but instead "bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger."

What Did Jesus Write in the Ground?

This certainly ranks as one of the chief mysteries in the New Testament. Many scholars have pondered over what Jesus wrote, not once, but twice in the ground with His finger. Were they actual words, symbols, or possibly just doodling?

Some offer the very simple explanation that this action is merely a delaying action on the part of Jesus as evidence of His refusal to be part of this "testing" (Matt. 21:23-27, 22:15-22)

Others see His action as a dramatic pause to compel the accusers to consider their own sins in what they are doing, especially since John mentions this particular activity (writing in the ground) twice.

³²⁶ Matt 18:15-17, 1 Tim 5:20, Titus 3:10

³²⁷ Schnackenburg, 169

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Since commentary by the Eastern Fathers has been silent we cannot tell what their interpretation was and so we only have commentary from the Western Fathers. Ambrose and Augustine proposed that Jesus was making reference to Jeremiah 17:13.

Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.

In Book II of his apology Against the Pelagians, Jerome referred to this saying,

None of the accusers of the woman taken in adultery were without sin. Christ wrote their names in the earth Jeremiah 17:13."

Verses 8:7-9

Initially this does not deter His accusers as they continued to question Him. Jesus now rises and provides an answer, but not to their direct question regarding a point of the Law but about their disregard for mercy in favor of justice. Jesus challenges them by commanding that "...any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

This saying by Jesus would have stirred a reminder in the woman's accusers of the fact that according to the Law, "*The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people.*"³²⁸

Once more Jesus kneels down to continue writing in the ground giving them more time to consider the severity of the action they are contemplating. Without making a ruling on the case they presented to Jesus, He was able to silence His accusers as they "one by one" all left until finally Jesus was "left alone with the woman." While this could have easily been the end of this passage, once again John's spiral movement take over and as the accusers fade, the spotlight is now focused on Jesus and the woman.

Verses 8:10-11

Jesus, who clearly has the authority to judge, as given to Him by the Father (John 5:22), only asks her the singular question, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Jesus' question should not be taken in the tone of mocking the accusers or a sense of satisfaction but as a question meant to elicit a response from the woman. The woman gives a slight hint of her knowledge of who stands before her when she answers with ουδεις κυριε (Not one, Lord)

Now the One who has the authority to invoke judgement upon her alleged crime offers mercy instead saying to her, "Then neither do I condemn you." This must not be watered down to be seen as "Jesus does not desire to condemn anyone" for throughout His ministry He has condemned many who have forgotten mercy and apply only rigid justice. This can be supported through Jesus' closing declaration to the woman saying "πορευου και μηκει αμαρτανε (Go now and sin no more)" which places upon her an obligation. She has been shown God's mercy and protection and must now honor that obligation.

This passage then is not to be read as Jesus commenting on the Law of Moses, nor on how the law should be applied by the godly or pious, but as a demonstration of God's Grace upon those who are most in need of His mercy and love. As St. Paul says throughout his epistles "We are no longer justified by the Law by justified by Grace." (Galatians 5:4)

Continuation of 8:12-59

³²⁸ Deut. 17:7

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Verse 8:12

As an aid to understanding the flow of the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, which consumes the remainder of Chapter 8, a breakdown of the sequence of events would be helpful.³²⁹

- 8:12-20 Jesus' claim to be the Light of the World and dispute with the unbelievers
- 8:21-29 Jesus' origin from above and their (Pharisees) origin from below
- 8:30-36 Jesus' freedom and their bondage
- 8:37-47 Descent from Abraham and their descent from the devil
- 8:48-59 Jesus' union with God and precedence over Abraham

Transition and Connection to Chapter 7

Before beginning an exegesis of the remainder of this chapter it is worthwhile to point out that support for section 8:1-11 as an insertion is to view what some believe is a smoother connection between verses 7:37-38 **and** verse 8:12 as opposed to the more abrupt connection between verses 7:53 and 8:12. Jesus' "I Am" statement in verse 8:12 could be seen as having been said during the "greatest day"³³⁰ of the festival. One can make the case that the connection with the pronouncements of Jesus at the close of the Festival; *I am the source of Living Water*, and verse 8:12 when He "*again spoke to the people*" proclaiming Himself as the source of true light flows more naturally than Jesus' encounter with the adulterous woman and then "again speaking to the people."

Traditional Order	Proposed Order
7:40 On hearing His words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." ⋮ 7:53 Then they all went home. <i>Note that Jesus is not present in this dialogue</i>	7:37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink." 7:38 Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."
<i>Then the sudden insertion of 8:1-12</i> 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to the people, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."	8:12 Again Jesus spoke to the people, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

In addition, if Jesus was teaching and speaking in the Temple Courts during the festival (7:28) then His second statement, I am the Light of the world, would have been more impactful to the crowds and the Pharisees. Especially since this would evoke the connection with their ancestors being led out of the darkness of slavery into the "Light" of the promised land. But here, unlike Moses as God's instrument of earthly salvation, here Jesus, as Divine Light, leads His followers to an eschatological and soteriological deliverance.

8:12-20 Jesus' claim to be the Light of the World and dispute with the unbelievers

³²⁹ Schnackenburg, 188

³³⁰ John 7:37

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In the opening verse (8:12) Jesus connects two important concepts, a) Himself as the Light of the world, and b) that following Him in faith leads one out of the darkness of this world.

One must be cautious however, that when reading John's recording of Jesus' words concerning light and dark, not to read the Gnostic idea of Dualism. Gnosticism is [metaphysical](#) in nature in that in Gnosticism the "revealer" frees people from the "world of darkness" and brings them into the "world of light."³³¹ In

contrast John presents a "dualism of choice" where each person must choose to belief in who Jesus is and how He offers salvation or not belief and live in darkness and death that belief in the world and the Law offers. And this choice "to walk in darkness" is not meant only in the ethical and moral sense but as a willing subjection to the dominion of death. This is the person who stumbles in the dark not knowing where he is going (John 11:10) and who, failing to belief in Jesus as the light, will "...indeed die in [their] sins."

Another reason to possibly view the verses 8:12 and 7:38 connected is that both statements reflect the same idea, the *personal* of Jesus; "I am" and the *relative*; the "one who believes in Him." Note that in each of the statements the believer in Christ is the physical witness of Christ's glory, both living water and light of life.³³²

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them (εκ της κοιλιας αυτου).

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (αλλ εξει το φως της ζωης).

8:13-18 Validity of Witnesses and Judgement

The Pharisees, lost in their darkness, now argue against Jesus' words by referring again to the Law (recall the discussion from [verses 5:31-47](#)). The Pharisees seemingly present a clever challenge by their formal objection to Jesus' testimony. And it seems as if Jesus does contradict His earlier statement, "*If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.*" However here Jesus clarifies the validity of His testimony through His origin which is from the Father. The rule of law in Deuteronomy refers to human witness and here Jesus does not offer witness regarding His human self, but testifies concerning Himself, *as God Who is able, without any departure from truth, to testify concerning Himself.*³³³

John clearly enlightens explanation of the validity of Jesus' testimony from chapter 5. Jesus states that He "*testifies on His own behalf*" "*because I know where I come from.*" But as God's representative (the Revealer) Jesus can be distinguished from "*my other witness [who] is the Father, who sent me.*"

With regards to Jesus' statement on judgement, for Bultmann Jesus' statement "*I pass judgment on no one*" speaks to the comparison between the human standard which judges according to what someone can outwardly see and observe (7:24). Since Jesus does not judge in this manner His statement can be seen as true.³³⁴

³³¹ The idea of "freedom" will be expanded later in 8:31-38

³³² The Gospel According to John, Dr. Campbell Morgan, page 126

³³³ The Meyer's Commentary. Also see Farley, page 151-2

³³⁴ Bultmann, page 281

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We also see in verse 16 John's use of the literary technique of the negative/positive and if/then clause to clarify and reinforce Jesus' statement about His authority to judge.

I judge no one (negative)

My judgement is true (αληθης εστιν) Positive/then

But (δε) if I judge (if)

Note the use of the connector "δε" to make an emphatic contrast to what he has just said.³³⁵ Here John returns the reader to the reality that was presented in chapter 5 with regards to judgment, that the individual, through his belief or unbelief will subject themselves to His judgement. (5:29-30) and that His decisions "...αληθης εστιν..." (8:16).

Matthew Poole summarizes this nicely.

"My testimony is not to be looked upon as a single testimony for myself; though I do judge, yet my judgment is true; for no act of mine is a single act: I and my Father are one; and what I do, my Father also doth, that sent me into the world as his ambassador. So as if the judgment of God be true, which you all own, grant, and acknowledge; then my judgment is true, because it is not mine only, but the judgment also of that God, whom you own, acknowledge, and worship, and who sent me into the world."

8:19 Where is your father?

When Jesus accuses the Pharisees of "...κατα την σαρκα κρινετε"³³⁶ the Pharisees, in yet another display of the Johannine use of misunderstanding, prove their misunderstanding with their follow-on question to Jesus asking Him "Where is your father?" The Pharisees assume that Jesus is referring to His earthly father which is further evidence that they fail to comprehend who Jesus is and therefore "do not know God." Chrysostom, as well as other Biblical scholars also note that the question put forth by the Pharisees is not "who" but "where." Thus they see the Pharisee's question as done in a derisive and mocking way since by this time the Pharisees have enough experience with Jesus to know the meaning of His frequent reference to 'Him that sent Me.'³³⁷

Jesus does not even deem them worthy of an answer to their question but rather offers stern accusations to the Jewish leadership whose proudest possession is the knowledge of God.³³⁸ The charge by Jesus that they "...do not know Me or My Father" is a denial of their knowledge of God because they have rejected He who reveals God and is One with God. John's added detail that Jesus made this accusation in the Temple," (verse 8:20) surely before a crowd of people makes Jesus' statement even more impactful and harsh.

According to Chrysostom Jesus "speaks all more clearly and more boldly; drawing His testimony from signs, and from His teaching of them that followed Him, and by the Cross being near. For, I know, He says, whence I come. This would not greatly affect them, but the adding, and where I go, would rather terrify

³³⁵ "δε" is used to indicate opposition and distinction and added to statements opposed to a preceding statement. It opposes persons to persons, thought or things previously mentioned usually with strong emphasis.

³³⁶ This is different from Jesus' words in 7:24, "...μη κρινετε κατ οψιν..." This is a judgement according to "appearances" whereas judgement "κατα την σαρκα" is that judgment by men not subject to the Holy Spirit and therefore motivated by unbelief. Beasley-Murray, page 129. Schnackenburg takes this further saying that the phrase "κατα την σαρκα" implies the sphere of existence of earthly man that is closed to the spiritual and the divine. Pg. 193

³³⁷ John 5:23-24; 5:30, 5:37-38, 6:38-40; 6:44, 7:16, 7:18, 7:28, 7:33

³³⁸ Schnackenburg, 195

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*them, since He was not to remain in death. But why said He not, I know that I am God, instead of, I know whence I come? He ever mingles lowly words with sublime, and even these He veils.”*³³⁹

8:21-29 Jesus: “I am from above and you are from below.”

Jesus’ words in verse 8:21 are reminiscent of His earlier, and almost identical statement in chapter 7 (verses 7:33-34) but now carry a much more ominous and accusatory tone. Here we have the “*other side*” of what Jesus told His believers earlier. Instead of “anyone who follows Me will have the Light of Life, Jesus tells them “*You will look for Me and you will die in your sins.*”

As with the Jews misunderstanding in chapter 7, “*Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks...*” we see the same earthly thinking here, “*Will he kill himself?*” The sin of suicide, in Judaism, would certainly result in that person being exiled to the world below demonstrating that their thinking is from “below”.³⁴⁰

Verse 8:23 In Jesus’ response to their question (verse 8:23) He clearly separates Himself from them by saying, “You are from below...You are of this world” against “I am from above...I am not of this world.”³⁴¹ This is exceedingly condemning since He not only admonishes the Jews for their earthly understanding of Him but even worse because they seek to drive Him below, *they show themselves to be creatures from below.*”³⁴²

Verse 8:24 Jesus continues to link sin with death as He did earlier in verse 8:21 except that now “sin is in the plural, “*αμαρτιας.*” Sin is “to walk in the dark” which is the domain of death and “to die” is to be subject to this realm. The ontological reality is physical death but the soteriological reality is that without belief in who Jesus is as Redeemer there is no hope for eternal life with God. John wants the reader to understand the clear linkage between *belief* and *sins*. Belief is the singular action that one takes to follow the One sent by God and walk in the Light of Life. Failure to perform this singular action results in the multiple “sins” causing the person to continue to walk in darkness in the “sphere of non-salvation.”³⁴³

Verse 8:25 Misunderstanding turns to contempt when the Jews ask Jesus, “*Who are You?*” The emphatic use of «*συ*» in the question “*συ τις ει*” could be read as a challenge, “*Who do you think you are to accuse us in this way.*”³⁴⁴

The Greek of Jesus’ answer «*την αρχην ο τι και λαλω υμιν* » is not necessarily clear and has been interpreted three ways.

- a) A simple answer to their question, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.” This is favored by Beasley-Murray and Dr. Morgan.

³³⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 52

³⁴⁰ Although Scripture does not specifically condemn suicide, the commandment against killing (Ex. 20:13) is commonly believed to include killing oneself. The Talmud does state that “For him who takes his own life with full knowledge of his action no (funeral) rites are to be observed.”

³⁴¹ The distinction between the “earthly” and the “heavenly” is common to both Christian and Jewish thought as well as in the Hellenistic world. The general meaning is that man can at most understand what is earthly but not what is heavenly unless it is revealed “from above.”

³⁴² Schnackenburg, 198

³⁴³ Schnackenburg, 197-8

³⁴⁴ Ref Acts 19:15

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- b) A response of exasperation translated as, *Why do I talk to you at all?! Since this is not the only time Jesus has exhibited frustration.*³⁴⁵ This is favored by the Eastern Fathers such as Chrysostom, Theophylactus and Cyril, as well as Schnackenburg, Bultmann, Meyers and Farley.
- c) The Gospel writer is emphasizing his point from the opening verse of his prologue. Thus, the translation is “from the beginning am I, that I may also speak to you.” This is favored by the Latin Fathers such as Augustine and Ambrose, and also Calvin.

Not the Heresy of Docetism! It should be noted here that Jesus’ statement of “*I am not of this world*” should not be taken as evidence to deny His humanity in the flesh, i.e. the heresy of Docetism³⁴⁶.

Chrysostom makes this clear when he comments saying,

Here again He speaks of their worldly and carnal imaginations, where it is clear that the, I am not of this world, does not mean that He had not taken upon Him flesh, but that He was far removed from their wickedness. For He even says that His disciples were not of the world John 15:19, yet they had flesh.³⁴⁷

Verse 8:26-29 The frustration of Jesus’ statement in verse 8:25b does not mean that the conversation has ended for in fact He has “*much to say in judgment of you.*” Verse 8:27 shows the Jews continue in their lack of understanding of either Jesus or the Father.³⁴⁸ Jesus, now in a veiled and mysterious statement, pronounces their judgement and the moment of their understanding.

“When you have **lifted up** (υψωσῆτε)³⁴⁹ the **Son of Man**³⁵⁰, **then you will know that I am He** and that I do nothing on my own but speak that which the Father has taught me.”

The implications of the title, Son of Man, is known historically to the Jews as both He who brings salvation and the eschatological Judge. However, in another case of Johannine irony the double meaning of the term the υψωσῆτε is not yet understood by the Jews. They will literally “lift up” Jesus on the cross but in doing so it is in His crucifixion that Jesus will be “exalted” to His heavenly glory as the Son of Man. And through their lifting up of the Messiah they receive judgement upon themselves. For those who believe in and understand who Jesus is, they shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life. (8:12). To those who do not believe, then Jesus is the Judge harkening the reader back to Jesus’ earlier statement, “*..you will die in your sin*” (8:21).

³⁴⁵ Jesus has several of these moments of frustration both with the people and His disciples. Recall Mark 9:19 and Matthew 16:7-9

³⁴⁶ [Docetism](#) is a 2nd century dualistic heresy which, similar to Gnosticism, held that matter was evil and the spirit good and claimed that salvation was attained only through special knowledge, or gnosis. The word comes from the Greek δοκέω, meaning to seem or appear.” Docetism asserted that Christ was born without any participation of matter and that all the acts and sufferings of His life, including the Crucifixion, were mere appearances and thus denied Christ’s bodily Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. This heresy was present during Apostolic times as evident by warnings from the apostles to avoid this particular heresy. (2 John 1:7)

³⁴⁷ Chrysostom Homily 53 on Gospel of John

³⁴⁸ This is somewhat evident in verse 8:19 when the Jews ask Jesus, “*Where is Your Father?*”

³⁴⁹ Note that the word υψωσῆτε can also have the connotation of “to exalt.” Ref Matt 23:12 and Luke 8:14

³⁵⁰ The title “Son of Man” (see also verse 1:51) is a Messianic title. In Old Testament prophesy **כִּבְרֵי אֱנוֹשׁ** (one like the son of man) would usher in the Kingdom of God (Dan 7:13,14). In Gen 28:12-15 Jacob dreamed of a ladder connecting heaven and earth upon which the angels of God were ascending and descending. In the Orthodox understanding the Gospel writer John (verse 1:51) confirms that this “ladder” is Jesus; “*Very truly I tell you that you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on (ἐπι) the Son of Man.*”

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8:30-36 Jesus offer freedom from their bondage

Verse 8:30-31 John ends the dialogue with “...many believed in Him.”³⁵¹ However, without offering any details that would indicate an improper belief on the part of the Jews, Jesus’ tone takes on a harsh accusatory tone calling these “believers” **slaves to sin** (8:34), **murderers** (8:37,40) and “...**belonging to your father, the devil.**” So how do we reconcile these harsh words to those who claim to believe in Jesus. Chrysostom offers the following explanation saying,

“They believed then, yet not as they ought, but carelessly and as it were by chance, being pleased and refreshed by the humility of the words. For that they had not perfect faith the Evangelist shows by their speeches after this, in which they insult Him again. And that these are the very same persons he has declared by saying, “...If you continue in My word.”

Chrysostom’s commentary speaks to a faith which is impressed by the spoken word but falls apart when they fail to recognize that they are slaves to sin and the world (as we will see in the successive continuing dialogue). These Jews, like the many thousands of Jews later believed, **but** were “...zealous for the law.”³⁵²

Jesus then speaks of the character of true discipleship which is to steadfastly “...remain in my word, (μεινητε εν τω λογω τω εμω) *for then you are really my disciples.*” This μεινητε implies a constant devotion and steadfast determination to live in the word of Christ. This faith that is anchored in what can be seen and this devotion in the Person of Christ are reminiscent of the types of faith in the Parable of the Sower.

The many who believed in Him are akin to “...the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”³⁵³

Those exhibiting devotion and steadfast determination to live in the word of Christ are the “seed falling on good soil and are those who hears the Word and understand it. These are the ones who produces a crop...”

Verse 8:32 *Then you will know the Αλήθεια (Truth), and the Truth will set you free.*

John’s repeated use of the verb γινώσκω together with πιστεύω is meant to emphasize the important relationship between the two words. For John, Γνώσις is not to be understood in the classic Greek sense of Θεωρειν. Greek philosophy saw the essential change in Man, (i.e. his attitude towards the divine), is brought about through γνώσις making it possible to ἀρώ (see) God. This concept is evident in the root of Θεωρειν which is Θεος. For the Greeks, contemplation of God is the way in which Man should seek to be like the immortals (what the Orthodox would refer to as Θεώσις), and the divine is revealed in this contemplation. Thus, contemplation takes on the Gnostic idea that *knowledge of God’s Truth* is an “object” which can be possessed. Christianity rejects this idea asserting that the knowledge of God’s “Truth” can only be “seen” through faith in the living Word (Christ). In Farley’s words, “Study of the Law could not effect inner transformation.”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ John uses this phrase several times in his Gospel. See 2:23, 4:41, 11:45

³⁵² Acts 21:20

³⁵³ Matt. 13:19-21

³⁵⁴ Farley, 158

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In this way Orthodoxy is not a dogmatically focused “thinking” about God but is an ontological submission in faith to the Truth that is the living God. Orthodox worship in its fullness demands experiential participation not only with the mind (hearing the Gospel) but also worship (Liturgy) and a physical “being in Christ” through Holy Communion. For Orthodoxy this is what distinguishes “eternal life” from temporal worldly life which only leads to death.

Verse 8:33-36 Verse 33 is one of the most profound of the Johannian misunderstanding, as it speaks of misunderstanding both from a Jewish and philosophical sense.

For Jews freedom was granted by God through Moses and thus understood in a worldly sense. The Jews, in their Midrashic interpretation, take Jesus’ promise of being set free as an insult, evident in their answer to Him, “*We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?*”

Philosophically, freedom is obtained by humanity’s search for intellectual, moral and eternal truth sought by philosophers like Socrates and Plato.

However, freedom as a divine gift, as Jesus stated earlier, liberates Man from the slavery of sin, death and the darkness of an existence separate from God. For the Gospel writer true freedom is recognition of the Person of Jesus as the Ultimate Redeemer sent by God the Father to humanity to redeem those who remain in Him and are His disciples. (8:31)

In verse 8:34 Jesus explains what He said in 8:32, “*...truth shall make you free.*” There is a slavery from which Abraham’s descendants are not exempt and which the merits of Abraham cannot affect. Unlike external slavery from which Moses was the redeemer, the inward slavery (bondage to sin) is rooted in a person’s relationship with God and liberation from that slavery can only come from One who is not subject to sin, Jesus.

Notice again the singular form of the word “sin” in Jesus’ statement “*...δουλος εστιν της αμαρτιας.*”³⁵⁵ Jesus here, as before, is speaking of sin, not in terms of sins of passion, but as a persistence of human willfulness...and attitude of hostility towards God...the One who tells the Truth which He has heard from God [the Father].³⁵⁶

In Judaism, the idea of becoming a “slave to sin” is a very real concept and the dangers of which are boldly highlighted by God Himself.

“But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching (like a beast) at your door; it desires to have you, but you must overpower it.” Gen 4:7

In 8:35 Jesus now shifts to using a metaphor to highlight the imagery of slavery in a parable easily recognizable to the people of Jesus’ time as well as those of John’s. The slave, as unfree, does not have a permanent home and thus “*does not abide in the house forever*” meaning he can be bought and sold, but a son, who can claim inheritance rights from the master of the house, “*abides to it forever.*”

In verse 8:36 the shift is made back to Jesus as the only Son with the house as the kingdom of heaven.

8:37-47 Descent from Abraham and their descent from the devil

³⁵⁵ This is singular genitive form of αμαρτία (sin)

³⁵⁶ Schnakenberg 208

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Jesus now returns to the claim of the Jews that “*Abraham is our father.*” Jesus acknowledges the point that the Jews are Abraham’s descendants (σπέρμα Αβραάμ) (8:37), **but are not Abraham’s children** (τεκνὰ του Αβραάμ) as they are trapped in their human darkness and do not comprehend the true meaning of the salvation history as understood by Abraham, the “*prototype and father of believers.*”³⁵⁷
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Chrysostom observes that Jesus’ teaching is for the Jews not to place their hope of salvation in being of the race of Abraham; “Gently and by little does He expel them from that relationship, teaching them not to be high-minded because of it. For as freedom and bondage depend on men’s actions, so also does relationship.”³⁵⁹

The evidence of this is Jesus’ next statement, “*you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.*” The Jews now add to their previous claim of being Abraham’s descendants saying that Abraham is also their father, claiming to follow the example he set.

Jesus challenges this new claim saying “If you were Abraham’s children then you would do the works (τὰ ἔργα του) that Abraham did.” But instead accuses them of doing the opposite, i.e. trying to kill Him.

Here we have echoes of John the Baptist’s warning to the Jewish leadership in Matthew.

But when [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. **And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’**” The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matthew 3:7-10

This Johannian portrait of Abraham is noticeably different from the picture painted by St. Paul. For Paul Abraham is the great Patriarch who was blessed by God for his righteousness and is the [patriarchal] father of many nations and of future believers.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. Roman 4:16

For John, Abraham’s importance is that he was a witness to the coming Christ, the Messiah and was a voice urging all, both Jew and Gentile to faith in Christ.

Verse 41-42 Notice the abrupt shift in the dialogue of the Jews, that is from Abraham as “our father” (verse 839) to God is our Father (verse 8:41). Add to this the beginning of their statement which takes on an accusatory tone, against Jesus “*We are not children εκ πορνειας* (of fornication)” possibly making reference to their knowledge of Jesus’ virgin birth.³⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that the term εκ πορνειας hearkens back to God’s description of the people of Israel in the Book of Hosea.

³⁵⁷ Schnakenberg 211

³⁵⁸ Galatians 3:6-9, Romans 4

³⁵⁹ Chrysostom, Gospel of John, Homily 54

³⁶⁰ This possibility was brought up as early as Origen

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“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for ἐκπορευούσα³⁶¹ this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.”

Once again Jesus does not respond to their accusation but response responds to their claim of God being their “Father” for if they believed that God were truly their Father, then they would do the works of Abraham and show love to He whose is sent by God. Jesus also makes the theological point stating “for I have proceeded forth (εξηλθον) and came from (ηκω) God.” In Greek εξηλθον speaks of Jesus’ coming into the world, having been sent by the Father, and ηκω speaks to the purpose of Jesus’ arrival; humanity’s restoration to God, i.e., salvation. (cf Revelation 2:25)

Notes on εξέρχομαι and εκπορεύομαι³⁶²

Both of these words have the meaning of “to go out” from, and are used interchangeably in the Gospels, however there can be some subtle differences when used or applied in specific passages. In the New Testament εκπορεύομαι almost always has the connotation of “to go forth from” either in a literal sense (Matt 20:29) or figuratively (Luke 4:37). The most well-known (and often controversial) use of εκπορεύομαι is in John 15:26 the Creed when speaking about the procession of the Holy Spirit, Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον...τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς *ἐκπορευόμενον*, resulting in the East-West controversy of the *Filioque*.

The word εξέρχομαι has more of a connotation of “to issue from.” This is the word used in Luke twice to describe the power of Jesus issuing forth from Him.

“...and the people all tried to touch him, because power ἐξήρχετο issued from Him and healing them all.” (Luke 6:19)

“But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has ἐξεληλυθίαν issued from me.” (Luke 8:46) or ἐξεληλυθίαν in Mark 5:30.

In this way εξέρχομαι is used to indicate something that has come to fulfillment according to a pre-arranged plan. In the case of John’s use of it here the purpose is Messianic.

Verse 43-45 Once again the Jews lack of understanding persists, so that Jesus once again chastises them for their inability to understand (cf 8:25). John’s use of the word λαλιάν (verse 8:43) emphasizes the Jews inability to hear and comprehend Jesus’ words, better translated as, “Why do you not understand the words I am speaking to you.” Or “Why do you not understand the manner in which I am speaking to you.”

The second half of Jesus’ rebuke of them, “οτι *ου δυνασθε ακουειν τον λογον τον εμον*” is the reason for their lack of understanding. Like Satan, their rigid attitude, in their case their rigid adherence to the Law of Moses and their religious traditions, has frozen their will against who Jesus is, as the Revealer, and the message He brings from God the Father. It is impossible to gain a real understanding of what someone is saying unless one has some relationship to the subject matter which [the person speaking] is trying to

³⁶¹ To give over to fornication

³⁶² Source: Kittel, footnote 227

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express. [The Jews] are prepared to hear only what they already know...and so to surrender all that they knew before, and with it their understanding of themselves, they cannot hear in this way.³⁶³

Here Jesus, as the Revealer, is calling on the Jews to decide to believe in He who was sent by the Father. This is the same [decision](#) that Jesus called His brothers and others to make at the Festival (cf 7:6-9)

And just as Satan's actions toward Adam and Eve in the Garden were lies to turn them away from their Creator, the Jews failure to believe the words of Jesus lead them to lie regarding their hidden desire to destroy (i.e. kill) Him (verse 8:40). Thus comes Jesus' conviction of them, "*You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.*" since they, in their unbelief, have chosen their origin and revealed their true motive. The Greek reveals Jesus' true description of the devil by alluding to his role from the beginning (απ αρχης - Gen 3:3-5, 1 John 3:8) as not just a murderer but ανθρωποκτόνος, the killer of humanity. And in order to free humanity from this killer, the Son of God has appeared, i.e. come forth, "to destroy the devil's work." 1 John 3:8

Jesus then contrasts Himself ("I speak the Truth, I am the...Truth" - 8:45, 14:6) against the devil ("...for there is no truth in him" 8:44.

NOTE: There should not be any attempt to envision from Jesus' statements that those who sin are therefore predestined to be children whose father is the devil. The division of children of the devil and children of God is based on each individual person's desires and actions. "*The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.*" (1 John 3:8)



Verse 46 "Can any of you convict me as guilty of sin?"

This verse must be approached carefully as it appears, on the surface to be a legitimate question from Jesus challenging the Jews to prove Him guilty. If this is then a question of specifics, that is "*Expose the sins have you seen Me commit?*" the Jews could point to the healing of the man on the Sabbath (5:16). If this is the case, then Jesus would be saying that man has the criterion by which to judge the Revealer and could also judge the "truth" Jesus was claiming to have. Certainly this cannot be, thus, Jesus' question is not meant to describe His personality and actions which could be judged according to human standards, (8:15) but speaks to His awareness that He is from God (8:42) and is in closest harmony with the Father.

In the second part of verse 8:46 John repeats the previous verse, "Why do you not believe Me?" to emphasize that they, the Jews, blinded by their father the devil, will not recognize Jesus' divine origin, nor His revelation and are therefore do not belong to God as did their father Abraham. Verse 47 answers the question of why the Jews do not believe and recognize Christ, recalling His words from verse 8:43, "Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

8:48-59 Jesus' precedence over Abraham and the Prophets

8:48-51 The Jews now counter Jesus' remarks against them by making two accusations, 1) "Aren't we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan" and 2) "that You are demon-possessed?"

You are a Samaritan! While some commentators see this as an insult, this statement by the Jews could also be viewed as a pronouncement of who they judge Jesus to be.³⁶⁴ For the Jews [Samaritans](#) were a)

³⁶³ Bultmann, 317

³⁶⁴ Beasley-Murray, 136 and Schnackenburg, 218. However, Chrysostom, Farley, and the Orthodox Study Bible view verse 8:48 as an insult.

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heretics, b) idolaters, and c) magicians who deceive the people. For the Jews Jesus' statements about being sent by God (7:16, 8:18) is similar to the Samaritan prophets who claimed to possess divine power having been sent by God. Jesus was also labeled as a [deceiver](#) (7:12). Add to this that Jesus, through His earlier statements, placed Himself above the righteous men of Israel's history namely Abraham (8:40) and Jacob (accusation by the Samaritan women - 4:12). Thus, with "human standards" of judgement (8:15), against these criteria, the Jews have judged Jesus as being guilty.

This accusation by the Jews is intensified by the additional statement that Jesus is also "demon-possessed," recalling what was recorded by Mark, "*And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'*"³⁶⁵ As John does not refer to this event, it could mean that John is emphasizing the direct connection made by the Jews between the Samaritan practice of magic and demon possession. And the charge of practicing magic was a great sin in Judaism carrying the penalty of death (Lev 19 and 20)

Jesus ignores the comment about being a Samaritan, but has a threefold response to their charge of demon possession.

- 1) Jesus clearly states, "I do not have a demon."
- 2) Jesus "honors" His Father by doing "*nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me... for I always do what pleases him.*" (cf. 8:28-29).
- 3) Jesus accuses the Jews of dishonoring Him by refusing to believe His word because they "do not belong to God." (8:47)

To this Jesus now adds the difficult reality that "*whoever keeps my word will never see death.*" This is not a new revelation but is what Jesus has already stated previously. (cf. John 3:16, 4:14, 5:24 and 6:54) The double emphasis of the importance of this statement is evident in the double amen and the requirement to "*keep my word.*"

NOTE: The word, in Greek, for "keep" is τηρήση, which is used extensively by John. For John however the sense is deeper than just duty or obligation, as the words "keep" or "obey" imply. Τηρήση has the sense of a responsibility to preserve, protect, and guard that which one believes and lives by, both physically (body) and mentally (soul). The following two Scriptural examples help to present the deeper sense of τηρήση.

In Luke when he speaks of the Virgin Mary, who upon hearing all the shepherds said concerning her child,

"η δε Μαριαμ παντα **συνετηρει** τα ρηματα ταυτα...εν τη καρδια αυτης" Luke 2:19

In Matthew when the rich man asked Jesus, "*Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?*" the answer Jesus gave was

"...ει δε θελεις εισελθειν εις την ζωην [αιωνιον] **τηρησον** τας εντολας [του Θεου]" Matt 19:17

8:52-53 In a continuation of misunderstanding, the Jews, hearing this humanly absurd statement by Jesus that those who keep His word "will never see death," make their final judgement, ***Now*** (*νυν*) *we know that You have a demon!*" In their literal interpretation of His words, clearly Jesus' statement is false since those who kept God's word, Abraham and the prophets, are long dead, forgetting the cases of Enoch and Elijah.

³⁶⁵ Mark 3:22

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Their response, “*Are you greater than our father Abraham?*” is now clearly reminiscent of the Samaritan woman’s question. However while she allowed herself to be drawn in slowly by Jesus’ words revealing His glory and His mission, the Jews here are increasingly drawn in the opposite direction pushing themselves further away from the truth of who Christ is and His mission.

These statements by Jesus now provoke a new question. The question the Jews asked earlier was a simple, *σὺ τίς εἶ* (Who are You? – 8:25). Having heard Jesus’ prior veiled blasphemous statements such as “I am with the Father who sent Me” (8:16), “I proceed from the Father” (8:42) and “Those who keep My words will avoid death” (8:50), now frame this new question in a different manner, “*τινα σεαυτον συ ποιεις*” that is, *Who do You make Yourself out to be?* This is more than just a question awaiting a logical answer, but is an attempt to push Jesus into open blasphemy.

8:54-59 Jesus’ response withdraws nothing He has said. He responds as He did after healing the paralytic, “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself...”³⁶⁶ Meaning that He cannot glorify Himself but is glorified by the Father who is with Him always. The Greek form *δοξαζων* is a present active tense indicating that the Father is glorifying Jesus now, at this moment and who bears witness to Jesus (8:18). This glorification of His Son will continue into the future but the focus here is to indicate the active presence of God the Father in the now.

Jesus then repeats His earlier accusations against the Jews that they do not recognize who Jesus is and are thus still blind to God the Father. Once again John is speaking to his readers who, as he knows, struggle with those who accuse the Early Christians of the same blasphemy.

Verse 8:56 Jesus now identifies Himself with Abraham in two-parts, **a)** Your father Abraham rejoiced (*ηγαλλιασατο*) at the thought of seeing **My** day, and **b)** he saw (*εωρακας*) it and was glad.”

- a) Jewish thought did allow that Abraham was given to see the future (cf. Gen 15:12-21) and this extended to Abraham having been given the “joy” of seeing the coming Messiah. What was offensive was Jesus’ statement that *He* was the Messiah that Abraham was rejoicing over. This first part of Jesus’ statement can be read as “Abraham exulted that God granted him the promise to see My (Jesus) day³⁶⁷.”
- b) Jesus’ next statement is in preparation for His final revelation with regards to this lengthy dialogue of revelation. The second part relates to a later vision where Abraham received the fulfillment of the promise and was witness to Jesus’ salvific and eschatological ministry.

For the Jews the absurdity of this latest statement by Jesus is evident in their response, “*You are not yet fifty years old and You have seen Abraham!*”³⁶⁸ While some of the Church Fathers and other scholars attempted to use this to make estimates of Jesus’ age, there is nothing to be gained by focusing on the specific age given as it is only meant to stress an age that clearly highlights the impossibility of Jesus possessing such knowledge of Abraham or having been present with him.

The Greek word *εωρακας* (root - *ὁράω*) can have the meaning of either an actual “seeing” or “experiencing” but can also mean “to see with the mind” or perceive. Thus the response of the Jews is one of incredulity since Jesus clearly could not have been physically present with Abraham, nor would His age or lack of

³⁶⁶ John 5:19

³⁶⁷ For Chrysostom, “My day” meant “...the day of the Crucifixion, which Abraham foreshadowed typically by the offering of the ram and of Isaac.”

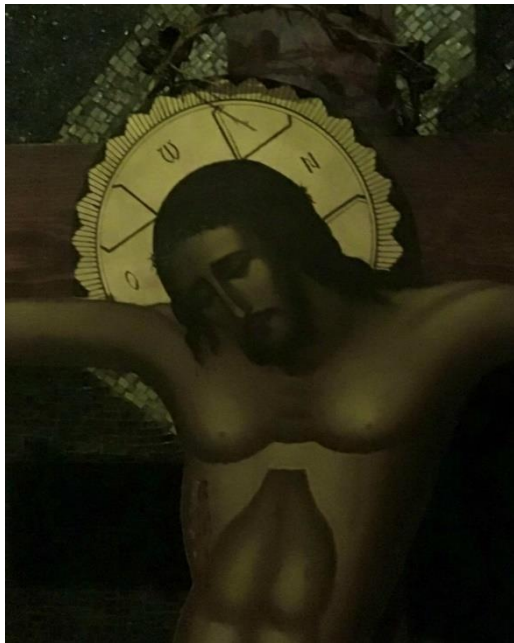
³⁶⁸ An alternate reading has been proposed as “*You are not yet fifty years old and Abraham has seen You!*”

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formal training allow for Him to have these mystical visions. Here the use of *εωρακας* suggests the longstanding relationship between Jesus and the patriarchs and prophets of Israel.

Verse 8:58 Jesus now testifies to His precedence over the patriarch Abraham with the theological statement of *“Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!”* With this statement there is no room for doubt that Jesus is making clear that He and God are one. This is much clearer than the “I am” statements of verses 8:24 and 8:28. This assertion by Jesus affirms that He is truly the revelation of God, and that He exists together with the Father and is the Revealer of the God of the nation of Israel, revealed to Moses. “Εγω Ειμι” (I am) is the name used only by the One True God (Ex 3:13-15) The Jews direct understanding of Jesus’ words are clearly indicated by their reaction, “they picked up stones to stone him.”

NOTE: This connection between what Jesus says here to the One true God is captured very distinctly in all proper Orthodox iconography of Jesus. In Exodus God answers Moses’ question regarding His name saying, “...λεγων Εγω Ειμι Ο Ων.” This is depicted in the halo surrounding Jesus’ head.³⁶⁹



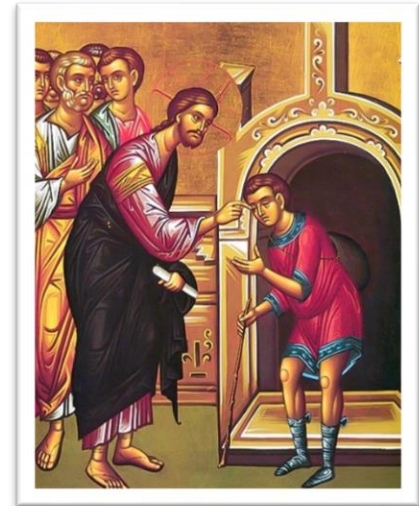
³⁶⁹ Farley, 167

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Chapter 9 Healing of the Man Born Blind and Jesus as the Light of the World

Central to this chapter is the healing miracle in this chapter and is the next “sign” in John’s gospel, along with the other signs (miracles) in chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6. However equally apparent is Jesus’ continuing to point out the spiritual blindness of the Jewish rulers and the addition of the faith of the man who was healed. As with the other miracles there are several important elements to observe.

- John’s use of the spiral movement. The chapter begins with Jesus and His disciples and then moves to Jesus and the blind man. Jesus and His disciples then recede as the Pharisees now come forward to engage with the now healed man. The chapter concludes with Jesus reappearing to engage both the man now healed and the Pharisees.
- John’s linking of the theological themes of chapters 8 and 9, that is Jesus as the light, 8:12 and 9:5 and will be restated in chapter 12.³⁷⁰
- A chronological continuation of the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees from the end of chapter 8, through chapter 9 which will grow increasingly hostile in later chapters.
- The elevation of the faith of the blind man as displayed in the conversion of the Samaritan woman.



The 6th Sunday after Holy Pascha is observed by the Orthodox Church as the Sunday of the Blind Man and commemorates this miracle of Christ healing the man who was blind since birth while in the Roman Catholic Church, this Gospel is traditionally read on the 4th Sunday of Lent.

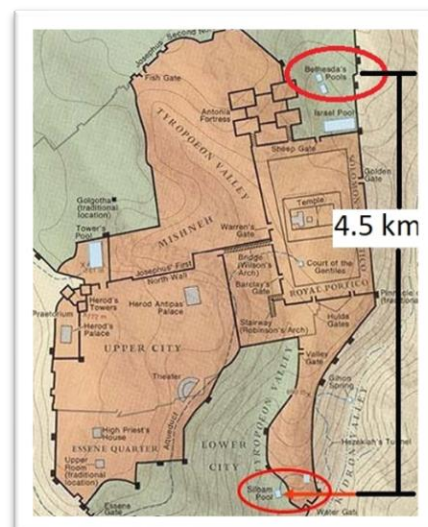
Is This Just a Retelling of the Blind Man Story in Mark?

In this miracle some view John as merely reproducing the account of the healing miracle presented in Mark 8:22-25 with the addition of stylistic details not only in the method of the healing but also adding dialogue between the Pharisees, the parents of the blind man, and Jesus. While there are several similarities such as the man being described as blind and a beggar and Jesus using spit (πτύσμα), the dissimilarities are more prominent.

In Mark’s account the beggar beseeched Jesus to heal Him whereas in John, Jesus takes the initiative to perform the healing without the blind man’s request. Mark makes no mention of the man being blind from birth and only spit is used in the healing. Also, there is no statement of faith in Mark’s account.

The Pools of Siloam and Bethesda

Also, the location of The Pools of Bethesda and Siloam are not the same. The Pool of Bethesda was located north of the



³⁷⁰ See also John’s reference to Jesus as the light in 1:9 and 3:19.

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temple complex, just outside the walls while the Pool of Siloam was located on the opposite side of the city, near the southeast corner but within the walls of Jerusalem separated by about 5km (3 miles). Both pools were constructed in the 8th century BC, most likely during the reign of King Hezekiah of Bethesda and are referenced in Scripture. (The Pool of Bethesda is referenced in 2 Kings 18:17 and Isaiah 36:2 and the Pool of Siloam is referenced in Isaiah 8:6 and Nehemiah 2:14 and 3:15). They were built originally as water sources³⁷¹ but were redesigned at the time of Herod the Great to be used by the general population as ritual purification baths for Judaism before going on to the Temple.

Jesus as Healer or Jesus as God?

A surface level reading of this miracle, as merely a retelling of Mark's account, presents a Jesus who merely alters how the [disabled](#) should be treated placing all the reader's attention on His commandment to "love one another." A deeper reading reveals John's true intent, as it is throughout his gospel, which is a continuous Christology of Jesus as One of the Holy Trinity who has power over Creation. John wants his readers to make the critical connection of Jesus as Revealer, Savior and God and not just another prophet in a long line of prophets. Evidence of this is in the opening verses of chapter 9 where Jesus once again proclaims that He is "the Light of the world" and at the end of the chapter warns that, "*For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.*"³⁷²

Many of the Church Fathers, East and West, understood this story of the Miracle of the Blind Man more universally as representative of the condition of Man before the coming of Christ. In his Sermon 135 against the Arians, Augustine says, "*... the whole world is blind. Therefore, Christ came to illuminate, since the devil had blinded us.* However we must be cautious to not reduce this miracle to only a spiritual metaphor, losing the all-important Johannian intent to provide witness of the historical Jesus who reveals Himself as truly the "I AM" and pre-existent Creator.

Chapter Structure Chapter 9 can be roughly divided as follows.

9:1-5 Introduction of the blind man, the disciples' question to Jesus and His answer.

9:6-7 Jesus performs the sign with a further instruction to complete the healing

Double Investigation of the Miracle

9:8-12 Neighbors' discussion with the now-cured man

9:13-34 The Pharisees investigate the healing

9:35-41 Jesus once again rebukes the Pharisees for their "blindness."

9:1-5 Introduction of the blind man and the disciples' question to Jesus.

The beginning of this chapter and the end of chapter 8 seem to be a connected transition into chapter 9 as the last verse of chapter 8 and the first verse of chapter 9 both contain the same verb παράγω. Also, the Temple area would have been a common place to encounter the lame and beggars. His identity as a beggar can be supported by the neighbors' statement in verse 9:8, "*Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?*"

³⁷¹ 2 Kings (4 Kingdoms) 20:20

³⁷² John 9:39

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Blindness in Judaism³⁷³ Unlike the deaf-mute, who is regarded in Jewish law as subnormal, the blind person is regarded as fully normal. The majority of legal and religious restrictions placed upon them are due to the limitations caused by this physical disability.³⁷⁴ These restrictions include performing sacrifices, approaching the altar as a priest or servicing as a judge, although many sages and rabbis were blind. In the 2nd century some rabbis thought that the blind were exempt from all religious obligations, but it was subsequently decided against this view. Blindness was seen as having either a physical or spiritual cause. Physical examples include old age (Isaac Gen. 27:1) or inflicted by someone (Samson Judges 16:21). Spiritual examples are those when God brings about the blindness, either directly (Elisha's request 2Kings 6:18) or by others for disregarding God's command (blinding of King Zedekiah, Jeremiah 39:7). Healings from disabilities were not unknown to the Jews, as recorded in the [Old Testament](#)³⁷⁵, but this case is unique in that *"Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind."*³⁷⁶

Lastly blindness is also prophetically indicative of the Messianic Era when God will open the eyes of the blind as prophesied by Isaiah

*"Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."*³⁷⁷

9:2,3 The Disciples Question Jesus Seeing the blind man, Jesus' disciples now ask Him the question that was debated throughout the ancient world, to include Judaism; what is the connection between sin and the person? And it is not without reason as they recalled Jesus' words to the paralytic he cured at the Pool, *"See, you are well again. Sin no more lest something worse happen to you"* inferring that *because of the sin of disobedience, infirmities have come upon men.*³⁷⁸

However, one must be cautious when interpreting the meaning behind the disciples' question to Jesus.

Did the man sin? The idea of sin before birth was a Hellenic influence on the Judaism of Jesus' time. The belief being that the soul was pre-existent and if it had committed sin in another world, it would be punished through a disability when it transmigrated into the new body, referred to as [metempsychosis](#). However, this teaching was not prominent in mainline Jewish thought and the disciples' profession as fishermen, would not have exposed them to this philosophical teaching of the Greeks.³⁷⁹

Cyril of Alexandria, in his [Commentary on John](#), argued against the pre-existent soul.

If souls were embodied for previous sins, and the nature of the body were invented as a species of punishment for them, how did the Savior profit us by abolishing death? How was not rather decay a mercy, destroying that which punished us, and putting an end to the wrath against us? Hence one might rather say that it were better to give thanks to decay

³⁷³ A detailed examination of blindness in the Ancient World is given by Ray McAllister in his paper Theology of Blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures, Andrews University, 2010

³⁷⁴ The connection with Lamentations 3:6, "He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead" meaning that the blind man is regarded as dead is of purely homiletic interest and has no practical application. [Jewish Virtual Library](#)

³⁷⁵ Gen 18:14, 1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4 and 5

³⁷⁶ John 9:32

³⁷⁷ Isaiah 35:5. See also 29:18 and 42:7

³⁷⁸ John 5:14, and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, Chapter 15

³⁷⁹ St. Theophylact of Nicomedia, *Commentary on John*

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than on the contrary to Him Who laid on us endless infliction through the resurrection of the dead. And yet we give thanks as freed from death and decay through Christ. Hence pre-existence is not of the nature of punishment to the soul of man.

While not a case of a pre-existent soul committing sin, there was rabbinical discussion about the possibility of a child sinning before his/her birth, i.e. in the womb. The story of Jacob and Esau struggling³⁸⁰ in the womb (Gen 25:22) is offered as an example.

Did his parents sin? The idea of the sins of the parents being borne by their children was based on God's decree upon Israel.

"I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God, recompensing the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation." (Ex 20:5)

St. Theophylact of Nicomedia cautions us that this is not a universal decree applying to all men at all times, but to those who came out of Egypt.

"The sins of your fathers (that is, the penalty for their sins,) will come upon you also, because you did not become better than they, but have committed the same, and even worse."

An example of this is the death of King Belshazzar and his kingdom for failing to give glory to God as did his father Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel, Chapter 5)

Additionally, God supersedes this commandment in Deuteronomy saying that *"Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin."* (Deut. 24:16)³⁸¹

What is Jesus' Answer?

Jesus dismisses the question in His statement, *"Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents"* negating the widespread belief of the connection between sin and infirmity. Rather than look for causes and assign judgement, Jesus wants the disciples to see opportunities for God to manifest His glory.³⁸² Torah Law could assign cause and pronounce judgement but was powerless to effect the cure. Jesus' answer rejects this juridical pronouncement.

So, what then is the reason? Jesus' answer is the same as it was for the other signs, the miracle of the wine (2:11) and the raising of Lazarus (11:40), that this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in Him. Chrysostom speaks of this when he says,

[Jesus] says not as acquitting them of sins, for He says not simply, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but adds, that he should have been born blind so that the Son of God should be glorified in him. For both this man has sinned and his parents, but his blindness proceeds not from that. And this He said, not signifying that though this man indeed was not in such case, ...since it cannot be that when one sins another should be punished.

Chrysostom, Homily 56, Gospel of John

³⁸⁰ The Hebrew word used here for "struggle" is $\gamma\alpha\tau$ which can also have the more violent connotation of bruise or crush.

³⁸¹ Ex. 20:5

³⁸² Farley, 170

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Ireanus goes further offering a reason for the man's blindness from birth.

"To that man who had been blind from his birth, He gave sight, not by means of a word, but by an outward action; doing this not without a purpose, or because it so happened, but that He might show forth the hand of God, that which at the beginning had formed Man... and that which the artificer, the Word, had omitted to form in the womb, [viz., the blind man's eyes], He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be manifested in him, in order that we might not be seeking out another hand by which Man was fashioned, nor another Father."

Ireanaus, Against the Heresies, Book 5, Chapter 15, §2

Chrysostom also adds that Christ was speaking of Himself when He said, *"That the glory of God might be manifested, for He spoke of Himself, not of the Father for His glory was already manifest."*

Punctuation Matters

As was seen [previously](#) the lack of punctuation in the ancient manuscripts can conceive different interpretations of what Scripture is saying. Here in verses 9:3 and 9:4 Campbell Morgan, in his Commentary on John, offers an interesting alternate interpretation through a shift in punctuation. As we have just seen, most texts punctuate this verse 9:3 so that it is one complete sentence indicating that the cause of the man's blindness is not sin but the opportunity for God's glory to be made manifest.

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Morgan suggests that the proper interpretation is found through the addition of a period and connects the second part of verse 9:3 with the first part of verse 9:4.

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus. But so that the works of God might be displayed in him we therefore are to do the works of Him who sent me as long as it is day.

For Morgan in the first sentence Jesus' is simply stating that blindness from birth is not the will of God. In the second sentence Jesus speaks to what His mission is and is not. Christ did not come to solve the problem of assigning judgment or to heal every infirmity. Christ's mission, while He is on earth (i.e., as long as it is day) is to remove the primal cause from which disabilities and diseases stem.

9:4 Who will do the works of God?

Depending on which text is read, Codex Sinaiticus (Greek) or the Codex Vercellensis (Latin), it is somewhat difficult to interpret who will do the works of God.

Codex Sinaiticus reads **εμε** δει εργαζεσθαι τα εργα του πεμψαντος με

Codex Vercellensis reads **ημας** δει εργαζεσθαι τα εργα του πεμψαντος με

According to Strong's Concordance «εμε» is the emphatic form of me or myself, while «ημας» is the plural case of εγω, that is "us" or "we." There is a different theological and a historical significance depending on which pronoun is used in Jesus' statement.

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Εμε The vast majority of ancient sources, such as Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and Theophylact, as well as the Orthodox Study Bible³⁸³, opt for this reading where Christ is the agent (singular) performing the works of the Father who sent Him (singular). Here the focus is on the present in that it is Jesus Himself who must do the works of Him who sent me. This singular «εμε» matches the singular «με» of the One who sent me. The singular εμε is also supported by the beginning of His statement, “*As long as it is day*” which the Fathers of the Church saw as representing the time that Jesus is present on earth accomplishing the will of the Father. Chrysostom’s commentary reflects this, “*While it is day, while men may believe in Me, while this life lasts, I must work.*” This translation would then also support Morgan’s translation of this verse since it is Jesus alone who “must do the works of Him who sent Me.”

Ημας The vast majority of modern sources, Metzger, Schnackenburg, Beasley-Murray, Nestle-Aland and Farley opt for this reading where Christ, *and His disciples*, are the agents (plural) performing the works of the Father who sent Him (singular). Here Jesus includes His disciples in the work to be done as they will inherit His works (εργα) after the Pentecost event and become witnesses and evangelizers of His work. Cyril of Alexandria supports this view when, in his commentary on John states,

“I deem it more becoming...in order to execute zealously God's commands, He has appointed us Apostles, to fulfil the works of the Apostleship. When the Lord numbers Himself with those who are sent, He enrolls Himself among those who ought to work...”

This plural reading also becomes an appeal from Jesus to His disciples to do whatever works of God have been entrusted to them in the face of human suffering and distress in spite of the hostility and persecution they will encounter.³⁸⁴

9:5 I Am the Light of the world

Jesus has used “light” in a spiritual sense prior to this, but now Jesus will literally accomplish what John said of Him in his prologue, that Jesus is “*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*” Notice that unlike the more universal statement in 8:12, here Jesus is making a concrete reference to His upcoming Passion, “*Night is coming...While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” This also is another validation that Jesus is obedient to the will of the Father by recognizing that He is subject to the “hour” that the Father has appointed for Him.

9:6-7 Jesus performs the miracle with a further instruction to complete the healing

9:6 Before diving into the miracle of the healing Chrysostom calls our attention to the subtle importance of noting every part of the New Testament text. At the beginning of verse 9:6, just prior to Jesus performing the miracle, John introduces the miracle with, “*After [Jesus] saying this...*”

*Those who...read must not pass by even any small portion of the words; and on this account we are bid to search the Scriptures, because most of the words, although at first sight easy, appear to have in their depth much hidden meaning. For observe...Having said these words, it says, He spat on the ground. What words? That the glory of God should be made manifest, and that, I must work the works of Him that sent Me.*³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Bultmann is also in the camp of εμε, but believes the original reading was altered to give the statement the character of a universally valid principle (for Christians) since it was thought offensive that the “night” should put an end to Jesus’ activity.

³⁸⁴ Schnackenburg, 241

³⁸⁵ Chrysostom Homily 57.1 on John

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Next, note that unlike the blind man's healing in Mark, there is no active request by the individual to be healed. In fact, there is no mention of Jesus addressing the man prior to performing the miracle (ref 5:6). Jesus takes the initiative and performs the healing using both spittle (πτύσμα) and clay (πηλον). Jesus' use of saliva would not have been seen as unorthodox or unique as the efficacy of saliva was well known in the Ancient World. What will prove significant is restoring eyesight to someone born blind.

Use of Saliva in the Ancient World

The healing properties of saliva were well known in the Ancient World attributed by several historical accounts. Pliny the Elder (24-79 AD), in [Book 28, Chapter 7](#) of his Natural History presented a number of instances of its use as a healing agent. He specifically commented on the use of saliva for ocular disorders, asserting that certain eye diseases could be remedied by daily application of "fasting spittle."

Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian (56-120 AD), in his book, *Histories*, recounts the story of the Emperor Vespasian using saliva to heal the blindness of one of his subjects.

In the months during which Vespasian was waiting at Alexandria ... One of the common people of Alexandria, well known for his blindness, threw himself at the Emperor's knees, and implored him with groans to heal his infirmity...He begged Vespasian that he would deign to moisten his cheeks and eye-balls with his spittle... Vespasian, supposing that all things were possible to his good fortune, and that nothing was any longer past belief, with a joyful countenance, amid the intense expectation of the multitude of bystanders, accomplished what was required...the light of day again shone upon the blind.

[Book IV, Chapter 81](#), *The Histories of Tacitus*

Use of saliva as a healing agent was also known among the Jews as the following Gemara commentary in the Talmud attests.

There was a certain man who came before Rabbi Hanina and said to him: I know that this man is a firstborn. Rabbi Hanina said to him: From where do you know? He said to Rabbi Hanina: Because when people would come before his father to obtain a cure for their ailing eyes, he would say to them: Go to my son Shikhhat, as he is a firstborn and his saliva heals this ailment...It is learned as a tradition that the saliva of a father's firstborn heals this ailment.³⁸⁶

Even if these accounts are untrue in demonstrating saliva as a cure for blindness, modern research has documented the healing properties of human saliva.

"Healthy human saliva possesses significant antimicrobial as well as wound healing properties. This innate ability of human saliva, ... suggests that salivary proteins can be further used for medicinal purposes."³⁸⁷

Why Spittle and Clay? ³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Due to the implied connection between the use of saliva and magic, later rabbis forbid the use of saliva in this manner.

³⁸⁷ Farid ul-Haq, *Antimicrobial and Wound Healing Properties of Human Saliva*, International Journal of Pharmacy and Life Sciences. 2016, 4911-4917

³⁸⁸ See also Daniel Frayer-Griggs article Spittle, Clay and Creation in John 9:6 and some Dead Sea Scrolls, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 132, No. 3, pp. 659-670, 2013

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Jesus using spit in the performance of His miracles is not uncommon in the New Testament as there are several recorded cases.³⁸⁹ However what is unique about John's reference is the use of *both* spit and earth (clay).

As was pointed out, one of the differences in John's account versus other accounts of healing is that clay is part of the healing remedy. The Holy Fathers viewed this addition of "earthly material" as an allusion to God's use of the earth in the creation of Man. (Gen 2:7)

וַיִּצֵץ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם מִן-הָאָדָמָה

Ground out of dust Man Elohim Yahweh Formed

Irenaeus, in his work *Against the Heresies*³⁹⁰, represents the generally agreed position of the Patristic Fathers.

"Now the work of God is the fashioning of man. For, as the Scripture says, He made [man] by a kind of process: And the Lord took clay from the earth and formed man. Wherefore also the Lord spat on the ground and made clay, and smeared it upon the eyes, pointing out the original fashioning [of man], how it was effected, and manifesting the hand of God to those who can understand by what [hand] man was formed out of the dust...And He, the very same who formed Adam at the beginning, with whom also the Father spoke, Let Us make man after Our image and likeness, revealed Himself in these last times to men, in the forming of visual organs for him who had been blind."

While the difference in the use of terms dust and clay seem like an exercise in semantics, there are many Biblical texts that portray God the Creator as a "potter who fashions the clay of creation."³⁹¹

Why not use water instead of spittle? Chrysostom addresses this question in the same manner he addressed the point of "filling the jars to the brim" in the Miracle at Cana. John wanted to be sure that the reader would not "ascribe anything to the fountain (i.e. Pool of Siloam), but that you might learn that the power proceeding from His mouth, the same both formed and opened the man's eyes. Then, to ensure that the healing might not seem to be of the earth, He bade him wash...sending him to Siloam."³⁹²

Jesus as Creator of Sabbath

Even so, modern scholarship disagrees with this connection between "dust" (χουσι) and clay (πηλον). Rather, they focus more on this being another instance of Jesus violating Sabbath Laws through the forming or kneading of the spit and clay mixture.

Recall that the Torah contains prohibitions against doing מלאכה (melachah) or "work," on the Sabbath. Another of the [39 general categories](#) of prohibited work on the Sabbath is any activity that joins small particles into one mass using liquid, (i.e. kneading). One clarification to kneading includes mixing sand or earth with liquid.

³⁸⁹ Mark 7:31-35, Mark 8:22:-25

³⁹⁰ Irenaeus, Book 5, Chapter 15

³⁹¹ Examples include Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, Jeremiah 18:6 and Romans 9:21.

³⁹² Chrysostom, Homily 57

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As the Creator of the Sabbath and thus Author of the Torah Laws, Jesus, as “Lord of the Sabbath”³⁹³ has the authority to overrule the Pharisees’ application of Sabbath traditions and regulations.

9:6 The Completion of the Miracle But the miracle is not complete as Jesus gives the man another instruction to complete the healing sending him to wash in the Pool of Siloam which the blind man does without seemingly without delay. In this event the Patristic Fathers and scholars have offered several theological comparisons.

1. Comparing Christ as the spiritual Siloam to Christ as the spiritual Rock of whom St. Paul said to the Corinthians, “*They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*”³⁹⁴
2. John’s addition of the translation of “Siloam” (ερμηνευεται απεσταλμενος) “to be sent” is an allegory for the reader to make the connection with Christ as the One *Who is sent* by the Father.³⁹⁵
3. Siloam was translated in the Septuagint for the Hebrew שִׁילֹחַ (Shiloh)³⁹⁶ thus identifying Jesus as the awaited messiah through a Messianic interpretation of Gen 49:10 “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the student of the law from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him will be a gathering of peoples.*”
4. The man washing in the Pool of Siloam as an antitype of Christian baptism connecting the healing of the man’s eyes with the salvific “healing” obtained through baptism into the Body of Christ.³⁹⁷

Regardless of the symbolism, the reality is that Christ, as the Light of the World, has give literal “light” to the formerly blind man demonstrating what He said to the people at the Feast of the Tabernacles; “*I Am the Light of the world, and he who follows me shall not walk in darkness...*”

Double Investigation of the Miracle

Now with the healing complete John shifts to the now-healed man’s encounters with both his neighbors (γειτονές) and the Pharisees.

9:8-12 The People Question the Man

Interestingly John does not record any excitement among the people concerning this healing in contrast to previous miracles such as the multiplication of the loaves (John 6:14) or Jesus’ knowledge during teaching (John 7:14-15). Instead, the focus was on confirming three facts.

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a) Who was healed? | “Is this the same man?” |
| b) How the healing happened? | “How were your eyes opened?” |
| c) From whom it came? | “Where is He?” |

In fact, Bultmann sees their reaction here and the reaction of the Pharisees to the paralytic in chapter 5 as stories which provide a historical commentary on the relationship of early Christian ideals to the hostile world, both Jewish and Roman, and serve as a warning to early Christians.³⁹⁸

³⁹³ Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5.

³⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:4

³⁹⁵ John 1:6, 5:36,37, 6:38, 7:16,28-28, 8:42

³⁹⁶ Σιλῳάμ, Septuagint, Isaiah 8:6

³⁹⁷ Farley, pg. 173, although Schnackenburg sees this connection as unlikely. Pg. 245

³⁹⁸ Bultmann, pg. 239

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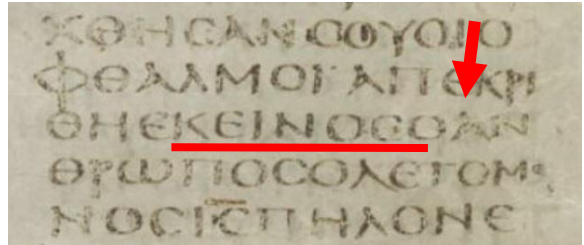
As for who was healed, John records the now-healed man removing the doubt of the crowd concerning his identity through the statement, "I am the man." Farley sees in the statement of the crowd, "...ουχ ουτος εστιν ο καθημενος και προσαιτων?" and "...στι ομοιος αυτω εστιν..." (Is this not the man who used to sit here and beg?, No, he is similar to him") an indication that the healing had not only granted the man his sight but also changed his demeanor from despair to hope and confidence so much so that the crowd did not recognize him.

The people's next question is the same in both Chapters 5 and here in chapter 9 regarding who healed him.

Chapter 5:12 "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

Chapter 9:10 "How then were your eyes opened?"

However, the answer is different, for in the case of the paralytic, he had no idea who it was that healed him (5:13) whereas in this case the man identified Jesus (9:11). This is supported by the emphatic nature of the man's response, indicated by the demonstrative pronoun (**ΕΚΕΙΝΟΣ**) intensified by the article (**Ο**) making it clear that the blind man was acquainted with who Jesus was. (*"Him! The one called Jesus..."*) While these comments can indicate that the man was familiar with the person of Jesus, this should not be extrapolated to show that the blind man identified Jesus as Messiah or of having divine authority.



The blind man's answer to their question of how the miracle occurred is the beginning of the testimony that he will repeat several times over (verses 15 and 27).

As for the last question, "Where is He?" we see another similarity between the paralytic in Chapter 5 with regards to Jesus' engaging the Pharisees after the miracle. and the blind man here in that unlike Jesus engaging into debate with the Pharisees regarding their inability to recognize who Jesus is, 5:38 and 9:41.

The people, unable to conclude how the miracle occurred, bring the man to the Pharisees, not out of hostility, but out of a sense of expecting that they, as their religious leaders, would be able to explain this event. They most likely thought it best to refer the matter to the Pharisees, the great authorities in matters of legal and orthodox observance of Sabbath law.

9:14-34 The Pharisees Question the Man (and his parents)

This next section can be divided into several dialogues.

- 9:13-17 Pharisees interrogate the formerly blind man
- 9:18-23 Pharisees interrogate the parents of the formerly blind man
- 9:24-33 Pharisees re-interrogate the formerly blind man
- 9:34 Pharisees expel the formerly blind man

One debate among scholars is whether the verse *"They brought him to the Pharisees..."* should be interpreted as either a formal investigation and trial of the blind man before a [Sanhedrin](#) or an informal question to the religious leaders.

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Farley, Schnakenberg, Benson and Gill read the term Pharisees as indicative of a formal Sanhedrin since the issue was not so much about the miracle but the performance of the miracle on the Sabbath.³⁹⁹

Beasley-Murray, Meyers, and the Pulpit commentaries read the term *Pharisees* as indicative of a regional or local accredited but an informal council, better described as “*the Jews*.”⁴⁰⁰ This is based on John’s use of the term “*chief priests*” (John 7:45, John 11:47; John 11:57, John 18:3) or “*the Pharisees and the chief priest*” (John 7:32) when he refers to a Sanhedrin. Also, The Sanhedrin did not meet on the Sabbath, festivals or festival eves and the text indicates that the people took the man to the Pharisees on the same day the miracle occurred.⁴⁰¹

John makes clear the fact that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath and also His use of clay so the reader can clearly see the controversy which is about to unfold. The dialogue that follows will unfold over four distinct avenues of interrogation that culminate in the expulsion of the healed man.

Pharisees interrogate the formerly blind man 9:14-18a

Firstly, the Pharisees focus on establishing the scenario in which Jesus violated Torah Law. Torah Law did allow for the work of healing to occur on the sabbath through a Talmudic interpretation of Leviticus 18:5, “*You shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live in them.*”

This was interpreted to mean that this text commands the Jewish people to keep Torah law “in their own lives”. The suggestion is that the Jewish people can observe Torah law, only if they do not die. In other words, acts of healing and saving life must always take place on the Sabbath, in order that the Jewish people can keep the Torah.

However, similar to the case of the paralytic in chapter 5, this is not applicable for the blind man since this was not a life-saving healing and thus the claim in verse 9:16, “This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath.” However, this attempt fails as some of the Pharisees disagree saying ““How can a sinner perform such signs?” The plural σημεια (signs) indicates that (at least some of them) were aware of previous healings that Jesus had performed.

Second, the Pharisees question the blind man asking him for his opinion of the man (Jesus) who cured his blindness. Like the progressive elevation of faith experienced by the Samaritan women, the blind man rebukes their claim that “*This man is not from God*” saying, “He is a prophet.” But this should not be seen yet as an acclamation by the blind man that Jesus is the Messianic prophet. Thus this line of questioning also fails to produce the desired result.

Pharisees interrogate the parents of the formerly blind man 9:18b-23

Third, since the Pharisees did not believe that the man was actually born blind (9:18) they attempt to discredit the immensity of the healing. So, they interview the parent of the man to confirm his blindness from birth. This also gains the Pharisees no ground for all the parents are willing to do is a) confirm that the man is truly their son, b) that he was indeed born blind from birth and c) that he is now able to see. As for the other questions, a) by what means did the healing happen and b) who did it, the parents truthfully disavow knowledge of how or who since they were not present when the healing took place.

³⁹⁹ John 9:14 and 9:16

⁴⁰⁰ John 6:52, 7:12, 8:22

⁴⁰¹ For a discussion on the distinction between Pharisees and Chief priests see the article by Urban Von Wahlde entitled The relationship Between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observations on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus., New Testament Studies, Vol 42, 1996, pgs. 506-522.

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John however adds, οτι εφοβουντο τους Ιουδαιους (for fear of the Jewish leadership) to cement their unwillingness to provide any speculation about how their son was healed or who performed the healing. The parents, by stating that their son is of legal age to represent himself and that the Pharisees should therefore question him, force the Pharisees once again in the position where they must make the judgement since these two witnesses, the formerly blind man and the parents, are not able to provide the necessary evidence for a ruling. It is interesting also to note that John has shifted from the term “Pharisees” given in verses 13, 15, and 16 to Ιουδαιοι (Jews) to indicate a change in the character of the interrogation since expulsion from the synagogue (9:22) must come from the Jewish leadership.

Pharisees re-interrogate the formerly blind man 9:24-28

Fourth, the Jews, desperate, now apply the tactic of pressuring the man to tell the truth and admit that either he was never blind or that it was not Jesus who administered the cure with the command to “Give glory to God by telling the truth.”

This phrase is generally mistranslated as “Give God the praise for your cure, instead of this Man, who is a sinner. Trace the gift to its true source, and give glory to the true Giver.”⁴⁰² This is the Old Testament formula for imploring sinners or liars to tell the truth.⁴⁰³ This imploring is given greater strength by stressing to the man their authority through the emphatic ημεις οιδαμεν (WE know) that this man is a sinner. However, the man remains undeterred and even demonstrates boldness before their accusations stating that regardless of Jesus’ status, sinner or not, what he knows to be true is that he was once blind and now can see (9:25). So now it is the Jews who cannot see evident in their repeating their earlier questions.

At this point the man’s response turns accusative when he says “...did you not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? In a final twist of irony, he asks if they (the Jews) want to become His disciples?” John provides this interaction as a way of speaking to his Christian readers as to the type of questioning and harassment they should expect from the Jewish leadership.

The και in his response of “...και υμεις θελετε αυτου μαθηται γενεσθαι” translates to “also” indicating the man’s next elevation of his faith in that it implies, a) he is aware of the existence of a band of disciples who follow Jesus and b) he counts himself as being one or at least ready to become one of Jesus’ disciples.

Pharisees expel the formerly blind man 9:28-34

The interrogation now drops all pretense of an inquiry with the accusations of “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don’t even know where he comes from.” The irony here is that the Jews claim to be the disciples of Moses not realizing that it is Moses who will accuse them (5:45-46). Their rejection of the healing as coming from the Son of God is to reject the Light of the world (9:12) plunging them further into darkness of sin 8:24).

Appalled that this unlearned man would dare argue matters of Mosaic Law and theology with educated Pharisees and seasoned elders and knowing that their questioning has yielded no clear verdict they hurl a final insult of “You were born in sin and you dare to lecture us!” The final act is to cast him out (εξεβαλον αυτον εξω). While some commentators argue that this is a literal excommunication from the synagogue, it would be presumptuous to assume this, the qualifier of **εξω** to εξεβαλον, compared to the same

⁴⁰² Ref Ellicott Commentary, Farley, and Cambridge Commentary

⁴⁰³ Joshua 7:19 and 1 Samuel 6:5

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wording in verse 6:37, could possibly indicate John was hinting at an actual or symbolic expulsion from the Jewish religious community.⁴⁰⁴ However only a formal trial held by the Sanhedrin could impose a sentence of excommunication.

Jesus dialogues with the man formerly blind 9:35-39

Once again, similar to the paralytic in chapter 5, Jesus seeks out the man whom He healed but the dialogue is different. In the case of the paralytic Jesus admonishes him to “stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” whereas here the dialogue is similar to Jesus and the Samaritan woman as He elevates the man to faith in Him as the Son of God. The formerly blind man may have been cast out from the Jewish community but *“All those the Father gives [to Jesus] will come to [Him], and whoever comes to [Him] I will never cast out.”* (6:37)

The question is asked indirectly as it is not “Do you believe in ME?” but instead is ““Do you (συ) believe in the Son of Man?”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Farley 181 and Schnackenburg 252

⁴⁰⁵ Most manuscripts such as the Codex Sinaiticus have the messianic title of “Son of Man” as referenced in Daniel 7:13 while some, like St. John Chrysostom, have translated “Son of God.”

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Maturation of Faith: Blind Man vs Samaritan Woman

	Blind Man		Samaritan Woman	
Literal	[Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes...	"The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.'	Jesus said "Give me a drink."	How is it that you, a Jew , ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?
	The Pharisees asked him "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened."	He is a prophet. '	Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.	Where do you get that living water?
Human	So for the second time the Pharisees called the blind man and asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?	Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? '	Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. It will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.	Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.
	The Pharisees said, "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."	If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'	Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.	Sir, I see that you are a prophet
	Jesus asked the blind "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"	'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.'	Jesus said to her, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."	I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.
Divine	Jesus said, "You have seen Him, and He is the one speaking with you."	Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him.	Jesus said to her, 'I am He, the one who is speaking to you.'	The woman said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Can He be the Messiah? And the people answered "for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'

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Son of God versus Son of Man

Scholars agree that these two terms are not interchangeable and have different connotations in both the Old and the New Testaments.

The phrase Son of God accentuates the divine character and the subject's close relationship with God. In Jewish literature it refers to God's 'divine council', an anointed human king (Psalm 2:7), or Israelites as the 'children of God' (Ex 4:22). This can also be negative as in Gen 6:1-2. Within a Greco-Roman culture it represents a deified human or a human descendent of a god. In Christianity the gospel writers have used the phrase as a divine title with a messianic tone.

The opposite applies to the title Son of Man. This phrase appears in the Old Testament 107 times mostly in the Book of Ezekiel and most popularly known in the Book of Daniel. In Jewish literature Son of Man represented a human being and not necessarily messianic. In later decades during the period during which the gospels were written – the 'Son of Man' became a fully developed messianic character in apocryphal and deuterocanonical literature which was applied to Christ as the new Adam. An example of this adapted title which includes a divine aspect to the title Son of Man is Matt 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Verse 9:39-41 Judgment and Judge

The scene now changes as the Pharisees reappear mocking Jesus with the statement of "Are we blind also?" This recalls the discussion Jesus was having with the people at the Temple Feast in Jerusalem (7:14-24) where Jesus said "*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.*" Just as the discussion in chapter 7 centered around the issue of the Sabbath, so here also the question is about a healing on the Sabbath. In both cases, chapter 7 and 9, the Pharisees judged by appearances, i.e. adherence to Law over the person, rather than judged by righteousness, compassion for the individual over the Law.

In [chapter 3](#) we asked the question of whether Jesus is or is not the Judge of the world. Here in chapter 9 we have Jesus using the term "judgement" rather than the verb "judge." Is there any significance to this?

Here we can clearly see that Jesus, in this passage, is speaking of two recoveries of sight, and two blindnesses; one rational, the other spiritual. Also John is making the connection with "spiritual blindness" and sin evident in the verse 41 where Jesus links the Pharisee's sin to their blindness of not recognizing Him as coming from the Father. (8:19)

Here, in the words of Bultmann, we see the two-fold role of Jesus as the Son of Man and the Revealer. He is the One who comes to mediate the kingdom of God and all it connotes of salvation, and at the same time is the judgement of God on those who do not believe. Equally Jesus' coming reveals and divides those who believe in the Light and thus see from those who do not believe and whose "sin remains."⁴⁰⁶

Chapter 10 The Good Shepherd and the Feast of Dedication

Introduction and Summary

It is generally agreed that verses 10:1-21 of chapter 10 are a continuation of the discussion that Jesus was having with the Pharisees, specific to the theme of those who do and do not recognize the Son of Man. Jesus uses the allegory of sheep, a Shepherd, and a door. The sheep are the people of Israel while Jesus

⁴⁰⁶ Bultmann, 341-42

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and the Pharisees are types of shepherds. The Pharisees claim to possess authority as God's leaders and shepherds but accomplish this through fear, intimidation and a blind adherence to the Law without the mercy and compassion. In this way they failed in their obligation to pastor and care for their people. Jesus however is the true Shepherd to those who can truly "see with spiritual eyes" and "follow Him because they know His voice."

The second part of this chapter (verses 10:22-39) has Jesus speaking to the Jews at the Feast of Dedication where they press Him once again about whether He is the Messiah. And more striking than the expected admission of being a human Messiah, Jesus publicly declares His divinity by stating publicly that "I and my Father are One."

The chapter closes with Jesus going away to return to Jordan and the place where John was baptizing thus coming full circle. The people there praised John, "who performed no signs" which was a feature that was expected in someone who was regarded as a prophet. And in the second half of their statement, "and all the things John spoke about this Man were true" indicates their belief in the authority Jesus claimed.

Verses 10:1-21

The Shepherd Image in Hebrew Scripture and the Gospels

The prophets of the Old Testament consistently used the "shepherd" image to remind kings, princes, and priests of their obligation and responsibility to care for their flock.⁴⁰⁷ And this shepherd image was used to describe not only the prophets and Jewish leadership but also God Himself. In Psalm 23 King David refers to God as יהוה רֹעִי (Yahweh my Shepherd)

When God told Ezekiel to speak to these "shepherds" of Israel He accused them of,

"shepherding themselves, but the flocks you so not shepherd...The frail you did not strengthen, the sick you did not heal, the broken you did not bind, those astray you did not bring back, and the lost you did not seek, but with strength and with rigor you chastised them...and now they scattered because they had no shepherd, and they became prey for all the beasts of the field."

After which God then becomes the Good Shepherd for the people of Israel.

"Behold, I shall demand My flocks from their hands, and I shall banish them from shepherding the flocks. The shepherds will no longer shepherd themselves, and I shall rescue My flocks from their mouth, and they will not be to them for food. For behold I am here, and I shall search for My flocks and I shall seek them out. I will shepherd them to the mountains of Israel..."

In the opening verses of chapter 10 Jesus, once again, uses allegories that would be easy for His listeners to recognize from a cultural perspective (sheep and sheepfold) but still allude to hidden symbolism. The Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Matthew echo this "shepherd" allegory; twice in Mark and four times in Matthew.

⁴⁰⁷ Zech 11, Ezekiel 34

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In Mark and Matthew Jesus accuses the Jewish leadership of these same failures of the false prophets and leaders of the Israelites through His words, “they were like sheep without a shepherd...,”⁴⁰⁸ echoing God’s words to Ezekiel, “they are shepherding themselves.”

In verse 11 of John chapter 10, Jesus saying “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” speaks as the Father did in the time of Ezekiel, “I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered...” However, Jesus also adds to this “flock” when He says “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also...” referring to the Gentile nations that will soon join the ranks of the Body of Christ.

The shepherd analogy also appears in Matt 2. Herod asks the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah (the Christ) was to be born and they answered by quoting from Micah,

*“And [from] Bethlehem Ephrathah...shall emerge for Me, a ruler over Israel; and his origin is from the Ancient of Days...And he shall stand and lead or shepherd (רָעָה) with the might of the Lord... and they shall return, for now he shall become great to the ends of the earth.”*⁴⁰⁹

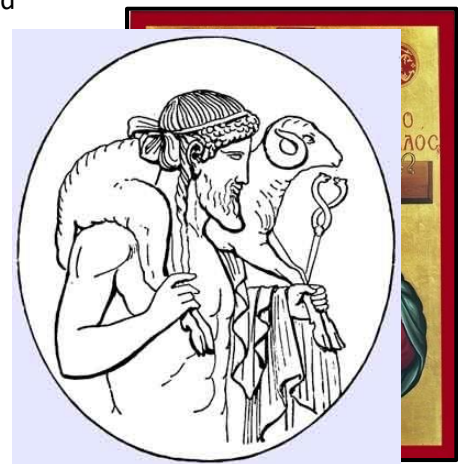
Lastly, in Matt 18, Jesus asks His disciples, “If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?” Here Jesus once again alludes back to Ezekiel to whom God said, “I will seek the lost and I will retrieve the one astray; I will bind the broken and I will strengthen the ill...”⁴¹⁰

In verse 10:11 & 17 Jesus identifies the mark of the true Messiah versus previous false messiahs and prophets when He says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” This is in strict contrast to the corrupt Jewish leaders of history and those current in Jesus’ time as through their negligence they have abandoned the care of their sheep.

Historical Image of the Good Shepherd The image of the Good Shepherd while thought of as a Christian idea, taken from the imagery created by John in chapter 10, can actually be traced back through thousands of years of cultural tradition, from the Mesopotamians through the Ancient Greeks. The god Hermes was considered, among other things, the lord of the flocks which he led to sweet waters. Statues show him shouldering a weak or tired lamb in a fashion similar to the early icons of



Christ, further evidence of the Early Christians adopting old pagan traditions to convey Christian ideals. A predominant image of Christ as the Good Shepherd leading His flock to the “sweet



⁴⁰⁸ Mark 6:34 and Matt 9:36. Also recall Jesus’ words at the Cleansing of the Temple (2:16) which was heard by the Jewish leadership.

⁴⁰⁹ Micah 5:1-4

⁴¹⁰ Ezekiel 34:16

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waters” of salvation and of carrying the weak and tired upon His shoulders (Matt 11:28-30) was common in Early Christianity as evident in the catacombs and in the early prayers of Christians.⁴¹¹ The shepherd imagery also spoke clearly to Christ’s mission to the “lost sheep of the House of Israel.” (Matt 15:24) And with His words in Mark 6:34 and Matthew 9:36 Christ clearly alluded to the failure of the Jewish leadership to properly shepherd their people.

However, after about 500 years this image of Christ as the Good Shepherd fades away being replaced with the icon of Christ as Teacher and King and Peter is seen as carrying on the role of shepherd. (John 21:15-17)

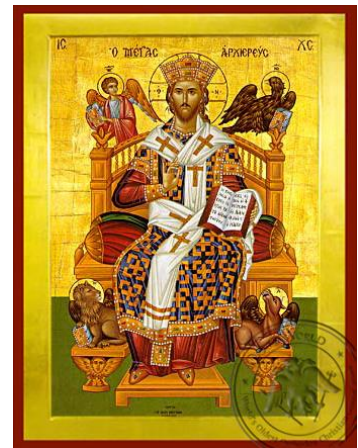
Christ now emerges from the simple humbleness of a shepherd protecting His flock to the royal status of a king (or sometimes bishop) enthroned in His kingdom from which He will judge all at the Second Coming. Additionally, the Church of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries was battling heresies, such as Arianism, that threatened to divide the Church and thus it was critically more important to stress the divinity of Christ over the idea of Christ as the protector and Teacher.

Examining the Principle Characters of the Shepherd Narrative

John paints a vivid picture as he presents the cast of characters that form the content of the narrative of verses 10:1-21. These include [the sheep](#), [the shepherd](#), [His own sheep](#), [the stranger](#), [the door](#), [the doorkeeper](#), [the thief](#), [the robber](#), and [the hireling](#).

Jesus begins the dialogue by referring first to those who enter into the sheepfold by another way calling them **thief and robber** with Satan as the ultimate thief. Chrysostom explains this saying,

Here also He refers to those who had been before, and to those who should be after Him, Antichrist and the false Christs, Judas and Theudas (44-46 CE), and whatever others there have been of the same kind...For he that uses not the Scriptures, but climbs up some other way, that is, who cuts out for himself another and an unusual way, the same is a thief.⁴¹²



It should be noted that in verse 10:8 when Jesus states, *All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not listen to them*” this should not be understood to include Abraham, Moses and the other genuine prophets of the Old Testament (and John the Baptist) but to those claiming leadership on false messianic or religious grounds and serve only to seduce the people away from the true faith. And for those who recognize Christ as the redeemer and the Son of God, they recognize His voice and flee from strange voices.

While for some the **door** is symbolic of Jesus as the Savior through the words of Psalm 118

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it. (verses 19-20)

⁴¹¹ Early Christian burial prayer, “Let us pray to God to grant that the deceased, carried upon the shoulders of the Good Shepherd, may enjoy the fellowship of the saints.”

⁴¹² Chrysostom Homily 59

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Christ also, by way of His voluntary death is the door and the way to eternal life (John 6:65)

However for Chrysostom the door is Scripture, *“for [Scripture] bring us to God, and open to us the knowledge of God, they make the sheep, they guard them, and suffer not the wolves to come in after them. For Scripture, like some sure door, bars the passage against the heretics, placing us in a state of safety as to all that we desire, and not allowing us to wander...”*

When later Jesus states that “I am the door of the sheep” Chrysostom clarifies this saying,

And if farther on He says that He is the door, we must not be disturbed ...for when He brings us to the Father, He calls Himself a Door, when He takes care of us, a Shepherd...”

The **doorkeeper** (θυρωρος) knows the true shepherd as he enters through the door and not by another way (αλλαχοθεν). Chrysostom speaks of Moses as the first doorkeeper *“for to him were entrusted the oracles of God.”*

The term **“His own sheep”** gives the idea that not all the sheep in the sheepfold belong to the shepherd. This will be understood through Jesus’ words later in verse 16, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.” With the goal of “one flock, one shepherd.”

In verse 5 Jesus speaks not of robbers or thieves but of a more general **“stranger.”** While thieves and robbers are those failed to live up to their obligations to feed and protect their sheep, strangers refer to the more general category of false prophets, priests and teachers who in both Jesus and John’s time were leading the people away from the true faith through heresies and false teachings as self-proclaimed messiahs.

The **hireling** is contrasted against the **Good Shepherd** mainly through the expression, “And I lay down my life for the sheep.” As was mentioned prior, this is the distinguishing mark of a good shepherd and is something that a hired person will not do since the *“hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep...runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.”* Jesus accuses these hirelings through the words of Zechariah who spoke of those corrupt judges, priests, and leaders responsible for shepherding their people *“who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh...”*⁴¹³

Jesus is the Good Shepherd in accordance with the “will of the Father who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life.”⁴¹⁴

Verses 10:22-39

Jesus Questioned at the Feast of Dedication

Now the scene shifts to the next of the Jewish festivals, the Feast of Dedication, also known today as Hanukkah and is celebrated on the ninth month of the Jewish calendar (Kislev) in December, as indicated by John mentioning that “It was winter.” It has been thought that this is also a duality of meaning by John indicating not only the climate was cold but also the frozen spirituality of the people questioning

⁴¹³ Zech 11. Also compare Judas as a hireling and thief. “But Judas did not really care about the poor; he said this because he was a thief. John 12:6

⁴¹⁴ John 6:38-40

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Jesus.⁴¹⁵ This festival is roughly 2 months after the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths. This Feast was mentioned in chapter 7:2 and is an autumn festival that occurs in the Jewish month of Tishri (September or October). Verse 10:23 gives a possible hint to the timeframe being winter as it states that Jesus “was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.”

This section of chapter 10 can be divided into two themes, the first being Jesus as the expected Messiah and the second Jesus’ claim as the Son of God, separated by the attempted stoning by the Jews. These themes can be seen as connected to and a continuation of the debate that the Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles were having (ref 7:25-30)

The Feast of Dedication

Also called "Feast of the Maccabees," is an 8-day celebration in December and is chiefly a festival of lights. It was instituted by Judas Maccabeus, his brothers, and the elders of the congregation of Israel, in the year 165 B.C., to be celebrated annually as a memorial of the purification and dedication of the altar.⁴¹⁶ Three years earlier, on the same day, Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Greece and Egypt built a pagan altar in place of the altar in the Temple at Jerusalem, and offered sacrifices to his idol Baal Shamayim.⁴¹⁷

After having recovered the Holy City and the Temple, Judas ordered a new altar to be built in place of the pagan one. When a new fire had been lit upon the altar and the lamps of the candlestick lit, the dedication of the altar was celebrated for eight days amid sacrifices and songs.⁴¹⁸ similar to the Feast of Tabernacles which also lasts for eight days.

The Feast of Dedication in Greek is referred to as the Εγκαίνια. This prayer service is still in use today in Orthodoxy and serves to consecrate a church through the cleansing (purification) of the Holy Altar.

Verse 10:24 The Jews gather around Jesus and use an interesting phrase, εως ποτε την ψυχην ημων αρεις. The literal translation is, “How long will You lift up our souls?” Chrysostom and the Orthodox Study Bible translates this as, “How long will you keep us in doubt?” while the NIV and Farley translates it as “How long will you keep us in suspense?” Others like Barrett and Schnackenberg see their question arising out of their frustration, so that the translation is “How long do You instead to provoke (or annoy) us?” Typically, the phrase την ψυχην αρεις is meant in the positive, i.e. to lift up the spirit but in this case carries a negative tone. Chrysostom even comments that the Jews questions “seemed to proceed from a certain longing and desire of learning, but the intention with which they asked the question was corrupt and deceitful.”

Jesus had never publicly admitted that He was the Messiah, only privately as He did for the Samaritan woman.⁴¹⁹ While He spoke openly at the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus only spoke of His relation to the Father and that He is the Light of the world. Thus, the Jews question is a challenge to either make a public admission or demonstrate through further signs what the people said at the Feast of Tabernacles, “When the Christ (Messiah) comes He will do more signs than this Man has done.”⁴²⁰ Even the Jews

⁴¹⁵ Beasley-Murray, page 173

⁴¹⁶ I Macc. 4:52-59

⁴¹⁷ I Macc. 1:20-59, prophesized in Daniel 11

⁴¹⁸ I Macc. 4:36

⁴¹⁹ The closest we have to this admission is Jesus’ warning to His disciples. After Peter’s answer to Jesus’ saying “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” Jesus ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

⁴²⁰ John 7:31

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words of εἰπε ἡμῖν παρρησια (speak to us openly and with boldness - verse 10:24) are reminiscent of the words of Jesus' brothers, "for no one who desires to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."⁴²¹

Verse 10:25-29 Once again, Jesus does not answer in the yes or no fashion that they expect, but rather answers as He has previously done, "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me."⁴²² Jesus is not being evasive out of a caution of sparking a political situation but, as Farley notes, *is that the Jews questioning Him refuse to allow Him to rearrange their basic presuppositions about the nature of the Messiah*⁴²³, one of which was that the Messiah would free them from Roman oppression. And Jesus then connects this back to the sheep motif saying "you do not belong to my sheep" since "My sheep hear my voice."

We see the same avoidance to answer the direct question in Luke. When Jesus was brought before the Jewish Council they asked Him the same direction question, "If you are the Messiah tell us." Jesus' reply spoke to their unbelief, "If I tell you, you will not believe."⁴²⁴

However, through the works Jesus performed and the words He has spoken Jesus has in both instances answered their question. The true Messiah speaks to the hearts of the people but to those who are able to hear and to those who can see.⁴²⁵

The next verses which, although seemingly have a predestination tone, actually speak to both the Christians of Jesus' time and the Evangelist's time. John wanted them to know that some who believe will be led away through failed discipleship, persecution or outright rejection of Christ, but those who truly desire to follow Him cannot be removed from the Father regardless of the presence of the Jewish leadership, false prophets or persecution. This will of course be proven by the Early Christians such as Irenaeus and Polycarp both of whom went willingly to their martyrdom.

NOTE: Variations on verse 10:29a

John makes clear that the protection that Jesus offer to His flock is from the Father. Various manuscripts of the Greek text have caused some confusion over the correction position of the word παντων.

- a) ο πατηρ μου ος δεδωκεν μοι μειζων παντων εστιν My Father, who has given them to Me is greater than all.
- b) ο πατηρ μου ο δεδωκεν μοι παντων μειζων εστιν What the Father has given me is greater than all.

The accepted text is version a) since version b) does not seem to fit into the context of what Jesus is saying, especially since throughout John's Gospel Jesus has continually said that He "does the work of Him (Father) who sent Me."

Verse 10:30-31 The statement by Jesus, "The Father and I are one" brought about the same response as His previous divinity statement, "before Abraham was, I AM" – the Jews took up stones to stone Him. However here, rather than Jesus hiding Himself (cf 8:59) Jesus engages with the now violent crowd with

⁴²¹ John 7:4

⁴²² See John 5:36, 7:21-24, 8:25-27,

⁴²³ Farley, page 193. See also Schnackenburg, page 305

⁴²⁴ Luke 22:66-68

⁴²⁵ John 10:39-40

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the challenge of “I have shown you many good (καλά)⁴²⁶ works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” Beasley expresses the relevance of Jesus’ question and the more clearly defined His Messianic claim.

The relevance of the question is clear. [Jesus’] works were done at the command and by the power of the Father through the agency of the Son and therefore bears witness to the unity mentioned in verse 30. And the works are one with the words given by the Father to the Son and attest to the truth of verse 30. (page 175)

The idea here is that Jesus wants to make every attempt to get these Jews to “see” by considering again all the works He has done in obedience to the will of the Father who sent Him. If Jesus were truly a blasphemer who held the Law (Torah) in contempt (cf 5:19) He would not be able to do the works He has done. This is to no avail since *His words have no place in them*⁴²⁷ and therefore they do not see that His works point to His divinity. Their judgement of Jesus is according to appearance (i.e. the Law) and not a judgement according to righteousness⁴²⁸, and thus the charge of blasphemy is from Jesus claiming divine status and honor (οτι συ ανθρωπος ων ποιεις σεαυτον θεον)⁴²⁹

Verse 10 34-39 In the style of rabbinical argument Jesus responds by quoting Scripture. “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called “gods”—and the scripture cannot be annulled, can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”?”

The quote is from Psalm 82:6 “I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you...” For the Jewish mind the citing of Scripture (which cannot be λυθηναι - broken or dissolved) indicates a clear meaning; in the Law the term god can be applied to others than God Himself. This is evident in several passages such as Ex. 4:16, 7:1, and Zech. 12:8. There are three distinct traditions with respect to this idea of “becoming gods.”

- a) The Psalm verse speaks to the early Judaic views that Israel’s judges were referred to as gods by virtue of their appointment by God for the divine function of judgement. This is understood in the light of God’s words to Moses in Ex. 7:1 and Mose’s charge to the judges of Israel. This is supported through the phrase in John verse 10:35, προς ους ο λογος του θεου (to whom the Word of God came) Thus if those who receive God’s Word can be called sons of the most high (gods) should not the One whom the Father Himself sent to transmit His Word and plan for the eschatological salvation of His creation have the authority to be called the Son of God.
- b) Passages in the Midrash tell that the Angel of Death was created for the nations of the world, but that God had refused this authority over the Israelites because He had given them His Law (Torah) AND had made them immortal (gods). Thus, when God took Israel as His allotment, He made them godlike. However when the Israelites became corrupt and forsook the Law God told them that they would die like men which is validated through the second part of Psalm 82:6, “...nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.” For no sooner had they received the Law from Moses that they sinned by making the golden calf, thus Israel, through

⁴²⁶ Here the word καλά expresses the idea of works that are noble. See Mark 14:16, Luke 8:15, and 1 Tim 4:6

⁴²⁷ John 8:37

⁴²⁸ John 7:24

⁴²⁹ John 5:18

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making the golden calf showed that they wanted to die. This then becomes the second Fall of Man.⁴³⁰

- c) The term “gods” in Psalm 82 addresses angelic powers who had authority on the nations and abused that authority. This is based on the Septuagint translation of אֱלֹהִים אֲמַרְתִּי in verse 6 as angels and not gods. Thus, they considered verse one, *“God stands in the congregation of God; in the midst of the judges He will judge”* to read *“The holy one stands in the congregation of God...”* This holy one was Melchizedek. Thus, it was thought that if Melchizedek is viewed as an angel with the title of god, then how much more rightly is Jesus to be considered God. This view is rejected since verse 33 only speaks of man and God and not of angels.

⁴³⁰ Neyrey, Jerome, “I said You are gods” : Psalm 82.6 and John 10, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1989, pp. 647-663

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Chapter 11 The Raising of Lazarus and the Plot Against Jesus

Introduction and Summary

The raising of Lazarus is the last of the miracles or signs performed by Jesus and, like the miracle of changing of the water into wine, is only recorded in the Gospel of John.

The raising of Lazarus can be seen as the summation of Jesus' revelations of divinity, representing his ability to conquer death itself. While this was not the first time Jesus raised someone from the dead, this is the first time that someone was resurrected after being dead for four days.⁴³¹

John's placement of the raising of Lazarus just prior to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem also prefigures Jesus' triumph over death through His resurrection from the dead.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is like the previous event; the healing of the man born blind (John 9:3), as both are performed so that the glory of God is made manifest through the Revealer and that "the Son of God may be glorified through it." The raising of Lazarus prefigures the glorification Jesus will receive in his glorious resurrection and conquering of death through His death. Jesus, in speaking to His disciples, will also use the imagery of light and dark as He did in the case of the blind man. (9:4)

As with other narratives in John's gospel this account has many of the hallmarks we have seen previously, mainly misunderstandings and the classic [spiral movement](#) where several characters advance and recede highlighting important and revealing dialogue between Jesus and the focal character.

There is also quite a discussion regarding the source material for the Lazarus account. It is believed that this account belonged to an existing tradition that was remolded to convey the particular theological significance of belief versus unbelief and of the relation of Lazarus' resurrection to that of Jesus.

The division of this chapter can be viewed as follows⁴³².

- 1-6 The illness and death of Lazarus and the sisters plea for help
- 7-16 Jesus' conversation with His disciples
- 17-27 Jesus' conversation with Martha and His revelation as the Resurrection and Life
- 28-37 Jesus' conversation with Mary and Jesus' wrath in the presence of unbelief
- 38-44 The raising of Lazarus to life
- 45-53 The Sanhedrin determines to put Jesus to death
- 54 The retreat of Jesus to Ephraim by the wilderness

A final interesting note: Floyd Filson, New Testament professor at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, published a paper entitled, *Who was the Beloved Disciple?* In this paper he proposed that his Biblical exegesis clearly shows that Lazarus was in fact the beloved disciple of Jesus.⁴³³

Verses 1-6 The Illness and Death of Lazarus and the sisters plea for help

Verse 1 The narrative begins with a simple introduction, "*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany...*" without reference to any previous events. Lazarus, is identified not only by name, but also by location; of Bethany (east of the Mount of Olives and about 2 miles from Jerusalem), and by relation, the brother of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha.⁴³⁴ The name is also interesting as "Lazarus" translates to

⁴³¹ Jairius' daughter (Matt 9:18-26 and Mark 5:21-43) and the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17)

⁴³² Beasley-Murray pg. 187 and Schnackenburg pg. 317

⁴³³ Who Was the Beloved Disciple? Floyd V. Filson, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 68, No. 2, pp. 83-88.

⁴³⁴ The family connection between Lazarus and Mary and Martha is given in verses 2 and 21

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“God helps” which is what will happen. Bultmann makes the interesting connection that the name Lazarus could be derived from the Lazarus in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man to show that the Jewish leadership did not believe in the divinity of Jesus; “*If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*”

Verse 2 John clarifies for his readers the identity of Mary by referring to a future event; the anointing of Jesus (12:1-8) indicating his assumption that his readers were aware of this event⁴³⁵. This event is referenced in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14:3-4) although Mary’s name is not revealed. These sisters are referenced by Luke (10:38-39) however the village of Bethany is not mentioned.

Verse 3 The sisters send word to Jesus about their brother’s worsening illness. This is similar to the plea of the centurion (Matt 8:5) and the nobleman (John 4:46) to cure their sons. Also similar is that Jesus is in a different place from the ailing person. While we are not given any details of Lazarus’ illness, the sisters plea takes on a personal nature with the words, “κυριε ιδε ον φιλεις ασθενει”, “Lord, *your friend* is ill.”

While Chrysostom sees that Mary and Martha desired to draw on Christ through pity, others, like St. Augustine, believe that the sisters spoke out of faith and confidence. The 16th Jesuit priest Thomas Suarez’ in his Treatise on Prayer sums this up when he writes.

The [sisters] did not say, *Come*, for to one who loved it was enough only to announce the fact. They did not dare to say, *Come and heal*; they did not dare to say, *Give the command there, and here it shall come to pass...*[as did the centurion whom Jesus praised for speaking thus]

...None of these things said [the sisters]; but only, Lord, he whom You love is sick; it is enough that You know it. For You will not love and leave uncared for! This then is the prayer implied, but hidden and implicit, because it signifies the necessity and the desire for help; which is often more efficacious than an open solicitation, because it is more humble, modest, relying, and trustful.

In this way their request is similar to Mary’s statement to her Son at the wedding of Cana when she said, “*They have no wine.*”

Verse 4 Jesus, hearing the plea from Lazarus’ sisters provides a confusing response, “*This illness does not lead to death...*” In the same way that the healing of the blind man was not just another miracle, so the healing of Lazarus is not just another demonstration of Jesus’ miraculous healing power but more importantly alludes to the deeper meaning that will be revealed to the disciples and to Lazarus’ sisters, that Jesus is the Christ and is the Resurrection. Chrysostom notes that in their plea the sisters still view Christ as a man, one who can perform miracles but still a man, evident in Martha’s comment to Jesus that “...if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21)

Just as Jesus told His disciples that “*he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him*”, so here the deeper meaning of Lazarus’ resurrection is given; “*it is for God’s glory*” emphasized by John’s use of the term υπερ in the phrase *αλλα υπερ της δοξης του θεου*. However, this will not be fully revealed and understood until Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Chrysostom also points out that the use of the word “that” in the phrase “...so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” indicates that Lazarus’ illness occurred from another cause.

⁴³⁵ Chrysostom points out that “*it is necessary to understand, that this is not the harlot mentioned in Matthew 26:7, or the one in Luke 7:37, but a different person.*” Homily 62 on John

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Verse 5,6 Jesus' subsequent action is now even more confusing as John relates that "after having heard that Lazarus was ill, [Jesus] stayed two days longer in the place where He was." The pretext heightens the seemingly out of character action by noting the intimate and spiritual affection that Jesus had for Mary and Martha (in addition to Lazarus) through the use of the term "ἡγάπα." This pretext helps to highlight the significance of Jesus' delay for two days. John shows us that His delay was not due to other pressing matters but to clearly reveal to them and His disciples the true meaning of raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus, through both His words and His behavior, wants His disciples to fully understand that His actions are determined by obedience to the Will of the Father (John 6:38)

Jesus' delay was, in Chrysostom's words, done so "that Lazarus might breathe his last, and be buried; that none might be able to assert that He restored him when not yet dead, saying that it was a lethargy, a fainting, a fit, but not death."

Pastor Joseph Benson comments further on Jesus' delay noting that "He did this not only **though he loved them, but because he loved them**. He loved them, and therefore he designed to do something great and extraordinary for them; to work such a miracle for their relief, as he had not wrought for any of his friends. If he had gone immediately, and had arrived at Bethany while Lazarus was still alive, and had cured his sickness, he would have done no more for him than he had done for many; if he had come to him, and raised him when he was but just dead, he would have done no more than he had done for some; but deferring his relief so long, he had an opportunity of doing more for him than he had done, or ever should do, for any other."⁴³⁶

Jesus' love for Lazarus and His reason for delay is attested to in the 6th Canticle of the Saturday of Lazarus Matins.

Love led The Master to Lazarus at Bethany...and as true God Thou knew of the falling asleep of Lazarus and announced it beforehand to Thy disciples giving them proof O Master of the infinite power of Your divinity.

An important lesson for us today that can be taken from this is that Jesus did share special and intimate friendships, with the example being that special attachments are not unnatural for Christians, and those friendships are especially lovely when tempered and sweetened with the spirit of Christ. Friendships should always be cemented by religion, and one main end of those attachments should be to aid one another in the great business of preparing to die.⁴³⁷

Verses 7-16 Jesus' conversation with His disciples

Verse 7,8 After His delay of two days Jesus now commands His disciples to "go back to Judea...again" which is not only more confusing, but distressing.⁴³⁸ The disciples remind Jesus that just a short while ago (vuv) at the Feast of Dedication the Jewish leadership sought to stone Him (10:31). And earlier when asked by His brothers to attend the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus Himself εν τη Γαλιλαια ου γαρ ηθελεν εν τη Ιουδαια περιπατειν as the Jewish authorities were looking for an opportunity to kill Him. (7:1) From the viewpoint of the disciples this journey which risks Jesus' life and their lives is not only unnecessary but foolish since Jesus has said that Lazarus' 'sickness will not end in death." (11:4)

⁴³⁶ Benson Commentary on the New Testament

⁴³⁷ Albert Barnes (1798-1870) was an American theologian and ordained as a Presbyterian minister. He was renowned for his Notes on the New Testament.

⁴³⁸ Judea here means Jerusalem where Jesus will realize His Passion, but for now His travel will be to the outskirts of Jerusalem but still under the jurisdiction of the Jewish authorities making clear the distress of the disciples.

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Verse 9a Jesus answers the disciples saying, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight?" followed by a reference to His previously used metaphor of light and dark.

The Division of Day and Night

In contrast to pagan mythology, where sunrise represents a daily contention between opposing forces, in Judaism the day-and-night cycle is attributed to a single God who "forms the light, and creates darkness" (Gen 1:3, Gen 1:16-18, and Isa. 45:7), "who changes the times," and "who removes the light from before the darkness and the darkness from before the light" (beginning of the evening prayer). The religious significance of this is observed in the Jewish Temple rites of regular morning and evening sacrifices and in the benedictions over the daily cycle in the morning and evening prayers (from which is the source of the Orthodox cycles of prayer)

The Bible does not clearly define the specific divisions of day and night only referring to evening, morning, and noonday and the notion of "hour" is not mentioned at all.⁴³⁹ The duration of a Jewish day is from dawn until the appearance of the stars. Every day (and every night) is divided into 12 "variable" hours with the duration of the hour dependent on the yearly season.⁴⁴⁰ During winter the Day Hour is shorter, and the Night Hour is longer, while the opposite holds during summer.

Verse 9b,10 The second part of Jesus' statement to His disciples, "*Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. // But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them*" would certainly remind his readers of John's previous references to Christ as the Light of the world.

In his opening prologue, "*In Him was life and the life was the light of men and this light shines in the darkness.*" (1:4,5)

And later Jesus Himself said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*" (8:12)

However, this "time of day and night" has two aspects, a) day, when work can be done and night, when work must cease, and b) that Jesus' opponents are unable to do anything until His appointed hour.

- a) The Call to Work** With regards to this call to work, earlier Jesus told His disciples "We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day for night is coming when no one can work." (9:4) And now He reminds His disciples that this work continues. St Cyril comments that Jesus is telling His disciples that "*It is not now a time for Me to separate Myself from the Jews, even though they be unholy, but I must do all things that pertain to their healing for they must not have the Divine Grace withdrawn from them.*" Verse 10 then switches to the consequences of refusing to walk in His light, i.e., refusing faith and discipleship which leads to a stumble or fall

⁴³⁹ There is the term "watches" which by Jewish reckoning recognized only three such watches, the first watch; sunset to 10 PM (Lamentations 2:19) the middle watch; 10 PM to 2 AM (Judges 7:19) and the morning watch; 2 A.M. to sunrise (Exodus 14:24 ; 1 Samuel 11:11). With Rome occupation the number of watches was increased to four, which were described as "evening," "midnight," "cock-crowing" and "morning." (Mark 13:35)

⁴⁴⁰ These divisions are noted in the Sanhedrin section 38b of the Talmud. "Rabbi Yoḥanan bar Ḥanina says: Daytime is twelve hours long, and the day Adam the first man was created was divided as follows: In the **first hour** of the day, his dust was gathered. In the **second**, an undefined figure was fashioned. In the **third**, his limbs were extended. In the **fourth**, a soul was cast into him. In the **fifth**, he stood on his legs. In the **sixth**, he called the creatures by the names he gave them. In the **seventh**, Eve was paired with him. In the **eighth**, they arose to the bed two, and descended four, i.e., Cain and Abel were immediately born. In the **ninth**, he was commanded not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. In the **tenth**, he sinned. In the **eleventh**, he was judged. In the **twelfth**, he was expelled and left the Garden of Eden."

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into the dark abyss and away from God and eternal life (salvation) for John tells us that “God is Light and in Him there is no darkness.” (1 John 1:5)

- b) Thus far each attempt by the Jewish authorities to apprehend Jesus has failed even though He has made Himself clearly available as He openly taught in the synagogues and at the Jewish Feasts. (see Luke 22:52,53) Jesus is thus telling His disciples that while they are with Him they will not walk in darkness as “*there is no darkness in Him.*” The first part of verse 11, “*these things He said*” for the purpose of easing the disciple’s fears and silence their objections. Jesus wants to make it clear that no hostility can touch Him until His hour arrives, this being the darkness referred to here.

Verse 11 Notice here that Jesus tells the disciples λαζαρος ο φιλος ημων (OUR friend Lazarus...) rather than My friend indicating a communion of friendship in Christ indicating that all who believe in Him are brothers and sisters.⁴⁴¹ Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus is sleeping and that he goes to wake him leading to a one of the widest chasms of misunderstanding as they take Jesus’ words literally. This is the same misunderstanding that Jesus encountered when He raised Jairus’ daughter saying to the crowd that “*The child is not dead but sleeping*” after which they laughed taking Jesus literally. Here John uses this as a literary device to reveal the distance which separates men from the Son of God.⁴⁴²

The term “sleep” when used in Scripture intimates that death will not be final: that there will be an awaking out of this sleep, or a resurrection. (Note that one of the word in Greek for cemetery is κοιμητήριον; place of sleep). The idea of sleep as the image of death is common in other passages of both the Old⁴⁴³ and New Testaments, and, from the time of the Ancient Greeks who spoken of sleep and death as twin-sisters.

In the second part of verse 11 Jesus says, “*but I am going there to awaken him*” revealing once again a duality of meanings for the term “sleep.” One is the literal awakening of Lazarus from his actual sleep which is not unto eternal death and the other being the awakening of the disciples, and other Jews, to the fullness of the reality of who Jesus truly is.

Verse 12,13 The disciples misunderstanding is brought into full focus with their response to Jesus saying, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be get well.” By this they are telling Jesus that there is no urgent reason to go and put themselves at risk. Sleep is seen by the Rabbis as one of six favorable symptoms to recovery from illness so that sleep would be the sign that Lazarus’ illness had ceased.⁴⁴⁴

Verse 14,15 Jesus, seeing the disciples misunderstanding speaks παρηρησία⁴⁴⁵ with plain, blunt language, telling them that “Lazarus is dead.” You can imagine Jesus sighing with frustration as He must explain His meaning to them even though He has used the metaphor of sleep before. This frustration will later turn to anger when confronted by the mourners who gather at Lazarus’ tomb (11:33) Both Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria note that Jesus said this not to boast [of divine knowledge] or out of a love of glory, but because this was going to become for the disciples a ground of faith.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ Farley 201,202

⁴⁴² See Mark 8:33

⁴⁴³ There are multiple references in the Old Testament where the body is said to be resting with their ancestors, Gen. 47:30; Dt. 31:16; 2 Sam 7:12; 1 Ki. 2:10, Dan 12:22. In Psalms, death is described as the “sleep of death” (Ps. 13:3; 90:5) and the death of the Assyrian army is called their “final sleep” (Ps. 76:5).

⁴⁴⁴ Berakhot 57b of the Talmud states that six matters are good omens for the sick: Sneezing, sweating, diarrhea, a seminal emission, sleep, and a dream. These are all alluded to in Scripture.

⁴⁴⁵ Παρηρησία – πας + ρεω meaning speaking with a fullness of force

⁴⁴⁶ Chrysostom Homily 62 and Cyril’s Commentary on Gospel of John, Book 7

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Jesus goes on to say that for their sake He is glad that He was not there, so that they may believe. Jesus' word "*that I was not there*" should be taken together with *χαίρω* to indicate that had Jesus been there, He would not have permitted His friend to die, but have saved him from his illness.⁴⁴⁷ Cyril comments that "*If [Jesus] had been there, Lazarus would not have died, because he should have had pity on him when he was suffering only a little; but now in [Jesus'] absence his death has taken place, so that, by raising him to life, [Jesus] shall bestow upon [the disciples] much advantage through their faith in Me.*"

Jesus ends this dialogue with words of action in which He includes not only Himself but the disciples to accompany Him, "*But let us go to him.*"

Verse 16 The disciple's reaction and Jesus' response now brings Thomas into the scene. The Gospel writer introduces Thomas here for the first time. And interestingly Thomas is not mentioned by name in any of the Synoptic Gospels. One thought regarding John's naming of Thomas as a disciple is the possible connection with the Syrian texts of the Gospel of Thomas and The Acts of Thomas. These texts were widely used in Gnostic circles where Thomas is regarded as having been given secret revelations by Jesus. John's Gospel however was known to have been written earlier than these Gnostic texts and therefore is independent of any relationship to Gnosticism.

John specifically brings out that Thomas, along with the other disciples, is slow to understand, but unlike the other disciples his insistence on visible, tangible evidence continues to distinguish his lack of understanding of Jesus' true mission and identity throughout John's Gospel until the very end when he makes a full profession of faith, "*My Lord and my God.*"

Thomas' comment to the disciples, *αγωμεν και ημεις ινα αποθανωμεν μετ αυτου* (Let us go up so that we may also die with Him) has been interpreted several ways.

Loyalty and Devotion

[Thomas] has understood nothing of the promise contained in Jesus' words, but his loyalty, an utterance of blind devotion to Jesus comes to the fore and he obeys the call. Schnackenburg, pg 328 and Beasley-Murray, pg. 189

Leader

[Thomas] takes the lead and rallies his co-disciples, appealing to them as fellow members of the same group. The forward positioning of the ημεις in Thomas' statement is emphatic. [Thomas] loves the Lord and cannot stand to see Him go into such danger alone. Farley, pg. 202

Weakness of faith

Some say that he desired himself to die; but it is not so; the expression is rather one of cowardice. Yet he was not rebuked, for Christ as yet supported his weakness, but afterwards he became stronger than all, and invincible. For the wonderful thing is this; that we see one who was so weak before the Crucifixion, become after the Crucifixion, and after having believed in the Resurrection, more zealous than any. Chrysostom, Homily 62

The language of Thomas has indeed zeal, but it also has timidity; it was the outcome of devout feeling, but it was mixed with littleness of faith...Cyril translates Thomas' statement of "Let us also go thus"; Of a certainty if we go we shall die: nevertheless let us not refuse to suffer, for we ought not to

⁴⁴⁷ Reference the similarity in Jesus questioning Philip about feeding the 5000 even though He knew what He was going to do. (John 5:5,6)

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be cowardly to such a degree; because if He raises the dead, fear is superfluous, for we have One Who is able to raise us again after we have fallen.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, Book 7 on the Gospel of John.

Resignation

Thomas' statement is not a warning but signifies a resignation to the fate that threatens alike the disciples and Jesus. For the present it is blind devotion, and he will reveal himself as blind (14:5) and must see in order to be able to believe (20:28) Bultmann, pg. 400

Thomas looked upon the return of Jesus as leading to His death; with His quick temperament, he at once expresses what is in His mind; immediately, however, manifesting the resignation and courage of love, seeing that their business now was to obey the clearly and definitely declared will of the Lord.

Meyer Commentary, 78

"...and die with him" – There has been much discussion as to whether the "him" refers to Lazarus or to Jesus. They who refer it to Lazarus suppose the meaning as: "Let us go and die, for...Lately they attempted to stone Him, and now they will put Him to death, and we also, like Lazarus, shall be dead."

Others suppose, probably more correctly, that it refers to Jesus: "He is about to throw himself into danger. The Jews lately sought his life, and will again. They will put him to death. But let us not forsake him. Let us attend him and die with him." Each of these interpretations still expresses the doubts of Thomas about the miracle which Jesus was about to work.

Regardless of the actual reason for Thomas' statement to the disciples most of the Biblical commentators agree that this summons of Thomas is addressed to every reader of the Gospel thus becoming a help to those readers under attack to retain the faith which must endure and struggle in darkness that in the end their dedication and devotion will lead to the fullness of their faith in Jesus as the Christ. Also, the lesson for us today is that Thomas' action illustrates the path that all believers must take, to die daily to the world for the sake of following Christ.⁴⁴⁸

17-27 Jesus' conversation with Martha and His revelation as the Resurrection and Life

Verse 17 After the short statement about Jesus' arrival in Bethany and a geographical note about the location of Bethany, the dialogue transitions to Mary and Jesus.

The Soul and Body after 3 Days in Jewish Tradition

John makes clear the point that has been alluded to earlier, that Lazarus had been dead for four days. It is Jewish tradition to bury the dead immediately. If it is not possible to have the burial the same day, then it should not be done more than three days after death. These laws may be attributed to early rabbinic tradition in which it was believed that it took the soul three days to transition from death to the afterlife and that *one should visit a burial place of the newly buried for three (3) days to ensure the person was dead.* [Semachot 8:1](#) of the Talmud.

In the Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 100:34, Rabbi Bar Kappara⁴⁴⁹ taught: The most intense time of mourning is only on the third day. For three days, the soul is hovering over its grave, believing that it will return [to the body]. When it sees that the radiance of the face has changed, it goes and leaves it. That is what is written: "But his flesh on him is painful, [and his soul mourns over him]" (Job 14:22).

⁴⁴⁸ Orthodox Study Bible, Notes section, pg. 1446

⁴⁴⁹ Bar Kappara was a rabbi of the late 2nd and early 3rd century CE

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Counting the parts of the days on which they set out there are two whole days in which Jesus delayed, after receiving the message of Lazarus' illness and two other days spent upon the journey to Bethany.

Verse 18,19 John's mention of the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem being under two miles⁴⁵⁰, is mentioned to indicate that the distance was not overly distant from the city thus allowing for the many Jews who came as mourners to console the sisters.

Verse 19 reads that *"many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother."* The Mishnah of the Torah, Chapter 2 states that *the relatives for whom a person is obligated to mourn according to Scriptural Law: His mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his paternal brother and paternal sister.*

John's comment regarding the Jews that came to visit refer to the sacred obligation, in fact a mitzvah, in Judaism upon every Jew to grant comfort to those who mourn, whether they are related to them or not, regardless of whether the deceased was a close friend or a passing acquaintance⁴⁵¹. This is considered to be Scripturally based in that Genesis 25:11 records that God visited Isaac, *"And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac, his son,"* from which it is inferred that God Himself was comforting the bereaved Isaac.

Both Schnackenburg and Bultmann, however, also see the important of these "visiting Jews" as the judging public by witnessing the miracle that Jesus will perform and proclaim this news, positively by those who came to believe in Jesus (11:45), or to warn the Pharisees. (11:46)

Verse 20 Martha, upon hearing of Jesus' arrival goes out to meet Him. Martha, being the elder and the hostess of the house, was most likely informed of Jesus' arrival, while Mary stayed at the house. This is typical of their character as we see in Luke 10:38-40. Also, it is interesting to note that while Mary remains in the house, Martha, the hostess, breaks Jewish tradition by leaving the house to meet Jesus. Chapter 7 of the Mishnah for mourning requires that the family *should not leave the entrance to his house to go any place for the entire first week.*

Verse 21 Martha greets Jesus with words that demonstrate both the strength and weakness of her faith, and these same words that Mary will later say to Jesus. While St. Cyril sees Martha's greeting to Jesus, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* as a soft and gentle reproach, others see it as a lament and expression of grief.

The strength is in that they both believed Christ's power was such that He could have cured her brother's sickness and so have prevented his death, while the weakness of their faith is in that they limit the power of Christ in saying, *If You had been here.* From the example of the centurion's servant who said *"But say the word, and let my servant be healed"*⁴⁵² they did not yet believe that Christ could cure at a distance, and that His power was not confined to his bodily presence. Chrysostom comments on the weakness of their faith saying *"these sisters believed in Christ, but not in a right way; for they did not yet certainly know either that He was God, or that He did these things by His own power and authority; on both which points He taught them."*

⁴⁵⁰ John writes that the distance was σταδίων δεκαπεντε (15 stadia) A stadium was a little over 600 ft. so the distance was about a 1 ½ to 1 ¾ miles.

⁴⁵¹ After the burial, mourners return to the home of the deceased to sit shiva for seven days, shiva being the Hebrew word for seven and is a recollection of the seven days of creation. The loss of a human being from this world is an undoing of the act of creation. That spark of the image of God that was in this world is lost in a way that cannot be recovered. The unique soul (Neshama) that occupied one particular body has left this world.

⁴⁵² Luke 7:7

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St Jerome comments that Martha (and Mary's) [incomplete] faith recognize that God is the source of Jesus' power and this separates them from the crowd or mourners that while amazed at Jesus' deeds are unsure of His divinity.

Verse 22,23 Martha's finishes her response to Jesus by acknowledging that God will grant Jesus His request, however the question is, is the request a) that Jesus will have her brother rise from the dead having heard Jesus earlier tell the disciples that Lazarus is asleep, remembering that Jesus used those same words to the family of Jarius' daughter before He raised her from death or b) that Jesus will intercede for Lazarus that he be given a place in Paradise.

The response from Jesus that "Your brother will rise again" is equally ambiguous as it can fit either thought that Martha is thinking.

Verse 24 Martha's response now answers the question of what she was expecting. In Jesus' time the widespread belief among the Jews was that at the end time, the Messianic era, the dead would be resurrected. Martha surely would have heard this as consolation from the mourners over the last four days and resigns herself that even Jesus is offering this consolation. While it is possible that she had a faint hope of Jesus resurrecting Lazarus, it is more probable that with her statement of "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the εσχατη ημερα* (last day) expresses her belief that Jesus will intercede to God on her brother's behalf." Martha's understanding here, in the presence of the Christ, the Messiah, is the same as the Samaritan woman when she says to Jesus, "I know that Messiah is coming."

Verse 25 Here we have a 4-part verse. 1) I am the resurrection, 2) and the Life, 3) Those who believe in Me, 4) even though they die, will live.

- 1. "I am the Resurrection"** Jesus' response of, "I am the Resurrection..." gives Martha the answer to the question that Mankind has asked since the beginning, the same question asked by Job, "*If mortals die, will they live again?*"⁴⁵³ Jesus is telling her that not merely that God will give me what I ask, but that *He needed no other to help Him, if so be that He Himself is the Life; since if He needed another, how could He be the Resurrection and the Life?*⁴⁵⁴ There is no need to look forward to the εσχατη ημερα for Jesus tells Martha that the Resurrection and the Life stands before her, recalling Jesus' words to the Jewish leadership earlier, *the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*"⁴⁵⁵ These words will soon become reality as they did for Ezekiel the Prophet who when asked by God, "Son of man, can these bones live?" After which the Lord God spoke to the bones saying, "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live."⁴⁵⁶
- 2. "...and the Life."** Not just the Resurrection but Jesus also reminds Martha, and us, that "*just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.*" Jesus is both Resurrection and the Life, thus holding the power over, and conquering death.

But this is radically different from the definition of "life" for either the Ancient Greeks or the Jews. For the Greeks the purpose of life was εὐδαιμονία. The pursuit of happiness by living a full life through friendship, participation in public life, avoiding poverty, and the attainment of knowledge.

⁴⁵³ Job 14:14

⁴⁵⁴ Chrysostom Homily 62

⁴⁵⁵ John 5:29

⁴⁵⁶ Ezekiel 37:3-5

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While the idea of the pursuit of happiness is present in Judaism, happiness is much more connected to a relationship with God, thus happiness may be defined as a person doing what God wants from him at any given moment. Therefore, as a person acts according to the directives of the Torah instruction, he is truly a happy and blessed person. The proper thing to do is to make the most of the soul's sojourn on earth and a life which is permeated by the Torah and mitzvot makes this possible.⁴⁵⁷

Christianity however calls for the person to let go of these ideas and understand that the greatest good is not this temporal life, but that "Life" that is promised by Christ, achieved through the desire to be in communion with Him. Our readiness to accept this is acceptance of earthly death. In fact St. Paul warns us of this when he says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through empty philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the structure of the world, and not after Christ."⁴⁵⁸

In this sense the verse, "I am the Resurrection" is a description of who Christ is while the second part "and the Life" speaks of the *greatest gift of God's saving sovereignty*⁴⁵⁹ that is offered to those who believe in Him. Orthodoxy repeats this theme quite often.

- a) In next to last prayer at the memorial Trisagion service, "...You are the Resurrection and the Life of your departed servant..."
- b) In the opening lines of the Holy Friday Lamentations, "Η Ζωη εν ταφω κατετεθης Χριστε (The Life, You laid in the tomb O Christ..."
- c) In the Paschal Hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead...bestowing Life to those in the tombs."

Christ as the Resurrection and the Life is captured in the Kontakion of Lazarus Saturday.

Christ the Joy, the Truth and the Light of all, the Life of the World and the Resurrection has appeared in His goodness, to those on earth. He has become the archetype (τύπος) of the Resurrection, granting divine forgiveness to all!

3. **"Those who believe in Me,"** They are those who truly recognize Jesus as the One sent from God, not to perform miracles and healings, or like John the Baptist – to point the way towards the Messiah but possessing the full divinity of God. The beginning of verse 26 (και πας ο ζων και πιστευων) will advance the idea of believers.
4. **"even though they die, will live."** St. Augustine addresses this, and the opposite, when he says, "Believe then, and though thou were dead [in your sins]⁴⁶⁰, yet shall you live. But if you believe not, even while you live you are dead. Let us prove this likewise, that if you believe not, though you live you are dead. To one who was delaying to follow Him, and saying, Let me first go and bury my father, the Lord said, Let the dead bury their dead; but come thou and follow me."⁴⁶¹

Commenting on "though they [believers] die" St. Cyril notes that "even the saints, who have received promises of life, die; this is nothing, for it is only what naturally comes to pass. And until the proper time has been reserved the display of the grace [of resurrection], which is powerful, not partially, but effectually, in the case of all men, even of those saints who have died in time past and are tasting death for a short time, until the general resurrection."

⁴⁵⁷ [What is Life's Purpose?](#) Chabad.org

⁴⁵⁸ Colossians 2:8

⁴⁵⁹ Beasley-Murray, pg. 190

⁴⁶⁰ John 8:24

⁴⁶¹ Augustine, Tractate 49 on the Gospel of John

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Verse 26 Here the “believer” is extended to *πας ο ζων και πιστευων* (all who live and believe). This reinforces what John the Baptist said earlier, “πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον μη αποληται αλλ εχη ζωην αιωνιον.”⁴⁶² Here, in verses 25 and 26 Jesus makes it emphatically clear that He is not just the Revealer but also the One who offers freedom from eternal death and comfort in eternal life. And this gift is not just given at the *εσχατη ημερα* but offered as salvation now to those who believe. These are the people referred to in Revelation 20:4-6, “*Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power...*” This freedom from death is also evident in the Gospel reading for the Orthodox funeral, “*the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life.*”

Verse 27 The last line in verse 26 is a direct question from Jesus to Martha, “Do you believe this?” Here Jesus is asking Martha if she understands the true meaning of her earthly life and the promise of eternal life granted only to those who believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Giver of Life. Just as in the case of the Samaritan woman, this question is the last step in Martha’s spiritual ascent to faith. To which, as did the Samaritan woman, and the man born blind, Martha answers “Yes, Lord, I believe...”⁴⁶³

Concerning our admission of “yes, I believe.” St. Cyril warns us that we *ought not quite vainly to cast our words into the air when we confess the venerable mystery, but to fix the roots of the faith in heart and mind and then to let it bear fruit in our confession.* He then goes on to refer the sacrament of Baptism where the Church puts our faith to test asking the catechumen or sponsor, “Συτασση⁴⁶⁴ τω Χριστώ, και πιστεύεις αυτω?” (Do you join together with Christ...and do you believe in Him?)

Martha follows her statement of *I believe* (unlike the Samaritan woman and the Blind Man) with a 3-point theological statement, a) You are the Messiah, b) the Son of God, and c) the One coming into the world and each of these are eschatological titles.

- Messiah – the fulfillment of the Jewish prophetic expectation in the Person of Christ
- Son of God –the term “son of God,” as used in Hebrew Scripture, refers to those who have a special relationship with God⁴⁶⁵ but does not hold the idea of unity with God the Father. In the New Testament the title “Son of God” surpasses the Jewish understanding and refers to the status of Jesus as the divine Son of God, sent by the Father and equal in essence to God the Father.
- One coming into the world – designates Jesus, as God who has broken through the heavenly realm, as the bringer of salvation sent by God. John’s use of the word *ερχομενος* refers back to Psalm 118:26,27

This idea of *One coming into the world* is expressed in the Apolytikion for the Saturday of Lazarus

⁴⁶² John 3:16

⁴⁶³ For Orthodoxy Martha’s confession represents a true and genuine understanding of what Jesus has asked of her. This in opposition to other commentators, such as Chrysostom, who say that while she did not fully understand Jesus’ meaning of *ζωη*, she at least expresses her faith in His divinely-conferred *ἐξουσία* (glory). This is taken from the term *πεπιστευκα*, which they translate as, “*I have believed*, not now for the first time, that You are the Christ of all our highest hopes and of our prophetic Scriptures.”

⁴⁶⁴ From the verb *συντάσσω* which literally means to arrange or appoint together, although the meaning is clearer in the synonym *προσκόλληση* which means allegiance or devotion.

⁴⁶⁵ Wisdom of Solomon 2:13,18, Wisdom of Sirach 4:10

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By raising Lazarus from the dead before Your passion, You did confirm the common Resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to You, O Vanquisher of death, Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who is coming (Ο ερχομενος) in the Name of the Lord!

Verse 28,29 [Μαρθα] εφωνησεν Μαρναν την αδελφην αυτης λαθρα ειπουσα...

Martha, after her confession of faith to Jesus, goes off to tell her sister Mary, λαθρα (in secret) that the *Teacher is here and is calling for you*. That Jesus expressly asked for Mary to come is evident in John's usage of the term ειπουσα rather than λεγουσα.⁴⁶⁶ While Mary's prompt obedience to Martha's summons supports this idea it can also demonstrate her attachment to Jesus and an expectation of comfort for the loss of a friend and family member. Martha identifies Jesus only as διδασκαλος (Teacher) and not Rabbi as we have seen used previously.

Note, that the use of the term λαθρα⁴⁶⁷ should not be interpreted here to indicate concern for Jesus' safety from the Jews who seek to kill Him or to the "Messianic secret" that Jesus has cautioned His disciples about, but merely that John wants the reader to understand that Jesus wished to speak to both Martha and Mary privately before witnessing the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection.

Verses 30,31 To reinforce the desire for private dialogue between Jesus and the sisters John relates that a) Jesus was away from her house and the mourners and that b) the mourners were not aware of the true destination of Mary since they said, "υπαγει εις το μνημειον ινα κλαυση εκει."

Verse 32 Mary, unlike Martha, falls at Jesus' feet⁴⁶⁸ which can be seen either as an act of grief over seeing Jesus who has arrived too late or her veneration of Him. Chrysostom, opting for the latter, comments that Mary is more ardent than her sister and seeks to honor the Master. The words she speaks to Jesus, although in a different order in Greek are the same words spoken by Martha earlier but lack the follow-on statement of hope and faith uttered by Martha, "*I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.*" Their meeting is cut short by the arrival of Jews who were mourning thus Jesus does not engage in dialogue with Mary but will engage her with deeds.⁴⁶⁹

Verse 33 Upon witnessing the κλαιου of both Mary and the other mourners Jesus is provoked to agitation. The word John uses to express Jesus' reaction of agitation is ενεβριμησατο. The literal meaning is to snort in anger, expressing indignant displeasure with someone and to be moved to sternly admonish. The use of the verb κλαιω, rather than δακρυω, to describe the expression of grief by Mary and the mourners reveals the nature of the mourning. Δακρυω is the act of shedding quiet (actual) tears and to weep silently, while κλαιω properly means to weep aloud, expressing uncontainable and audible grief. Compare this with verse 35 where Jesus, in His humanity displayed proper grief; εδακρυσεν.

To What is Jesus' Anger Directed?

- a) With the addition of the words "*και εταραξεν*"⁴⁷⁰ to the first verb of ενεβριμησατο Chrysostom, Cyril, (and the Jerome Commentary) see Jesus' anger as directed at the conflict between his human nature and His divinity. This same ταρασσω is seen in John 12:27 and 13:21

⁴⁶⁶ Whereas λεγουσα reflects just the relating of what Jesus said about wanting to see Mary, ειπουσα has the tone of a bidding to go to Jesus.

⁴⁶⁷ The modern usage of Λαθρα can be seen in the word λαθραίος meaning secretive, covert, or concealed.

⁴⁶⁸ Recall Mary's similar action in Luke 10:39

⁴⁶⁹ Orthodox Study Bible, pg. 1447

⁴⁷⁰ From the root word ταρασσω, refers to a state of inward commotion, to be troubled, disquieted, or restless.

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He weeps, and is troubled; for grief stirs up the feelings. Then rebuking those feelings, for He groaned in spirit means, restrained His trouble.

Chrysostom, Homily 63 on Gospel of John

Now since Christ was not only God by Nature, but; also Man, He suffers in common with the rest that which is human; and when grief begins somehow to be stirred within Him, and His Holy Flesh now inclines to tears, He does not allow It to indulge in them without restraint, as is the custom with us. But He groans in the spirit, that is, in the power of the Holy Spirit He reproves in some way His Own Flesh...

Cyril, Commentary on Gospel of John, Book 7

- b) Farley sees Jesus' stern displeasure aimed at the "power of death" or "the ancient serpent for wreaking this havoc."⁴⁷¹

In a similar manner St. Augustine, in his Tractates on the Gospel of John, *sees that Christ troubles Himself, to intimate to you how you ought to be troubled, when weighed down and crushed by so great a mass of iniquity.*

*Wherefore did [Christ] groan and trouble Himself, but to intimate that the faith of one who has just cause to be displeased with himself ought to be in a sense groaning over the accusation of wicked works, to the end that the habit of sinning may give way to the vehemence of penitential sorrow?*⁴⁷²

- c) Schnackenberg, Beasley-Murray and Bultmann's see Jesus' anger directed at the inappropriate display of grief.⁴⁷³

Granting that the Evangelist reports Jesus as angry, what was the cause of His anger? Verse 33 makes it plain, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping..." They sorrowed as St. Paul put it, "...like the rest of men who have no hope," which is irreconcilable with faith in the Resurrection. Despite the testimony of Scripture, despite the signs that Jesus wrought among them...and despite the word He proclaimed, with its emphasis on the promise of life now and hereafter, they mourned "like the rest of men." Beasley-Murray, pg. 193

The wailing of Mary and of the Jews provokes the height of agitation in Jesus. In this context, it cannot be otherwise interpreted than His wrath over the lack of faith, expressed in the wailing that is raised about the death of Lazarus in His presence...The absurdity of this lack of faith is laid bare...as it represents doubt in the power of Jesus to raise the dead. Yet this is really a symbolic picture of the faithlessness that does not understand that the Revealer is the Resurrection and the Life, in whose presence earthly death is void. Bultmann, pg. 406

We see this agitation of Jesus at the healing of the two blind men where Jesus sternly admonishing His disciples,⁴⁷⁴ and also at the healing of the Synagogue leader's daughter. *"When [Jesus and His disciples] came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly...and He said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep?'*⁴⁷⁵

However in an earlier homily (62) St John Chrysostom echoes this sentiment, still occurring in his time, when he writes,

⁴⁷¹, Farley, pg. 207

⁴⁷² Augustine, Tractate 49:18,19

⁴⁷³ See also Schnackenberg, pg. 336.

⁴⁷⁴ Matt 9:30 See also Mark 1:43

⁴⁷⁵ Mark 5:38-39

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But in our days, among our other evils there is one malady very prevalent among our women; they make a great show in their dirges and wailings, baring their arms, tearing their hair, making furrows down their cheeks. And this they do, some from grief, others from ostentation and rivalry, others from wantonness ...If he [who died] had been righteous, it again behooves to be glad, that what is his is now placed in security, free from the uncertainty of the future; if young, that he has been quickly delivered from the common evils of life; if old, that he has departed after taking to satiety that which is held desirable. But you, neglecting to consider these things, incite our hand-maidens to act as mourners, as if you honor the dead, when it is an act of extreme dishonor. For honor to the dead is not wailings and lamenting, but hymns and psalmodies.

A Case for Source Material ⁴⁷⁶

In verses 32-38 we see a repeat of Jesus' anger or discontent in the double usage of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι. Below is the full text from John's Gospel and a table which divides this account into the supposed Grundschrift and John's added material.

32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly ἐνεβριμησατο (disturbed in spirit) and deeply moved. 34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.

Original Source	John's Addition
32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.	
33 When Jesus saw her weeping,	
	and the Jews who came with her also weeping,
He was ἐνεβριμησατο (greatly disturbed in spirit) and deeply moved.	
34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.	
	35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'
38 Then Jesus	
	again ἐμβριμωμενος (greatly disturbed)
came to the tomb.	

Verse 34 Now Jesus asks them "Where have you laid him?" This should not be seen as a lack of divine knowledge on the part of Jesus but more in the light of God's call to Adam of "Where are you?" Gen 3:9 or His question to Abraham, "Where is your wife, Sarah?" (Gen 18:9) or Jesus' question to His disciples at the multiplication of the loaves, "How many loaves do you have?"

⁴⁷⁶ For a full discussion of the case for source material for the Gospel of John see "Two Accounts of Lazarus' Resurrection in John 11, Delbert Burkett, Novum Testamentum XXXVI, 3, 1994.

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Cyril comments that the reason for Christ's question is that *through His inquiry a multitude might be gathered together to the manifestation, and that by His enemies, rather than by others, testimony should be given to the miracle of restoring to life one who was already corrupt.*

Verse 35,36 Jesus wept. The shortest sentence in the Gospels. Here, it could be, by the comment (verse 36) of the Jews with Him who, in response to seeing Jesus weep, "*See how he loved⁴⁷⁷ him,*" that the reason for Jesus' weeping was a display of His sadness as He reflects on the death of His friend, without any comprehension of the miracle that is about to be revealed to them.

But this would only be a superficial reading since earlier Jesus tells His disciples that Lazarus will be raised from the dead.⁴⁷⁸ Jesus now *weeps out of compassion for all humanity, not bewailing Lazarus only*, but at the sight of the chaos that is wrought through Man's disobedience through which sin and death has darkened the Father's plan for His Creation. John provides us this short sentence to show the Jesus, although fully God, is also fully Man and as one with humanity is not impervious to their distress.

In his eulogy of his brother Satyrus, St. Ambrose of Milan speaks about the tears that Jesus wept for Lazarus saying

Tears, then, are marks of devotion, not producers of grief. I confess, then, that I too wept, but the Lord also wept. He wept for one not related to Him, I for my brother. He wept for all in weeping for one, I will weep for you in all, my brother.

He wept for what affected us, not Himself; for the Godhead sheds no tears; but He wept in that nature in which He was sad; He wept in that in which He was crucified, in that in which He died, in that in which He was buried.

Verse 37,38a While some of the Jews saw Jesus' tears only as sadness at the event of Lazarus' death, others (τινες), through their comment of *ουκ ηδυνατο*, implies at best a mortal perception of Jesus as someone who arrives too late to help or at worst malicious criticism. The latter is evident in Chrysostom's homily, "*Not even amid calamities did they hold back their πονηρια (wickedness).*" Meyers also sees this saying,

"...those who were maliciously and wickedly disposed treat His tears as a welcome proof, not of His want of love but of His inability, apart from which He must surely have been able to heal Lazarus of his sickness, even as He had healed the blind man of his blindness! In this way they at the same time threw doubt on the reality of the healing of the blind man."

⁴⁷⁷ Note that the word used here is *εφιλει* not *ηγαπα*. As to the distinction between *αγαπα* and *φιλειν*: the former denotes a love founded in admiration, veneration, esteem, whereas *φιλειν* denotes an inclination prompted by sense and emotion. *Φιλειν* is the same verb used by Mary and Martha in the message they sent to Jesus in verse 11:3.

⁴⁷⁸ Verse 11:4

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In either case John's narrative does not indicate they had any expectation that Jesus would resurrect Lazarus demonstrating their lack of faith. This once again provokes Jesus to anger as the same word *εμβριωμενος* is used. The link between these two actions, the criticism of the Jews and Jesus' anger are evident in the word "ουν," i.e. *therefore*.

Verse 38b "Jesus...came to the tomb, it was a cave and a stone lay against it."

History of the Tomb of Lazarus

The Tomb of Lazarus is located in the West Bank town of al-Eizariya, in Palestine, the biblical village of Bethany, on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives, some 1.5 miles east of Jerusalem. It is thought that there was an antechamber with an opening in the ground which lead to the actual burial chamber. Tradition is that Jesus was standing in this antechamber when he called Lazarus from the grave. The stone most likely laid on the opening of the ante-chamber as this can be deduced from Jesus' words in both verses 38 and 39.⁴⁷⁹ This is different from the tomb of Jesus where the stone was horizontal closing the entrance to the tomb.



The first mention of a church dedicated to Saint Lazarus, called the Lazarium, is by Jerome in 390 and is confirmed by the pilgrim Egeria where she speaks of a liturgy celebrated there about the year 410.

In 1384, a simple mosque was built on the site of the existing structures and in the 16th century, the Ottomans built a larger mosque to serve the town's inhabitants and named it in honor of the town's patron saint, Lazarus of Bethany. Throughout the time as a mosque Christians were invited to worship in it.

In 1863, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land gained title to a plot of ground close to the tomb of Lazarus and by the early 1950's a modern church dedicated to St. Lazarus was built on this property over the remnants of the former Byzantine and Crusader churches.

In 1965, a modern Greek Orthodox church was built just west of the Tomb which incorporates the north wall of the former medieval Benedictine chapel. Nearby the church are ruins that belong to the Orthodox Patriarchate and are traditionally identified either as the House of Simon the Leper or Lazarus.

Verses 39a and 39b

Verse 39a Jesus now commands (*απατε*) that the stone be removed. Chrysostom now brings up an interesting point. "Why did [Jesus] when at a distance summon Lazarus, not place him before their eyes? Or rather, why did He not cause him to arise while the stone yet lay on the grave? For He who was able by His voice to move a corpse, and to show it again endowed with life, would much more by that same voice have been able to move a stone."

⁴⁷⁹ In verse 11:38 the word used is *επεκειτο* (*επι+κειμαι*) which means to lay upon. In verse 39 Jesus says "*απατε τον λιθον.*" Meaning to lift up the stone. See also Luke 11:44 "*For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it.*"

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Both he and St. Cyril provide two answers.

In order to make them witnesses of the miracle; that they might not say as they did in the case of the blind man, It is he, It is not he. For their hands and their coming to the tomb testified that it was indeed he. If they had not come, they might have deemed that they saw a vision, or one man in place of another.

St John Chrysostom, Homily 63

And He did not roll away the stone Himself for these two reasons: first, to teach that it was superfluous to work wonders when there was no necessity for them.

St. Cyril, Commentary on Gospel of John

John Laidlaw, in his book *The Miracles of Our Lord* reinforces St. Cyril's comment when he writes

"He employed natural means to remove natural obstructions, that His Divine power might come face to face with the supernatural element. He puts forth supernatural power to do just that which no less power could accomplish, but all the rest He bids men do in the ordinary way."

Verse 39b Jesus now commands that the stone be taken off the tomb. However, here, just as with the previous verses 32-38, the thought is that the original text led directly to the onlookers taking away the stone (verse 41). It is supposed that John inserted the brief conversation between Jesus and Martha to drive home the point to John's readers regarding the elevation of Martha's faith. In the second half of verse 39, Martha's concern, and most likely alarm, upon hearing Jesus' request to open her brother's tomb reveals she has forgotten what Jesus had said to her earlier (verse 25). After confessing earlier to Jesus that she believes He is the Son of God, Martha, resorts back to human reasoning which would expect that a dead body after four days would suffer decay and decomposition so that Lazarus will surely emit a foul odor, οζει since certainly after 4 days the fragrance of the anointing oils and spices would have worn off.

Verse 40 Jesus seemingly repeats back to Martha the words He had said to her earlier but with a slight difference. The words He said earlier to Martha spoke of Him being the Resurrection and the Life. What Jesus says now to Martha; Do you believe that...*"you will see the glory of God."* This is what He told to His disciples when Jesus received the message about Lazarus; *"This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory..."* Just as in Jesus' healing of the Blind Man (9:3) where He states that the miracle He performs is to reveal the works (glory) of God, here again His last and final sign will be performed to make manifest the works of God.

Verses 41,42 Once the stone is taken away Jesus lifted His eyes⁴⁸⁰ [skyward] and says, *"Father, I thank you for having heard me, I know that you always hear me."* The words *I thank you* attest to the fact that this is a prayer of thanksgiving and not a petition (exhortation) to God the Father. Thus, we must be cautious to distinguish this from Judaic or Hellenistic prayer. In the Judaic idea holy men and prophets pray to God who hears and answer their prayers, indicative of Psalm 118, 21, *"I shall thank You because You answered me, and You were my salvation."* In the Hellenistic idea supernatural powers are granted by the gods to men to perform wonderful feats and miracles. Here in this verse however Jesus is not praying

⁴⁸⁰ This gesture of Jesus lifting up His eyes is recorded in several places. Also, this posture is not unknown in Judaism as is evident in Psalm 123; *To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven. Behold, as the eyes of slaves to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a handmaid to the hand of her mistress, so are our eyes to the Lord our God, until He favors us.*

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to God but is rather giving vocal expression of His complete union with the Father's Will, emphasizing what He said earlier to the Jews about the Father and the Son working together.⁴⁸¹

And the force of Jesus' words regarding His authority over life and death which He also spoke of in chapter 5, will be realized in His raising of Lazarus, for Jesus said to the Jews, "*Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes.*" (5:26)

Equally so, Jesus' prayer, "*for I know that you always hear me*" is a reminder of the continuous (παντοτε) and absolute communion that is present between Jesus and His Father. For us as Orthodox this is another teaching moment from the Great Teacher of how we should strive to be in a constant state of communication, better yet Communion, with God, not only with our mind but with mind and body. We see this call to give thanks to God many times in the Divine Liturgy.

The silent prayer after the Creed. *It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion.*

After the Anamnesis *We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, and we pray to You, Lord our God.*

In the second half of verse 42 the reason for Jesus' prayer becomes clear, "*...but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that You sent me.*" Chrysostom clarifies this saying, "*...Christ looks not so much to His own honor as to our salvation.*"

Cyril comments, "Of course it is agreeable to His self-humiliation as a Man that the Christ thus speaks in a lowly manner, not according to the excellency of the Godhead: and He offers His thanks to the Father not on account of Lazarus only, but for the life of all men."

Cyril, as does Chrysostom, also alludes to Jesus' purpose for His vocal prayer is that by "*giving thanks to the Father as if effecting by Him His God-befitting deeds, that they (Jews) might no more say it was by Beelzebub He did signs.*"⁴⁸²

Verse 43 Lazarus Come Out!

Finally, all the preparation has led to this moment; to the simple command of Jesus, *Lazarus, come out!* The impact of a command is given both by the imperative (command) form of Lazarus, *Λαζαρε*, and the description of Jesus' voice, *φωνη μεγαλη*. And this voice is different from the voice referred to earlier when Jesus spoke of the sheep that "*...hear his voice...and [He] leads them out. (10:3).* This voice is the same apocalyptic voice of the resurrection at the end time, "*when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come forth.*" (5:28,29)

Why Did Jesus Cry Out? St. Cyril comments on the reason Jesus cried out with a loud voice.

The use of a piercing cry, however, was altogether strange and unwarranted in the Savior Christ. For instance, God the Father somewhere says concerning Him: He shall not strive nor cry aloud, and so on. For the works of the true Godhead are without noise or tumult of any kind; and this was the case with Christ, for He is in His Nature God of God and Very God. How then is it to be explained? It was for the good of the hearers...He set forth as a beautiful image of what will be universal and common to

⁴⁸¹ When, after the healing of the paralytic at the Pool, Jesus told them, "I can do nothing on my own...because I seek to do not my own will but the will of Him who sent me." (5:30)

⁴⁸² Matt 12:24 and John 8:52

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the whole race...that there will be a cry made by the sound of a trumpet, according to the language of Paul, proclaiming the resurrection to those that lie in the earth.

In answer to Jesus' command Lazarus comes out of his tomb still wrapped in bandages with the words used here being *κειριαις* and *σουδαριω*.

Κειρία were bandages or grave-clothes for wrapping the deceased hands and feet, this being different from the term used to describe Jesus' burial cloth; *οθονιοις* which are thin strips of (typically) fine linen.

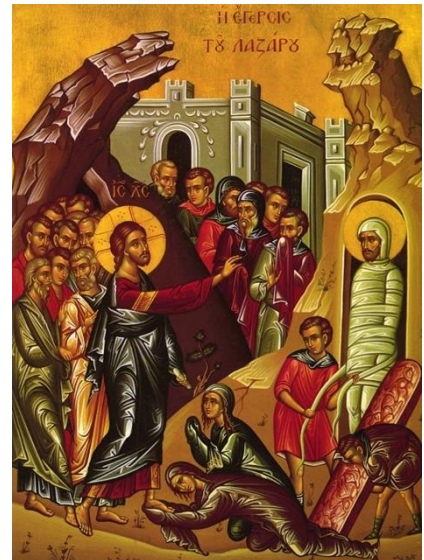
Σουδάριον was a handkerchief from the Latin word, *sudor* (sweat) and was used for wiping the perspiration from the face. However, it also referred to a head cloth (for the dead) and is the same term used to describe the napkin found neatly folded in Jesus' tomb. However, the *σουδάριον* in Lazarus' case did not cover his face as did the napkin which covered Jesus' face. The text of Jn 20:7 tells us that the napkin was *επι της κεφαλης αυτου* (on Jesus' head) whereas in the case of Lazarus his face is not hidden by a cloth, but is rather encircled by the napkin, *σουδαριω περι-εδεδετο* hence the .

Jewish Burial Customs in the 1st Century

A misconception about Lazarus' burial is that he was wrapped like a mummy in a traditional Egyptian style, as the Greek is typically translated in both the Synoptic and John's Gospel of Lazarus being wrapped or bound. There is similar confusion about Jesus' burial because although Matthew, Mark and Luke all use the word *σινδών*, while John uses the term *κειρία*.

In the case of Lazarus, a likely scenario is that described by J. N. Sanders.⁴⁸³

The corpse would have been placed on a strip of linen (κειρία), wide and long enough to envelop it completely. The cloth would be then drawn over the head to the feet, the feet would be bound at the ankles and the arms secured to the body with linen bandages, and the face bound with another cloth (σουδάριον) to keep the jaw in place.



Seemingly in this condition it would have been a struggle to walk. Several of the Church Father make the commentary that for this reason, Lazarus walking out of the tomb is a "*miracle within a miracle.*"⁴⁸⁴ Egyptian mummies were bound in numerous layers of bands, wrapped first around each member separately, then around the entire, whereas in Jewish burials the wrapping were tied around the hands, feet and body just tight enough to contain the spices used to anoint the body. Thus, it is believed that the wrappings were slack and loose enough to render them loosened by Lazarus' movements, although he was not completely freed from the grave-clothes, hence the second command from Jesus, *λύσατε αὐτόν*.

Just as in the case of Jesus telling the people to "*Take away the stone*" so here Jesus again "*bids men do natural things in the ordinary way*" by having them remove the binding from Lazarus so that they were

⁴⁸³ Sanders, J.N. *Those Whom Jesus Loved*, New Testament Studies, Vol. 1, pp. 29-41

⁴⁸⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 64. "*...for his coming forth bound did not seem to be less marvelous than his resurrection.*"

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able to touch the previously dead man and know that a) this was truly Lazarus and b) he was not a phantom or spirit.

St. Cyril also sees in Lazarus' binding cloths and Jesus' call, a metaphor for our own spiritual lives writing,

For, falling into sin, we have wrapped the shame of it like a veil about the face of our soul, and are fast bound by the cords of death. When therefore the Christ shall at the time of the resurrection bring us out from our tombs in the earth, then in very truth does He loosen us from our former evils, and as it were remove the veil of shame, and command that we be let go freely from that time forward; not under the dominion of sin, not subject to corruption, or indeed any of the other troubles that are wont to cause suffering; so that there will be fulfilled in us that which was said by one of the holy prophets: Ye shall both go forth and leap as calves let loose from bonds.

*And consider I pray you the miracle as regards its inner meaning. For if our mind be dead like Lazarus, it behooves our material flesh and our nobler soul, like Martha and Mary [respectively,] to approach the Christ with a confession of faith, and to entreat His help. Then He will stand by us and command the hardness that lies upon our memory to be taken away, and cry with the loud voice of the Evangelic trumpet: "**Come forth from the distractions of the world,**" and loose the cords of our sins; so that we may be able in full vigor to devote ourselves to virtue.*

Silence of the Synoptic Gospels on the Event of the Raising of Lazarus⁴⁸⁵

One question that seems fair to ask is, why for such an important event and meaningful sign such as a four-day resurrection, are the other three Gospels silent about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The only other occurrence of the name Lazarus occurs in Luke with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.⁴⁸⁶ There are also similar resurrection events those being the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and the raising of Jairus' daughter.⁴⁸⁷

In the case of the widow's son and Jairus' daughter the connecting elements are Jesus' annoyance with the extent of the mourning, the use of the term "sleep" to refer to death, and the final command of Jesus to the people, "give her something to eat."

In the Lucan parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus ends the parable with a warning to those who do not believe, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." This being echoed in Jesus' statement to the Jewish leadership, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. *but if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?*" In the raising of Lazarus this unbelief and hardness against Jesus leads the Jewish leadership to the decision to kill Him (John 11:53). In Mark this decision happened after the cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:18) and in Matthew and Luke this happened at the time of Passover.

⁴⁸⁵ For a more complete discussion see the commentaries from Beasley-Murray, pgs. 199-201 and Schnackenburg, pgs. 340-343

⁴⁸⁶ Luke 16:19-31

⁴⁸⁷ Luke 8:49-55, Mark 5:38-43, and Matthew 9:23-26

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John’s Gospel stresses the importance of not only Jesus’ relationship with God the Father but also the historical Jesus, meaning that the events that John relates actually occurred. The Synoptics tend more towards the evangelistic in that they stress Christ as the new and final Covenant with God, Jesus as the awaited Messiah, and the advent of the kingdom of God. As for the Lazarus mentioned in Luke, it is thought that the Lazarus parable has its source in the historical account of the Lazarus who is raised from the dead since the significant features of John’s account of Lazarus are central to the theme of the necessity to believe the words of those who prophesized the Jesus as the Christ.

Verse 45,46 This final sign is the final preparation for those who believe in Him as the “Resurrection and the Life” to understand the significance of the coming event of Christ’s resurrection and the fulfillment of the prophesy of Ezekiel.⁴⁸⁸

And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...
37:13,14

Once again John records that the sign performed by Jesus is divisive, as some believed in Jesus as the Son of God, while others reported it to the Pharisees, either as a proof that He really was the Messiah, or to demand from the Pharisees a judgment on what has happened. Regardless of their reasons what comes about from this is the final determination by the Jewish leadership that Jesus must die. (11:53)

It seems worthwhile to pause here to compare Jesus’ method of elevating people’s faith in Him by the similar pattern of the Samaritan Woman and the Blind Man to Martha.

	Blind Man		Samaritan Woman		Martha	
Literal	[Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes...	“The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’	Jesus said “Give me a drink.”	How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?	Martha and Mary send word to Jesus who answers, “Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him.	If You had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.
Human	The Pharisees asked him “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”	He is a prophet.’	Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.	Where do you get that living water?	Martha, your brother will rise again.	I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

⁴⁸⁸ Orthodox Study Bible, Note section, pg. 1448

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	So for the second time the Pharisees called the blind man and asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'	Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?	Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. It will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.	Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.	I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?	Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the One coming into the world.
	The Pharisees said, "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."	If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'	Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.	Sir, I see that you are a prophet	Take away the stone from the tomb.	Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.

	Blind Man		Samaritan Woman		Martha	
Human	Jesus asked the blind "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"	'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.'	Jesus said to her, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."	I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.	Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?	
Divine	Jesus said, "You have seen Him, and He is the one speaking with you."	Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him.	Jesus said to her, 'I am He, the one who is speaking to you.'	The woman said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Can He be the Messiah? And the people answered "for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'	[Jesus] cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' and the dead man came out...	Orthodox tradition holds that Martha was among the Myrrh-bearing Women who stood at the Cross at the Crucifixion of Jesus and later came to His tomb early on the morning following Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body.

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Verses 47,48 Both the Jewish leadership and the Pharisees (αρχιερείς και οι φαρισαίοι) called for a meeting of the Sanhedrin (Συνέδριον)⁴⁸⁹ to decide on how to handle “*this Man who works many signs.*” The grammatical form of the leadership’s response to being informed of Jesus’ miracle, τι ποιούμεν is not a question but more of exasperation, “What are we accomplishing” or “Our past actions are getting us nowhere.”⁴⁹⁰ Previous actions such as the order that “*anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue*”⁴⁹¹ are not having the desired effect and with the upcoming Passover in Jerusalem, the event of Lazarus’ resurrection will spread so that many Jews will come to honor Jesus as the Messiah at the Passover in Jerusalem.⁴⁹²

Also note that even though the Jewish leadership and the Pharisees acknowledge that Jesus could not perform these signs (miracles) without the grace of God⁴⁹³ they continue refusing to acknowledge Jesus’ divinity as they refer to Jesus as οὗτος ο ἀνθρώπος (this person).⁴⁹⁴

In the next verse (48) we see where the true concern of the leadership lay and their hardness against believing in who Jesus is. Their fear, should the belief in Jesus grow, is not that the Romans will take away their Temple and the Jewish nation, but that *they will take away our τοπον* (place), thus their concern is politically motivated rather than religious. Their true fear is losing the power and authority to *rule our own people, or to give judgment; themselves [Romans] rather giving judgment.*

Chrysostom comments that this love for power and authority is not to be laid strictly at the feet of the Jewish leadership but that its infectious nature.

*...has filled the world with ten thousand evils; through this malady the law courts are filled, from this comes the desire of fame and wealth, from this the love of rule, and insolence, through this the roads have wicked robbers and the sea pirates, from this proceed the murders through the world, through this our race is rent asunder, and whatever evil you may see, you will perceive to arise from this. This has even burst into the churches...”*⁴⁹⁵

Verses 49-52

Who Was Caiaphas?⁴⁹⁶

Caiaphas was the high priest of Jerusalem from 18–36 AD. He is mentioned by Josephus Flavius as Joseph Caiaphas and was appointed by the regional governor Valerius Gratus and served throughout the administration of Gratus' successor, Pontius Pilate.⁴⁹⁷ Caiaphas is also mentioned in the New Testament (Matt. 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:13–14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6). Josephus also records that in 37 AD

⁴⁸⁹ See note 46 for the definition of the Sanhedrin. Note that the lack of an article “O” indicates that this was most likely not a formal council which could properly review and pass judgement upon Jesus’ actions but merely a “meeting” (συνήγαγον) of the Sanhedrin members. This unofficial council would occur again at Jesus’ mock trial (John 18:13)

⁴⁹⁰ The word ποιούμεν is in indicative mood which describes a situation that actually is rather than the subjunctive mood that is used to express a wish, desire, or recommendation.

⁴⁹¹ John 9:22

⁴⁹² John 12:9-13

⁴⁹³ Refer to what was said at the formal inquiry of the man born blind, “*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.*” 9:33

⁴⁹⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 64 and Cyril, Book VII

⁴⁹⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 64

⁴⁹⁶ See *Caiaphas in the New Testament*, David Flusser, Atiqot / עתיקות, Vol. 21, pp. 81-87

⁴⁹⁷ Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, §35 and 95

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Caiaphas along with Pilate was deposed by Vitellius, governor of Syria. Even so, Caiaphas must have possessed great political skills as he was the longest serving high priest during this time, 19 years.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas,⁴⁹⁸ the powerful and important priestly family in Jerusalem. In addition to the New Testament, the Mishnah and the Tosefta⁴⁹⁹ mention the House of Kaipha as a high-priestly family. It was to this priestly family to whom Jesus had directed his early comments after His cleansing of the Temple saying, “You have made my Father’s house into a εμποριου (marketplace).⁵⁰⁰

The family of Annas, which included Caiaphas and his family, were Sadducees as is evident by referencing Acts 4:5,6 together with Acts 5:17. The Sadducees, different from the Pharisees, were priests of the aristocracy of Israel descended from Zadok, the first high priest of ancient Israel who served in Solomon’s Temple.⁵⁰¹

The Sadducees were strict adherents of the Law, rejecting the status of Oral Traditions given to them by the Pharisees who were champions of the Oral Traditions, and it was on this point mainly that the Sadducees and the Pharisees disagreed and thus the reason why the Sadducees were more alarmed than the Pharisees regarding what they perceived to be Jesus’ disregard for the Law.

Equally, Caiaphas was fearful that Jesus’ followers would incite another rebellion against the Romans to which the Romans would react violently. Caiaphas surely had in mind the unsuccessful uprisings in Judea in the early years of the 1st century AD, especially the one led by the robber and seditionist Theudas who is mentioned in Acts 5:36.

Verse 49

These two points, Sadducees hostility towards the Pharisees and the danger of Jesus’ actions threatening their established position helps to explain the arrogance of Caiaphas’ two derisive statements “ουκ οιδατε ουδεν.” (You know nothing) followed by ουδε διαλογιζεσθε (and you even don’t consider).

Verse 50-52

Caiaphas now makes a prophesy.

“... ‘it is more expedient (profitable) for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather together the (διεσκορπισμενα) scattered children of God.”

The idea that one man dies rather than a whole nation is echoed in the Mishnah. In Genesis Rabbah 91 the commentary speaks of the time of the famine in Egypt during the time of Joseph. “Judah said to Israel his father: Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, and we will live, and not die, both we, and you, and our children” (Genesis 43:8). The rabbinic meaning is given as “it is preferable for one person to be given over than for all of us to be in a state of death.”

There is a clarification to be made. Within Jewish tradition, if there is a demand for a single unnamed Jew among a group, that individual must not be given up, but all must fight. However, if the demand is for a

⁴⁹⁸ John 18:13

⁴⁹⁹ The [Tosefta](#) is a companion volume to the Mishnah, containing laws and discussions that were not included in the Mishnah.

⁵⁰⁰ John 2:17

⁵⁰¹ 2 Samuel 8, 1 Kings 1:38-45, and Matt 1:15

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named individual, especially one deserving of death, then he must be surrendered. Precedence for this is seen in the giving over of Sheba who led a revolt against King David.⁵⁰² Thus Caiaphas portrays Jesus as one who through His rebellious actions should be given up preserving the peace with Rome and not threaten the destruction of the nation of Israel. Recall that when Jesus went to the Festival of Tabernacles (John 7:2) some of the people accused Jesus of being a false prophet (πλανης) leading them astray.

The irony in Caiaphas' words is that Caiaphas, unknowingly, speaks the truth. With his next statement he shows that he is the one "who knows nothing," for yes, Jesus will die for the nation of Israel (Matt 15:24) but also for all people (Mark 11:17, Luke 24:47). Certainly unintended, Caiaphas' prophecy is not of his own. God was using him as an instrument to prophesize the Father's Will.⁵⁰³ Albert Barnes, in his commentary on the Gospel of John and St. Cyril speak of God who uses men both willing and unwillingly.

He may make even their malice and wicked plots the very means of accomplishing his purposes. What they regard as the fulfillment of their plans God may make the fulfillment of his, yet so as directly to overthrow their designs, and prostrate them in ruin.

Barnes

[Caiaphas] proclaims beforehand of what good things the death of the Christ would become the source, saying that which he did not understand... the prophecy being as it were given, not to him personally, but to the outward representative of the priesthood.

Cyril

Caiaphas' word of συμφερει, (verse 50) which often times is translated as "better" has more of a connotation of expediency for political or financial gain. This translation fits more closely that Jesus' death was politically motivated by Caiaphas for the sake of preserving the priestly house of Annas (and himself). And while it can be argued that a part of his concern was for preserving peace for the sake of the nation of Israel, John makes us to understand the larger truth which is that Jesus' death (and resurrection) will be for the salvation, not only of the scattered Jewish Diaspora but of all τα τεκνα του θεου (children of God).⁵⁰⁴

Caiaphas then said that the death of Christ would be for the Jews only, but the Evangelist says that it would be for all mankind.

St. Cyril

Finally note that in verse 52 John uses the term εθνους (nation) to designate the nation of Israel and then τεκνα (children) of God, this being done so as to avoid any confusion that Jesus was sent only for the people of Israel. And the term λαου (people) is different from the word John uses, εθνους (nation) indicating that Christ fulfills a new covenant over Deut 14:2 and was no longer only for the people specially chosen by God, but for all nations.

Verse 53 The advice of Caiaphas is accepted and they συνεβουλευσαν (took council *together*) to plan how Jesus was to be put to death. John makes clear that the intent was not to capture Jesus so that he can be put on trial but that He be put to death. All the previous ideas of "seeking to kill Him" have now coalesced into a formal plan to each of them had agreed.

Verse 54 Jesus now leaves Bethany and ουκ επι παρρησια περιπατει εν τοις ιουδαιοις (no longer walks openly among the Jews. John does not tells us if this is because Jesus discovered their plan or

⁵⁰² 2 Samuel 20

⁵⁰³ Farley, 215, Bultmann, 412, Schnackenburg, 349

⁵⁰⁴ See also John 6:40, 10:16, 17:20,21

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knowing that some had gone to the Jewish leadership to relate the miracle of Lazarus does the same thing He did earlier at the Feast of the Tabernacles when” Jesus did not go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him.”⁵⁰⁵ Jesus’ departure is for the same reason as it was back in chapter 7 when His brothers encouraged Him to go to the Festival; His time had not yet come.

As for the location of His destination, Εφραϊμ (Ephraim) this is only mentioned in John’s Gospel. The location is disputed among historians, both ancient and modern. Eusebius mentions this as Ephron about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. Josephus mentions it in his book on the Jewish Wars, and it is mentioned in both 1 and 2 Samuel. This now marks the end of Jesus’ ministry.

Verse 55 John records Jesus attending three (3) Passovers, the first in John 2, at which He cleansed the Temple arousing the ire of the Jewish leadership, the second in chapter 6, where many ceased to follow Him after He said “*My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink,*” and the third one now.

Verse 56,57 People on both sides of faith sought Jesus out, both those who through His teachings and signs believed Him to be the Son of God and Messiah and those who agreed that he was the agitator and false prophet the Pharisees claimed Him to be.

The form of the people’s question, *στι ου μη ελθη εις την εορτην* therefore could have two meanings. The first being “*Surely He would not come to the Festival*” since His presence certainly put Jesus in great danger. Secondly it could merely be a question, “*What do you think. Will He come?*” In this case it is simple doubt. What will Jesus decide to do since there was danger on the one hand from the command of the Jewish leadership to turn Jesus in to the authorities, against His duty as a Jew who was required to attend the Festival as an observant Jew.



Chapter 12 The Anointing of Jesus and Entry into Jerusalem

Introduction and Summary

This chapter will mark the end of Jesus’ ministry and ends the first half of the Gospel of John, The *Prologue and Book of Signs*. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem sees Him received as King and Messiah but it is also the Way to the Cross. The world, who will judge Christ, will also be judged by Him so that the decisive test for those claiming to belong to Christ will be their answer to the question that He asked Martha, *πιστευεις τουτο* and to His disciples, *μη και υμεις θελετε υπαγειν*.⁵⁰⁶

Chapter 12, both closes the Book of Signs and is an introduction to the second half of the Gospel of John (The Book of Glory) as is evident in Jesus’ words, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*”⁵⁰⁷ The chapter also includes the Father’s answer to this statement is the acknowledgement of the work Jesus has already accomplished and will accomplish, “*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*”

The chapter consists of

- The event of the anointing of Jesus by Mary 12:12:3-8
- Two (2) narratives, one between Jesus and Judas and one with the Greeks
- Entry into Jerusalem 12:1-16
- A discourse by Jesus on faith and judgement 12:17-43

⁵⁰⁵ John 7:1. Although Jesus may have heard that orders were given that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him, 11:57

⁵⁰⁶ Bultmann, pg. 392

⁵⁰⁷ John 12:23

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- Epilogue 12:44-50

Verse 1 The Approaching Passover The word *ouv* (therefore) in the beginning of the first verse indicates the continuation of John's narrative as picked up from verse 11:55. Jesus then returns to Bethany to the home of Lazarus to show that He did not flee previously from fear or concern for safety but with a full intention to return to fulfill the Father's Will.

The mention of "Six days before Passover would mean that this day is the Great Sabbath, as this whole week was termed The Great and Holy Week as commanded by God⁵⁰⁸ during the time of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. From the last verses of chapter 11 we know that there was great expectations on the part of the people (11:55-56) to see if Jesus would be present at the Passover Festival given the command by the chief priests (11:57). Later in chapter 12 we are told that many of the Jews in attendance found out that Jesus did indeed come to the Festival.⁵⁰⁹

Verse 2 Dinner in Honor of Jesus Jesus returns to Lazarus' home to attend a dinner with, at the very least, His disciples, Martha, Mary and of course Lazarus. In of itself this was very dangerous for those attending. Jewish Law, both in the Torah and in the Mishnah required obedience to the priest's command and offered severe penalties to those in violation.

"If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible."

Leviticus 5:1

Verses 3 The Anointing of Jesus This anointing is recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels and reflects several inconsistencies leading to questions regarding the relationship and timing between John's account and the Synoptics.

John 12:3 *Mary took a round of **costly** (πιστικης πολυτιμου) perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

Mark 14:3-9 *While He was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of **very expensive** (πιστικης πολυτελους) perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.*

Matt 26:6-13 *While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of **very expensive** (βαρυτιμου) perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table.*

Luke 7:36-50 *When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life (αμαρτωλος) learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind Him at his feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

⁵⁰⁸ Exodus 12:14-20

⁵⁰⁹ 12:9

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Some of the more pronounced inconsistencies (below) led the Early Church Fathers and modern scholars to question if all the Gospel accounts refer to a single event of the anointing Jesus or do the differing accounts point to multiple anointings?

- a) In Mark and Matthew, the woman anointed Jesus just before his arrest. In John she anointed Jesus just prior to His final entry into Jerusalem. In Luke, the anointment occurs much earlier before His final entry into Jerusalem.
- b) In the Synoptic Gospels the woman's name is not mentioned and only in the case of Luke's account is it mentioned that she is a sinner.
- c) In Matthew and Mark, the anointing occurs in the house of Simon, not Lazarus. In John the anointing occurs at the home of Lazarus and his sisters while Luke's account is the home of a Pharisee.⁵¹⁰
- d) In Matthew and Mark the anointing oil is only mentioned as being poured over Jesus' head while in John and Luke's account it is poured over Jesus' feet, with the addition that she "wiped" the oil with her hair.
- e) Mark's account only says that "some were indignant" at the perceived waste of anointment. Matthew's account indicates that "the disciples were indignant" but only John mentions that it was Judas who was indignant.

One Anointing or Multiple?

Cyril of Alexandria in his commentary on Luke does not relate Luke's account of the anointing to any other account in his sermon on the passage.

John Chrysostom in his Homily on Matthew, implies that the women are one and the same in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but that John is referring to another woman.

This woman seems indeed to be one and the same with all the evangelists, yet she is not so; but though with the three she does seem to me to be one and the same, yet not so with John, but another person, one much to be admired, the sister of Lazarus.

Chrysostom Homily 80

Theophylact⁵¹¹ in his commentary on Luke states that Matthew and Mark are referring to one event, Luke to a different event, and John to yet a third.

*The [Eusebian Canons](#), (4th century), imply that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all refer to the same event. This is evident in Section 39 of the *Diatessaron of Tatian*⁵¹² which harmonies all the accounts.*

Based partly on this the Eastern Church came to the consensus that Matthew, Mark, and John's account were, in fact, referring to the same event, as represented in the hymns of Canticle 9 of Holy Wednesday in the Lenten Triodion of the Eastern Orthodox.

⁵¹⁰ It is not accepted among scholars that the Pharisee was Simon the Leper as it is questionable that a leper would be accepted as a Pharisee.

⁵¹¹ See note 24

⁵¹² The *Diatessaron of Tatian* (160–175 AD) is the earliest attempt to harmonize the gospels. It was created by the Christian apologist and ascetic Tatian who sought to combine all the textual material he found in the four gospels

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Eusebian Harmonization of the Account of Jesus' Anointing

Jn 12:1-3 And Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where was Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from among the dead. And they made a feast for him there. Martha was serving; while Lazarus was one of them that sat with him.

Mk 14:3 And at the time of Jesus' being at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,

Jn 12:9-11 great multitudes of the Jews heard that Jesus was there: and they came, not because of Jesus alone, but that they might look also on Lazarus, whom he raised from among the dead. And the chief priests considered how they might kill Lazarus also; because many of the Jews were going on his account, and believing in Jesus.

Jn 12:3, Mk 14:3 And Mary took a case of the ointment of fine nard, of great price, and opened it, and poured it out on the head of Jesus as he was reclining; and she anointed his feet, and wiped them with her hair

Jn 12:3-6 and the house was filled with the scent of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, he that was to betray him, said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given unto the poor?" This he said, not because of his care for the poor, but because he was a thief, and the chest was with him, and what was put³ into it he used to bear. And that displeased the rest of the disciples also within themselves, and they said,

Mk 14:4-7 Why was this ointment wasted? (Mt 26:9) It was possible that it should be sold for much, and be given to the poor. And they were angry with Mary. (Mt 26:10) And Jesus perceived it, and said unto them, (Jn 12:7) "Leave her. Why molest her? She has done a good work for me for the day of my burial.

Mt 26:11, Mk 14:7, Jn 12:8 At all times the poor are with you, and when you wish you can do them a kindness, but I am not at all times with you. Mt 26:12, Mk 14:7 And for this cause, when she poured this ointment on my body, it is as if she did it for my burial and anointed my body beforehand.

Verses 4-6 The charge of waste by the disciples as given in Matthew 26:8 is now personified by John in the person of Judas. In the hymn of the Matins of Holy Wednesday the actions of the sinful woman and Judas are compared.

Ungrateful and envious in his wickedness, the wretched Judas calculated the value of the gift worthy of God, whereby the woman gained release from her debt of sins, he traffics in the grace of divine love.

But this still leaves three questions.

- a) If the disciples were indignant in the same manner as Judas (Matt 26:8,) how then is Judas' anger different?
- b) Would have the cost of the perfume (300 denarii - \$700) been better spent on the poor?
- c) Why would Jesus, who is all-knowing, allow Judas to be the treasurer if He knew of his weakness?

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- a) **Judas vs. the Disciples** Both the disciples and Judas said basically the same thing however the difference is in the motive. John gives us the important detail that Judas motivation was greed and not charity as was the disciples motive.⁵¹³
- b) **Better Use of the Ointment** This is a question that was certainly an issue during the Reformation regarding what was seen as poor stewardship of money. Funds that were used to build grand churches, the finery that accompanied it, altars, mosaics, painting, and sacramental items of precious metals, rather than used to care for the thousands of people in need during the Middle Ages. This conversation continues even unto today when people question the necessity of splendid Orthodox architecture, priest's vestments, and iconography.

Jesus' response to Judas in John and His response to the disciples in Matthew is revealing. He tells them to "*leave alone*" the action she has performed, then adding that "The poor you will always have with you." In Exodus (chapters 25-28), God laid out extravagant plans for first the Ark of the Covenant, Tabernacle, Altar, Sacramental items, and Priest's vestments and here Jesus tells His disciples that acts of devotion to Him are worthy acts.

St. Cyril echoes this when in his homily on the Gospel of John comments that nothing is better than devotion towards Him...*Love for the poor is very praiseworthy, only let it be put after veneration of God.* And what [Christ] says amounts to this: The time which has been appointed for My being honored, that is to say, the time of My sojourn on earth, does not require that the poor should be honored before Me. Therefore, when there is need of service or of singing, these must be honored before love towards the poor; for it is possible to do good after the spiritual services are over.

Regarding ornamenting the church St. Cyril continues, *If you should see any one provide sacred vessels and offer them, and loving to labor upon any other ornament of the church, about its walls or floor; do not command what has been made to be sold, or overthrown, lest you spoil his zeal. But if, before he had provided them, he were to tell you of it, command it to be given to the poor; forasmuch as [Christ] also did this not to spoil the spirit of the woman, and as many things as He says, He speaks for her comfort.*

- c) **Judas as Treasurer?** Many theologians and scholars have searched for the answer to this question attempting to shroud it in symbolism, but the reality is that Jesus this as a deliberate act of love. Knowing his weakness Jesus puts Judas in charge of the money to demonstrate that He gave Judas every opportunity to save himself from his lust for money.

Even though Chrysostom admits that Jesus purposely assigned Judas as treasurer, he takes a rather jaded view of Judas.

And if anyone ask why He put the bag of the poor in the hands of a thief, and made him steward who was a lover of money, we would reply, that God knows the secret reason; but that, if we may say something by conjecture, it was that He might cut off from him all excuse. For he could not say that he did this thing from love of money, (for he had in the bag sufficient to allay his desire,) but from excessive wickedness which Christ wished to restrain, using much condescension towards him.

Origen takes a more humane approach pointing out that Judas should not be seen as simply an evil person, but as someone who was the image and likeness of God. The Jewish idea of

⁵¹³ Orthodox Study Bible, pg. 1449 and Schnakenberg, pg. 368

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humanity is that Adam was formed with two impulses: a good impulse יצר הטוב (yetzer ha-tov) and an evil impulse יצר הרע (yetzer ha-ra) and Origen points this out.⁵¹⁴

I would not think that he would have been entrusted with the money-box if he were a thief from the beginning. He was trusted with it, therefore, because he was worthy of being trusted, although it was foreknown that he would fall away. And he was so great a man of Christ's peace that Jesus once had high hopes in him, as a good apostle, for hear the words, "In whom I hoped" Psalm 41:9

Origen, Commentary on John 32

St. Augustine, taking a similar track as Origen, writes that Jesus trusted Judas to show that the Church should be patient and tolerant even of thieves.

Why did He give admission to a thief? To teach His Church patiently to bear with thieves? But he who had formed the habit of abstracting money from the bag, did not hesitate for money received to sell the Lord Himself. But let us see what answer our Lord gave to such words. See, brethren: He does not say to him, You speak so on account of your thievishness. He knew him to be a thief, yet did not betray him, but rather endured him, and showed us an example of patience in tolerating the wicked in the Church.

Augustine, Tractates on John 50.10-11

⁵¹⁴ Yetzer ha-tov is the moral conscience, the inner voice reminding us of God's law when considering an immoral or unethical act. Yetzer ha-ra is not a desire to do evil but rather, it is the selfish nature which desires to satisfy personal needs.