

The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple

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Preface

A small fragment of the gospel of John, p52 by its academic designation, is arguably the earliest piece of the New Testament in existence. Popularly called the John Rylands fragment because it resides in the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, it dates to about 125 A.D. and contains portions of John 18:31-33, 37-38. In 1993, as a visiting scholar to England, I had the opportunity to examine it for an hour or so in its vacuum sealed plates. What an irony that the oldest existing piece of the New Testament belongs to what once was regarded by many critical scholars to be one of the latest books in the New Testament.

The present treatment of the Fourth Gospel does not attempt to break new ground. Rather, it aims at collecting some of the scholarly work that has been performed in the Fourth Gospel and offering it in a readable, concise commentary. The distance between ivory tower scholarship and the average Christian is great, and it is my belief that there are too few bridges between them. Hence, this short work.

Any treatment of the gospels, of course, must be selective, and this one is no exception. I have tried to maintain those distinctives which are most compatible with evangelicalism's bibliology. This does not mean that I draw exclusively from evangelical scholars, but it does mean that when I draw from beyond the evangelical circle I try to avoid importing ideas which are in conflict with the authority and infallibility of Holy Scripture. Still, since all truth is God's truth, valid insights that come from resources beyond my own circle are still welcome.

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Introduction to the Fourth Gospel

It has been recognized from the very earliest periods of the church that the Gospel of John is unique. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of their similarities in emphasis and structure. Large sections of the synoptics run parallel to each other. The Fourth Gospel follows a different course. Comparatively little is common between the synoptic gospels and John, particularly in the narratives of Jesus' public ministry prior to his passion. In the synoptics, Jesus is largely in Galilee; in John he is largely in Judea and Jerusalem. If one read the synoptics only, it might be concluded that Jesus' ministry was only about a year in length, but John speaks of three Passovers which Jesus attended in Jerusalem, thus extending his ministry to at least two and a half years and quite probably three and a half.¹

A great many critical questions have occupied students of John's gospel for many years, and the debates are ongoing. These issues concern possible textual displacements, possible sources, theories of authorship, the possibility of later editing, the place of composition, possible influences from Hellenistic and Palestinian world-views, a possible target audience, special theological issues peculiar to the gospel, and the work's literary structure. For advanced discussions of these technical matters, the reader is referred to the formal introductions in academic commentaries and introductions to the New Testament. It will be sufficient for our purposes here to treat these matters in a brief overview.

Authorship

It is a peculiarity of the Fourth Gospel that while the document describes in the third person the witness whose record is preserved, the author is not named. Rather, he is called "the beloved disciple" or "the other disciple" (cf. 13:23-24; 18:15-16; 19:26-27; 20:2-8; 21:7, 20-24). The traditional identification, going back to the time of the second century fathers, is that he is John bar Zebedee, and the classical defense has been given by B. F. Westcott.² However, critical scholarship is inclined to explore other possibilities, such as, John Mark, Lazarus, or a symbolic figure of an ideal disciple.³ It is almost axiomatic among critical scholars to attribute the authorship of the Fourth Gospel to a community of disciples rather than to the apostle.⁴ Nevertheless, the traditional position is still plausible and may be the best.⁵

¹For an extensive discussion of this problem, see H. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 45-63.

²B. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) v-xxxii.

³R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) LXXXVII-XCVIII.

⁴R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979); O. Cullmann, *The Johannine*

We see no compelling reason to challenge the ancient tradition that the Fourth Gospel was written by one of the twelve apostles, John the brother of James.

Place and Date of Composition

Several documents in the New Testament have historical connections, in one way or another, with the city of Ephesus. They include Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 1, 2 and 3 John, Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. If the Apostle John is the author of the Fourth Gospel, as the early fathers believed, then Ephesus is the natural choice, since the patristic testimony is that John spent his final days there. Furthermore, if John's composition was late in his life, again the common assumption, then there is little reason to object to the traditional date in the mid-90s A.D.

Structure

The theological purpose of the Fourth Gospel is quite clear. The first half of the work is built around a series of "signs" which all point toward the answer to a single, implicit question, "Who is Jesus?" This section of the gospel, which occupies chapters 1-12, is commonly referred to by biblical scholars as the "Book of Signs."⁶ The last half of the work, which begins in chapter 13, describes Jesus' death and the surrounding events in Jerusalem.⁷ It is commonly referred to as the "Book of Glory" and also seeks to answer the question of Jesus' identity, though not by a series of miraculous signs. John's final answer, of course, is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by accepting this conclusion, a person may have eternal life (20:30-31).

The Fourth Gospel falls into a fourfold structure which can be outlined as follows:

Prologue (1:1-18)

The gospel begins with a hymn of the incarnation.

Book of Signs (1:19--12:50)

Here, John structures his account of the life of Jesus around the alternating signs and discourses. While Jesus performed many miracles during his ministry, and

Circle, J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

⁵D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970) 241-271; E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 218-225.

⁶In using this appellation, one need not accept Bultmann's suggestion that there was an actual literary source of collected miracle stories which existed prior to the composition of the Fourth Gospel, cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. Beasley-Murray, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

⁷Scholars do not all divide the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory the same way. Most scholars prefer to divide them between chapters 12 and 13, see comments R. Brown, cxxxviii-cxxxix.

the synoptic gospels record dozens of them, the Fourth Gospel confines itself to a limited number (20:30; 21:25). In the section addressed here, only seven miracles are recorded. They are:

Turning the water to wine (2:11)

Healing the nobleman's son (4:54)

Healing the invalid at Bethesda (5:8-9)

Walking on the Sea of Galilee (6:14)

Feeding the five thousand (6:16-20)

Healing the man born blind (9:13-16)

Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:43-44)

These miracles are interwoven with long discourses which expound on the meaning of Jesus' person and work. The miracles are not ends in themselves, but they are events which point beyond themselves to great truths about Jesus. The discourses and dialogues which surround the signs explain their deeper meaning.

Book of Glory (13:1--20:31)

The latter half of the gospel is the story of Jesus' passion and the events surrounding it. Consistently in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks of his passion and death as his glorification, the moment when he would be lifted up on the cross in order to draw all people unto himself. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus told his followers, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). On the night of the betrayal, Jesus exclaimed, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him!" (13:31). In his prayer later that same evening, Jesus prayed, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (17:1). The concept of glorification implied resurrection, for Jesus also spoke of being glorified with the glory he had with the Father before the world began (17:5), a statement pointing to an existence after his anticipated death. He prayed that his followers would "be with me where I am" so that they might "see my glory," a statement that surely implies resurrection not only for Jesus but for all those who would believe in him (17:24). Only after Jesus was "glorified" did his followers understand the full import of the prophetic writings concerning his suffering and death (12:16). Still, death itself was the supreme moment of glorification. Even in connection with the prediction about Peter's martyrdom, Jesus could speak of it as a death by which Peter would "glorify God" (21:19).

Epilogue (21:1-25)

The gospel closes with a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Peter and several other disciples in Galilee. The Fourth Gospel has two closings, one in 20:30-31 and the other in 21:25, so that the latter forms a kind of appendix to the whole.

One other structural/theological factor should be observed initially, the prominence of the Jewish festivals. It has already been mentioned that no less than three p

Passovers are recorded, and in addition to them, there are also references to the sabbath, the feast of booths and the feast of dedication.⁸ The prominence of these festivals and the way in which John structures the narratives around them imply that he intended the reader to discern that the eschatological fulfillment of these celebrations was in the life of Jesus. The fact that Jesus' death was at the Passover celebration is especially significant in this regard. Jesus' death is the ultimate concern of Passover, and Jesus is the ultimate concern of Pentecost, Dedication and the Sabbath as well.

Theological Themes

Theologically, the Fourth Gospel is characterized by stark contrasts, so much so that it is common to speak of Johannine dualism. These antitheses between *light and darkness* (12:35-36, 46), *truth and falsehood* (14:6; 16:13; 17:17; 18:37-38), *life and death* (12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2-3), *love and hatred* (13:1, 34-35; 14:15, 21, 23-24, 31; 15:9-17; 17:26), *faith and unbelief* (12:37-48; 14:10-12; 16:29-31; 20:8, 24-31), and *the world and the disciples* (12:31; 14:17, 19, 27, 30-31; 15:18-25; 16:2-4, 8-11, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 11, 14-16, 18, 21; 18:36) are woven throughout the woof and warp of the book.

The Book of Glory has a very carefully developed theology of the Holy Spirit which is somewhat different in orientation from the way the synoptics and the Book of Acts treat the Spirit. Jesus' extensive teachings about the Paraclete on the night of his betrayal are unparalleled elsewhere in the New Testament. Here, Jesus anticipated the mission of the apostles to the world after he had returned to the Father.

Historical Context

If the historical context of the Fourth Gospel and 1, 2 and 3 John are the same, several things can be deduced about the circumstances surrounding the compositions. The letters are clearly aimed at a heresy promoted by a group that ostensibly was

⁸In 5:1, there is an unnamed feast, possibly either Pentecost or trumpets, though the arguments for either cannot be followed here.

once a part of the Christian community (1 Jn. 2:19, 26; 3:7; 4:4-5). Enough information is given to indicate that the essence of this heresy was a devaluation and a distortion of the apostolic teaching about Jesus of Nazareth. Members of the opposing party claimed to "know" Jesus (1 Jn. 2:4), and they insisted that they were "in the light" (1 Jn. 2:9). However, they denied that Jesus was the Messiah (1 Jn. 2:22), and they refused to accept the apostolic message that he appeared in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7). Such a position was not only a blunt denial of apostolic teaching, but according to John, it was a blunt denial of God's own testimony about Jesus (1 Jn. 5:10-11). As might be expected, such controversy fostered an attitude of hatred and created a schism (1 Jn. 2:19; 4:20).

The nature of this heresy bears important affinities with what we know of the Johannine Community's struggles within itself as well as what we know of gnostic ideas in the second century A.D. Both of these areas form important background material for the study of the Johannine Letters and the Fourth Gospel.

When speaking of the Johannine community, it is necessary to delve briefly into the structure of the church in the apostolic era. Different apostles became recognized leaders in particular areas. While a given city might have several house churches, each with its own leadership (cf. Ro. 16:5; 1 Co. 16:19; Col. 4:15), each house congregation seems to have looked beyond itself to a common apostolic leader. James, for instance, was the recognized leader in Jerusalem (Ac. 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12). Paul was especially important for the congregations he established in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia (1 Co. 4:14-17; 9:1-2; 1 Th. 1:6-7).⁹ The dominant tradition of the church fathers associates the Apostle John with Ephesus in the later years of his life, and it is from here that tradition testifies to John's authorship of the Fourth Gospel, the Johannine Letters and the Apocalypse.¹⁰

If the Fourth Gospel and the letters 1, 2 and 3 John are to be grouped together as having a common source and presumably as being addressed to a common community, then we may expect them to reflect to some degree the character of the communities to which they were addressed. Such an expectation is obvious in the letters, but it is quite possible in the Fourth Gospel as well. In fact, one may reasonably assume that if the four gospels were written to specific Christian communities, then the evangelists who wrote them chose stories about Jesus and teachings from Jesus that would relate to particular church situations. This may in part explain the difference in subject matter between the Fourth Gospel and the

⁹Scholarly explorations into the relationship of specific communities to apostolic leadership may be found in R. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984) and R. Brown, *Antioch and Rome* (New York: Paulist, 1983).

¹⁰F. Filson, "John the Apostle," *IDB* (1962) II.954.

synoptics. On the basis of these assumptions, scholars have attempted to reconstruct the progress of the Johannine community from its inception by examining the kinds of stories in the Fourth Gospel and the content of the Johannine letters. To the perceptive reader, several groups of individuals are discernable in the Fourth Gospel.

Groups who did not believe in Jesus fall under the categories of the world, the Jews and the disciples of John the Baptist.¹¹ The "world" is the most general category, and while Christ's mission was to the world (Jn. 3:16-19); 6:51; 8:12; 9:5; 12:47), it is clear that the world at large rejected him (Jn. 1:10; 3:19; 7:7; 14:17; 15:18; 16:20). In the Johannine Letters, the world continues as the alien culture opposing Christianity (1 Jn. 3:1, 13; 5:19). The false teachers are themselves products of the world (1 Jn. 4:5).

In one sense "the Jews" may be subsumed under the world (Jn. 8:22-23), and yet they form a special group which is addressed repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel. For the most part, there is a severely negative tone associated with the mention of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel. Such references should not be taken as anti-semitisms nor can they hardly refer to all Jews, since Jesus' own disciples, not to mention Jesus himself, were also Jews. The Jews in the Fourth Gospel refer especially to the Jewish leaders and the Jewish culture which rejected Jesus as the Messiah. The references to the Jews would have had special relevance in the history of the church during the mid-80s when the synagogue authorities introduced the specially designed *Birkat ha-Minim* (curse on the deviators) into their liturgies in order to identify and expel those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah.

The sectarian "disciples of the Baptist" were those who thought John the Baptist himself was God's promised one. Traces of them are to be found in the New Testament (Ac. 18:24-25; 19:1-4) and in later writings which indicate that they survived well into the Christian era and eventually became opponents of Christianity.¹² The opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel may well be an apologetic toward the sectarian Baptist group.

The groups who claimed to believe in Jesus include those who claimed faith

¹¹The importance which John attaches to the categories of the world and the Jews in the Fourth Gospel can be seen by a simple usage comparison with the other gospels.

<i>kosmos</i> (world):	Mt. 9 times	<i>Ioudaios</i> (Jew):	Mt. 5 times
	Mk. 3 times		Mk. 7 times
	Lk. 3 times		Lk. 5 times
	Jn. 79 times		Jn. 71 times

The category of the Baptist and his sectarian disciples is less apparent than the categories of the world and the Jews, but there is sufficient evidence to warrant seeing such a category, cf. R. Brown, *Gospel*, 1:LXVII-LXX.

¹²Recognitions of Clement, I.54 and I.60.

but refused to publicly admit their faith, those whose faith rested primarily in miraculous signs, and those whose faith was clearly in the apostolic tradition. The first group, those who claimed to believe in Jesus but refused to confess their faith out of fear of being expelled from the synagogues, is mentioned in Jn. 12:42-43. John judges them to be more concerned about human opinion than God's opinion. The story of the blind man who publicly confessed his faith and was so expelled may be an apologetic toward such a group of timid and private believers (Jn. 9:22, 30-38). To such a group, if it lasted into the apostolic era, the *Birkat ha-Minim* of the Jewish synagogues would have been a watershed.

The second group, those whose faith rested primarily on miraculous signs, were distrusted by Jesus (Jn. 2:19-25; 11:45-46). They were willing to eat miraculous bread and fish, but they were not willing to accept Jesus' exclusive claims (6:41-42, 60-66). Jesus took a dim view of using miracles in and of themselves to prove his authenticity (7:3-6). True faith rested in believing Jesus' exclusive claims, not merely admitting to his works of power (20:24-31). Even those who were said to "believe" (8:31) are later shown to have inadequate faith if they rejected Jesus' claims (8:33-59).

The third group, those whose faith fit the apostolic pattern, were the ones whose faith in Jesus included his exclusive claims (Jn. 6:67-69; 16:29-31; 17:6-10, 20; 20:31).

The Prologue (1:1-18)

Unlike the introductions to the gospels Matthew and Luke, the prologue of John does not begin with an account of the birth narratives. Rather, John begins with a theological hymn of the incarnation.¹³ This hymn concludes with the statement:

No one has ever seen God, but God the only [Son],¹⁴ who is at the Father's side, has made him known (1:18).

While Mark begins the story of Jesus with the preaching of John the Baptist, and Matthew and Luke begin the story of Jesus with his birth in Bethlehem, John

¹³Whether or not this was a formal hymn is unknown, but that it has poetic character is generally accepted, and the likelihood of the prologue being written as a hymn is not without support, cf. R. Brown, *John*, I.20-21; R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 52.

¹⁴While there is a textual variation at this point between "God the only [Son]," "the only Son," "the only Son of God," and "the only [Son]," the early papyri of p66 and p75, along with the Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus and others which contain the first reading, justifies the NIV rendering and makes it probable, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York/London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 198.

begins the story of Jesus in the bosom of God. Genealogically, Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham (Mt. 1:1), Luke traces it back to Adam (Lk. 3:38), but John traces it back to the Divine Nature before the creation of the universe.

The entire prologue resonates with words and ideas which permeate the whole gospel, such as, *phos* (= light: 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46); *zoe* (= life: 3:14-16, 36; 5:24, 26; 6:33, 40, 47-48, 68; 10:10, 27-28; 11:25; 17:2-3); *aletheia* (= truth: 3:21; 4:23-24; 8:31-32; 14:6; 17:17; 18:37); *erchomai* (= coming [into the world]: 3:19, 31; 4:24; 5:43; 6:14; 7:27-29; 8:14, 42; 11:27; 12:13; 15:22; 16:28; 18:37); and *Huios* (= Son [of God]: 1:34, 49; 3:16-18, 35; 5:19, 23, 26; 6:40; 10:34-36; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31).

Ironically, an element in the prologue which is not found later in the gospel is the description of Jesus as the *Logos* (= the Word). John reserves this word to describe Jesus before he came into the world, probably so that the Jews would understand that Jesus was pre-existent with the Father, even though the idea of the Son of God, as a personal entity within the Divine Nature, was not a clear OT concept. After Jesus is born into the world and after he begins his ministry, however, John shifts his vocabulary from the *Logos* (Word) to the *Huios* (Son). Jesus acts and speaks as the incarnate expression of God's speech. As word gives body to thought, so does Jesus give visible expression in the world to the invisible power and presence of God.¹⁵

John does not leave his readers in any doubt as to his purpose in writing the Fourth Gospel. He explicitly says,

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:30-31).

To be sure, these words are capable of meaning either that John was writing evangelistically to outsiders in order to convert them or pastorally to insiders in order to urge them to continue in their faith.¹⁶ Still, the basic thrust of his purpose is not in doubt. It was that Jesus was to be accepted as the Messiah, God's Son. The prologue is John's first treatment in the gospel of this theme.

¹⁵L. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 480.

¹⁶The NIV text reads "may believe" and the alternate reading is "may continue to believe." This variation is based on a textual variation between *pisteusete* (= aorist subjunctive) and *pisteuete* (= present subjunctive), the former indicating "may come to believe" and the latter indicating "may continue to believe."

The Meaning of the Logos

In his prologue to the Fourth Gospel, John uses an idea which requires some explanation. He begins his gospel with the enigmatic, "In the beginning was the *Logos* (= Word)," yet he is obviously not talking about mere language, for he speaks of the Word as a personal entity. He declares that the Word was *pros ton Theon* (= with God), and this expression directly implies personality. The preposition *pros* (= with) indicates relationship, and it means to be near or in company with someone.¹⁷ While John does not define exactly what he means by the term *Logos*, he obviously intends his readers to understand that the *Logos* was someone, not just something.

So, then, just what does John mean by the *Logos*? It is probable that John draws his ideas from the world of Jewish thought and the Old Testament tradition.¹⁸ For the Jews, the Word of God, the *debar Yahweh*, was that which brought into existence everything (Ge. 1). It was the *debar Yahweh* which spoke to the prophets. In short, the *debar Yahweh* in the Old Testament denoted God in action, especially in revelation and deliverance. Furthermore, the personality of the Word is at least hinted at in the Old Testament. The creation of the heavens was made by the Word of the Lord (Ps. 33:6). The Word of the Lord came to the prophets (Is. 38:4). God is able to send his Word, so that the Word heals and restores (Ps. 107:20). God's Word, when it is sent forth, will accomplish its mission (Is. 55:11). These sorts of expressions are certainly open to the possibility of personifying the Word of the Lord, and in fact, in later Jewish theology, this is exactly what was done. The Word of the Lord is pictured as the messenger of death in Egypt on the night of the exodus (*Book of Wisdom* 18:14-15).¹⁹ Also, in the Targummim (Aramaic translations of the Old Testament for public reading), the Aramaic term *Memra* (= word) was sometimes substituted for the divine name due to the Jewish reluctance to pronounce it. As such, when Moses brought the people out of the camp at Sinai to meet God, the Targum

¹⁷BAG (1979) 711. Specifically, it means to be facing someone, and quite literally, the idea in John 1:1 is that the *Logos* was "face to face with God," A. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 623.

¹⁸There are scholars, of course, who see it otherwise. Bultmann, for example, appeals to early oriental gnosticism and the redeemer myths from the Greek philosophical tradition. For him, the *Logos* is an intermediary figure which stands between God and the world, as in the Greek myths, but he believes the biblical author(s) has developed the idea under the influence of Judaism, cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. Beasley-Murray et al (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 19-31. Others make appeals to other forms of Greek thought, such as, the Stoic use of *Logos* to denote the divine rational principle of the universe. The integration of Greek thought with the OT by the 1st Century Jewish scholar Philo has convinced yet other scholars that John may have been drawing from this tradition, so that the Greek *Logos* became identified with *Wisdom* in Jewish Wisdom Literature, cf. especially the tables in C. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 274-277.

¹⁹F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 29-30.

reads that they came "to meet the Word of God."²⁰ We conclude that John's use of the term *Logos* need not be sought outside the biblical tradition.²¹

The Preexistent Word (1:1-5)

It is no accident that John begins his Gospel with the same opening words as the first book in the Old Testament.²² However, instead of the familiar, "In the beginning God...", he writes, "In the beginning was the Word." This effectively sets up the entire prologue, and the parallelism is deliberate.

The question might well be asked, "In the beginning of what?" The answer, of course, is in the beginning of things which had a beginning, that is, the beginning of the universe. When the universe began, the Word was already there, existing with God. It is likely that John has in mind the personification of divine wisdom as it appears in Proverbs 8:22-31. Here, Wisdom (feminine in the Hebrew Bible) is both older than the creation and fundamental to it. Not a speck of matter (8:26b) nor a trace of order (8:29) came into existence but by wisdom.²³ In the creation, Wisdom was the craftsman by God's side (30). Jewish theologizing about wisdom identified it with the *Memra*, the Word of God.²⁴

Thus, when the universe began, the preexistent Word was already there. Later in 1 John, the similar expression appears: "That which was from the beginning...the Word of Life...we proclaim to you" (1 Jn. 1:1). In his prayer on the night of his arrest, Jesus affirmed that he was loved by the Father before the universe was created (17:24) and that he possessed divine glory with the Father before the world came into existence (17:5).

John's language is simple, but his ideas are paradoxical. The statement that the Word was *with* God and yet at the same time *was* God seem mutually exclusive. The paradox cannot be softened. Grammatically, the clause *Theos en ho Logos* must be rendered, "The Word was God," or as one translation paraphrases it, "what God was,

²⁰L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 119. William Barclay says that in the Targum of Jonathan alone there are some 320 uses of *Memra* in this way.

²¹B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972) 83. It may be noted in passing, however, that some scholars see John as including the whole gamut of *Logos* traditions, both Greek and Jewish, so that Jesus is at the same time the Stoic *Logos*, and the Old Testament *debar Yahweh*, and Jewish Wisdom, cf. R. Kysar, *John the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976) 25; also, Morris, *John*, 122-123.

²²In fact, the first words in the Greek text of John's Gospel, *en arche* (= in the beginning), match exactly the LXX translation of the Hebrew participle *bereshith*.

²³D. Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964) 78-79.

²⁴Kysar, 25.

the Word was" (NEB).²⁵ This immediately requires that the Word shares the very nature of God, although the Word may be distinguished from God.²⁶ The Word exists in the closest possible association with God, partaking of the very essence of God. The Logos is distinct, yet at the same time, he is to be identified as God. There is both individuality (distinctness, separateness, twoness) and at the same time identity (oneness, sameness) between God and the Word.²⁷

This tension between unity and distinction is evident throughout the Fourth Gospel. The Jews believed Jesus to be blasphemous because he made himself God (5:18; 10:33). Yet John does not flinch at having one of the apostles say to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (20:28). In fact, one of the earliest descriptions of Christian worship by an outsider (112 A.D.) was given by the Roman Pliny, who said that Christians "sang an anthem to Christ as God."²⁸ It is this one, who was with God in the beginning and yet who somehow was God, of whom the good news is preached.

From the preexistence of the Logos with God before the creation, John then addresses the act of the creation itself. The preexistent Word is the agent by which God made the universe. The use of the preposition *dia* is quite clear on this point.²⁹ Nothing that exists came into being apart from his direction. Thus, John asserts both positively and negatively the creator role of the Logos. He made everything that exists, and nothing exists that he did not make.³⁰

²⁵The Jehovah's Witness rendering in the *New World Translation*, "the Word was a god," is a patent violation of Greek grammar, and in fact, in other passages having the same grammatical structure they do not consistently follow even their own pattern, cf. J. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980) 161-163. The construction in Jn. 1:1 is a predicate nominative in which two nominative nouns (*God* and *Word*) are joined with an equative verb. Since the word *Theos* (God) has the definite article, it must be read first in the sentence. Furthermore, it is a standard grammatical rule that when a definite predicate nominative precedes the verb, it usually does not have an article, but this in no way makes it indefinite, E. Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1965) 47. Thus, while the Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to deny the full deity of Jesus Christ in this verse, they do so against the mass of Greek scholars world-wide, not to mention all well-known and respected English translations.

²⁶If John had intended the Word to be indistinguishable from God, he would have included definite articles for both *Theos* and *Logos*, i.e., *ho Theos en ho Logos*. As such, he would have introduced an impossibility, for the Word could not be with God if it was indistinguishable from God.

²⁷Kysar, 27.

²⁸Letters X.96.

²⁹*Dia* with the genitive indicates agency, means or instrument, BAG (1979) 180. The KJV rendering "by him," while not incorrect, tends to obscure the idea of agency. Better is the rendering "through him" (NIV, RSV, ASV, NAB, NASB, NEB, JB, TEV, TCNT, Goodspeed, Phillips, Weymouth, Williams).

³⁰It is worth pointing out that Paul makes this same assertion about Jesus as the agent of creation. Through the Son, "all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). Similarly, the author of Hebrews, says that the Son is the one "through whom he [God] made the universe" (He. 1:2). Finally, the Apocalypse says that Jesus is the *arche* (= first cause, origin) of God's creation (3:14), cf. BAG (1979) 112.

The affirmation "in him was life" may be taken to refer to either eternal life, which was preached as the result of faith in Jesus, or creation life, which was evident in the Genesis narratives of universal origins. Contextually, the idea of creation life is probably better, though John may be intentionally hinting at the other as well.³¹ In the Logos was the self-existent life which belongs to the Creator as opposed to the derived life of his creatures (cf. 5:26). Furthermore, the creation of living creatures, such as birds, fish, and land animals, not to mention humans, all have their source of life in the Logos (Ge. 1:20-27). It was the special endowment of this life through the breath of God that set humans apart from all other creatures, and it was through the rejection of this life that the first humans were condemned with the words, "You will surely die" (Ge. 2:15-17).

What then does John mean by the statement, "The life was the light of men?" Obviously, there is an allusion to the first creative act in which God said, "Let there be light," and light appeared (Ge. 1:3). Beyond this, however, John employs a technique which he will use throughout the remainder of his gospel, the technique of double entendre.³² Frequently in his gospel, John uses words and expressions that carry double meanings.³³ Light is one of these words, and it can mean intellectual perception, faith and revelation from God (5:35; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46), physical light and the ability to see (9:5-7; 11:9-10), and moral perception (3:19-21). Frequently, there is a play on meanings, such as, when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," just before healing the man born blind (9:3-5). Not only is he capable of restoring sight to the man so that he can see physical light, he is the revelation of God in the world so that men and women may perceive God. Similarly, on his way to the home of Lazarus, Jesus says, "A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light" (11:9). The obvious meaning has to do with daylight, but the more subtle meaning has to do with spiritual perception and a life lived according to God's will.

In the prologue, the term light is used several times (1:4-9). When John says, "The life was the light of men," he intends a double entendre. The Logos, God's personal Agent of Creation in whom was creation life, was also the one who created

³¹R. Brown, *John*, 1:26-27.

³²A double entendre is a word or expression which is capable of more than one interpretation, and the interpretational options arise from the fact that the language is intentionally ambiguous so that it lends itself to multiple meanings.

³³Some of these double meanings are only intelligible in Greek or Aramaic, such as, the expression in 3:3 where the expression *gennethe anothē* can mean either "born from above" or "born again," and both are equally true. Similarly, in 4:10-11, the word *hydōr tō zōn* may mean either "flowing water" or "living water." Again in 7:8 Jesus speaks of "not yet going up...because for me the right time has not yet come." This saying obviously refers to his trip to Jerusalem, but it also hints at his return to the Father.

light as the first creative act and the one who revealed God to women and men in the incarnation. He dispelled the physical darkness of chaos (Ge. 1:4-5), and he dispelled the spiritual darkness of sin, evil and ignorance through his coming into the world. It is in both these senses that John says, "The light shines in the darkness."

Once again, John employs a double entendre. The verb *katalambano* is capable of two meanings, and John probably intends both. On the one hand, it may mean "to comprehend or grasp," and it is due to this meaning that some translations read, "...and the darkness has not understood it" (so NIV, KJV, RV, NASB, ASV). On the other hand, it may mean "to master, overcome or put out," or "overcome it" (so NEB, RSV, JB, TEV, NAB, Phillips, Williams, Weymouth). While translators often struggle over which meaning is intended, it may not be necessary to choose between them. In one sense, the powers of darkness were not able to quench the light, and this is true on several levels. The powers of chaos could not overpower the created light in a physical sense, nor could they destroy the moral light even in the fall of Adam and Eve. Similarly, any efforts to thwart the birth or ministry of Jesus were to be defeated. In another sense, when the incarnate Light shined in the Jewish world, the Jews did not perceive it. Their lack of comprehension led them to reject Jesus. So both meanings are important and fit into the whole scheme of John's Gospel.

John, the Witness (1:6-9)

All four of the gospels contain stories about John the Baptist. The theological significance of John can only be appreciated against the fact that the living voice of prophecy was believed to have been quenched since the last of the writing prophets in the Old Testament canon. However, in the days of the Messiah, it was believed that the quenched Spirit would return.³⁴ During the intertestamental period, there were two streams of religious life which functioned in place of the living voice of prophecy. One was scribal religion, which interpreted God's will strictly in terms of the written Scriptures, especially Torah, and the other was apocalypticism, which encouraged people to withdraw from the world and anticipate its end.³⁵

John was a fresh voice. The people considered him to be a prophet (Mt. 14:5; 21:26//Mk. 11:32//Lk. 20:6), and so also did Jesus (Mt. 11:9//Lk. 7:26). John's preaching, then, heralded the end of the so-called Silent Period. After a number of years in the desert, away from the population centers (Lk. 1:80), John heard God's call thrusting him into a prophetic role of public preaching (Lk. 3:2-3). Even his clothing

³⁴See 1 Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41; Josephus, *Against Apion*, I:8; D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 80-82; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) 80-82; E. Schweizer, *TDNT* (1968) 332-455.

³⁵G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 34-35.

was an implicit badge of prophethood (cf. 2 Kg. 1:8; Zec. 13:4).

The primary significance of the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel is his testimony about Jesus. Just as the miracles of Jesus pointed beyond themselves to profound truths about Jesus' identity, so John the Baptist served as a living voice who pointed beyond himself toward Christ. His role was that of a witness (3:26; 5:33, 36a), and he belongs to the larger theme of witness which pervades the entire gospel, a witness to the truth of God's revelation in Jesus given by the Father (5:32, 37; 8:18b), the Son (3:11, 32; 8:14, 18a; 18:37), and the Holy Spirit (15:26), as well as through the miracles of Jesus (5:36; 10:25), the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39), and the disciples (15:27; 19:35; 21:24). It is faith in Jesus, not faith in John, that is called for.

There is a very pronounced emphasis in the Fourth Gospel which subordinates John to Jesus. The first of these subordinating statements is here in the prologue, where it says, "He himself was not the light," but this is followed throughout the gospel with other similar statements. Jesus existed before John and in fact surpassed him (1:15, 30).³⁶ John was not the messiah, he was not Elijah,³⁷ nor was he the prophet who would come into the world (1:19-24; 3:28).³⁸ John was destined to become less while Jesus would become greater (3:30). Unlike Jesus, who performed so many miracles that the books of the world could not contain them (21:25), John did not perform even one (10:41).

The point of this explicit subordination of John to Jesus comes against the background of those disciples of John who did not follow Jesus and who, in fact, felt some antagonism toward those who did (3:22-26). In later years, long after John was dead, his followers still were loyal (Ac. 18:25; 19:3), and there is some evidence that they survived well into the Christian era.³⁹ It is not impossible that Baptist groups came into conflict with Christian groups in the time that the Fourth Gospel was being

³⁶In light of the birth stories in Luke, this can only suggest that Jesus was divine. John was born before Jesus (Lk. 1-2), yet the Fourth Gospel says that Jesus was before John.

³⁷Elijah did not die but was removed to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (2 Kg. 2:11). The post-exilic prophet Malachi had predicted that before the Day of Yahweh, God would send back Elijah the prophet (Mal. 4:5). In another Jewish writing, Elijah is pictured as returning to reestablish the tribes of Jacob, and this hope is expressed in the benediction, "Blessed is he who shall have seen you [Elijah] before he dies" (Sir. 48:10). The expectation of a returning Elijah remained strong in Jewish thought (Mk. 8:28; 9:11), and John certainly dressed the part (2 Kg. 1:8; Mk. 1:6).

³⁸The expression "the prophet" derives from the promise in Torah of "another prophet like Moses" who would arise (Dt. 18:15-19). This promise was understood by the Jews to refer to a particular prophet who would arise in the end of time to exercise the full mediatorial functions of Moses. Torah itself said that there had not yet arisen such a one (Dt. 34:10-12), and in some circles, especially among the Samaritans and the Qumran community, the messiah was pictured as this coming prophet (4:19, 25), Bruce, *John* 48; Lindars, *John*, 190-191; 1 QS ix.11.

³⁹*Recognitions of Clement*, I.54, 60. Here, the Baptist sectarians claimed that John, not Jesus, was the messiah.

written.⁴⁰ In any case, the Fourth Gospel makes abundantly clear that John and Jesus must not be confused. Jesus was the true light; John was only a witness to the light. To be sure, he was a burning lamp insofar as his preparatory work for Jesus was concerned (5:35), but he was not the Light of the World.

Grammatically, it is possible to understand 1:9 in two ways, either as referring to humans who are born into the world or as the true Light which was coming into the world through the incarnation. This variation is not due to a manuscript discrepancy, but rather, to the ambiguity of the grammar itself.⁴¹ On contextual grounds, the idea of incarnation fits somewhat better, and on stylistic grounds, the expression "coming into the world" is consistently used of Jesus, not of humans (cf. 3:19; 6:14; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37).

The preaching of John, then, was the unimpeachable testimony that the true light was even then coming into the plane of human history. Jesus, of course, was already grown by the time John began preaching, but he was still in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth and had not yet been inaugurated into his messianic ministry, nor would he be until his baptism by John in the Jordan. The image of the messiah as light coming into the world is especially to be found in the Book of Isaiah (Is. 9:2; 42:6; 60:1-3); though it also appears elsewhere (Mal. 4:2). What the prologue affirms, then, is the anticipation of what the Fourth Gospel will develop in more depth later: Jesus is the Light of the World!

The Logos in the World (1:10-14)

The cue for this next section of the prologue is taken from the final phrase in 1:9, the statement that the True Light was "coming into the world." Here the evangelist describes the nature of that coming, particularly in terms of the polarization among people which resulted from his presence.

The Logos who was with God in the beginning and who was God, who created all things as God's agent of creation, who was both life and light, came into the world which he had made. Some comment is in order on the Johannine concept of the *kosmos* (= the world), since in John this term is much more frequently used than in the synoptic gospels.⁴² In general, John uses the term *kosmos* to refer to the world of

⁴⁰R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 70-71.

⁴¹The participle *erchomenon* (= coming) can legitimately modify either *anthropon* (= man) or *phos* (= light). As such, then, the English translations vary, some rendering it as "every man that cometh into the world" (so KJV, TCNT, ASV, RV, NASB, Phillips and generally followed by the Greek Fathers) and others as "the true light...was coming into the world" (so NIV, RSV, NEB, JB, TEV, AB, NAB, Williams, Weymouth and generally followed by the Latin Fathers).

⁴²See footnote #11.

people, and in particular, the society which rejected him. His mission was to the world (3:16-19; 6:51; 8:12; 9:5; 12:47) though the world did not recognize him (3:19; 7:7; 14:17; 15:18; 16:20). Throughout the gospel, the world continues as the alien culture opposed to Jesus and his disciples. Here, of course, John not only says that the Logos was in the world, but he was in the world that he had created. This seems to include the entire universe, though of course, it is the world of humankind that is especially in view.

Not only was the Logos rejected by the world, he was rejected by his own people, the Jewish nation. Again one encounters a special Johannine category, the Jews.⁴³ This should not be construed as an anti-Semitism, for John was himself a Jew, as was Jesus and the other earliest disciples. In the Fourth Gospel, "the Jews" refers not to all Jews, but to the Jewish religious leaders and those who sided with them in rejecting Jesus.

There is some disagreement as to what time is specifically in view in these statements. Some interpreters understand that the Logos was already in the world from the creation prior to the incarnation. Yet the world did not accept this general revelation (cf. Ro. 1:19-21, 28), and though the Jews were privileged to have the Logos in law, prophecy, wisdom, and God's mighty acts, they did not accept this special revelation either (cf. Je. 7:25-26).⁴⁴ Others view the entire sequence of 1:10-14 as referring to the incarnation.⁴⁵ Once again, it may not be necessary to choose between the options, since both are consistent with John's other intentional ambiguities and double entendres. Perhaps the phrase "he was in the world" is deliberately broad enough to include both ideas. In any case, the knowledge of God, both in general and special revelation,⁴⁶ was rejected by human society at large and Israel in particular, both in the Old Testament and New Testament eras.

If Jesus was rejected at large, he was accepted by a remnant of faith. As is typical of the Fourth Gospel, the critical factor is belief.⁴⁷ To all who received him

⁴³See footnote #11.

⁴⁴F. Bruce, *John*, 36-37; B. Westcott, *The Gospel According to John* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 8.

⁴⁵The arguments in favor of this view seem substantial. If the former position is correct, the prologue introduces the Baptist and then reverses the logic to go back to the Logos in the world before the incarnation, and this seems to fit awkwardly, cf. R. Brown, *John I-XII*, 28-30. If the entire section proceeds chronologically, the anachronism is avoided. On the other hand, there is no objection to the idea that the Logos was in the world in some sense prior to the incarnation, in a way similar to the role of wisdom in the Wisdom Literature (cf. Pro. 1:20ff.).

⁴⁶The terms "general" and "special" revelation are technical terms. General revelation is that knowledge of God which can be perceived from creation and providence. Special revelation is that knowledge of God which can be perceived only through God's mighty acts and prophetic word, cf. B. Ramm, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 107-11.

⁴⁷The word *pisteuo* (= to believe) is extremely significant in the Fourth Gospel. With Jesus/God/gospel as its object, it occurs some 99 times.

and believed in him he gave authority⁴⁸ to become children of God. In biblical and ancient Near Eastern thought, a name is not merely a label of identification but an expression of the essential nature of its bearer. Hence, to know the name of God is to know God as he has revealed himself (Ps. 9:10). The expression "to believe in the name" is found only in the Johannine literature, where it occurs five times (Jn. 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:23; 5:13). It is used synonymously with believing in Jesus himself (e.g., 3:18). The name of God is a synecdoche for God himself.⁴⁹

Those who received the Logos and believed in him were begotten of God. This birth, which John will later describe in more detail (chapt. 3), is to be carefully distinguished from natural birth. The one who is a child of God is begotten by God, that is, he/she is begotten through a spiritual activity that can be performed by God alone. It is not a birth by natural procreation,⁵⁰ and hence, it cannot come merely by the lineage of Abraham and Sarah. In fact, Jesus would later challenge his detractors upon this very point. In attempting to kill Jesus, they were following the lead of their father, who in spite of their protestations to the contrary, was neither God nor Abraham but the devil (8:33a, 37-44). Those who are born of God are begotten by a divine act, not by procreation. They are not products of sexual desire⁵¹ nor a husband's will. What John has in view here are two orders, one natural and the other spiritual, and in the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains these two orders more thoroughly (3:3-8). The metaphor is also developed further in 1 John.⁵²

The statement of incarnation in 1:14 is perhaps the most explicit in the New Testament. It describes not a dwelling christology, that is, a christology in which God adopts a human being already existing in which to live, but it describes the Logos who became flesh. This is much more than simply saying that the Logos took a body. It is not unlikely that John may have had specifically in mind a refutation of the docetic views which held that Jesus had not actually come in the flesh (cf. 1 Jn. 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7).⁵³ In any case, it is clear that John here describes the Logos as both fully God and fully human, and "it is this scripture, more than anything else in the New

⁴⁸The word here is *exousia* (= authority, right, freedom to act, ability, power).

⁴⁹R. Abba, "Name," *IDB* (1962) III.501, 507.

⁵⁰Quite literally, the text reads *ouk ex haimation* (= not of bloods). This peculiar expression may refer to a theory of conception found in rabbinic circles in which the sperm of a man is derived from his blood and mixes with the blood of the woman in order to produce a conception, cf. Lindars, *John*, 92.

⁵¹Lit., "will of flesh"

⁵²Cf. 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18

⁵³Docetism, from the Greek word *dokeo* (= to seem), was a view developed out of radical Greek dualism in which matter was evil and spirit was good. As such, it was held that Jesus could not actually have become flesh if he was the divine redeemer. Docetists asserted that Jesus only seemed to be a real human, and what appeared to be his body was actually a disguise, J. Drane, "Gnosticism," *NBD* (1982) 424-426.

Testament, that provided the foundation for the doctrine of the person of Christ formulated in the Creed of Nicaea (AD 325) and the Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451).⁵⁴

The Logos who became flesh lived temporarily among humans. The temporary nature of his earthly appearance is stressed by the verb *skenoo* (= to pitch a tent) and could legitimately be rendered as "had His tent for a time in our midst" (Weymouth, mg.).⁵⁵ Beyond the temporary nature of the life of Jesus on earth, there is probably a deliberate allusion to the Tent in the Desert in which Yahweh lived among his people, enthroned between the cherubim (Ex. 25:8). In fact, the messianic age was described by the prophets as a time when God would make his dwelling in Zion (Eze. 43:7; J1. 3:17; Zec. 2:10). Just as Yahweh had formerly lived among his people, so now in Jesus, the Logos made flesh, he also lived among them.

Those who knew Jesus personally observed his glory, reminiscent of the *kavod* (= glory, heaviness) of Yahweh in the Most Holy Place of the ancient Tent of Meeting.⁵⁶ It was the glory of the one and only Son⁵⁷ who came from the Father. The fact that the Son came from the Father reinforces the earlier statement that from the beginning he was with God (1:1-2), and his being sent by the Father into the world is a common assertion in the Fourth Gospel (3:13, 17, 34; 4:34; 5:36, 38; 6:62; 7:29; 8:26; 9:4; 11:42; 16:28; 17:3). The coming of the Son from the Father into the world was characterized as being full of grace and truth, a characterization repeated in 1:17.

The Primacy of the Son (1:15-18)

The prologue concludes with a short section emphasizing the uniqueness and priority of the Son of God. He has primacy over John the Baptist, primacy over Moses, and in fact, is the single, unique revealer of God, the Father, proceeding from

⁵⁴Bruce, *John*, 40. The Creed of Nicaea, against the Arians, affirmed the full deity of Jesus Christ by declaring that he was "of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father..." The Definition of Chalcedon asserts that Jesus was "in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ..." cf. H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University, 1979) 25, 51-52.

⁵⁵Rotherham translates "pitched his tent among us"

⁵⁶It is worth pointing out that the root *skn* which also means "to dwell" and from which the rabbis derived the Aramaic word *shekinah* as a technical term for the dwelling of God, cf. Brown, *John I-XII*, 33. It is not unlikely that John is suggesting that Jesus is now the *shekinah* of God among men.

⁵⁷The adjective *monogenes* does not denote procreation, as though Christ had a point of beginning, but rather, it denotes a position of uniqueness, just as Isaac was called Abraham's "only son," even though he was not the only child born to Abraham (He. 11:17), cf. C. Hoch, Jr., *ISBE* (1986) III.606.

the very Being of God.

Earlier in the prologue (1:6-8) the role of John the Baptist as the witness was introduced. Though commissioned by God, John was not to be confused with the True Light who was coming into the world. Rather, his role was to testify concerning that True Light. Here, now, is part of John's testimony (1:15).

John's preaching, as we know from the synoptic gospels, included a variety of subjects. He called for men and women to turn to God and to express this change of heart by being baptized with a view toward God's forgiveness (Mk. 1:4). His sermons carried ethical injunctions to his hearers, whether citizen (Lk. 3:10-11, tax collector (Lk. 3:12-13), or soldier (Lk. 3:14). John was no timid lecturer, but he boldly denounced sin all the way to the tetrarch himself (Lk. 3:19-20). But all of the synoptics agree with the Fourth Gospel that John's primary message was about someone who would follow him. As Mark succinctly says, "This was his message: 'After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie'" (Mk. 1:7).

Twice John records a similar saying of the Baptist: "He who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me" (1:15, 30). The Greek of this statement is especially emphatic. It is not merely that Jesus is before John chronologically, but the nuance of the phrase is that "he was first in respect of me" or "he had absolute primacy over me" or, as the NEB renders it, "Before I was born, he already was."⁵⁸ We know from Luke's Gospel that John was born some six months prior to Jesus (Lk. 1:36), so the statement that Jesus was prior to John can only refer to his deity as the Logos from the beginning, being both God and with God (1:1-2). It is similar in kind to the statement later made by Jesus to the Jewish leaders, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (8:58).

From the testimony of the Baptist, the Fourth Evangelist turns to the fullness of grace and truth which Jesus brought (cf. 1:14). John certainly spoke words of grace and truth in his proclamation of the gospel, but the maximum level of grace and truth was resident in the one who came after John (1:16).

The syntax of this verse is difficult to reproduce in English except through dynamic equivalencies, though the general idea is clear enough. Quite literally, it reads, "Because of his fullness, we have all received, and grace after grace." This is a way of describing the inexhaustible graces which all believers receive through Jesus, and translators have found a variety of dynamic equivalencies to express this thought, i.e., "gift after gift of love" (TCNT), "blessing after blessing" (Goodspeed), and "one grace after another" (Berkeley).

⁵⁸F. Bruce, *John* 42.

The use of the word *pleroma* (= fullness) is similar to the expressions of Paul regarding Christ's fullness, where this same word also appears (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10; Ep. 3:19).

John has deliberately led his readers to a climax in the prologue. He has postponed his introduction of the actual name "Jesus Christ" until now. This technique has served to heighten the impact of Jesus' identity. The reader so far has been left with a series of implicit questions:

"Who is the Logos who was with God yet who was God?"

"Who is the one through whose agency God created the universe?"

"Who is the True Light who was coming into the world?"

"Who is the one who was rejected by most but received by the few?"

"Who is the one who through faith gives the authority to become the children of God?"

"Who is the one who became flesh and lived for awhile among men and women, displaying for them the fullness of grace and truth?"

"Who is the one and only Son who came from the Father?"

The answer is now given: He is Jesus Christ!

If Jesus is greater than John he is no less greater than Moses. The old order and the new order are set in contrast. Moses was the channel of revelation through whom God gave the Torah, which in turn controlled the entirety of Old Testament life. Yet while there was grace and truth even in Torah (cf. Ex. 34:6; Ps. 25:10),⁵⁹ the fullness of grace and truth came only in Jesus Christ.

Now John arrives at the climax of the Prologue. Jesus is the full revelation of God!

John asserts that no one has ever seen God in his purest form. This assertion is in keeping with the Old Testament dictum that no one could see God and survive (cf. Ex. 33:20). To be sure, God had revealed himself in limited ways, through theophanies and epiphanies. Moses himself caught a fleeting glimpse of God's glory (Ex. 33:23). Still, these appearances were always partial and occasional. Jesus,

⁵⁹It is not without interest to note that rabbinic exegesis of Ps. 25:10 in the *Mishnah* uses the words "grace and truth," cf. B. Lindars, *John*, 97.

however, is not merely someone from the outside. Rather, he is God the only Son⁶⁰ who is at the Father's side--the Son who is both with God and who is God. He, the Son, knows the Father intimately, and he has revealed God to us.

The preexistent intimacy of God, the Son, with God, the Father, is everywhere expressed in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus claimed a unique and complete knowledge of the Father (6:46; 8:55; 10:15; 17:25). A mutual love existed between the Father and the Son before the creation of the world (14:31; 15:9; 17:24). Jesus' words and works on earth were merely a reflection of what he had seen and heard in the Father's presence (5:19-20, 30; 8:26, 38). Their purpose was one (6:38-39; 10:30), their work was one (8:29; 10:37-38), their honor was one (5:23; 13:31-32; 17:1, 5), their witness was one (8:16-18), their ownership was one (17:10), and their teaching was one (7:16-17; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:24). A unity of essence existed between the Father and the Son, so much so, that Jesus could say that to believe in the Son was to believe in the Father, to see the Son was to see the Father, and to know the Son was to know the Father as well (12:44-45; 14:7-13, 20). The declaration that the Son was "at the Father's side," literally "into the bosom of the Father," indicates that Jesus has access to the innermost being of God. Later, John will describe this intimacy as an interpenetration between the Father and the Son (14:10-11, 17:21).

This One, the Logos who was with God and who was God, who created the universe, who came into the world incarnate in flesh, who was greater than John or Moses, and who is the very fullness of grace and truth, this One--God the only Son--has made God known to us.⁶¹ That is the story of John's gospel! Between the prologue and the epilogue, John's portrait of Jesus has the fundamental purpose of leading the readers to faith so that they might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in his name" (20:31).

⁶⁰The translation "God the only [Son]" or "God the only begotten" has the strongest and earliest attestation in the manuscripts. This includes the two earliest extant manuscripts of the Fourth Gospel, p66 (about 200 A.D.) and p75 (early 3rd century), as well as the important codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (4th century). Hence, this reading is followed in most English translations, i.e., "God the only [Son]" (NIV), "the only begotten God" (NASB), "God the only Son" (NAB), "God, only begotten" (Montgomery), "the divine One, the only Son" (Moffat), "who is God" (Berkeley), "the only One, who is the same as God" (TEV), "God the only Son" (AB), "the unique one, he who is God" (Barclay). The compilers of the Textus Receptus (which underlies the KJV) did not have available to them the earlier manuscripts, so it is not surprising that the most ancient reading is not followed there and in subsequent revisions of the KJV, though most revisions at least include the older reading in the margin (RSV, ASV, RV) as do other versions (NEB, Weymouth).

⁶¹This statement is quite similar to one in the synoptic gospels that "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. 11:27//Lk. 10:22).

The Book Of Signs (John 1:19--12:50)

Jesus and John (1:19-51)

All four gospels agree that the ministry of Jesus was initiated through the preaching of John the Baptist. The emphasis in the synoptics is upon John's moral preaching and his call to baptism. In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, the emphasis is upon John's witness concerning Jesus as the Coming One (cf. 1:6-8, 15). The testimony of John was sharpened when he was interrogated by a delegation from the temple about his own ministry. Given the repeated efforts of rather large groups of Jewish freedom fighters to take up arms against Rome and the consequent retaliation of the Roman military,⁶² it was important to them to know whether John considered himself to be a messianic figure. John spoke clearly to them that he was neither the Messiah, Elijah *redivivus*⁶³ nor the Prophet like Moses (1:19-21).⁶⁴ Instead, he chose to speak in the words of the lonely desert voice which long ago had called the exiled Jews in Babylon back to their homeland (1:22-23; cf. Is. 40:3). This ancient call was a prophetic double entendre. Its original meaning, of course, was that there was a returning highway from Babylon to Jerusalem. In the longer view, however, the Christians in the New Testament saw striking overtones in this passage concerning the events surrounding the coming of Jesus, the Messiah (Mt. 3:3//Mk. 1:2-3//Lk. 3:4-6)--a perspective which they derived from Jesus himself (Lk. 24:44-47).

Since John did not claim to be Moses, Elijah nor the Messiah, he was questioned concerning his authority to baptize converts (1:24-25). Proselyte baptisms were common enough when non-Jews became Jews,⁶⁵ but to call for members of God's chosen people to be baptized was an insult. John responded that his baptisms were an anticipation of the Coming One, and furthermore, that the Coming One was

⁶²Following the death of Herod in 4 B.C., Palestine was a hotbed of Jewish nationalism, J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. and C. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 126; D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 37-39.

⁶³Of course, there is a spiritual sense in which John did indeed fulfil the prediction of Elijah's coming, cf. Mt. 17:10-13//Mk. 9:11-13.

⁶⁴The three figures in question, the Messiah, Elijah and the Prophet like Moses, were all eschatological figures in Jewish theology. The Jewish ideal of a messiah was not always consistent, but it was predominantly the anticipation of a Davidic king who would establish an earthly kingdom for the people of Israel after banishing Israel's enemies, cf. D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 236-238. The appearance of Elijah was predicted in the post-exilic oracles of Malachi (Mal. 4:5-6), and the eschatological prophet like Moses, based on Dt. 18:15-19, was anticipated as the final harbinger of the end of the age, cf. O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 14-23.

⁶⁵The practice of the baptism of proselytes to Judaism antedates the time of John the Baptist, cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 18-25.

already among them, though he as yet had not been identified (1:26-28).

The public identification of the Coming One occurred on the very next day. Jesus came to the place where John was preaching, and John singled him out as the "Lamb of God who takes away the world's sins" (1:29). This description must have been startling. To be sure, lambs were sacrificed at the Jewish Passover, but the Passover was not a celebration of forgiveness for sin. Rather, it was a memorial of the exodus from Egypt. Yom Kippur was the national Day of Atonement for sin, and the sacrifices specified were a goat and a bull (Lv. 16). It may be that John had in mind the Servant of Yahweh, who was to be slaughtered like a lamb as a sin offering for others (Is. 53:7, 10). In any case, his identification was a creative cause for reflection. He had been promising that the Coming One was near, though at first he did not know who this one was either (1:30-31). However, at the time of Jesus' baptism, he saw the sign that God had promised him. It was the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove upon Jesus (1:32-33).⁶⁶ This convinced John that Jesus was the Son of God (1:34), the same announcement in Luke's Gospel at the birth of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 1:35).

The importance of the Baptist to the mission of Jesus is further indicated in that Jesus' first disciples were followers of John before they became followers of Jesus. More to the point, they began to follow Jesus precisely because John indicated that Jesus was the Coming One (1:35-39). Word began to spread through the community of the Baptist that the Coming One was now known. Andrew brought to Jesus his brother Simeon bar-John (1:40-42), and Philip brought Nathanael (1:43-45). When Jesus met Simeon, he nicknamed him *Kephas* (Aramaic for "rock"), though the more familiar form is the Greek *Petros*, also meaning "rock." Nathanael, for his part, was unimpressed with the identification of Jesus as the Coming One, especially when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth (1:46). That Jesus was called the son of Joseph was not an issue (cf. 1:45b), since it is unlikely that the story of the virgin birth would have been known to either man. That Jesus was from Nazareth, however, was not very promising, since Nazareth was a rather second class village in a second class province. This doubtful opinion was sharply challenged, however, when Nathanael met Jesus personally. Jesus seemed to know Nathanael, even though he had never met him, and in particular, Jesus seemed to know something of a particular moment in

⁶⁶On the basis of 1:32 and 5:37, some have conjectured that only John saw the form of the dove and that this sign was hidden from the people. In Matthew and Mark, the Greek text uses singular pronouns ("he saw") rather than plural ones ("they saw"). This is a possible, though not necessary, conclusion.

The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus should be understood against the background of the then current Jewish thought that the Holy Spirit had been quenched after the last of the writing prophets, cf. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribners, 1971) 80-82. That the Spirit both descended and remained upon Jesus marked him as the one who was anointed to inaugurate God's kingdom with heavenly power.

Nathanael's life which no one else knew (1:47-48). Jesus' awareness of this incident immediately dismissed Nathanael's doubts, and he affirmed the same conclusion as did the Baptist: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God" (1:49).

Twice, then, the conclusion has been reached that Jesus was "God's Son" (1:34, 49), and Nathanael adds the further messianic title "King of Israel." Both titles were messianic, since both were poetic designations for a monarch from David's family (cf. Ps. 2:6-7; 2 Sa. 7:12-14; Ps. 89:26-29). Probably at this time, Nathanael meant no more than this. However, in the mind of John, Nathanael surely spoke more than he knew! In the prologue, John has already identified Jesus as God's one and only Son, pre-existent before the universe (1:1-2), the agent of creation (1:3), the source of life and light (1:4-5), and the full expression of the Father's glory (1:14) who is ever at the Father's side (1:18). In the Fourth Gospel, the title Son of God will become more and more significant, not merely as a pedigree from David's family, though that was important also, but as describing his deity. Jesus, also, knew that the full nature of his identity was still to be revealed, and he indicated as much to Nathanael (1:50). In the end Nathanael and the others⁶⁷ would come to know Jesus as Bethel, the house of God, the bridge between the heavens and the earth (1:50-51). By directly identifying himself as the ladder in Jacob's dream at Bethel (cf. Ge. 28:10-19), Jesus implied that he was himself the gate of heaven, the abode of God, and the mediator between God and humans. His pronouncement was solemn and emphatic, beginning with the untranslated Hebrew, "Amen, amen."⁶⁸

The First Sign and the First Passover (2:1--4:42)

An important depiction of Jesus' teaching in the Fourth Gospel is his use of striking metaphors to illustrate spiritual concepts. Whereas in the Synoptics Jesus' teaching is characterized by parables, in the Fourth Gospel his teaching is characterized by metaphors.⁶⁹ These metaphors serve as bridges toward

⁶⁷All English texts do not show the shift between the singular and plural in 1:50-51 (though see NIV footnote).

⁶⁸Jesus' use of the Hebrew expression *Amen* is unique in that, unlike the traditional usage which puts the *Amen* at the end of a statement, Jesus places it at the beginning of a pronouncement. In the synoptics, the *Amen* occurs as a single word, but in the Fourth Gospel, it appears as a double expression, i.e., "Amen, amen," cf. J. Jeremias, *Theology*, 35-36.

⁶⁹The Synoptics contain copious references to the parables of Jesus, and the Greek term *parabole* appears many times, Matthew (17 times), Mark (13 times) and Luke (18 times). By way of contrast, the word *parabole* does not appear at all in John. In all, it is estimated that about 35% of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics is parabolic, A. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 7. While the Fourth Gospel does not contain the parables of the Synoptics, it certainly contains symbolic language in the form of metaphors, such as, water, birth, life, light, bread, shepherding, and so forth. Some of the Johannine proverbial sayings and metaphors are quite similar to the symbolism in the Synoptic parables, though the context of the parables are real life situations while the metaphors in John are more abstract, cf. C. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge:

understanding the spiritual meaning of Jesus' person and work. In the section from 2:1 to 4:42, the cohesive metaphor is water. It begins with the miracle of turning water to wine, moves to the teaching on being born of water and the Spirit, describes the water baptisms performed by John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples, and climaxes with Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman about the water of life. Other metaphors are also used, such as temple and wind and light, but water is the repeating metaphor. In this metaphor, Jesus teaches that every human person has spiritual thirst which can only be quenched by spiritual water--and he is that water!

Three days after John had designated Jesus as the Lamb of God (cf. 1:35, 43; 2:1a), Jesus and his new friends attended the celebration of a home-taking in Cana, a small village within walking distance of Nazareth (2:1-2).⁷⁰ The celebration typically consisted of great merriment, with feasting and wine, and Jesus' family and friends participated heartily. On this occasion, the wine was expended rather quickly, and Mary approached Jesus about the problem (2:3). Her approach to her son immediately raised the issue of Jesus' mission, if not in Mary's mind, certainly in his.⁷¹ His response indicated that whatever Mary thought about his mission, Jesus had a very clear idea of what was appropriate and what was not (2:4). It was certainly too early to announce his messianic role by a bold miracle, so he chose to perform one quietly (2:5-10). Only Jesus' new disciples and the servants who had filled the large water pots actually realized what had happened. A large quantity of water had been turned into very excellent wine! This miracle was the first of the seven signs, and in this sign, the disciples saw the glory of the Coming One and put their faith in Jesus (2:11; cf. 1:14).

The spiritual meaning of this first sign comes from an implicit parallelism. Just as Jesus held the solution to the thirst of the wedding guests, at a deeper level, he held the solution to the human thirst to know God. His mission was to reveal God's glory (cf. 1:14), for no one had ever seen God (1:18). This concept of glory is important in the Fourth Gospel, and it will arise repeatedly, culminating in the cross (12:23-28). John described the glory of God in Jesus as the full expression of grace and truth (1:14, 16-18). The sign of turning water into wine became a catalyst for faith, and this also is paradigmatic for all the other signs in the gospel. The signs are works of God, expressions of his power which call people to faith in Jesus. They legitimate

Cambridge University Press, 1968) 134ff.

⁷⁰Jewish marriages occurred in two stages, the betrothal and the home-taking. The betrothal consisted of the pledge of marriage and the paying of the bride price. The home-taking, usually occurring about a year after the betrothal, was the marriage proper in which the girl would be transferred from her parental home to the home of her husband, O. Baab, *IDB* (1962) III.284-285; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 364-368; A. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 148ff.

⁷¹The translation of 2:4a is idiomatic and difficult. Literally, it reads, "What is it to me and to you, woman?", which probably means something like, "Why do you trouble me with that, dear woman?"

Jesus' claims to be the One who came from the Father. At the same time, John will take care to point out that faith which is grounded in signs alone, and particularly the faith which does not move beyond the personal benefits of a miracle, is superficial and short-lived (cf. 2:23-24; 4:48; 6:26-27; 12:37).⁷²

From Cana, Jesus descended from the mountains with his family and disciples to the fishing village of Capernaum (2:12).⁷³ There they joined the many pilgrims headed south to Jerusalem for Passover (2:13). At the temple, Jesus drove the money exchangers and animal hucksters from the Court of the Nations,⁷⁴ an act which reminded the disciples of an ancient phrase in Ps. 69:9 where David experienced a similar plight of rejection and persecution because of his fervor for God (2:14-17).⁷⁵ The temple authorities⁷⁶ were understandably incensed by Jesus preemptive purge. They demanded from him a miraculous sign to validate his action, but Jesus refused (2:18). Instead, he retorted with the ambiguous claim that if they destroyed "this temple," he would raise it in three days (2:19). Such a statement was a double play on words. "This temple" referred to Jesus' own body (though the authorities thought he meant the sanctuary), and the verb "raise" referred to resurrection (though the

⁷²See the insightful discussion, R. Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976) 67-73.

⁷³Directions such as "went down" and "went up" refer to elevations, not compass directions.

⁷⁴The second temple was built in a series of concentric courts and terraces. The Court of the Nations was the lowest outer enclosure of the Sanctuary, paved with marble, and open to all people so long as they observed the prescribed rules of decorum and reverence. Gentiles were warned by an inscription not to go beyond this courtyard at penalty of death. Here, the money-exchangers were allowed to set up booths, since common currency had to be changed into temple coinage. Roman coinage, with the impress of Caesar's head and sometimes pagan deities, was felt to be a defilement of the holy place. Also, there were marketing stalls for the animals considered fit for sacrifice, cf. E. Edersheim, *The Temple* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 46; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 138.

The fact that the cleansing of the temple in John occurs near the beginning of Jesus' ministry but near the end of it in Matthew, Mark and Luke is a long-debated problem. The ancient church uniformly believed that Jesus cleansed the temple twice. Most modern scholars believe that John's account is a chronological dislocation based on the assumption that John's concern was theological, not chronological, cf. J. Green, *How to Read the Gospels and Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987) 62-63. However, there are still legitimate arguments for concluding that Jesus did, in fact, cleanse the temple twice, cf. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987) 171-173.

⁷⁵That John considered Ps. 69 to have messianic overtones is clear in that he also alludes to it in recording Jesus' announcement that the world would hate him (Jn. 15:25; Ps. 69:4) and in the wine vinegar which he received while on the cross (Jn. 19:28-29; Ps. 69:21).

⁷⁶This is the first of many confrontations between Jesus and "the Jews." The expression "the Jews" may strike the reader as odd inasmuch as Jesus and his disciples were themselves Jews. It is important to understand that this designation is a theological one, not an ethnic one. The "Jews" are those Jewish people who rejected Jesus. They were part of the Jewish establishment which would not accept his claim of messiahship. Beyond the conflict of Jesus with his fellow Jews, the Christian church near the end of the first century also had serious conflicts with the Jewish community, and this later conflict may help explain why the Fourth Gospel emphasizes such language, cf. R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 66-69. See footnote #11.

authorities thought it meant a reconstruction of the edifice). This sort of double-talk served to separate the sincere from the insincere in the same way as the parables in the Synoptics (cf. Mk. 4:10-12). Furthermore, the fact that Jesus referred to his own body as the temple implied that he considered himself to be the sanctuary of God.⁷⁷ In the Prologue, John had explained the incarnation as the "tenting" of the *Logos* in the world, an expression that recalled the glory of Yahweh in the Tent of Meeting (cf. 1:14).⁷⁸ Now, he claimed to be the temple itself, the sanctuary of God.

The temple authorities did not perceive Jesus' play on words (2:20-21). Later, they even used Jesus' statement as evidence against him in his trial (cf. Mk. 14:58). Already, the problem of a faith based on miracles begins to appear. Jesus' disciples, of course, were first stimulated to faith because of the sign at Cana (2:11). Here, however, Jesus was not willing to perform a sign in order to convince the temple authorities of his legitimacy (2:18-19). Finally, though Jesus apparently performed other miracles in Jerusalem which brought him into the public eye (2:23), he was unwilling to put confidence in the enduring loyalty of those who were attracted to him for this reason (2:24a). His ability to evaluate human motives did not depend upon conventional sources. He genuinely knew the internal thoughts and motives of the people who surrounded him, and therefore, he knew that a faith grounded only in miracles was not a solid foundation (2:24b).

While still in Jerusalem, a member of the Sanhedrin came to speak with Jesus (3:1-2a). Here again, the interrelationship between miraculous signs and faith are central. Nicodemus had been impressed by the signs (cf. 2:23), and he frankly admitted that they had convinced him Jesus was a legitimate prophet (3:2b). However, Jesus immediately challenged this entry level faith with the assertion that what was necessary was to be born anew.⁷⁹ Only in this way would one be able to participate in (idiomatically "to see") the kingdom of God (3:3). Such a statement must have sounded very odd to Nicodemus. That the Jews were already God's people and heirs of his eternal kingdom was assumed in Jewish theology. Yet Jesus seemed to imply, much as did the Baptist earlier (cf. Mt. 3:7-10/Lk. 3:7-9), that Jewish birth and heritage were insufficient. It was not enough to simply accept Jesus as a prophet because he performed miracles.

Nicodemus was confused, and as is often the case in the Fourth Gospel, his

⁷⁷It is significant that John shifts from the word *hieron* (= whole complex of buildings and courts) in 2:14-15 to *naos* (= sanctuary including the holy of holies) in 2:19.

⁷⁸See discussion of the word *skenoo* in 1:14.

⁷⁹It is well known that the Greek *anōthen* can be translated either as "born again" or "born from above." The metaphor of new birth goes back to the prologue, where John described this new birth as the right to become children of God by receiving the *Logos* from God and believing in him (1:12-13).

misunderstanding created the opportunity for further explanation. The birth of which Jesus spoke was not a natural birth, but rather, a spiritual one (3:5-6).⁸⁰ It was not like Jewish birth at all. It was an internal work by the sovereign God, and like the wind, it was not outwardly observable (3:7-8). Its origin was not to be found in the conventional religious structures of Judaism. As John had said earlier, it was not humanly controlled (cf. 1:13). As a teacher of his people, Nicodemus might have been expected to know that such spiritual realities do not always fit into institutional categories (3:9-10). Nevertheless, Jesus was willing to explain more fully this new birth.

Jesus, along with others, functioned as a witness to God's work in the world, even though that witness was largely rejected (3:11).⁸¹ Though Jesus declined to entrust his full message to those who were interested only in the signs (cf. 2:24), he now entrusted much more to Nicodemus. God's work in the world, however difficult for Nicodemus to understand (3:12), was fully known by Jesus, the One whose origin was heavenly (3:13; cf. 1:1-2).⁸² His work on earth was to be lifted up (on the cross,

⁸⁰Much discussion has attended the phrase "water and Spirit" in 3:5. While it is clear enough that the word "Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit, to what does the word "water" refer?" Does it refer to baptism in water, either by the Baptist or by Jesus' disciples? (It could hardly anticipate Christian baptism, since the whole context of the dialogue seems to imply that this was something Nicodemus could enter into immediately). It is unlikely to be an ambiguous symbolism of the gospel or the Word of God, as used by Paul and Peter (cf. Ep. 5:26; 1 Pe. 1:23), since there is nothing in the immediate context or even the whole Johannine corpus to suggest such a meaning. Some have interpreted it to be an oblique reference to natural birth, that is, to the emerging of the fetus from the embryonic fluid of the womb. Contextually this is better, since there already exists the extended parallelism between natural birth and spiritual birth. Against this is that no evidence from the language of the period supports the idiom of natural birth being a birth "by water." If this is what Jesus meant, then his words were certainly oblique. Perhaps the best solution is that the term "water" may be a hendiadys, that is, a grammatical construction in which two nouns connected with the conjunction "and" refer to the same thing. As such, water would itself be a symbol of the Spirit in much the same way as it is used elsewhere in the gospel (cf. 7:37-39). Such a symbolism would agree with the Old Testament promises of the gift of the Spirit as water (cf. Is. 32:15; 44:3; Eze. 36:25ff.)

⁸¹The temporary shift to the first person plural is unusual in 3:11. If Jesus is using the so-called royal "we," it can at least be said that this is unique, since in the Fourth Gospel Jesus habitually uses the first person "I." Some interpreters feel that 3:11 is not part of Jesus' quoted words, but the verse functions as an editorial witness of the Johannine community at the time the gospel was written. If so, the verse should appear in brackets. Better, perhaps, is the interpretation that Jesus simply joins all the other witnesses who testify to his legitimacy as the Messiah, the Son of God.

The concept of testimony or witness is very important in the Fourth Gospel. The Baptist is presented as the first witness to Jesus as the Messiah (1:6-7, 15, 19-20, 32-34; 3:26; 5:33). The signs of Jesus were also witnesses to his validity (5:36). The voice of God at Jesus' baptism was a witness (5:37; 8:18b). The Holy Scriptures pointed toward Christ (5:39). Jesus himself, who from eternity had been in the very presence of the Father, testified to God's work (3:31-32; 8:14, 18a; 18:37). The coming Paraclete would later give witness about Jesus (15:26). Finally, the disciples stood as witnesses to Jesus as the one sent from the Father (15:27; 19:35; 21:24).

⁸²Many early manuscripts and some English versions contain the additional phrase, "the one who is in heaven" (so KJV, JB, NEB, NAB). If this is authentic, then either it means the Son of man whose "home" (implied) is in heaven (so NEB), or else, it means that by the time the Fourth Gospel was written, Jesus had already ascended back to the

cf. 12:32-33), and in this work, he would provide forgiveness of sins for the people, just as the bronze snake was erected for the same reason during the plague of serpents in Moses' time (cf. Nu. 21:4-9). Those who saw the Son of man lifted up (on the cross) would be given eternal life (3:14). God's purpose in the world was not condemnation, but salvation for all who would believe in his Son (3:16-18), and since it was a universal purpose, it was not confined to Jewish limitations. With the coming of God's Son into the world, the true Light was now shining in the midst of spiritual and moral darkness (3:19a; cf. 1:4-5, 9). Those who rejected this witness by God stood condemned (cf. 3:11b), because they did not wish to change their sinful behavior (3:19b-20). Those who were willingly open to the scrutiny of God's truth in Jesus would be transformed by God's power (3:21). This is what it means to be "born anew." John does not use Paul's forensic metaphor of justification by faith, but in his own way, he witnesses to the same truth!

Following the description of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, John returns to the testimony of the Baptist. Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem but stayed in Judea, where they engaged in the ministry of baptism (3:22). Thus, both Jesus and John conducted parallel ministries of baptism for a time, John apparently continuing until he was imprisoned (3:23-24).⁸³ Jesus did not personally perform baptisms, but his disciples represented him in doing so (cf. 4:1-2). He eventually suspended this baptismal ministry when he discovered that more people were coming to him than to John (cf. 4:3). Inevitably comparisons would be made, and the danger of a rift between the followers of Jesus and those of John was increased by agitators who used Jesus' success as a foil against the disciples of John (3:25-26). John's disciples were naturally concerned, and his response to them is a remarkable example of true humility! He faithfully repeated to them that he was not the Messiah. By analogy, he compared himself to a groom's attendant who felt joy for the marriage of his friend (3:27-30). Likewise, John consistently deferred honor for himself so that he might point to the Coming One. Once more, John called their attention to his own human origin as contrasted with Jesus' divine origin (3:31; cf. 1:29-30, 34, 36). Like Jesus, John also realized that the testimony of heaven's true representative would be rejected by the masses, though of course, a few would accept it (3:32-33; cf. 1:11; 3:11). Jesus came from heaven where, in the intimacy of the Father's presence, he had seen the Father's works (cf. 5:19-20; 6:46; 8:38). In his earthly incarnation, he was given the Holy Spirit without limit (3:34).⁸⁴ The unity and relationship between the Father

Father and the phrase should be taken as an editorial comment (so NAB).

⁸³Aenon near Salim cannot be located with precision, cf. M. Avi-Yonah, *IDB* (1962) I.52. The Fourth Gospel is the only one of the four which describes this baptizing ministry of Jesus.

⁸⁴Unlike the prophets, who were given the Holy Spirit "by measure" according to the Rabbis, Jesus as God's Son has an unlimited endowment, cf. G. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 81-84.

and the Son were complete, for all the dominion of God had been given to the Son (3:35). He is the object of faith. To believe in him is to participate in eternal life, while to reject him is to reject eternal life and to remain under divine wrath (3:36). John concluded his description of the Baptist's witness by narrating Jesus' return to Galilee (4:1-3).

Declining the normal route of Jews traveling north, Jesus took the more direct route through Samaria (4:4).⁸⁵ Near Sychar at Jacob's well, he sat down during the noon hour to rest (4:5-6). The disciples had gone into the village (4:8), and in their absence, Jesus was confronted by a Samaritan woman (4:5-6).⁸⁶ He asked her for a drink (4:7), a bold transgression of social protocol risking ceremonial defilement (4:9).⁸⁷ The woman was surprised, and Jesus used the occasion to speak of "living water," an expression currently in usage to denote spring water or running water as opposed to water collected in a cistern (4:10).⁸⁸ Of course, he used this expression as a play on words implying eternal life (4:11-14). The woman's failure to understand Jesus' word-play was comparable to Nicodemus' failure to understand the saying about new birth (4:15). So, Jesus took up a new line by asking her to call her husband (4:16). Surprised at such a personal question, she attempted to shrug it off with the noncommittal, "I have no husband." Yet, this stranger knew more about her than was possible of any ordinary traveler. When he told her exactly the circumstance of her several marriages, much like Nathanael earlier, she was immediately convinced that Jesus was a prophet (4:17-19).⁸⁹ If he were a prophet, then he could settle one of the great vexing questions separating Jews and Samaritans concerning the proper location for a temple, whether Mt. Gerizim or Mt. Zion (4:20).⁹⁰ Jesus announced to her that, though the Jews were God's channel for salvation, the question was now irrelevant since a new order had arrived (4:21-22). The future had become the present. That

⁸⁵The Jews normally avoided Samaria because of the strained racial relations between the two peoples, preferring instead to cross the Jordan at Jericho and travel through the Transjordan until they could cross again south of the Sea of Galilee, cf. Edersheim, *Sketches*, 44.

⁸⁶The "sixth hour" is reckoned from sunrise, i.e., about 6:00 A.M.

⁸⁷Not only was there the natural animosity between Jews and Samaritans concerning their religious differences, Samaritan women were considered by the Rabbis to be ceremonially unclean from birth, so that Jesus could not even risk touching her water-pot without contracting uncleanness, cf. Lindars, 180-181.

⁸⁸F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 104.

⁸⁹Such an admission was especially significant, since the Samaritans did not recognize any prophets after Moses, cf. Bruce, 108. Between the first Moses and the eschatological Moses (cf. Dt. 18:18), there were no prophets. Dt. 34:10 was taken as absolute.

⁹⁰The Samaritan Pentateuch, which differs from the Masoretic text in a variety of places, even includes a command inserted after Ex. 20:17 to build a sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim. In some nineteen places in Deuteronomy, there are tendentious readings which indicate that the place for the permanent worship shrine had already been chosen on Mt. Gerizim, cf. E. Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 43.

which was coming had come (4:23a). The question was no longer "where" to worship, but "how" to worship.

The kind of worship for which God now called was worship "in Spirit and truth" (4:23). Since Jesus was both the bearer of the Spirit (1:33) and the baptizer with the Spirit, the life-giving water he offered issued forth in a new intimacy with the Father which did not depend upon the formal structures of time and location.⁹¹ Since God is himself pure Spirit, this kind of intimacy is only appropriate (4:24). However, such intimacy is dependent upon the incarnation of the Son, who alone has seen the Father (cf. 1:18). If the woman asked about the coming of the Messiah, who would make all these religious problems clear, Jesus declared that he was the Messiah (4:25-26)!

When the disciples returned, they were naturally surprised (4:27). The woman, for her part, returned to Sychar to announce to the village that she had met a man with supernatural knowledge who might well be the Messiah (4:28-30). The disciples apparently had brought back some food from the village, but Jesus declined to join them, only saying that he had food which they knew nothing about. Once again, he used a play on words which his disciples misunderstood. They thought he meant normal food, but he spoke of his mission to do the Father's will (4:31-34). His mission was to bring in a harvest of those who would believe, and the harvest had already begun (4:35)!⁹² The reapers were already gathering grain (possibly referring to the Baptist along with himself and their disciples). Both sowers and reapers would be amply rewarded, for both were truly laboring for the same harvest (4:36-38). Jesus remained in the area for two days, and many Samaritans came to believe in him as the Savior of the world, some because of the woman's witness and others because they heard him themselves (4:39-42).

The Second Sign (4:43-54)

After the two days Jesus spent in Samaria (4:40, 43), he continued north into his own home region of Galilee. John takes the trouble in advance to warn his readers that Jesus' work in Galilee would not receive full honor (4:44), and indeed, the crowd

⁹¹Considerable discussion has occupied translators about whether to capitalize the *pneuma* as "Spirit" (i.e., the Holy Spirit, so NAB, AB, Moffat, Beasley-Murray) or leave it uncapitalized as "spirit" (i.e., the human spirit, so ASV, NIV, TEV, JB, RSV, KJV, NEB, NASB, Phillips). In a sense, both are correct. The new order of worship is, in fact, with the human spirit, but it is mediated through the gift of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives. The term "truth" either refers to the highest form of reality or else functions as a hendiadys for the Spirit itself. Spirit and truth are not to be divided from each other in worship anymore than in Christ, who bears the Spirit and is the Truth, for the Spirit is the Spirit of truth (cf. 14:17; 15:26).

⁹²The saying in 4:35a was probably a proverbial cliché meaning that normally there was four months between sowing and reaping. Here, however, the harvest occurred on the same day the seed was sown!

who welcomed Jesus was more interested in the sensationalism of his powers than in his identity as the Messiah (4:45, 48).⁹³

Once again he visited Cana, where his first miracle had been performed. While there, he encountered a *basilikos*, an official attached to the service of Herod Antipas, whose son was at the point of death (4:46-47). Apparently, the entire crowd was eager to see another miracle, and Jesus' terse comment implies that the people's faith had not yet risen to the appropriate level (4:48). Once again, as in 2:18 and 2:23-25, the danger of superficial faith surfaces, a faith which fastens itself only upon sensational signs. It is not that the signs have no value, else Jesus would not have performed them. Rather, it is that the signs are not ends in themselves.

The official persisted in his plea for his child, and Jesus gave the word that the child would be healed (4:49-50a). Accepting Jesus' promise, the man left for home, and while still enroute, he received news that his son had been restored at precisely the time Jesus had spoken (4:50b-53b). This sign became the threshold for the official's faith, for when he and his family realized that Jesus had healed the child, they all believed in Jesus (4:53b). This narrative and Jesus' comments about faith help the reader to understand the phrase used earlier about believing in "his name" (1:12; 3:18). To believe in Jesus only in the sense that one accepts his power to do miracles is not the level of faith which leads to eternal life. Rather, the faith which leads to eternal life is faith in "his name." This higher level of faith is that which goes beyond the miracles to include Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, the one who came from heaven from the Father to bring light and salvation into the world. It is his identity as *Messiah* and *Son of God* that is the object of saving faith.

John concludes the narrative by numbering this miracle as the second of the signs (4:54). While he mentions that Jesus performed many miracles, just as do the Synoptics (cf. 2:23; 4:45), he only describes seven. From this point on, the signs will not be numbered as were the first two (2:22; 4:54).

The Third Sign and the Sabbath (5:1-47)

There are actually two holy days that form the background for the next sign. One was an unnamed feast of the Jews (5:1)⁹⁴ and the other was the Sabbath (5:16).

⁹³The orientation of the statement in 4:44 is somewhat obscure, since it is not directly connected with Jesus' stay in Judea and yet it is followed by his welcome in Galilee. Another possible solution is that John understood Jesus' short stay to be his way of avoiding making Samaria his "homeland." If he did so, he might incur the familiarity that breeds contempt (4:44), cf. J. Michaels, *John [NIBC]* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989) 78-79.

⁹⁴Although various arguments have been put forth to try to establish precisely which feast Jesus attended, and the choices vary between Tabernacles, Trumpets, Pentecost and Passover. The fact that John does not mention the name of the feast indicates that its precise identification is unnecessary for what he wishes to communicate. It is enough that what happened occurred at one of the Jewish festivals.

While Jesus often healed people who came to him, this occasion, like the others which occurred on the Sabbath (cf. Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 13:10-17; 14:1-6), describes Jesus as taking the initiative (5:2-6).⁹⁵ It suggests that when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he did so intentionally rather than incidentally, and his intention seems to have been to demonstrate that he was the master of the Sabbath. On this occasion, he discovered a longtime invalid at Bethesda, one of the pools in Jerusalem. Confronting the man, Jesus asked him if he wished to get well, and having heard the man's dilemma,⁹⁶ he cured him (5:6-9a). Since the miracle occurred on the Sabbath, Jesus immediately came under suspicion of Sabbath-breaking inasmuch as he had instructed the man to carry his bedroll when he left the pool (5:9b-10). The restored man, for his part, simply reported to his inquisitors that he was only doing what he had been told, thus shifting the question back to Jesus (5:11). Since the man did not even know Jesus, other than through this brief encounter, he was at a loss to say more (5:12-13). Later, however, Jesus found the man in the temple precincts. Confronting him again, Jesus told him to stop sinning or something worse than blindness might happen to him (5:14). The man abruptly left to identify Jesus to the Jewish authorities (5:15).

Three theological issues immediately arise from this incident. One is the obvious disregard which Jesus had toward the Jewish technicalities in keeping the Sabbath. It was not that he was anti-Sabbatarian so much as he was against the rigidity of regulations which forbade showing mercy on the Sabbath. Second, the issue of faith in the context of miracles again arises. Not only was the faith of those who observed miracles often insufficient (cf. 2:18, 23-24; 4:48), the faith of one who had received a miracle was sometimes superficial. The restored man seemed to demonstrate little gratitude for what he received, but instead, he reported Jesus to those who were his enemies (5:15). Finally, there is the question of why the man was disabled in the first place and the meaning of Jesus' statement, "Stop sinning, or something worse might happen" (5:14). This suggests that the man's disability was a judgment upon him. While it is clear that sickness and trouble are not always a judgment (cf. 9:1-3), sometimes they are, and Jesus let the man know that he knew this to be the case here. The "something worse" might be another malady, but it might also be eternal judgment!

As before, the sign sets the stage for a larger discussion. Who was this man

⁹⁵G. Beasley-Murray, *John [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 71.

⁹⁶There are several textual variants in 5:2-4, the most important being verse 4, which virtually all scholars consider to be a gloss, since it is absent in the earliest and best witnesses. Even in many of the Greek texts which contain it, the passage is marked with signs which indicate that it is spurious, B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Society, 1975) 209. It is generally agreed that this gloss represents a popular explanation for why the pool was populated with so many sick folk.

who so boldly went against the Sabbatarian laws of the Jewish establishment? As might be expected, Jesus received severe criticism for his actions (5:16), and even worse, the Jewish authorities were incensed by his explanation that he was only doing the work of his Father (5:17). Jesus' answer implied that the Father continued to do his work on the Sabbath, that is, that God plainly continued his providential care of the universe.⁹⁷ In restoring the invalid, Jesus was only following the example of his Father. It was clear that when Jesus spoke of God as his Father, and of the Father's work as his own, he was claiming a relationship which made him on a level with God (5:18). This, in the Jewish mind, was blasphemous and worthy of death. The remainder of the narrative is taken up with a lengthy monologue by Jesus explaining his role as the Life-giver and Judge followed by the authenticating witnesses to his divine person and work.

Jesus began his explanation by asserting the close relationship between himself and the Father. He was not acting independently of the Father, but rather, he acted in full accord with the Father who loved him and openly shared with him his full work (5:19-20). The full extent of what the Father planned to do was even greater than what he had already begun.⁹⁸ It is interesting that Jesus here speaks of himself in the third person (i.e., "the Son" rather than "I"), just as in the Synoptics he regularly refers to himself as the "Son of Man."⁹⁹ In doing so, Jesus introduces the confessional language which became the heritage of the church. Just as the Father holds the power of life over death, so also does the Son (5:21). In fact, the full judgment of all humans had been delivered to the Son so that the Father and the Son might fully share the honor of divine sovereignty (5:22-23). Thus, a person's response to Jesus is, by definition, his response to God. The sovereignty and work of the Father and the Son are one.

This, then, is the essential faith that leads to eternal life. It is to believe in the Father who sent his Son into the world. This is the kind of faith which results in eternal life and saves one from condemnation (5:24; cf. 1:12-13; 3:16-18). While there will be a resurrection of the dead at the end of the ages, spiritual life is already being given to those who are spiritually dead (5:25).¹⁰⁰ The Son, just as the Father,

⁹⁷Jesus implies here what He. 4:3-10 states explicitly, that is, that God's sabbath rest began when creation was finished, and it has never come to an end.

⁹⁸More than once Jesus refers to the future and the "greater works" that were still to come (cf. 1:50; 5:20; 14:12). While he does not specify what these greater works are, they would surely include his resurrection from the dead.

⁹⁹J. Michaels, *John [NIBC]* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989) 90.

¹⁰⁰Jesus does not here deny the eschatological resurrection, contra C. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980). Rather, he teaches that in some sense the eschatological resurrection has impinged upon the present through the eternal life which Jesus now gives. It is not that people will no longer die, but rather, that they have been given spiritual life which transcends death. Still, Jesus anticipates an

has the power of life resident within himself (5:26). It is not a derived power of life, but rather, it is uncreated, innate life.¹⁰¹ As the Son of Man, the one whom the prophet Daniel described as coming from heaven with sovereign authority over the nations (Da. 7:13-14), Jesus held the authority of final judgment over all (5:27). He is the one who would call the dead from the grave at the end of the ages (5:28-29). His judgment would be in full accord with the Father, for he would not judge independently of the Father, but he would only judge "what he heard," that is, what was commonly shared between himself and the Father (5:30). In all these sayings, Jesus does not counter the accusation that he had made himself equal with God (cf. 5:18). If anything, he goes a long way toward emphasizing that this was exactly the case!

Now, Jesus follows his amazing claims with the testimony of witnesses who substantiate his validity. He did not simply depend upon self-assertion (5:31), for the validity of his claims rested upon the testimony of others (5:32-34). John witnessed to those questioning him that Jesus was "God's Son" (cf. 1:34; 3:35), pre-existent (1:30), one whose sandals he was not worthy to unstrap (1:27). He did not hesitate to identify Jesus as the one who came from heaven (3:31) endowed with the words of God and the Spirit without limit (3:34). For a time, John had been accepted as a prophet (5:35). However, John's testimony did not stand alone. The miraculous signs which Jesus performed, as Nicodemus admitted (3:2), verified that Jesus was sent by God, the Father (5:36). Furthermore, the Father himself gave testimony in sending the Spirit like a dove upon Jesus at his baptism (5:37a; cf. 1:32-34). At the baptism, the Father had boldly announced from heaven, "This is my Son" (Mt. 3:17//Mk. 1:11//Lk. 3:22). While the Jews acknowledged that they had never seen the form of God (as had Moses, cf. Ex. 33:18-23), they prided themselves that they had heard his voice (Ex. 19:16-25; Dt. 4:11-12, 33). Jesus now says they have done neither, for they have rejected God's Son of whom the Scriptures testify (5:37b-40). They did not truly love God in spite of their many religious actions (5:41-42). Jesus had come to reveal to them the Father,¹⁰² and they would not accept him (5:43a), though they would quite willingly accept others who had no more verification than their own self-assertions (5:43b).¹⁰³ The weakness of Jewish theology was that it depended too much

eschatological resurrection in the end (5:28ff).

¹⁰¹Such a statement tells significantly against any form of Arianism, which holds that there was a time when the Son did not exist. If there was a time when the Son did not exist, then the life of the Son is derived and he does not have "life in himself." Thus, the Nicene Creed is squarely on target when it says that the Son is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made..."

¹⁰²This is the meaning of the phrase, "I came in my Father's name," that is, that Jesus came in the authority of God to make the Father known (cf. 1:18). It could hardly mean that the Father's name was "Jesus."

¹⁰³Some have taken this latter statement to be a reference to the anti-Christ, cf. J. Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 334.. This seems to be a leap. It is true, of course, that various messianic figures had significant followings, both before the time of Jesus and afterward. It may be that Jesus has these figures in mind.

upon the esteem of one's peers (5:44; cf. 12:43). In the end, however, the greatest accusation against Jewish theology would be Moses (5:45). Moses, whom the Jews looked to as the head of their religion, wrote about Jesus,¹⁰⁴ but they did not believe Moses either (5:46-47).

The Fourth and Fifth Signs and the Second Passover (6:1-71)

The fourth sign in John's Gospel, the feeding of the 5000, is one of the few events and the only miracle which is described in all four gospels. Once again, John places the event in the context of a Jewish feast, the Passover (6:4). Jesus had crossed to the eastern side of the lake with a great crowd following him (6:1). It is not unlikely that the crowd contained many pilgrims who were already preparing to make their way toward Jerusalem for the feast. As before (cf. 2:23; 4:45, 48), they were primarily interested in Jesus because of the miracles he was performing (6:2). The setting of this miracle in the Passover context, even though Jesus was not at Jerusalem, probably suggests that the Passover, the miracle of feeding, and later, the Lord's Table have an inner theological connection. The specific descriptions of Jesus taking the bread, giving thanks and distributing the pieces have eucharistic overtones as do Jesus' explanations about eating his flesh and blood.¹⁰⁵

From his vantage point on the hillside (6:3), Jesus could observe the curious crowd coming toward him. He already knew what he intended to do when they arrived, but nevertheless, he challenged Philip with the question of how to feed them (6:5-7). After Andrew had presented the offer of the lad's small lunch (6:8-9), Jesus gave instructions for seating the crowd on the grassy slope (6:10). Taking the bread and then the fish, he gave thanks and had the food distributed to the seated crowd until all had eaten, after which twelve baskets of fragments were gathered to avoid waste (6:11-13). This miracle of feeding, like the miracle of the water changed to wine, demonstrated that Jesus was the source and sustenance of life.

The people in the crowd were understandably impressed, and they began to suggest to each other that perhaps this was the prophet like Moses (6:14; cf. 1:21, 25;

In particular, the Bar-Kokhba revolt in 132-135 A.D. was just such a messianic movement, cf. Y. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* (New York: Random House, 1971).

¹⁰⁴Jesus did not cite any particular references, but it is possible he had in mind Moses' prediction of a prophet like himself who would arise (cf. Dt. 18:17-19).

¹⁰⁵John's Gospel contains no mention of the eucharistic words and actions of Jesus, even though John mentions the last supper. Some interpreters see this as an intentional omission which serves as a warning against the dangers of externalism. Others suggest that John takes for granted his readers' understanding of the Eucharist and seeks to find unique ways to address the inner meaning of these rituals, cf. R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII) [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 246-249. Certainly the early Christian church understood the feeding of the 5000 to have some relationship to the Eucharist, for the eucharistic words of the early church were, in part, a reflection upon this passage: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom," *Didache* 9.

4:19; Dt. 18:15).¹⁰⁶ However, John makes it clear that this opinion was not the kind of faith for which Jesus was looking, since it was motivated by a political agenda. Those in the crowd were on the verge of accepting Jesus as the eschatological Prophet, but on their own terms, and those terms were to meet their own political ends. In fact, so intent were they on such political hopes that they were on the verge of kidnapping Jesus and forcing him into a popular kingship (6:15a). Just as earlier Jesus would not entrust himself to those who sought him for the sake of miracles (cf. 2:23-24), so now he withdrew into the mountains by himself (6:15b). Once more, faith in Jesus as a miracle-worker is shown to be susceptible to distortion. The signs are real miracles, but belief in them does not automatically lead one toward true faith.

The fifth sign, also a nature miracle, was performed only in the presence of the inner circle of his disciples. Jesus was now in the high mountains which arise abruptly from the north shore of the lake. The disciples were attempting to cross back toward Capernaum in the gathering darkness (6:16-17). A heavy wind blew against them, and after rowing a considerable distance, they were terrified to see a figure walking toward them on the surface of the lake (6:18-19). It was Jesus, and he allayed their fears as he stepped into the boat (6:20). Suddenly, they reached the shore (6:21). The crowd, for its part, was disappointed at not finding Jesus or the disciples, so they took boats back to Capernaum to search for them (6:22-24).

Jesus' feeding of the crowd and the people's subsequent search for Jesus in their desire to force him into a political uprising sets the stage for the long discussion to follow. Jesus immediately confronted those seeking him with the fact that their motives were misdirected (6:25-26). They were oblivious to the signs as signs. They only saw the sensationalism of the miracles, not the truth toward which these miracles pointed. For them, the miracles were only a means to personal benefit, not a means to recognize Jesus as the one sent by the Father for salvation. Thus, Jesus challenged them to work for the food that endures eternally. Like the metaphors of new birth and living water, the food that Jesus gives is eternal life, for he is the one authenticated by the Father (6:27). To their question about what works God requires, Jesus replied that God requires faith in the one he sent (6:28-29).

The people rightly understood that Jesus was speaking about himself, so they asked him for further miraculous verification, such as the renewal of the gift of manna from heaven (6:30-31). Perhaps they believed that in the messianic age the gift of manna should be renewed.¹⁰⁷ What they did not understand was that the bread from heaven had already been given in Jesus himself. It was not earthly bread for an

¹⁰⁶Cullmann, 13-50.

¹⁰⁷Later rabbis taught that this would happen, cf. D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 286.

earthly subsistence, but heavenly bread for spiritual life (6:32-33). Jesus was the bread of spiritual life, and the only way to receive this bread was to come to him and believe in him as the one sent from the Father (6:34-35).¹⁰⁸ It is apparent, of course, that Jesus did not yet consider the people to have believed in him at this level, regardless of what they thought about his miracles (6:36). Such faith is a gift, for it arises in the hearts of those whom the Father promised to give to his Son for preservation (6:37).

There is paradox here, for while the Father gives to the Son those who are to be saved, yet the promise of salvation is for "whoever comes." The fundamental error of both Calvinism and Arminianism is the same--the insistence upon removing paradox from the doctrine of election. Each emphasizes one side of the paradox to the exclusion of the other. The nature of salvation embraces both the pull of God upon people as well as their response of faith. God's drawing is neither selective nor irresistible, but rather, he wills to save all who will come to him in the manner he has prescribed, that is, through faith in his Son (1:12-13; 3:16, 18, 36; 4:42, 53; 6:40, 47).¹⁰⁹ They cannot come to him under their own power, of course, but only as the Father draws them (6:44, 65). This, then, was God's will for his Son: that he would preserve and raise to life again at the resurrection all those who had been given to him (6:38-40).

Jesus' self-claims were offensive to his listeners, especially his claim to be the bread that came from heaven (6:41). As local Galileans, they knew his family, and it is apparent that either they did not know the story of the virgin birth, or more likely, had rejected it (6:42). Thus, they complained about his sayings. They were willing to accept his miracles for personal benefit, but they were reluctant to accept the higher truth toward which his signs pointed--that he was, in fact, God's unique Son who had come from heaven. In the face of their grumbling, Jesus continued his discourse, asserting that to listen to God and to learn from him was to come to his Son (6:43-45). They had never seen the Father (cf. 1:18; 5:37); only the Son had seen the Father (6:46). Thus, they must look to the Son in faith as the bread of life (6:46-48). So long as they were primarily interested in earthly bread, such as the manna given to their forefathers which had not saved even their ancestors from death, they would be turned away from the true bread that could give eternal life (6:49-51). The true bread which gave eternal life was the incarnation of Jesus in the world so that through his death he might draw to himself all who would come (6:51b; cf. 1:29, 36; 3:14). Of course, the Jews could hardly have been expected to understand the full meaning of

¹⁰⁸The *ego eimi* (I am) statement here and elsewhere will be discussed at 8:58.

¹⁰⁹See the discussion in W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990) 156-157.

this metaphor (6:52). Nevertheless, in seeking for miracles without putting their faith in Jesus as God's incarnate Son, they closed to themselves the full meaning of Jesus' mission.

So, Jesus concluded, in order to eat the true bread from heaven and drink the true water of life one must "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood" (6:53-55). This shocking and brutal metaphor presupposes the coming violent death of Jesus.¹¹⁰ For Jews, it was a particularly offensive metaphor, since the law of Moses forbade drinking blood of any kind. Cannibalism certainly was no less offensive to them. As in the Synoptic parables, this difficult metaphor was intended to test the spiritual sincerity of the crowd. Would they open their minds and hearts to the deeper meaning of Jesus' words, or would they persist in following their own political hopes? The real issue was not whether there would be more miracles, but rather, it was how the crowd would respond to Jesus, the Father's Son. True union with God and true spiritual life were not in miracles, even in authentic miracles like the manna which fell from heaven in the time of Moses (6:56-57). All who participated in that ancient miracle died in any case. In order to have eternal life, one must feed on the true bread from heaven, that is, one must put his/her faith in the one whom God had sent into the world (6:58-59).

This sermon on the bread from heaven was a watershed in the Galilean ministry of Jesus. It is at this point that Jesus' popularity collapsed. Now comes the justification for the earlier statements that those who followed Jesus only for the sake of miracles did not have proper faith (cf. 2:23-24; 4:48; 5:14-15; 6:26). Though aware that his metaphor had deeply offended his listeners (6:60), Jesus did not attempt to lessen its force. Instead, he pressed even further that the one who had come from the Father into the world would also return to the Father where he had been before (6:61-62). Jesus' difficult metaphors, which pointed toward the true nature of his person and work, would lead all who would believe him into spiritual life, but he knew that many would not believe, and one would even betray him (6:63-66; cf. 2:24-25). Furthermore, no one could come to true faith without divine enablement (6:65). The result was that many rejected Jesus and abandoned his mission (6:66).

Turning to the Twelve, Jesus asked where they stood in light of the mass defection. Peter, in a bold confession analogous to the confession he made following

¹¹⁰It is not necessary, as in Roman Catholic theology, to take this statement as non-metaphorical. John has been recording Jesus' striking metaphors all along (i.e., birth, water, food) to illustrate the meaning of his person and work, so there is no reason to think that suddenly he abandons his own methodology and now speaks literally in the sense of transubstantiation. It is difficult not to believe that here John expected his readers to gain insight into the powerful symbols of the Eucharist, but a miracle of transubstantiation is hardly a clear idea in the text.

the transfiguration in the Synoptics, asserted the full loyalty of the group (6:67-69). Yet even here Jesus was fully aware of the coming treachery of Judas (6:70-71).

The Feast of Booths (7:1-52)

The Synoptic Gospels describe at length Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but John confines himself to the brief summary in 7:1. From this point in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus will not be seen in Galilee again until his post-resurrection appearances (cf. 21:1). Leaving Galilee, he traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, the last of the three great annual festivals which all male Jews were expected to attend each year.

Due to the antagonism of the Judean religious hierarchy over his healing of the invalid on the sabbath, Jesus had been avoiding Jerusalem (7:1), and the question on the minds of many was whether he would now go south. Jesus' brothers echoed this same question by urging him to quit operating in the relative seclusion of the north so that he might display his miracles once more in the holy city. Their sarcasm, motivated by unbelief, was biting (7:2-5).¹¹¹ Once more, the issue of faith and the role of miracles is raised. Jesus' brothers did not deny that Jesus had miraculous powers, yet still they did not accept him as the Messiah, God's Son. As in the earlier account at Cana, where Jesus had been similarly urged on by his mother, Jesus responded to his brothers that it was not time to make a full revelation of himself (7:6; cf. 2:4).

Doubtless there was tension between Jesus' self-understanding of his messiahship and the popular notion that the messiah would be a political liberator of the Jews. This tension probably lies behind the statement, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me" (7:7).¹¹² Jesus' brothers probably held the popular, ethnocentric viewpoint. Jesus, on the other hand, not only rejected this viewpoint, he taught that the Jews themselves stood under divine condemnation, along with the rest of the world. It was not a welcome idea! So, Jesus sent his brothers along ahead of himself (7:8). Later, he traveled to Jerusalem privately and without fanfare (7:9-10). The pilgrims in Jerusalem were anxiously watching for his appearance, though they held mixed opinions about him, the most vehement being the murderous antagonism of the Jewish hierarchy who had already decided that he must be killed (7:11-13; 5:18; 7:1). The feast, which lasted for a whole week, was half over when Jesus finally showed up at the temple and began to teach in the courtyards (7:14). Jesus' teaching was undeniably impressive. Though he had studied under none of the great rabbis, he had mastered well the theology of the Hebrew Bible (7:15). In response to their

¹¹¹The Synoptics, also, demonstrate that Jesus' brothers did not fully accept his ministry and claims. Mark even says that they thought he was insane (cf. Mk. 3:21).

¹¹²It is unlikely the "the world" in this passage refers to the Gentile world. Rather, it refers to the alien culture opposed to Jesus, including the Jews themselves (cf. 8:22-23).

amazement at his theological acumen, Jesus explained that his teaching was not the product of professional study, but instead, it came from God who had sent him into the world (7:16). Only those who diligently sought to follow God would truly perceive that his teaching was not self-generated but came from God (7:17). Normally, rabbinical studies were conducted by exhaustive reference to the collected wisdom of preceding rabbis. A disciple who excelled in this kind of learning gained immense status. Jesus, however, was not interested in status. Instead, he only sought to honor the Father who had sent him into the world (7:18). By contrast, the religious authorities, who took great pride in their theological training, were at that very moment plotting to murder Jesus, an action which violated the commandments of Moses. Jesus was not backward about confronting them (7:19).

The crowd protested that Jesus must be having delusions of persecution to speak about someone trying to kill him (7:20), but Jesus knew that the mindset of the religious leaders, ever since the previous exchange months earlier, was to destroy him (cf. 5:16-18). The one miracle when he had healed the invalid had astonished them, for it put into irreconcilable conflict their regulations concerning sabbath-keeping against the obvious fact that a supernatural event had occurred (7:21). Once more addressing this problem, Jesus challenged them with the fact that even circumcision was performed on the sabbath, for the laws of circumcision took precedent over the laws for sabbath (7:22).¹¹³ If this was so, why was it not appropriate for Jesus to perform a cure on the sabbath (7:23)? Such sabbath legalism was tendentious and superficial (7:24).

Apparently some among the crowd were perceptive enough to realize that Jesus' life was indeed in danger, and they were surprised that though he was speaking publicly, no overt action was taken against him (7:25-26). Some idly speculated that perhaps even the authorities had been swayed in his favor (7:27), though it is apparent that the authorities themselves did not favor such a turn. They had concluded that Jesus was not the Messiah, since they knew about his origins in Galilee, something that in their view was not supposed to be known.¹¹⁴

¹¹³Rabbinical sources in the *Mishnah* confirm that it was standard practice to prefer the law for circumcision, which was required for newborn males on the eighth day, over the laws for sabbath, cf. Bruce, 186 (Note 7). Jesus used a similar argument in Mt. 12:5, when he appealed to the fact that priests continue their duties on the sabbath, even though the sabbath requires that all work cease.

¹¹⁴It is popular to assume that there was a single messianic concept in the Jewry of the first century. This assumption is simply not accurate, for there were various opinions, some conflicting, about the origin, nature and mission of the messiah, cf. R. Klein, "Aspects of Intertestamental Messianism," *The Bible in its Literary Milieu*, ed. J. Maier and V. Tollers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 191-203. Even in this same chapter, there are conflicting ideas about the origin of the messiah (cf. 7:27, 41-43). The idea that the origin of the messiah was to be unknown may have been based on passages such as, "He was concealed in the presence of the [Lord of the spirits] prior to the creation of the world..." (1 Enoch 48:6) and, "Just as no one can explore or know what is in the depths of the sea, so

Jesus, who knew the thoughts of all people (cf. 1:50; 2:24; 4:17, 29; 5:14), responded to their objections. Essentially, he said that they both knew yet did not know his origins. They knew he was from Galilee, but they did not know the Father who had sent him into the world (7:28-29). His response angered them, and they attempted to seize him, though they were not able to do so (7:30).¹¹⁵ While many of the pilgrims put their faith in Jesus because of his miracles, and apparently their faith was of the sort which saw beyond the signs to the true identity of Jesus (7:31), the efforts of the authorities to apprehend him did not cease. They ordered the temple guard to arrest him (7:32), but again to no avail (7:45-46). In the context of this opposition, Jesus explained that his mission would be short. After it was completed, he would return to the Father, a place where normal humans could not go (7:33-34).

Once more, Jesus' words were misunderstood. What did he mean? Would he seek out disciples among the Diaspora (7:35-36)? It is apparent that the crowds at large knew no more about Jesus' destiny than about his origins, and their speculation that he might go to the Greeks has more than a touch of irony, since after his ascension back to the Father, Jesus' followers would, in fact, go to the Diaspora and the Greeks.

At the end of the festal week, Jesus loudly announced to his listeners that anyone who was thirsty could come to him and drink (7:37). It is not unlikely that his statements were made as a reflection upon the ritual libation connected with the Pool of Siloam. It had become a custom for the pilgrims at the Feast of Booths to go by procession to the pool and return with some of its water, which was then poured out as an offering to God. It may well have been that Jesus made his proclamation in association with this ritual.¹¹⁶ In any case, his proclamation has the same inner meaning as the miracle of transforming water to wine, the teaching about new birth, the metaphor about living water, and the teaching about the bread from heaven. This inner meaning is that all humans have a spiritual hunger and thirst, and it can only be satisfied by Jesus.¹¹⁷ The quenching of this spiritual thirst comes by faith in Jesus and through the gift of the Holy Spirit which he gives (7:38). The gift of the Spirit would be like an inner well flowing from the indwelling residence of the Spirit, which had

no one on earth can see my Son...except in the time of his day" (4 Ezra 13:52). It may also be that Jn. 7:27 hints at a popular notion that Jesus was illegitimate, such as is directly implied in 8:41.

¹¹⁵John gives only the theological reason, "...his time was not yet come...", for their failure to seize Jesus. The inference is that their failure was due to God's sovereign control.

¹¹⁶R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.535.

¹¹⁷Christians have developed additional ways of expressing this hunger and thirst. Some speak of a "God-shaped hole in the human heart," and others speak of a spiritual vacuum in everyone's inner self. Augustine expressed it most admirably in his well-known prayer, "You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

been promised by the prophets (cf. Joel 2:28-29; 3:18; Zec. 12:10; 14:8).¹¹⁸ John parenthetically adds, of course, that the gift of the Spirit as yet had not been given inasmuch as it necessarily must occur after the glorification of Jesus through the cross and resurrection (7:39). Jesus would explain this sequence more fully to the disciples in Chapters 14-16. Still, since Jesus was both the bearer of the Spirit without limit (cf. 3:34) and the one who would baptize with the Spirit (cf. 1:33-34), it was only appropriate for him to make such a proclamation.

Jesus proclamation created considerable speculation. Some were ready to accept him as the eschatological prophet like Moses, and others were ready to accept him as the Messiah (7:40-41a). Still others were dubious, since Jesus had come from Galilee, not Bethlehem, and apparently they were unfamiliar with the birth narratives (7:41b-42). So, the opinions varied. While there were those who wished to apprehend Jesus, no one took action (7:43-44). Even the temple guards who had been sent to arrest Jesus were taken back by his teachings (7:45-47). The Pharisees were adamantly opposed to him, of course (7:48-49), though Nicodemus was willing to offer a somewhat timid effort for his defense (7:50-51). He was quickly rebuffed for his efforts (7:52).¹¹⁹

An Ancient Account of Jesus' Forgiveness (7:53--8:11)

Though not an original part of John's Gospel, the story of the woman taken in adultery is probably a true account in the ministry of Jesus.¹²⁰ It appears here, more than likely, as an illustration of Jesus' words, "I pass judgment on no one" (cf. 8:15). The scribes and Pharisees had brought to Jesus a woman taken in the act of adultery (7:53--8:3). It is apparent that they wished to manipulate Jesus into a conflict with the law of Moses. Moses not only forbade adultery, he commanded adulterers to be

¹¹⁸The careful reader will notice, of course, that there is no single passage which says that streams of living water will flow from within the believer. It appears that Jesus brought together passages which speak of the gift of the Spirit and refer to the Spirit's blessing through the symbolism of flowing water. Both the Spirit and the water are eschatological images, cf. Burge, 88-93.

¹¹⁹Actually, the Pharisees were wrong in their retort that no prophet had come from Galilee. Elijah had come from Galilee beyond Jordan (i.e., Gilead, cf. 1 Kg. 17:1), and Jonah had come from Gath Hopher in Galilee (2 Kg. 14:25).

¹²⁰While this passage has been included in the traditional English Bibles, it is not in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Many of the later manuscripts which contain the passage have asterisks or obeli, indicating that its textual authenticity is in question. Furthermore, the story does not always appear in this location even in the later manuscripts. It is to be found at the end of John's Gospel, following Luke 21:38, at the end of Luke's Gospel, and following John 7:36. In spite of its questionable textual history, the passage seems characteristic of the Lord, and many if not most scholars believe that it recounts a true incident. That it is not an original part of the Fourth Gospel does not mean that it is therefore to be discarded. There seems to be no good reason for supposing that someone concocted the story, L. Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 290-291.

executed (Dt. 22:22; Lv. 20:10). It is also apparent that the Pharisees were implicitly shielding the man, for if the two had been caught in the act, they had brought only her. The *Mishnah*, the Jewish code of rabbinical oral interpretation, called for strangulation of the man and stoning for the woman.¹²¹ So, ignoring the man, they set the woman before Jesus and asked for a public opinion (8:4-6a).

It would seem there was no safe answer. If Jesus called for mercy, he could be accused of opposing Moses. Almost certainly he would be accused of condoning or even encouraging adultery. If he called for stoning, his judgment would seem to go against his teachings of love, mercy and forgiveness. Never again would he be called the "friend of sinners." Also, since the Roman government did not allow the Jews the right to execution without a Roman hearing, Jesus might very well get himself into difficulty with the Procurator. After hearing the accusation, Jesus stooped and wrote in the dirt (8:6b).

No completely satisfactory answer has ever been given as to what Jesus may have written. An Armenian translation (5th century) contains the following interpolation, "He himself, bowing his head, was writing with his finger on the earth to declare their sins; and they were seeing their several sins on the stones." While this explanation is plausible, it is certainly not part of the original story. In the end, the reader does not know what Jesus wrote; however, what he said was certainly effective, and the accusers left one by one (8:7-9). The story demonstrates Jesus' compassion for sinners. He did not abandon judgment and say, "O, it is quite alright. Don't worry about it." Rather, he deferred her sentence and offered to her forgiveness, giving her the freedom to begin over again. His final word required that she leave her lifestyle of sin (8:10-11).

Jesus and the Father (8:12-59)

Earlier, Jesus had angered the hierarchy in Jerusalem, because he claimed a unique relationship with God as "his Father" (5:17-18). At that time, he explained that this unique relationship included the authority of the Son to do the works of the Father (5:19), such as raising the dead (5:21, 25), to execute judgment (5:22, 27), and to receive equal honor along with the Father (5:23). Now Jesus returns to this issue.

He begins his dialogue with the assertion, "I am the light of the world" (8:12), something which he had implied earlier, when talking to Nicodemus (cf. 3:19-21).¹²² Such a statement, by any standard, is shocking. It is the sort of statement which, if not true, consigns one to the categories of insanity or grandiose deception. The

¹²¹W. Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) II.2.

¹²²For further discussion on the "I am" statements of Jesus, see comments at 8:58.

Pharisees immediately confronted Jesus on the grounds that he was a self-inflated braggart (8:13). Once more, the discussion revolves around the concept of valid testimony (cf. 5:31ff.).

Jesus defended his self-testimony because it was based on his own experience of coming from the Father into the world and his knowledge that after his mission to the world he would return to the Father (8:14a). The Pharisees were in no position to pass judgment on him, because they had no knowledge of Jesus' heavenly origin. Their condemnations were made on the basis of conventional wisdom (8:14b-15a). Jesus, by contrast, had not come into the world on a mission of condemnation (8:15b; cf. 3:17), though of course, if he chose to do so, his judgment would be righteous, for he stood at one with the Father (8:15b-16). Whatever judgment Jesus would make would be precisely the same judgment that the Father would make. Nevertheless, Jesus challenged his detractors with the fact that he did not depend entirely on self-testimony. His claims were validated also by the testimony of God the Father (cf. 5:37), thus establishing two witnesses in conformity to the Torah (8:17-18; cf. Dt. 17:6). The Pharisees retorted, "Where is your father?", a question which, as earlier, implied that Jesus was illegitimate (cf. 7:27; 8:41). But Jesus simply charged them with ignorance of both himself and his Father, a charge that they knew indicted them for ignorance of God (8:19). As before, they were unable to arrest him (8:20; cf. 5:18; 7:30, 32, 44).

Referring to his eventual return to the Father, Jesus declared that he was going where they could not come (8:21; cf. 7:33-34). Earlier, they speculated that he might be going to the Diaspora; now they speculated that he might be contemplating suicide (8:22). Ignoring their speculation, Jesus declared that they were from two different worlds, he from the heavenly world and they from the earthly world (8:23). Their response to him would, in fact, be decisive, for if they did not come to faith in him for who he claimed to be, they would die in their sins (8:24; cf. 8:21). Here, of course, is the higher level of faith that has been at issue all along in the context of the miracles Jesus performed. It is faith *in Him* that is critical, not merely the affirmation of his sensational healings and works of power. It is Jesus as the water of life, the bread from heaven, the light of the world, the Messiah, and the Son of God that is the fundamental issue--those things that Jesus had been claiming all along (8:25).¹²³ His

¹²³This text has a long tradition of difficulty, and it may be the most obscure sentence in the whole gospel. As it stands, the sentence reads, "Jesus said to them, 'The beginning that also I speak to you,' or else if the words are divided differently in the Greek text (there are no word divisions in the oldest manuscripts) it reads, 'The beginning why I speak to you.'"

The expression *ten amen* can be rendered as "the beginning" or "the first." It is in the accusative case, meaning that it functions as a direct object. Thus, while some ancient versions (Latin, Gothic and Ethiopic) as well as the Douay-Rheims Version translate it as a nominative (i.e., as the subject), a nominative rendering can only be

claims were no more than what the One who had sent him had commissioned him to say (8:26). His listeners did not yet understand that the One who sent Jesus was, in fact, God the Father (8:27), nor would they until the time of his death. The answer to the question, "Who are you?", would only become clear in the crucifixion of Jesus, when he would be lifted up on the cross (8:28). In the meantime, his ministry was confirmed by the Father who stood with him (8:29).

Many in the crowd were moved by the power of his words and put their faith in Jesus (8:30). Though there had been a defection in Galilee (cf. 6:66), there were a growing number of people in Jerusalem who were becoming convinced (cf. 2:23; 7:12, 40-41, 45-49). Jesus, however, warned them that they must remain steadfast to his teaching (8:31). Only by an unyielding loyalty to truth would they be free from the bondage of false belief (8:32). Yet, this saying also was difficult for them. As the descendants of Abraham, they believed that they had always been free, at least spiritually, if not politically (8:33). Jesus, however, responded that sin is slave-master to all (8:34).¹²⁴ To be a slave to sin is to be excluded from free access to the Father's house, for slaves are not privileged to participate in the family (8:35). It is only a free-born son that has this privilege, and it is only by coming to God's unique Son that such standing of sonship can be gained (8:36; cf. 1:12).

Though many in the crowd were on the verge of faith, others were skeptical because Jesus' words seemed too fantastic (8:37).¹²⁵ Yet, Jesus was only saying and

regarded as a mistake. Undoubtedly, these translators were theologically influenced by passages such as John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1, both of which contain the word *amen* in reference to the beginning of time and the universe. Unfortunately, their theology was better than their grammar. These mistranslations read:

[I am] the beginning, and I told you so. (Ethiopic)

[I am] the beginning, that which I am saying to you. (Vulgate)

[I am] the beginning, even I who speak to you. (Gothic)

Not only is the attempt to read *ten amen* as a nominative in error, it compounds the error by adding the expression *ego eimi* as a predicate nominative construction, which is not possible given the accusative case.

Since the earliest manuscripts did not have word divisions, the earliest Greek text does not distinguish between *ho ti* and *hoti*. Later Greek texts go in both directions. The split reading can be taken either as an exclamation (similar to the Hebrew *mah* (= "That I speak to you at all") or as an affirmation supplying *ego eimi* ("[I am] from the first what I am telling you" or "[I am] what I have told you from the first.") The reading without the split functions as a question with an adverbial accusative, i.e., "Why do I speak to you at all?"

When the Bodmer papyri (p66) became accessible in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a very early textual variant in this passage also became available, dating back to the early 3rd century. The text p66 includes two additional words *eipon humin* and reads, "*I told you at the beginning what I am also telling you [now].*" If this represents the true text of 8:25b (and a number of scholars think that it does), then the problem is solved. If not, then the difficulty remains.

¹²⁴Even the Hebrew Bible is unequivocal that no one is free from sin. Solomon's prayer, "There is no one who does not sin" (2 Chr. 6:36), admirably summarizes the theology of the Old Testament on this count.

¹²⁵Some interpreters view those "who had believed in him" as belonging to the group with superficial faith. Here, we have followed the line of interpretation that there were both believers and doubters in the crowds who listened to Jesus.

doing what he had observed in the Father's presence, whom he had been with since the beginning (8:37; 1:1-2, 18; 5:19). By contrast, those who were trying to kill him were simply mirroring the things that their father did (8:38), implying, of course, that their father was someone other than God. When they once more asserted that Abraham was their father, Jesus said that this could only be true if they behaved like Abraham. It was not a natural relationship but a moral one that would prove the identity of their father (8:39). Since they were trying to murder Jesus, something Abraham would never stoop to do, they could not claim Abraham as their spiritual father, regardless of the natural relationship (8:40). Instead, their murderous intentions suggested that their father was someone else. Jesus' enemies retorted that the only father they had was God--and they added the stinging sarcasm that they were not illegitimate, implying that Jesus was (8:41).

The debate continued. Jesus asserted that if God were truly their father, they would love him, for he had come from God (8:42-43). As it was, they betrayed their identity to their true father by their murderous intentions. Their true father was the original murderer and liar, Satan (8:44). In Eden, Satan had lied to Eve (Ge. 3:4), and in doing so, he incited her to rebellion against God which led to her death. In deceiving her, he had committed an act of murder (cf. Ge. 2:17). The religious leaders had accused Jesus of the double sins of sabbath-breaking and blasphemy (cf. 5:18), but after lengthy argument, they still had not been able to effectively argue their case (8:45-46). The reason that they were adamant in their rejection of Jesus was that God was *not* their father; they did not belong to him (5:47).

The Jewish leaders retorted with the racial slur that Jesus was a demon-possessed Samaritan, since Samaritans were considered to be racially defective and heretics as well (8:48). The accusation about demon-possession is similar to the accounts in the Synoptics (cf. Mt. 12:24/Mk. 3:22/Lk. 11:15). Jesus responded that in his mission his only motive was to honor the Father, while their motives were to discredit him (8:49). However, though Jesus did not seek to promote himself, ultimately he would be glorified by the Father, the judge of all, and that was why obedience to Jesus was so important (8:50). Only in this way could a person find eternal life (8:51). So, they continued to press the accusation of demon-possession and asked if Jesus were greater than Abraham or the prophets, all of whom had died (8:52-53). Bluntly they queried, "Who do you think you are?" Of course, that is the fundamental question of the whole gospel, "Who is Jesus?" This is the question that underlies the crisis of faith and the one that must be answered if one is to come to genuine faith.

Jesus responded again by stating that, far from only giving self-authentication, he had the witness of God, the Father, who verified that he was who he claimed to be (8:54). Jesus certainly could not deny the truth of his relationship to the Father (8:55). Even Abraham, who the Jews claimed as their ancestor, had looked ahead to the time

of Jesus with glad anticipation (8:56).¹²⁶ Jesus spoke of Abraham almost as though he knew him, and this prompted the stinging jab that he was not even fifty years old, so how could he speak as though he knew Abraham (8:57)! Jesus' response was the most bold yet, for he said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58)! It was clear that Jesus was claiming to have been alive in Abraham's time, and even more, to have been the God of Abraham. They immediately began to collect stones for a lynching, the penalty to be exacted upon a blasphemer (Lv. 24:16), but Jesus escaped by slipping away from them through the temple courtyards (8:59).

Special comment is in order regarding Jesus' use of the expression *Ego eimi* (= I am). In the Fourth Gospel there is a group of unique sayings which are statements in the first person form *ego eimi*.¹²⁷ Some are without a predicate (i.e., 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19), some are with an implied predicate (i.e., 6:20; 18:5), and some have an explicit predicate (i.e., 6:35, 51; 8:12, 18, 23; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). Those with predicates or implied predicates (i.e., "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the door," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," "I am the true vine") are profound enough, but those without predicates are even more profound inasmuch as they are direct affirmations which connect Jesus with the "I AM" of the exodus (cf. Ex. 3:14). The implication is that Jesus is himself God. He is the Yahweh who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The Jews who heard Jesus say, "Before Abraham was, I am," were not slow in reading the implications of his statement. They were ready to lynch him as a blasphemer.¹²⁸

The Sixth Sign and Another Sabbath (9:1-41)

Earlier, it was pointed out that Jesus took the initiative in his sabbath miracles (see discussion at 5:2-6). Here, the reader encounters another such occasion. It was another sabbath (9:14), and Jesus and his disciples passed a man who had been blind from birth (9:1). It was typical in Jewish theology to assign all maladies to a divine judgment on sin. A person blind from birth, of course, raised a rather difficult theological issue. How could a newborn be accused of sin? Some rabbis advocated

¹²⁶Some interpreters believe that what Jesus has in mind here is the prophetic statement of Abraham to Isaac on the way to Moriah, "God will provide a lamb for himself" (Ge. 22:8). It is equally possible that he was referring to the promise of blessing to all the nations (Ge. 12:1-3), which the early church understood to mean the blessing of salvation (cf. Ro. 4:13, 16-25). Later, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews understood Abraham as being in search of a heavenly city whose architect was God (cf. He. 11:9-10).

¹²⁷These constructions are emphatic in that in Koine Greek it is unnecessary to use the subject pronoun *ego*, since it is already implied in the conjugation of the verb. By using such emphatic constructions, it is apparent that Jesus is making a christological point.

¹²⁸Kysar, 40-44; Guthrie, 330-332.

the possibility of prenatal sin, while others, on the basis of certain passages in the Torah (Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Nu. 14:18), held that the affliction was an indirect judgment due to the sin of the parents.¹²⁹ It is on the grounds of this theological issue that Jesus' disciples asked him about the case of the man who was blind from birth (9:2). Jesus responded that the traditional arguments were not right. While it might be true that some maladies are forms of judgment, as was implied in Jesus' statements to the invalid (cf. 5:14), it is too sweeping to generalize that all suffering is a direct judgment due to sin. There is suffering in the world, but it comes from indirect as well as direct causes. In this case, there was no direct judgment whatsoever (9:3a). Instead, the man's blindness, like much of the other suffering in the world, was simply the product of a fallen universe, waiting for the redemptive work of God to be performed (9:3b). This redemptive work was the mission of God's Son, and he was determined to fulfil his mission while he had the opportunity (9:4-5). The time would come when the chance to work would be at an end. He was the world's light, and he must shine brightly while he had the chance.

The account of the healing is straightforward. Jesus made mud from saliva and dirt, created a small pack for the man's eyes, and directed him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. When the man did so, he could see (9:6-7). The cure created a sensation among those who formerly had known the man, some even doubting that he was the one they had known as a blind beggar (9:8-9). They questioned him closely, and he told them how Jesus had healed him, though he did not even know where Jesus was to be found (9:10-12). As in the healing of the invalid on the sabbath, the initiative for the miracle lay completely with the Lord, but when the miracle had been performed, Jesus stepped into the background (cf. 5:13; 9:12). The signs which called for faith were duly performed, but after they were performed, Jesus seemed to expect serious effort on the part of those who had either seen or benefited from the signs. Those for whom the signs were only ends in themselves were to be distinguished from those for whom the signs were doorways to faith in the person of Jesus. The invalid (John 5), and later the crowd who ate the bread and fish (John 6), both encountered Jesus some time after the miracle. Both had the opportunity to put their faith in Jesus. The healed invalid instead reported Jesus to the authorities (5:15), while the crowd who had been fed bread and fish defected (6:60, 66). In the story of the man born blind, we have the story of one who came to true faith when he found Jesus again.

Once more, the Pharisees serve as the foil to sharpen the issue of faith and unbelief. The former blind man's acquaintances brought him to the Pharisees,

¹²⁹Barclay, II.37-39.

probably since the cure had occurred on the sabbath, and they knew that this was already a bone of contention due to the previous sabbath controversy (9:13-14). So, the Pharisees cross-examined the former blind man concerning the miracle (9:15). They flatly contradicted Jesus' claim that he came from God, since he had broken their sabbatical regulations (9:16a). Some of the neighbors who were listening to the polemics countered by asking the obvious question, "Can sinners do such signs" (9:16b)? Once more, the Pharisees questioned the former blind man about his opinion of Jesus, to which he replied that Jesus must be a prophet (9:17). At first the Pharisees were not even convinced that the man had been blind at all, and it was only after they had questioned his parents that they were willing to concede that the whole affair was not a hoax (9:18-21). The parents, for their part, were not a little intimidated by this interrogation, for the Pharisees, whose domain was the synagogue,¹³⁰ had already made it clear that to accept Jesus was to warrant disfellowship (9:22-23).

Finally, the former blind man was recalled. He was instructed to give praise to God for his healing while at the same time he was reminded pointedly that Jesus was a sinner, and therefore, unworthy of commendation (9:24). The former blind man artfully responded that he had no knowledge about Jesus' personal life--he only knew that at one time he had been blind and now he wasn't (9:25). Once more, the Pharisees interrogated him concerning the procedure of the cure, and he angered them by asking if their repeated questions indicated that they wished to become Jesus' disciples (9:27). To this, they responded with the same language that had been used earlier. They were disciples of Moses, and as for this Jesus, his origins were unclear (9:28-29; cf. 6:42; 7:27; 8:19, 41). The former blind man, now more bold in the face of their insults, responded with the irrefutable logic that if Jesus had performed a miracle of healing, his origin must surely have been God himself (9:30-33). So, the Pharisees expelled him from the synagogue (9:34).

The story climaxes when Jesus once more found the former blind man. As in the healing of the invalid and the feeding of the 5000, Jesus' inaccessibility after the miracle gives time for those who see the signs to contemplate its deeper meaning. Now, he confronts the former blind man, asking him if he believes in Jesus, the Son of Man.¹³¹ The high point is the man's frank confession, "Lord, I believe," followed

¹³⁰While the Sadducees' domain was primarily the temple, the Pharisees used the synagogue as their chief instrument for propagating their interpretive translations of the Torah and the teaching of the oral traditions, which they maintained held equal authority to the Torah, cf. Russell, 50-51.

¹³¹In the Synoptics, the title *Son of Man* often functions against the background of Da. 7:13-14, where one like a son of man comes in the clouds of heaven to be established over the kingdom of God with dominion and glory. In the intertestamental period, this title gained messianic status as the description of the one who would descend to the earth, destroying the wicked and delivering the righteous. Though not the only way the title is used in the

by his worship of Jesus (9:35-38). This, then, is genuine faith. It is not faith for miracles but faith in Jesus as the one whom the Father sent into the world. The signs have their place. They become a threshold for true faith. However, one must go beyond this threshold to the person of Jesus to reach the true faith that gives new birth, new water, eternal life, and spiritual light.

At the man's confession of faith, Jesus declared that his mission in the world was to bring about separation between those who have true faith and those who have superficial faith (9:39). This is the meaning of the metaphor of light, for it plays upon the difference between natural blindness and spiritual blindness (cf. 9:5). Some of the Pharisees heard his declaration, and they sarcastically asked if they were blind also. Jesus responded with a further play on words. Blindness (physical) is not due to the guilt of sin (cf. 9:3), but rather, the guilt of sin is the claim to be able to see (spiritually), while at the same time rejecting the one God has sent (9:40-41).

The Good Shepherd (10:1-21)

Both Matthew and Mark in the Synoptics regard the death of Jesus as the fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction that the Shepherd, the representative of Yahweh, would be struck down, scattering the flock of Israel so that only a remnant would be left (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 14:27; cf. Zec. 13:7-9). After the fires of purification and refinement, the remnant of the flock would call upon Yahweh's name, so that the relationship between God and his people would be restored (Zec. 13:9). Jesus' comments about his role as the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep follows a similar theme and, in fact, may be an intentional commentary on this prophecy. The metaphor has overtones of other passages from the prophets, also. Zechariah denounced the false shepherd of Israel who would desert the flock and flee in time of danger (Zec. 11:17), and Ezekiel equally denounced the shepherds of Israel who did not properly care for the flock (Eze. 34:1-10). Only God himself, according to Ezekiel, is the Good Shepherd who truly cares for his sheep (Eze. 34:11-31; cf. Ps. 23). Thus, when Jesus used the metaphor of the Good Shepherd to describe himself and his mission unto sacrificial death, he implicitly claimed for himself the role about which these ancient oracles spoke.

Those who claimed to be shepherds but who gained their positions by means other than legitimate ones could only be expected to brutalize the sheep, since they were thieves and robbers (10:1). There is more than a hint, here, of censure against the synagogue officials who expelled the man born blind (cf. 9:34) and who

Synoptics, it is one of the most important ways, cf. G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 147-158. In the Fourth Gospel, this same title is used, although the apocalyptic nuance is played down, cf. Ladd, 244-246. In the present saying in 9:35, it is hard not to assume, from the nature of the question, that Jesus intends a messianic connotation for the title.

threatened to expel anyone else who confessed Jesus' messiahship (cf. 9:22). Jesus goes on to claim that he is himself the gate to the sheep pen, that is, he is the legitimate means by which the true sheep enter. If the synagogue rulers had thrown out the former blind man, he had been received into the true sheep fold by the one who was the true gate, Jesus himself (10:2-3; cf. 9:35-38). True sheep hear the voice of the true shepherd (10:4-6). They enter by the true gate. While there had been other pretenders to the messianic role (cf. Ac. 5:35-37), they had all been frauds (10:7-8). Now, however, the true gate into the sheep pen of God's kingdom had been declared (10:9). All others brought destruction and death, but Jesus, the true gate, offered full life (10:10).

Now the metaphor shifts slightly, for Jesus offers another *ego eimi* statement, "I am the good shepherd" (10:11a). Unlike false shepherds, who are primarily motivated by self-interest, Jesus' concern was for the sheep themselves, a concern that was to be demonstrated in his willingness to die on their behalf (10:11b). Mercenary shepherds, who have no true interest in the flock, will abandon the sheep, just as the synagogue rulers had abandoned the man born blind (10:12-13). By contrast, the Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him. There is an unbreakable bond between the two, just as there was this same bond between Jesus, the Son and God, the Father (10:14-15). Besides the sheep in the Jewish pen, Jesus had other sheep as well, a statement that envisions the universal message of the gospel to the nations.¹³² In the end, there would not be two flocks, but rather, a single flock under a single shepherd (10:16). The bond of love between the Father and the Son was due to the Son's willingness to offer himself in this redemptive work for the sake of his sheep. As the Son, Jesus not only had the authority of his Father to lay down his life, but he also had authority to rise from the dead, just as the Father commanded him (10:17-18).

This whole discourse, couched in the metaphor of shepherding, was not understood by the crowds in Jerusalem (cf. 10:6). The teaching polarized the listeners (10:19), some judging Jesus to be insane and demonic (10:20) and others willing to listen further because of his words and the recent miracle (10:21).

The Feast of Hanukkah (10:22-42)

Hanukkah, also known as the Feast of Dedication and the Festival of Lights, was a relatively recent addition to the Jewish religious calendar. It celebrated the Maccabean revolt against the aggressive Syrian attempts to Hellenize the Jews. In

¹³²This passage could hardly refer to a personal appearance of Jesus to the supposed ancestors of the American Indians (Nephites), as Mormon theologians wish to take it, cf. L. Rosten, *Religions in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) 135.

this revolt, on December 25, 165 B.C. (three years to the day from the time the temple had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes), the temple was cleansed, re-dedicated and its worship restored (Maccabees 1-4). Jesus had been in Jerusalem for some time now, and during the celebration of Hanukkah, while walking in the temple courtyards, he was confronted by those Jews who were opposed to him (10:22-23). That this confrontation occurred during Hanukkah suggests that Jesus should be recognized as the true Liberator, of which Judas Maccabeus was a type. The authorities demanded that he make a clear declaration as to his messiahship (10:24). It is certain that their interest was to find a way to destroy him. So far, Jesus had not used the term Messiah of himself while in Jerusalem, though earlier he had admitted as much to the Samaritan woman (cf. 4:25-26). Others, however, had certainly come to this conclusion (cf. 1:41), and there was considerable speculation about it (cf. 7:26-27, 31, 41-42; 9:22). Jesus had come close to such an admission in Jerusalem, especially in his teaching about the Good Shepherd (cf. 10:1-2, 11-13), but because his teaching had been couched in an extended metaphor, the authorities would not be happy until they had a plain statement. Jesus continued to avoid such a plain statement, especially since the messianic concept among most Jews was so thoroughly political and militaristic.

Thus, Jesus responded with the ambiguous, "I did tell you, but you do not believe" (10:25a). What he means, of course, is that he has told them of his messiahship in his signs, though not in words. His miracles spoke for him, and in fact, this was the purpose of the miracles in the first place (10:25b). However, the authorities did not believe, because they were not the true sheep (10:26). This concept of the true sheep parallels the Old Testament concept of a remnant of faith, or in the explanation of St. Paul, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (cf. Ro. 9:6b). Earlier Jesus said that no one could come to him unless drawn by the Father (cf. 6:44) and everyone whom the Father gave him would come to him (cf. 6:37). Now he states the inverse--those who were not of the true remnant of faith would not accept him (10:26). The true sheep know the voice of the true shepherd, and they are eternally safe in his care (10:27-29). To be in the protective hands of Jesus, the Son, was equally to be in the protective hands of God, the Father, for the Father and the Son were one (10:30).¹³³

This elevation of Jesus to equality with the Father incited his enemies to a near

¹³³Jesus' statement should not be taken to mean that he was indistinguishable from the Father, as in Oneness Pentecostal theology. Rather, he means that he is one in mind, purpose and action with the Father. The point of John's Gospel is to teach that Jesus is more than a human rather than that he is indistinguishable from the Father. Because he is the one and only Son, who was with the Father before the beginning and had been sent by the Father into the world, he must be judged on a higher level than his humanness alone.

lynching (10:31-33), just as had happened on two previous occasions (5:17-18; 8:58-59). Jesus, however, deflected their antagonism by quoting from Psalm 82:6, where the traditional Pharisaic interpretation was that humans were called gods (10:34). If mere humans could be called "gods," surely it was not worthy of death for Jesus to speak of himself as God's Son (10:35-36).¹³⁴ Of course, the issue was double-edged. Jesus was not merely claiming to be God's Son in some secondary sense, but in a unique way, and they knew it. The larger issue, however, was how the authorities would respond to the signs which Jesus had performed. Even they could not deny that in healing the man born blind a notable miracle had been performed (cf. 9:18-23). So, Jesus challenged them to believe in him because he performed the same restorative work as did his Father (10:37-38). If they would evaluate him, not so much on the technical grounds of his verbal claims, but more on the evidential grounds of the miraculous signs of restoration, they would realize that the Father was in him and he was in the Father. For their part, Jesus' enemies were preoccupied with the theological issue of titles, while passing over completely the practical issue that Jesus was able to perform deeds only to be credited to God (cf. 3:2). Surely the work of evil was not to miraculously restore anything or anyone! The unity of the Father and the Son was so close as to be an interpenetration of the one with the other, and the restorative signs which Jesus performed should have been ample proof. This statement, however, only inflamed them even more, and they tried to seize him, though he escaped as before (10:39; cf. 7:30).

After this confrontation, Jesus once more left the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. He did not return to Galilee, however, but went to the transjordan (Perea), where John the Baptist had formerly ministered (10:40). Crowds continued to seek him as they recalled the witness John had given earlier about Jesus (10:41). Though now dead by the hand of Herod, John was still considered a prophet. Though he had done no miraculous signs as had Jesus, his testimony about Jesus had proved to be the truth, and many people came to faith in Jesus (10:42).

The Seventh Sign (11:1-57)

It is probably too much to attempt to identify a precise escalation in the seven signs, one by one. Still, there is the general observation to be made that from the first

¹³⁴Rabbinical interpretation, as represented in the Targums, held that the cosmic courtroom, in which Yahweh sat as the head of the divine assembly of the gods (Ps. 82:1), referred to God's headship over the judges of Israel, who showed partiality in their administration of civil justice, cf. A. Anderson, *Psalms (73-150)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) II.592. This judgment by the rabbis may have been based on the fact that the Torah (cf. Ex. 21:6) seems to refer to human judges as '*elohim*' (= gods). Some Christian commentators have followed this same line of thinking, *KD* (rpt. 1970). Other scholars identify the '*elohim*' as angels or pagan gods. Jesus leaves their identify an open question, but he does use common rabbinical interpretation to defend himself.

sign, the turning of water into wine, to the final sign, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, there is at least a general escalation in the magnitude of the miracles. Jesus had been in Jerusalem from the Feast of Booths in *Tishri*/September (7:14) until his withdrawal to the transjordan after Hanukkah in *Chislev*/December (cf. 10:40). He knew very well that to return to Jerusalem was to put his life in imminent danger, since more than once attempts had been made in Jerusalem to apprehend and kill him (cf. 5:18; 7:19, 30, 32, 44-46; 8:20, 37, 59; 10:31, 39).

In the end the event that brought Jesus back to Jerusalem was the death of a close friend. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were friends with whom Jesus stayed on occasion (cf. Lk. 10:38-39), and Mary, in particular, seemed to have been a very sensitive woman whose love for Jesus was deep and caring (11:2; cf. 12:1-3; Lk. 10:39-42). Their home in Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem (11:18). When Lazarus became deathly ill, the sisters naturally sent word to Jesus (11:1, 3). Since there were miracles for many others, surely there would be one for this close friend whom Jesus loved deeply (11:5)! However, when Jesus received the message, he simply remarked that this sickness would not result in death, but like the malady of the man born blind, it would become a means for glorifying God's Son (11:4; cf. 9:1-5). Instead of setting out for Jerusalem, Jesus deliberately delayed for two days (11:6-7). The delay seemed only appropriate to the disciples, since they knew Jesus' enemies in Jerusalem were seeking his life. Lazarus might be quite ill, but if Jesus returned, he would be killed! So, when Jesus announced his intention of returning, the disciples protested vigorously (11:8). Jesus, however, answered them with one of his frequent word-plays. Since he knew what the future held, he was walking in daylight instead of at night (11:9-10).

Jesus' delay seems to have been a deliberate action so as to allow Lazarus to die. In spite of his statement that the situation would not result in death, Lazarus would die, and Jesus knew it (11:11-14). What would now happen would be a foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of all believers, whom Jesus said would not die if they believed on him (cf. 5:24; 6:50; 8:51). Of course, what Jesus meant is not that they would be exempt from natural death, but rather, that they would not die eternally (cf. 5:21, 25). The death and raising of Lazarus is a paradigm, both of the death and resurrection of believers to eternal life and also of the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Of course, the disciples could not understand all of this at the time, though later the meaning of Jesus' words must surely have been clear enough. Jesus himself said that the death of Lazarus was allowed so that the disciples might believe (11:15). So, they set out for Jerusalem once more. Thomas, whose inclination to doubt has earned him considerable bad press (cf. 20:24-25), here demonstrated his deep loyalty to Jesus by his willingness to die with him, if necessary (11:16).

It was about a two-day walk to Jerusalem, and when Jesus arrived, his friend

had already been in the tomb for four days (11:17).¹³⁵ Friends had gathered to comfort Mary and Martha (11:19),¹³⁶ and when the sisters heard that Jesus was coming, each in turn confronted him over the delay. Martha met him on the road (11:20), and there is more than a hint of bewildered disappointment in her greeting, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). Still, her faith in Jesus did not waver (11:22). Jesus assured her that Lazarus would rise again, and though Martha only understood his words in an eschatological sense, Jesus assured her that he was (*ego eimi*) the resurrection and the life (11:23-26)! Martha's response is the confession of true faith to be emulated by all believers (11:27). Her words have almost a creedal quality, and it is in keeping with Jesus' egalitarian attitude toward women that such an important confession, every bit as potent as Peter's (Mt. 16:16), was made by Martha.¹³⁷

After Martha had called her sister, Mary went to greet Jesus on the road with the same despairing words as Martha, "Lord, if you had been here..." (11:28-32). Without even going to the house, Jesus asked directions to the tomb, expressing deep anger at death and grief over his friends' loss (11:33-35).¹³⁸ The friends who were nearby, while also genuinely concerned for the situation, speculated about Jesus' power to heal Lazarus had he been there earlier (11:36-37).

At the tomb and against the protests of Martha, Jesus commanded that the stone be removed (11:38-40). With a short prayer, more for the benefit of the listeners than anyone else, Jesus called out in a loud voice to the dead man, "Come out" (11:41-43). The dead man came out, still bound with the winding strips of linen (11:44).

¹³⁵The later expression in 11:39, "He is a fourth [day man]," emphasizes the Jewish popular view that after four days there was an absolute dissolution of life. The face would be unrecognizable, the body would burst, and the soul, which was thought to hover over the body, would leave, cf. C. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (London: SPCK, 1955) 335.

¹³⁶Though the friends of Mary and Martha are called "the Jews" in this passage (11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45), the tone is neutral. In almost all other passages in the Fourth Gospel, the term "the Jews" describes either the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem, who tried to kill Jesus, or the larger body of Jewish people who rejected him. This passage, however, makes it clear that the category is not merely racial, but more importantly, it is theological. When the Jews do not oppose Jesus, the tone is neutral.

¹³⁷Barrett, 330; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Seabury, 1980) II.332. Fiorenza has appropriately stated that Martha represents the full apostolic faith for the Johannine community, just as Peter does for the Matthean community, E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 329.

¹³⁸There is an interesting verb, *embrimaomai*, used to describe Jesus' feelings (11:33, 38). Generally, it expresses strong displeasure and anger, or a snort of indignation. Some interpreters think Jesus directed his anger toward the lack of faith expressed in the wailing Jews, cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 406. Better, however, is Westcott's solution that Jesus was angry because he found himself face to face with the realm of Satan as represented by death, cf. B. Westcott, *The Gospel According to John* (rpt. London: James Clarke & Co., 1958) 170-171.

It is apparent that this account is intended to prepare the reader for the account of Jesus' death and resurrection. Some have even called it a dress rehearsal,¹³⁹ and while this way of describing it seems crass, the fact remains that there are striking parallels between the raising of Lazarus and the account of Jesus' resurrection. This is the final sign of the seven before the passion of Jesus, and in both this account and the passion account to come, there are parallel details, such as, the mourning women, a rock-hewn tomb covered with a stone, the strips of grave wrappings, the facecloth, a role for Thomas, and an unbelieving body of Jewish leaders. The parallels are too precise to have been incidental.

There are two other significant meanings in this story for the early church. At the time the Fourth Gospel was written late in the first century, many Christians had already died. This story was a call to face death with courage and faith. The life that is in Jesus transcends death, not by avoiding it but by passing through it. Furthermore, since the popular idea that Jesus would return in the lifetime of the first generation disciples had by this time become untenable (cf. 21:22-23), this story was an encouragement to maintain faith in Jesus, even in his absence. If Jesus was absent when Lazarus died, but in the end, all was set right, then the same would be true for believers who lived near the end of the first century. Jesus was still the resurrection and the life, even when absent, and the one who believed in him would see the glory of God, even though he died (cf. 11:25-26, 40). The absence of Jesus did not mean that death was final, either for Lazarus or anyone else who put his/her faith in Jesus!

The consequence of this last sign was that even more people put their faith in Jesus (11:45). At the same time, when the matter was reported to the Pharisees and temple authorities, a hurried meeting of the Sanhedrin was called (11:46-47a). There was grave concern among them that if Jesus were accepted as the messiah by the ever-patriotic zealots, an uprising might invite a crushing retaliation from Rome (11:47b-48). Caiaphas, the current high priest and overseer to the session,¹⁴⁰ recommended that they allow Rome to destroy this one man rather than let him go free and endanger the whole nation (11:49-50). Whatever he intended to say, John saw something even deeper in Caiaphas' words, and credited them with prophetic significance (11:51-52). The alternative meaning of the words indicated that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation as well as God's other scattered children, the Gentiles. His sacrificial death would be the divine act which would break down the racial divisions between Jews and non-Jews, bringing them together (cf. 10:14-16).¹⁴¹ It is

¹³⁹B. Lindars, 382.

¹⁴⁰Recently, an inscription in a Jewish burial site has been uncovered which contains an inscription with the name Caiaphas, and it is possible that it might be the very person in the biblical accounts.

¹⁴¹St. Paul, also, expresses this same idea (cf. Ep. 2:11-22).

clear that John sees the sovereign will of God superimposed upon the human will of Caiaphas. The effort by the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus now became even more calculated than before (11:53).

For Jesus, the result was that he was no longer free to move about publicly, and once more, he withdrew from the vicinity of Jerusalem (11:54).¹⁴² He remained away until the next passover (April). While the many pilgrims who made the trip early to Jerusalem to prepare for the passover looked intently for Jesus to show himself (11:55-56), just as they earlier had looked for him at the Feast of Booths (cf. 7:11), Jesus did not come early. The members of the Sanhedrin, for their part, had put out the word that they wanted Jesus located when he came (11:57).

The Final Trip to Jerusalem (12:1-50)

The transition between the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory consists of Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem. The last of the seven miracles was the raising of Lazarus at Bethany, just two miles from the Holy City. The official reaction to this miracle and Jesus' increased popularity was severe. The Sanhedrin, who perceived the Jesus movement as a genuine political threat, determined that it would be better for Jesus to die than for the wrath of Rome to descend upon the whole community (11:45-53). The upshot was that Jesus no longer could move uninhibited near Jerusalem, so he spent a short time in the village of Ephraim (11:54).¹⁴³ The crowds debated whether he would show up at all, given the dangers (11:55-57). Still, it was required that all males appear to celebrate the three great pilgrim festivals, one of which was Unleavened Bread and Passover (Dt. 16:16). Finally, less than a week before Passover, Jesus returned to the Jerusalem area, arriving once more at his friends' home in Bethany (12:1).

The anointing at Bethany (12:1-8), also recorded in the synoptic gospels (Mt. 26:6-13/Mk. 14:3-9),¹⁴⁴ forms a prelude to Jesus' approaching death. At a dinner, where Jesus and the others were reclining in the formal fashion,¹⁴⁵ Mary anointed Jesus' feet with about a pint of nard, a very expensive perfume imported from India (12:2-3). It was worth about a year's wages (12:5).¹⁴⁶ In a very unusual gesture, since

¹⁴²The exact location of Ephraim is unknown, but it was probably north of Jerusalem and near Bethel, cf. W. Ewing and R. Hughes, *ISBE* (1982) II.119.

¹⁴³While the village cannot be located precisely, if it is the same as the ancient village of Baal Hazor, it would have been about 13 miles NNE of Jerusalem, cf. *ISBE* (1982) II.119.

¹⁴⁴This anointing of Jesus at Bethany should not be confused with a similar incident in Galilee (Lk. 7:36-50), cf. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987) 147, 173.

¹⁴⁵The Greek term *ton anakeimenon* is a technical term for reclining on couches at a formal meal, cf. *BAG* (1979) 55.

¹⁴⁶A denarius was reckoned as the common wage for a day's labor, hence, 300 denarii was about a year's wages.

Jewish women did not appear in public with unbound hair,¹⁴⁷ Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her loosened hair. How much Mary perceived about the significance of her act is unknown, but Jesus certainly understood it to be a prelude to his coming death and burial (12:7-8).

Judas Iscariot objected, and while earlier in the gospel it was noted that he would eventually betray the Lord (cf. 6:71), here is the first occasion which indicates that his treachery had begun with petty thievery from the group's common fund (12:4-6). It was now known that Jesus was in the vicinity of Jerusalem, a fact that soon made its way to the ears of the Sanhedrin. Its members determined that both Jesus and Lazarus should be killed (12:9-10). The raising of Lazarus was the sort of miracle that could not be ignored, and many of the Jews were convinced (12:11).

The next day, Jesus began his final approach to the Holy City, riding on a donkey, the symbol of peace (12:12, 14). The ascent to the city was accompanied by pilgrims chanting *Hoshia-na* (= "Save, now!") from the last Psalm of the so-called "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118) which were sung to celebrate Passover (12:13; cf. Ps. 118:25).¹⁴⁸ They waved palm branches, the national symbol, to signify their heightened expectation of imminent liberation.¹⁴⁹ Later, the prophetic significance of this moment dawned upon the apostles as they read the oracle of Zechariah 9:9 in light of it (12:15-16). Meanwhile, Jesus' popularity continued to grow while the frustration of the Pharisees smoldered (12:19).

When some visiting Greeks asked to see Jesus (12:20-22),¹⁵⁰ Jesus used the occasion to speak of his upcoming glorification. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," Jesus announced (12:23). It is clear that this glorification was to be closely connected with his coming death, for he illustrated it first as the "death" of a grain of wheat (12:24-25) and later as his being lifted up on the cross (12:32-33). Earlier in the gospel, it was pointed out that Jesus' "hour" had not yet arrived (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). Now, however, it was time (cf. 12:31; 13:1; 17:1).

Jesus introduced the grain of wheat metaphor with the solemn, "Amen, Amen" (12:24). This usage, always in doubled form in John's Gospel, is without parallel in the whole of Jewish literature, for Jesus used the formula to preface his solemn

¹⁴⁷L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 577.

¹⁴⁸D. Kidner, *Psalms 73-150 [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975) 401.

¹⁴⁹From the time of the Maccabees, palm branches were used as a national symbol, cf. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 259.

¹⁵⁰These Greeks were either proselytes to the Jewish faith, or more likely, *phoboumenoi* (= God-fearers, fearing ones), Gentiles who attached themselves to Jewish worship without becoming proselytes, cf. R. Tannenbaum, "Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite," *BAR* (Sept.-Oct. 1986) 54-57.

sayings rather than as a concluding affirmation.¹⁵¹ His coming death and resurrection would be the ground for "many seeds."

The saying about loving or hating life equally applies to Jesus and those who follow him (12:25-26). It is the counterpart of the synoptic sayings about taking up the cross and following Jesus. The hyperboles of love and hatred are intended to emphasize priorities. To "love life" is to put the highest value on one's present, temporal life. To "hate life in this world" is to put the values of the kingdom of God first. In the end, the saying is a paradox, for to love life is to destroy it, while to hate life is to keep it eternally.

The prospect of the cross was very distressing for Jesus.¹⁵² The natural inclination was to pray for deliverance, and from a human viewpoint, this is what Jesus wanted to pray (12:27). He knew, however, that the cross was his divine appointment, so instead, he prayed, "Father, glorify your name" (12:28a)! The pattern of this prayer for those who follow Jesus is apparent (cf. 12:26). The disciples, also, would have to forego intercessions for deliverance in order to glorify God, some even to death (cf. 21:19). This saying is the Johannine counterpart to the synoptic prayer, "Father, let this cup pass; nevertheless, not my will but thine," and still later, to the apostolic interpretation of Psalm 40:6-8, "Here I am....I have come to do your will, O God" (He. 10:7, 9).

There was an immediate response from the heavens to Jesus' prayer, for a celestial voice declared that the divine name had been glorified and would yet be glorified (12:28b). Earlier, God had been glorified in the incarnation and public ministry of his Son (cf. 1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40). Now, he would be glorified in his Son's death. The crowd heard something, though they could not identify it clearly. Still, even though the content was not understood, the sound from heaven validated the authenticity of Jesus' prayer (12:30).

In the cross, Jesus would encounter the full power of evil headed up by "the prince of this world" (12:31; cf. 14:30; Lk. 22:53b). The cross would be a judgment, and the evil one would be driven out. This driving out of Satan must refer to his loss of authority over God's children (Col. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:13; He. 2:14-15). (It can hardly mean, for instance, that Satan no longer had any power in the world, cf. 1 Jn. 5:19). So, while the cross was the casting down of Satan, it was the lifting up of the Son of Man on the cross by which all people would be drawn to him (12:32-33; cf. 3:14; 8:28). John's use of the verb *hypsoo* (= to be raised, to be exalted) is probably a

¹⁵¹The expression appears some 25 times in John, J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribners, 1971) 35-36.

¹⁵²The Greek verb *tarasso* (= agitate, throw into consternation) is very strong.

double entendre, referring both to the physical raising of the cross and to the glorification of the Son.

The crowd, for its part, understood the implied departure in Jesus' saying about being lifted up, and to them, it introduced a contradiction if Jesus considered himself to be the Messiah (12:34). Would not the Messiah-Son of Man have an eternal kingdom? By "the law," the reader should understand the Hebrew canon, not the Torah (cf. 2 Sa. 7:16; Ps. 89:27-29; Is. 9:7). The people had made an identification between the title "Son of Man" and the title "Messiah," a connection probably based on Daniel's vision of "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" who was to be given authority, glory and sovereign power over the world (Da. 7:13-14). In John, as in the synoptics, the title Son of Man is used by Jesus to describe himself, and if he were truly the supernatural regent who should come to earth in apocalyptic glory to rule the world, how could he die? Such an idea seemed preposterous!¹⁵³ Hence, they asked, "Who is this Son of Man?" What they could not understand was that his death would also be his enthronement.

Jesus, however, did not answer their question directly. Instead, he offered them an enigmatic saying about light and darkness. The light would be available only for a little longer. They must make use of the light while it was still with them, putting their trust in it so that they would be "sons of light."¹⁵⁴ The double entendre on the word light refers both to Jesus, who was the true light (1:4-5, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5), and his message, which was the truth (3:21; 8:12; 11:9-10). This was to be Jesus' last public discourse (12:36b). From now on, he would talk only to his apostles.

Now, John adds an editorial comment about the stubborn resistance evident among the crowds and the Jewish leaders. In spite of the signs, and in spite of the fact that the miracles led to a minimal level of faith (2:23-25; 6:14-15, 41-42, 60-66; 11:45-46), the end result was superficial and fell short of full commitment (12:37). Some who were said to believe (8:31) are later shown to have inadequate faith when they rejected Jesus' self-claims (8:33-59). Some secretly believed but were intimidated by their fear of the religious authorities (12:42-43; cf. 9:22-23). For John, such vacillation was no more than Isaiah had predicted (12:38-41; cf. Is. 53:1; 6:10). Genuine faith was not merely the acceptance of miracles; it was faith in Jesus' self-

¹⁵³The Son of Man sayings in the Fourth Gospel form a unique category as they describe Jesus' origin and destiny (1:51; 3:13; 6:62; 12:23; 13:31), his authority (3:14-15; 5:26-27; 6:27; 8:28), and his being lifted up (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34), see the discussions in G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 244-246; D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 285-290.

¹⁵⁴The expression "sons of light" is a Semitism which is the antithesis to "sons of darkness" or "sons of Belial." The contrast appears repeatedly in the Qumran literature, cf. T. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Anchor, 1976) 399ff., 549-550.

claims and in the Father who had sent him into the world (12:44-46).

In refusing to give full commitment to Jesus, the people, in effect, were judging themselves. Still, Jesus had not come to pass sentence upon them, but to offer them salvation (12:47; cf. 3:17). In refusing him, however, they were liable to judgment at the end of the age when their failed opportunity would be measured against Jesus' teachings--teachings that had come directly from God (12:48-50). If to accept Jesus meant accepting the Father, then to reject Jesus meant rejecting the Father! Raymond Brown and others have pointed out that Jesus' words in this section may be intentional parallels to the Deuteronomic warnings about listening to the eschatological prophet like Moses whom God would send (Dt. 18:18-19). If so, the passage gives particular insight into Jesus' previous words that Moses would accuse them in the judgment (4:45-47).¹⁵⁵

The Book Of Glory (John 13-20)

The Last Meal (13:1-38)

All four gospels describe Jesus' last meal with the disciples on the night of his betrayal. However, while the synoptic records are very similar, the Gospel of John follows a unique course. The following graph points out some of the most important differences.

<u>Common to Synoptics & John</u>	<u>In the Synoptics Only</u>	<u>In John Only</u>
<i>Farewell meal</i>	<i>Disciples prepare the room</i>	
		<i>Washing of feet</i>
<i>Prediction of betrayal</i>	<i>Institution of Eucharist</i> <i>Teaching about servanthood</i>	
		<i>New commandment</i>
<i>Prediction of Peter's denial</i>		
		<i>Teaching on the Paraclete</i>
<i>Departure for Gethsemane</i>		

Three important questions should be addressed here regarding chronology, the sacraments and the calendar. First, John appears to have the disciples leaving the

¹⁵⁵Brown, 492.

scene of the meal twice (14:31; 18:1). The traditional explanation is that Jesus left the upper room in 14:31, while the lengthy discourse and prayer in chapters 15-17 occurred in the street.¹⁵⁶ However, this scenario does not explain the rather specific statement in 18:1, "When he had said these things, Jesus went forth with the disciples..." Another explanation is that John's gospel contains two independent accounts of the last supper discourse, each ending with the statement that the group left the upper room. John included both accounts without trying to conflate them.¹⁵⁷ Yet another is that there may have been a dislocation in the text.¹⁵⁸ The simplest explanation is that the text should remain as it is--that Jesus announced his intention to leave the room at 14:31 but did not actually leave until 18:1.

The second question arises from the larger issue of how John regarded the sacraments. It has often been pointed out that the Fourth Gospel contains no explicit teaching concerning baptism and Eucharist as do the synoptics. Some have concluded that John's Gospel is anti-sacramental, while others see the sacraments symbolically implicit in several teachings and events (i.e., water changed to wine, water of life, bread from heaven, washing feet).¹⁵⁹ With regard to the last supper, the question arises as to why John does not record the institution of the Eucharist as do the synoptics and Paul. It may be that John felt the inner meaning of the Eucharist already was well-defined in Jesus' discourse on the Bread from heaven (chapt. 6). Whatever the reason, there is not sufficient cause to think that John objected to baptism and the Lord's table. Rather, the entire gospel seems concerned with inner meaning, not merely the event itself. Even when John does describe events, such as the seven signs, the narratives move quickly to the inner meaning of the sign. We may suppose that this same approach holds true for the sacraments.

Finally, there is the issue of why the synoptic gospels show the last supper as a Passover meal (Mk. 14:1-2, 12-16//Mt. 26:17-19//Lk. 22:7-8, 11-15), while John's gospel seems to put it a day earlier, since he views the crucifixion as occurring before the Passover was eaten (Jn. 13:1; 18:28; 19:14).¹⁶⁰ Could Jesus have celebrated

¹⁵⁶In Robertson's popular harmony of the gospels, for instance, he labels this section as "The Discourse on the Way to Gethsemane, Possibly on the Street," cf. A. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950) 198.

¹⁵⁷G. Beasley-Murray, *John [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 223-224.

¹⁵⁸Bultmann's rearrangement of the text is as follows: 13:1-30; 17:1-26; 13:31-35; 15:1--16:33; 13:36--14:31; 18:1ff., thus making 14:31 and 18:1 fit together, cf. Bultmann, x-xi, 459-461. However, there is no textual evidence whatsoever for such a rearrangement.

¹⁵⁹For a somewhat longer discussion concerning the sacraments in the Fourth Gospel, see R. Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976) 105-109.

¹⁶⁰The date has more consequence than simply the problem of harmonization. The western church, for instance, follows the synoptic calendar (and eats unleavened bread), while the eastern church follows the Johannine calendar (and eats leavened bread).

Passovers on two consecutive evenings? Was Jesus' final meal with the Twelve a private, irregular paschal meal held a day early? Was more than one liturgical calendar in force so that both the synoptics and John are correct, even though they seem to be at variance? A well-developed argument exists that the Pharisees and the Sadducees followed different calendars, and this accounts for the apparent discrepancy, since the synoptics follow one, and John follows the other. This solution seems the most satisfactory, though the question cannot be considered closed.¹⁶¹

The Washing of Feet (13:1-17)

The pericope about Jesus washing the disciples' feet begins with John's statement that Jesus knew his time had come to leave the world, and as a parting gesture, he demonstrated to them the full extent of his love by his act of humility (13:1).¹⁶² It is fully in accord with the Hebrew viewpoint that love is expressed in concrete action.¹⁶³ In the Johannine version of the evening meal, there are two dominant themes. One is Jesus' act of humility and loyalty, the other the threat of betrayal and denial by Judas and Peter. These two polarities sharpen the tension of the scene. Judas was already contemplating betrayal (13:2), his disaffection apparent by his earlier comments at Jesus' anointing in Bethany (cf. 12:4-6).

Jesus' humility did not arise from a sense of weakness but of strength. With full consciousness of his divine origin, sovereignty and coming triumph (13:3), Jesus assumed the role of a slave and washed his disciples' feet (13:4-5). The washing of feet was a hospitable gesture to be assumed for honored guests (cf. Lk. 7:44), but it was not usually performed by the host.¹⁶⁴ So, Peter was reluctant at first (13:6-9). The key to the meaning of Jesus' action comes in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. It is obvious that Jesus intended his gesture to be more than a simple act of hospitality, for he indicated that Peter would not realize its full significance until later (13:7). Furthermore, Jesus made the blunt comment, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (13:8). Thus, it is clear that the gesture of washing and the concept of cleansing is another Johannine double entendre, referring not only to the cleansing of feet, but beyond that to Jesus' ministry of cleansing from sin. Jesus' humiliation in

¹⁶¹For exhaustive treatments of this problem, see J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 15-88; I. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 57-75.

¹⁶²It is not entirely clear who is meant by "his own." Early in the gospel, this same expression was used to refer to the Jewish community at large (1:11). Later, in the Good Shepherd discourse, Jesus used the expression to refer to "his own sheep," that is, his disciples (10:3-4, 12). I have taken the usage in 13:1 in the latter sense.

¹⁶³For instance, the Hebrew word *hesed* (= love, mercy) is a noun always used with the verb "to do," hence, love is concrete action, not merely emotional affection.

¹⁶⁴W. Hendriksen, *John [NTC]* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953-54) II.228.

washing feet was a symbol of his coming humiliation in vicarious death for sin.¹⁶⁵

The saying about the bath and subsequent washing of feet extends the metaphor. If this meal was a Passover meal, the disciples already would have had a full ritual bath in preparation for it (cf. Nu. 19:19). Now, it only remained for them to wash their feet after walking to the site of the farewell meal (13:10). This bath, in turn, symbolized the once-for-all cleansing from sin, and afterwards, one only needed the regular cleansing from incidental defilement (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-10). The disciples were clean, except for Judas, who had decided to betray Jesus. The Lord's act of humility was lost on him (13:11)!

When finished, Jesus instructed the disciples that they should follow his example (13:12-17). If he, the Lord of the universe, could take the part of the servant, then his disciples, also, should cultivate the same attitude. If he was willing to lay down his life for others, than his followers should be willing to lay down their lives for their brothers (cf. 1 Jn. 3:16).¹⁶⁶

The Defection of Judas (13:18-30)

The defection of Judas was foreshadowed in the experience of other righteous people of the past who had experienced betrayal (Ps. 41:9; cf. Ps. 69:25//109:8//Ac. 1:16-20; Mt. 26:15//27:3-10//Zec. 11:12-13). All along, Jesus had known that Judas would be unfaithful (cf. 6:64, 70-71). Now, in warning the group ahead of time, the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction about betrayal would support his claim of oneness with the Father (13:19-21).¹⁶⁷ Peter motioned to the beloved disciple, who was sitting between him and Jesus, to find out the betrayer's identity. Since they were reclining side-by-side, the disciple had only to lean backward to pose the question (13:22-25). Jesus' answer must have been given in a low tone, and the sign was to be the dipped bread given to Judas (13:26). Up to that point, the die was not cast for Judas, but at that moment that the man steeled himself to carry out the betrayal (13:27a). When Jesus saw that Judas had made his final decision, he urged him to carry it out with expediency (13:27b). No one else understood this byplay (13:28-29).

Various psychological defenses and explanations of Judas have been offered, but John does not offer one. He simply ends the pericope with the ominous, double-

¹⁶⁵It is less clear that there is a secondary symbolism of Christian baptism here. Certainly the liturgical churches have often interpreted the passage in this way, but it is unclear that John intended such a meaning.

¹⁶⁶Some Christians or Christian groups have taken Jesus' statement in 13:14 as the institution of a ritual ordinance (i.e., St. Ambrose, St. Austin, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Pope, the Czar, the Patriarch of Constantinople, the English kings until James II, the Mennonites, the Dunkards, and some Pentecostals). While liberty should be granted, the symbolic rather than the literal interpretation seems more in keeping with the general pattern of the Fourth Gospel.

¹⁶⁷This saying is one of the *ego eimi* sayings without a predicate (see comments at 8:58).

edged saying, "It was night" (13:30)!

The Prediction of Peter's Denial (13:31-38)

With the departure of Judas, Jesus once more turned to the theme of his upcoming glorification. He speaks in the past tense because he has already fully accepted the cross.¹⁶⁸ He would be glorified by being lifted up on the cross, the Father would be glorified by his Son's willing submission to death, and in the end, the Father would consummate this glorification by receiving his Son alive in the heavenlies (13:31-32; cf. 17:5).

With all this in view, Jesus frankly told his apostles that his remaining time with them would be short. Through death and resurrection, he would move to another dimension which was inaccessible to them in the present life (13:33), though of course, later they would make the same transition after their own deaths and resurrection (13:36b). In the meantime, Jesus delivered to his disciples a new commandment which would be their rule of life after he was gone. They must love each other as he had loved them, for their love would be the most powerful testimony of their authentic discipleship (13:34-35). By contrast, quarreling Christians well may have been the greatest detriment to the gospel witness through the ages.

Peter was bold to ask where Jesus was going (13:36a), courageously offering to lay down his life for his Lord (13:37). Without doubt, Peter sincerely meant what he said, and later in the garden, he would demonstrate his loyalty by attacking one of the arresting party (cf. 18:10). However, Jesus knew more about Peter than Peter knew about himself. He knew that Peter would disavow his friendship with Jesus before morning (13:38)!¹⁶⁹

The Last Great Discourse (14:1--16:33)

After the departure of Judas from the farewell meal and Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny him, John recounts a long discourse, the longest in the Fourth Gospel. During this discourse Jesus instructed his disciples about his departure from the world to return to the Father, his unity with the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit who would minister to them after Jesus left, and the prospect of the disciples living in a hostile world.

Before working through the discourse, it is theologically important to notice

¹⁶⁸This use of the aorist passive tense to state a present reality with the certitude of a past event is an idiom used for emphasis, cf. H. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955) 198.

¹⁶⁹The expression concerning cockcrow can be a technical reference to the third of the four Roman watches of the night (i.e., halfway between midnight and sunrise), cf. Bruce, 295.

the setting for this teaching by addressing the question, "Who is Jesus' intended audience?" At first glance, the answer may seem obvious, but there are significant issues at stake. It is obvious that Jesus' remarks were made to the apostles. The synoptic gospels are clear that the last supper was attended only by Jesus and the Twelve (Mk. 14:17//Mt. 26:20//Lk. 22:14). With Judas now gone, there were eleven left who listened to Jesus' final teachings before his arrest.

How did Jesus address this group? Did he speak to them as his apostles who constituted a unique category, men who had been with him in his earthly ministry (Mt. 10:2-4//Mk. 3:14-19//Lk. 6:13-16; Ac. 1:21-22) and now were to serve as witnesses of his death and resurrection (Ac. 2:32; 3:15; 10:39-42; 13:30-31)? Did he speak to them as representatives of the entire future church, so that, what Jesus said to the eleven he equally says to all believers of all times? The critical *logia* in this regard revolve around two themes. One has to do with the performance of miracles (cf. 14:12-14; 15:7, 16b; 16:23-24), and the other with the teaching role of the Holy Spirit (14:26; 16:13). Jesus said, "You may ask me for anything...and I will do it." Is this promise an open-ended pledge for any believer who has enough faith? Jesus also said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send, will teach you all things." Was the promised teaching role of the Paraclete intended for the apostles, whose memories of Jesus finally would be collected in the four gospels, or was it a broader reference to subjective, immediate revelation apart from the tradition of the church. Today, such questions divide mainline evangelicals from Pentecostals and Charismatics, and they have divided Christians in the past as well.

Pentecostal-charismatic Christians tend to argue that the apostles represent the whole church in germ, so the promises are for all believers of all times. Miracles, especially instantaneous healing miracles, should be the common experience of the church just as it was the common experience of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Certainly the New Testament records miracles performed by Christians other than the apostles (cf. Ac. 6:8; 8:6; Ga. 3:5). James advocates prayer for the healing of the sick (Ja. 5:13-16), while Paul mentions gifts of healings as part of the ministry of the church (1 Co. 12:9, 28, 30). Furthermore, John later writes, "The anointing you have received...remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you" (1 Jn. 2:27), a statement that seems very much like the promise of Jesus that "the Spirit...will teach you all things" (14:26).

Mainline evangelicals may or may not accept the ongoing legitimacy of such spiritual gifts as instantaneous healing. Still, they tend to argue that the promises about miracles and the teaching role of the Spirit, at least in this discourse, were made to the apostles as a unique group, not as symbols for the whole church. On the one hand, if the teaching role of the Spirit is open to everyone unmediated by Scripture or tradition, what is to prevent extra-biblical revelation on the order of Ellen G. White, Charles Taze Russell, Joseph Smith and a host of others? On the other hand, the

divine healing movement with its showmanship, general lack of verifiable miracles, and tolerance for gullibility seems to be unhealthy, even dangerous.

In the end, the reader may not reach as conclusive an answer as might be hoped. It must be conceded that some of the *logia* seem generally applicable to Christians of all times and eras, such as, the promise about being taken to the Father's house (14:1-3) or the new commandment that the disciples should love each other (15:12; cf. 13:34-35). Christians of all persuasions have no hesitation in quoting Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life," as generally applicable. On the other hand, some of Jesus' statements are necessarily restricted to the apostles, such as, his statement about their special role as witnesses, because, as he said, "You have been with me from the beginning" (15:27). The warning that the disciples would be expelled from the synagogue could hardly refer to Christians in any era except the first century (16:1-4). Again, the grief the disciples would experience during the days between Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection must apply directly to the apostles, not to Christians in general (16:17-22). So, also, must Jesus prediction that at his death they would all be scattered and abandon Jesus (16:31-32). More to the point, it was because Jesus had chosen them as his apostles that they would be given whatever they asked of the Father in Jesus' name (15:16; 16:22-23). If it is true that the Spirit would teach them in Jesus' absence (16:13-15), it is equally true that this promise was made to the apostles who had been with Jesus from the beginning (15:26-27). When Jesus said, "The Spirit...will remind you of everything I have said to you," grammatically we ought to take the two pronouns "you" to refer to the same group, not the first to refer to the whole church and the other to refer to the apostles only. Since the phrase "what I said to you" is restricted to the apostles, then the other phrase should be equally restricted.

In the end, some *logia* seem to have general application. However, the primary audience seems to be the apostles as a unique group, not as symbols of the whole church. If a statement has wider application than for the apostles, something in the context should point in that direction.

The Way to the Father (14:1-14)

The discourse begins with the encouragement to trust the Father and his Son (14:1). The theme of trust points to yet another double entendre, for the events of the weekend would mirror the church age. Jesus would be absent from his disciples after his death, but joined to them again at his resurrection. Similarly, Jesus would be absent from the community of disciples after his ascension to the Father, but he would come back to receive them as well. Throughout the discourse, the various phrases, "I am going away," "I will come back," "in a little while you will see me no more," and "after a little while you will see me" all carry this same double meaning. What the disciples would experience over the weekend would be recapitulated in the larger

experience of the church. The disciples must trust in Jesus now, and the church must trust in him later.

Jesus was going to the Father's house, a metaphor for heaven. However, heaven was not a place exclusively for the Father and the Son. Rather, it was a place of "many rooms,"¹⁷⁰ a place which also would accommodate Jesus' disciples. In going there, Jesus would make it possible for his disciples to follow him later (14:2-3). Already they knew the way, for it was not in a map but in a person, Jesus himself (14:4-6). If he went away, he would come again for his followers to take them personally to the Father's house. There was no other way. The way to the Father was through Jesus alone!

This talk of Jesus returning to the Father raised the issue of his relationship to the Father. Jesus was the full expression of the Father's nature. When the disciples saw Jesus, they saw the Father, too (14:7-11). There was mutual interpenetration between the Father and the Son (14:10a, 11a), so that Jesus could say, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."¹⁷¹ In this saying, Jesus claims full deity. He says, in effect, that he is himself divine, just as the Father is divine. In this saying, however, Jesus does not teach that he is indistinguishable from the Father. Jesus may say, "I and the Father are one" (cf. 10:30), but he never says, "I am the Father." Rather, the testimony of the Fourth Gospel is that Jesus is "the only Son," that is, he is God's Son in a unique way (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18).¹⁷² He came from heaven, sent by the Father into the world (3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:36, 38; 7:29; 8:26; 9:4; 11:42; 17:3). Full knowledge of the Father is only mediated through his Son, for only the Son knows him fully (1:18; 6:46; 10:15; 17:25).

Now follows the first of the sayings about the disciples petitioning the Father in Jesus' name (14:12-14). This command to "ask in my name" does not refer merely to a verbal formula using the name "Jesus," as is strikingly evident in the story of the Jewish exorcists who parroted Jesus' name as though it were a magic word (cf. Ac. 19:13-17). Rather, Jesus' command rested on the fact that he was returning to the Father after his earthly mission was complete. Only he who had come from the Father and was returning to the Father had the authority to offer immediate access to

¹⁷⁰The old English "many mansions," taken from William Tyndale's translation, is decidedly archaic. For Tyndale, it simply meant "dwelling place," an adequate rendering of the word *mone* (= room, dwellingplace). The modern connotation of a mansion as a palace is not true to the Greek text.

¹⁷¹It is obvious that this statement cannot simply refer to a dwelling christology, as in Apollinarianism (4th century), Nestorianism (5th century), and oneness Pentecostalism (20th century). If so, then only half of the statement would be true, but the inverse could not be true. Rather, the passage refers to an ontological interpenetration between the Father and the Son.

¹⁷²The Greek word *monogenes* (= unique, one and only) has been traditionally rendered "only begotten," but the intent is kind, not origin.

God (cf. 3:13). So, if the apostles were to ask the Father for anything, they must do so through his Son (cf. 15:16b). Before Jesus returned to the Father, completing his incarnational work, it had not been possible to petition the Father in this way (16:23-24, 26-28). After he had returned to the Father, however, the disciples would be able to "ask for anything," even things greater than Jesus did, and their request would be granted.

What are these "greater things," and just how open is the invitation to "ask for anything?" It is hard to imagine miracles greater than those described in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus walked on water, restored sight to a man blind from birth, and created bread and fish on one occasion and wine on another. He raised from the dead a man who had been in the tomb for four days. So, there is reason to doubt that Jesus had in mind more spectacular miracles. John says that if all Jesus' miracles had been recorded, the books of the world could not hold them, so the issue can hardly be quantity (cf. 20:30; 21:25). Earlier, Jesus used the expression "greater things" to refer to his role as mediator between earth and heaven (1:50-51) and to refer to God's revealed will that the Son had authority over life (5:19-21). This suggests that the "greater things" that the disciples would do were not simply more sensational acts of power, but the more profound mission that they would take the message of Jesus to the whole world. During his lifetime, Jesus and the apostles were limited to Palestine. After Jesus' return to the Father, the work of the disciples would be unlimited, and therefore, greater.

Closely connected with the idea of "greater things" is the idea of "asking for anything." Later, the "ask anything" phrase is associated with the metaphor of fruitfulness (15:7-8, 16). We should assume some implied conditions for this statement, otherwise, a person could ask for preposterous, even destructive, things, and they would happen. Furthermore, even God cannot do what is intrinsically impossible, and he certainly will not do things that violate his moral character. Here lies the importance of asking "in Jesus' name." This Semitic idiom denotes "in the interests of" or "for the sake of" or "in the authority of." The phrase "in Jesus' name" restricts self-aggrandizing requests. It limits the "anything" to those things in harmony with God's will in Christ Jesus. To pray "in the name of Jesus" is to pray in union with Jesus as prompted by the mind of Christ and in accord with his character.¹⁷³ Later, John will write, "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us," which directly implies that if we do not, he will not answer us (1 Jn. 5:14).

¹⁷³R. Abba, "Name," *IDB* (1962) III.5-7; R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, XIII-XXI [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 636.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit (14:15-31)

In the context of love and obedience, Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit (14:15). In some sense, of course, the work of the Spirit was active throughout the ministry of Jesus (cf. 3:5-8; 4:23-24). Still, it is clear that the full messianic gift of the Spirit had not been bestowed as yet (cf. 7:38-39). Since Jesus was now about to return to the Father, he announced that in his absence the disciples would be given "another *Parakletos*" (14:16).¹⁷⁴ By "another," he obviously means that he was their present *Parakletos*, but there was one yet to come. Paradoxically, the Paraclete would be both similar to yet different than Jesus. In one sense, the coming Holy Spirit would be the same Spirit which now anointed the Christ (14:17a). However, the promised Spirit would not have a body like Jesus had, for he would live "in them," not merely alongside them in the person of Jesus (14:17b). This manner of speaking indicates that, just as between Jesus and the Father, there also would be both unity and distinction between Jesus and the Spirit. It was important for the disciples to know that they would not be abandoned after Jesus returned to the heavenlies. In typical Johannine fashion, Jesus' words, "I will come to you" (14:18), and "You will see me" (14:19), are intentionally ambiguous, suggesting his brief post-resurrection appearances, the coming of the Paraclete, and his second coming at the end of the age (cf. 14:3). The coming of the Paraclete would make clear to them the relationship between Jesus and the Father and between Jesus and the disciples (14:20). Once again, the context of the Spirit's coming would be obedience and love (14:21). Authentic love must be coupled with obedience (14:22).

In this context of love and obedience, the Spirit would come, and his coming would be both a coming of the Father and the Son (14:23-24). The trinitarian implications are profound in this paradoxical language of unity and distinction between the Father, Son and Spirit. The traditional language of "one God in three persons" may not be entirely adequate, but the terms are probably the best available. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) said he was not entirely satisfied with the term Person, but he used it, "...not in order to express it [that is, the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit], but in order not to be silent."¹⁷⁵ In this passage, it should be observed that the pronouns used for the Spirit are personal, not impersonal. Thus, it is proper to

¹⁷⁴Translators have struggled to capture the nuance of the Greek word *parakletos* (= one who is called to someone's aid). In various contexts, it might mean something as technical as a legal advocate or as general as a mediator, cf. BAG (1979) 618. English translations vary accordingly: "Paraclete" (NAB), "Counselor" (NIV, RSV), "Comforter" (KJV, ASV), "Advocate" (JB, NEB, Weymouth), "Helper" (NASB, TEV, Moffat), "Friend" (Knox, Williams), and "someone to stand by you" (Phillips).

¹⁷⁵L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1937) 92. Other terms, such as, "modes" (Karl Barth) or "manifestations" or "offices" (oneness Pentecostals) fail to do justice to the biblical concepts, and worse, often lead to distortions.

speak of "him," not merely "it."¹⁷⁶

In the end, Jesus' teachings would not stand unsupported. They would be reaffirmed by the coming of the Spirit who would quicken the memories of the apostles so that they might be faithful witnesses of everything Jesus had taught (14:25-26). Because of this promise, the disciples could be at peace, even as they anticipated Jesus' return to the heavenlies (14:27).

If the disciples could only grasp the implications, Jesus' return to the Father was a good thing, something about which they could be glad (14:28). The return to the Father would be the culmination of Jesus' mission in death and resurrection, and ultimately, it was the event toward which the disciples faith must be directed (14:29). The Father's eternal purpose was not merely to send his Son to live on the earth, but rather, through the incarnation of his Son to bring the human family to live in the heavenlies. If the disciples could understand this greater purpose, they would be glad that Jesus was returning to the Father!

In the meantime, Jesus' teachings now would draw to a close, for the hour of his passion was upon him, and his confrontation with the power of evil was impending (14:30). Still, he knew that Satan had no claim upon his life, and as he had said earlier, he had the authority to lay down his life and the authority to take it up again (cf. 10:18). By subjecting himself to death, Jesus would demonstrate to the world that he truly loved the Father and was unequivocally committed to the Father's redemptive mission (14:31).

It was now time to leave the upper room, though apparently Jesus' stated intention was not acted upon for yet some time (cf. 18:1). This, in itself, is not unusual for anyone who has had the experience of trying to get a group to leave a certain place.

The Teaching on the Vine (15:1-17)

In both word and action, Jesus implied that he was initiating a new Israel. The choosing of the twelve apostles (cf. 6:70a), a parallel with God's choice of the twelve sons of Jacob, hardly could have been coincidence. The temple, the center for worship in old Israel, was now to give way to a new center (cf. 4:21-26). The true bread from heaven was not manna in the desert, but God's Son who would give life to the world (cf. 6:31-33). The Feast of Booths, with its annual celebration of harvest and vintage, had its highest fulfillment in Jesus, the one to whom all could come to

¹⁷⁶This point is more obvious in the Greek text, where, even though the *pneuma* (= Spirit) is neuter, John deliberately uses masculine pronouns instead of neuter ones, thus emphasizing the personality of the Spirit. The Spirit is "someone," not merely "something," cf. Westcott, 209, 230-231.

receive the gift of the Spirit (cf. 7:37-39). So, when Jesus described himself by the metaphor of the vine (15:1), which traditionally was the symbol of the Israelite nation (cf. Is. 5:1-7; Je. 2:21; Eze. 19:10-14),¹⁷⁷ he was announcing that the new community of faith must be vitally connected to him. It may well be that he intentionally reflected upon Psalm 80, which described the Israelite exile as the ravaging of the vine, and offered a plea to God for the nation's restoration by "the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself" (Ps. 80:16-17).¹⁷⁸ It is less clear that the vine metaphor had any eucharistic intent. Still, even though John does not describe the eucharistic words and actions of Jesus at the last supper, if this conversation immediately followed what was described in the synoptic gospels, the disciples naturally might have connected his statement, "I am the vine," with his eucharistic words, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

The primary meaning of Jesus' teaching, however, was relational and task oriented. If the disciples were to succeed in their calling, Jesus must remain central in their lives and ministry. Their calling was to bear fruit. Branches which did not do so would be cut off, and even fruitful branches would be pruned (15:1-4). No one was authorized to start an independent movement. The vine was Jesus, while the disciples were only branches. (Too many Christian groups have adopted the attitude that their group is the vine and all other Christians are branches, whereas, according to the Lord, only he is the vine, and we all are branches.) This theme of absolute dependence upon Christ was critical if they were to accomplish the mission for which they had been chosen as apostles.

There is a play on words in 15:2-3, where the verb *kathairo* (= prune, make clean) and the adverb *katharos* (= clean) are from the same root. Earlier, Jesus said that not all of them were clean (cf. 13:10), speaking of Judas. Judas, then, would be the first branch to be cut clean from the vine (15:5-6).

Once more, there appears an "ask anything" phrase (cf. 14:14). Here, it is conditioned by the clause, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you" (15:7). It is apparent that the "ask anything" clause is aimed at fruit-bearing, not general requests for personal benefit (15:8). The disciple who is in full harmony with the message of Jesus surely would not ask for anything inappropriate. Rather, such a disciple would ask to bear much fruit for the cause of the Lord.

The context of all fruit-bearing is love--the Father's love for his Son and the Son's love for his disciples (15:9). This love, which existed between the Father and

¹⁷⁷ According to Josephus, the outer gate of the temple was adorned with a huge golden vine from which hung clusters of grapes about the height of a man, cf. *Wars*, V.v.4; *Antiquities*, XV.xi.3.

¹⁷⁸ Kidner, 291-292.

the Son before the creation of the universe (cf. 17:24), was fully demonstrated in the obedience of the Son to the Father's mission. Such love also was to be demonstrated in the obedience of the apostles to Christ (15:10-17). If Jesus' love was such that he would lay down his life for his friends, the disciples love for each other must be no less intense (15:12-13). Now, because of Jesus' teachings, the disciples were full partners in God's mission to the world. They were friends, not servants (15:14-15). Jesus chose them as his apostles so that they would be fruitful, and it is in this context that they could "ask for anything," and it would be done (15:16).

The Apostles in a Hostile World (15:18--16:4)

If it was true that the apostles were now friends of the Lord and partners in his heavenly mission to the world, it was equally true that the world into which he was sending them was hostile. The disciples had yet to experience the full measure of this hostility, but within the next few hours, they would see it in all its malignancy. As they faced this hostility, they must remember that the world hated their Lord before it hated them (15:18).

When John speaks of the *kosmos* (= world), a term that is found throughout the Fourth Gospel, he refers to the realm of those who are estranged from God. It is a world under condemnation because of its antagonism toward God and love for evil (cf. 3:17-20; 12:31). It is a world that did not recognize the messiah (cf. 1:10). Those who opposed the heavenly Father's mission, and in particular those who rejected his Son from heaven, belonged to this negative polarity which Jesus described as "below" as opposed to "above" (8:23-24; cf. 7:7; 14:17; 16:20). The leader of this darkened world is Satan, the "prince," and he, too, is a rebel under judgment (cf. 12:31; 16:11).

So, it was to be expected that the world would hate the followers of Jesus. The disciples had not joined the world's antagonism against God and his Son (15:19). Therefore, so long as they showed allegiance to Jesus, they opened themselves to persecution from those who were alienated from God (15:20-21; 1 Th. 2:14-16).

Ignorance may have been excusable in the past, but no longer (15:22; cf. 9:39-41; cf. Ac. 17:30-31; Ro. 2:12-16). The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. The generation to whom the Messiah appeared had the greatest privilege of all (cf. Lk. 11:30-32). To reject him was to reject the Father as well (15:23). In the presence of such authenticating signs, to reject Jesus was inexcusable (15:24). So, as the Hebrew canon states, "They hated me without reason" (15:25; cf. Ps. 35:19; 69:4).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹Two comments are in order regarding 15:25. First, the expression "their law," when referring to the psalms, is obviously not speaking of the Torah, but rather, the acknowledged Scriptures by whose authority the Jews were bound (cf. 10:34). Second, as is also the case in Jesus' allusion to Psalm 41:9 (cf. Jn. 13:18), the concept of fulfilled

If the disciples could expect harsh treatment from the world, they could also count on the presence of the Holy Spirit to uphold and defend them. The Spirit would be their Advocate, and repeatedly, this work of the Spirit was demonstrated in the life of the early church (cf. Ac. 4:8, 31; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9-10). The saying that Jesus would send the Spirit from the Father refers to the Son's authority as the bestower of the messianic gift of the Spirit after his ascension (15:26; cf. 14:26; 16:7; cf. Ac. 2:33).¹⁸⁰ Jesus' assurance of the coming of the Paraclete was crucial in view of his own return to the Father. They must depend upon the Spirit to hold them steady (16:1, 3-4). Persecution, even to the point of death, was the solemn forecast (16:2). In retrospect, the tradition of the church indicates that all the apostles, save John, suffered death by martyrdom, and while the authenticity of these traditions has been questioned, certainly they were true in some cases (cf. 21:19; Ac. 12:2).

The Coming Work of the Holy Spirit (16:5-15)

Resuming the theme of the coming Paraclete, Jesus again remarked that he was returning to the Father (16:5a; cf. 13:3; 14:2, 12, 28). His statement, "Yet none asks, 'Where are you going?'" (16:5b), seems in conflict with the earlier questions by Peter and Thomas (13:36; 14:5), but their questions were much earlier in the dialogue. Now, after his further explanations, it would have been natural for them to question Jesus intently about his return to the Father, yet none of them seemed to perceive its deep significance. The earlier questions were, in one sense, more of a protest against Jesus' leaving than a true inquiry about his destination. The disciples were preoccupied with the grief of his departure (16:6), while they ought to have realized the benefit. Only by returning to the Father could Jesus send to them the Spirit (16:7), and only by the coming of the Spirit would the greater mission of Jesus to the world be accomplished.

This greater mission would be accomplished through the Spirit's work as both the "defender" for the disciples and as the "prosecutor" against an unbelieving world (16:8-11).¹⁸¹ The world had rejected the Spirit in Jesus (cf. 14:17), had shown hatred for him and his followers (15:18-22), had extended this hatred to the Father himself (15:23-24), and now stood under indictment by the prosecutorial work of the

prophecy does not always follow a prediction/verification model, but also follows the model of a recapitulation of the experience of other righteous people in the past.

¹⁸⁰Eastern and Western Christendom are divided over their creedal statements at this point. The traditional form of the Nicene Creed, still maintained by the Eastern Church, is, "[I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father..." In 589 A.D., at the Council of Toledo, the Western Church added the *filioque* phrase, "...who proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*." This dispute has never been resolved and still divides the church. Protestants generally recite the western form of the creed, though the weight of theology and history favors the eastern form.

¹⁸¹Here, the versatility of the term *parakletos* is apparent in that it can refer both to a friend as well as to a prosecutor.

Paraclete.¹⁸² So, when the Spirit came, he would indict the unbelieving world for its sin and unbelief (16:8-9). The Spirit would vindicate Jesus' righteousness, in spite of his sentence of death, by the ongoing testimony of the resurrection (16:10; cf. 1 Ti. 3:16; Ro. 8:11). The Spirit would convince the world of the condemnation of Satan, who was defeated by Jesus' triumph over death (16:11; cf. Col. 2:15).

This matrix of ideas--Jesus' return to the Father, the sending of the Spirit, the hostility of the world, and the Spirit's role as defender and prosecutor--was too complex for the disciples to assimilate in a single evening (16:12). However, when the Spirit came, he would make clear the full meaning of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and what these events would mean for the future (16:13). The role of the Spirit would be to testify to Jesus' messianic work. The Spirit would not "speak on his own," that is, the role of the Spirit was not independent of Jesus' mission. Rather, it was to testify about that mission. The Spirit would glorify Jesus, taking the meaning of Jesus' work and illuminating it to the minds of the disciples (16:14).

Once again, the trinitarian nature of God's mission to the world is evident. The mission was the Father's, who gave it to his Son. When the Son appeared, he did not teach out of his own initiative; rather, he taught only what the Father gave him to teach (cf. 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49). After the Son had returned to the Father, the Spirit would be sent to Jesus' followers to make clear this mission (16:15). The Spirit has no message but what is already given in the incarnate *Logos*. The Spirit's role is to make clear the meaning of Jesus' person and work and to convince the disciples of its truth. Far from a call to mysticism for its own sake, the promise of the Paraclete was essential for the internal verification of the truth claims of Jesus.

The Return to the Father (16:16-33)

Jesus' death and return to the Father would mean the disciples could see him no more (16:16). This theme of "seeing Jesus no more" (cf. 14:19; 16:10) is the background for Easter faith, when Jesus would no longer be visible to the disciples. More to the point, the theme is important in light of the men and women who would be called upon to believe in Jesus without seeing him at all (cf. 17:20; 20:29, 31). Jesus' comments about returning to the Father and not being seen any longer, comments that earlier had not elicited the proper response (cf. 16:5), now incited a flurry of questions (16:17-18). In typical Johannine fashion, Jesus' statements, "You will see me no more...then, you will see me" are double entendres, referring both to

¹⁸²The meaning of this passage is greatly affected by how one takes the verb *elencho* (= expose, convict, reprove, punish). The English translations have rendered it variously as "convince" (RSV, Phillips), "prove" (Knox), "convict" (ASV, NASB, Goodspeed, Weymouth), "reprove" (KJV), "confute, convince, convict" (NEB), and "prove wrong" (AB, JB, NAB, TEV, Williams).

the interval between his death and resurrection and the interval between his ascension and second coming (see comments at 14:1).

In explaining the meaning of his words, Jesus spoke first of all about the interval between his death and resurrection (16:19). For the world which had rejected him, his death would seem like a total defeat. For the disciples, it would be an experience of wrenching grief (16:20a). However, the overwhelming loss experienced between Jesus' death and resurrection would be akin to the anguish of childbirth followed by the joy of having a newborn infant (16:20b-21). Now, the disciples were beginning to feel the first sting of sorrow in Jesus' prediction that he would be taken from them. However, their temporary grief at this loss would be erased by the permanent joy to come because of his resurrection (16:22)! The unrestricted power and grace of the resurrected, ascended Christ meant that full access to the Father would be possible through Jesus. At the present, their participation in Christ's mission was limited; afterward, their participation would be unlimited, and they could ask the Father anything in his Son's name, and he would respond (16:23-24).¹⁸³ As noted earlier (see comments at 14:13-14; 15:7-8), the "ask anything" phrase is directly associated with the Father's mission to the world. Later, the disciples' requests will be explicitly connected with the prayer for forgiveness of sin (cf. 20:23).

Up to the present, Jesus' teachings about the impending crisis and the future beyond had been illustrated with figures of speech (16:25a), such as, the metaphor of the Father's house with many rooms (cf. 14:1), the metaphor of the vine (cf. 15:1ff.), and the metaphor about the pain of childbirth and the joy to follow (cf. 16:21). Now, however, Jesus would dispense with all such figures. His final conversations with them, and later, the illuminating work of the Spirit who would be sent from the Father to them, would communicate plainly without such figures of speech (16:25b). Their requests to the Father in Christ's name could be made directly, since by his return to the Father, Jesus had made such intimate access possible (16:26-27; cf. He. 4:14-16; 10:19-22). Because of their love and loyalty to Jesus, the Father was only too ready to hear their requests! Now, the incarnational mission was almost complete. Jesus had come from the Father into the world, and now he was returning from the world back to the Father where he was before (16:28; cf. 6:62).

At last, the full implications of Jesus' farewell teachings began to dawn upon the disciples (16:29). Not only had he answered their questions, he had anticipated them before they were even asked. They were ready to accept without reservation his heavenly claims (16:30)! Still, their faith, even though sincere, was about to meet a

¹⁸³The statement here is John's counterpart to Matthew's, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Mt. 18:18-19).

test more severe than they could have imagined.¹⁸⁴ Earlier, Jesus had predicted the defection of Judas and the denial of Peter (cf. 13:21, 38). Now, he says that the entire group would be scattered, abandoning their Lord (16:32a; cf. Mt. 26:56/Mk. 14:50).¹⁸⁵ Only the presence of the Father would remain with him through his crucible (16:32b; cf. 8:29). The beloved disciple and Peter would follow at some distance, of course (cf. 18:15-16; 19:26), but neither of them could provide the necessary spiritual support for such a trial. So, rather than depending upon his followers for support, Jesus depended entirely upon the Father. Yet he anticipated the events of his passion and shared them with his apostles so that, when the events occurred, the apostles could be at peace, knowing that such trouble was bound to come in the world (16:33a). They must rest in his promise that his victory over the world was a certainty (16:33b)!¹⁸⁶

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26)

The traditional title of this chapter, "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer," goes back to the 16th century.¹⁸⁷ It probably owes more to the theology of the Book of Hebrews, with its description of Jesus as both High Priest and sacrifice, than it does to the Gospel of John, but the title is appropriate, nonetheless. Here, Jesus offers his prayer of consecration to the great task before him. Earlier, he had predicted that the time for his glorification had come (cf. 12:23), and he explained that this glorification would be accomplished when he was lifted up on the cross (12:32-33). In the upper room discourse, Jesus repeatedly announced that he would be "going away" and that for a little while they would see him no longer. Judas, his betrayer, was already dismissed. Now, he turned his face toward his Father with a final prayer of commitment.

The prayer should not be confused with the Gethsemane prayer recorded in the synoptic gospels. However one pieces together the chronology of the final discourse in chapters 14-16, John is clear that Jesus did not cross the Kidron Valley until after the prayer was complete (cf. 18:1-2).

Jesus' prayer falls into three parts, the first being about himself and his glorification, the second being his intercession for the apostles, and the third being his

¹⁸⁴The NIV renders 16:31 as an emphatic statement, while virtually all other translations put it in the form of a question. Grammatically, the sentence is ambiguous, but either way, in the context of what follows, it suggests that the disciples' faith was not yet very strong.

¹⁸⁵John implies what Mark makes specific (Mk. 14:27)--that the scattering of the disciples would be a fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction that the sheep would scatter at the striking down of the shepherd (cf. Zec.13:7).

¹⁸⁶The perfect tense, similar to the aorist in 13:31 (see note), is the emphatic expression of a future, abiding reality with the certainty of a past event.

¹⁸⁷Bruce, 328.

prayer for the community of faith who would believe the testimony of the apostles. The fact that Jesus addressed God by the familiar title of "Father" is significant, both because it is the unanimous testimony of all four gospels that Jesus did this at all times, and also because the use of *Abba* (= the child's word for father in Aramaic) as an address for God is without parallel in the whole of Jewish literature. If the Aramaic *abba* underlies the Greek *pater* (= father), as most scholars believe, then Jesus demonstrated a unique and exceedingly intimate form of address. This form was repeated in the earliest Christian communities (cf. Ro. 8:15; Ga. 4:6).¹⁸⁸

For Himself (17:1-8)

In the prayer, Jesus lifted his face toward heaven, presumably with his eyes open (17:1a; cf. 11:41).¹⁸⁹ He knew that the time for his glorification had come, and he prayed to that end, not simply for his own sake, but in order to honor the Father (17:1b). His acceptance of the cross was a sign of his authority over the whole human race, and his death was to be a death for all (17:2a; cf. 1 Jn. 2:2). Unlike the authority that is so desperately sought in the world, Jesus' authority was to offer his life in behalf of others (cf. 10:14-18). In this sacrificial gift, he would give eternal life to all whom the Father had given him (17:2b). The language of the Father "giving" humans to Christ has occurred earlier (cf. 6:37-40). Both there and here, John uses a neuter form when we might expect a masculine, a form which emphasizes the collective aspect of the Father's gift of believers. It is doubtful, then, that the interpreter should use this passage in support of the double predestination of individuals. What Jesus has in mind is the collective body of believers, not the aggregate of individuals chosen one by one. As to individuals, the Fourth Gospel is clear that whoever comes will not be rejected (cf. 6:37). Furthermore, God's love is toward the whole world (cf. 3:16-17; 6:40).¹⁹⁰ Barnabas Lindars is surely correct when he says that "those whom the Father gave" are the same as "those who have been receptive" (cf. 1:12).¹⁹¹

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, the theme of eternal life has been central. Its essential definition is a relationship of faith in the true God and his Son, Jesus (17:3; cf. 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40). Now, the completion of Jesus' incarnational mission, by which he had demonstrated his Father's glory in his earthly life (cf. 1:14, 18), was as certain as if already finished (17:4; cf. 4:34-36).¹⁹² It was now the time of

¹⁸⁸J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, trans. Bowden, Burchard and Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 54-65, 108-112.

¹⁸⁹The Greek text says, "Jesus, lifting his eyes to heaven, said..."

¹⁹⁰W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 139-142.

¹⁹¹B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 90, 521.

¹⁹²The aorist form, "I glorified you, finishing the work...", as in 13:31, views the work of the cross with the finality

his glorification. Through death, resurrection and his return to the Father he would resume that place of exaltation which he had with the Father before the creation (17:5; cf. 1:1-2; 6:62; 16:28). He had fully revealed the Father to his disciples (cf. 1:18; 14:8-10), and they now understood that his mission was not independent, but entirely dependent upon the Father's purpose (17:6-8).

For the Apostles (17:9-19)

Jesus' prayer now continued for the apostles (17:9). He had shared the truth from the Father with them, and in their faithful discipleship, they had brought glory to him (17:10). Though Jesus would now return to the Father, they would remain in the world, a world they could expect to be hostile (cf. 15:18ff.). Because of this hostility, Jesus committed them into the care of the Father, praying that they would be unified, just as the Father and the Son were unified (17:11). The protective power over them would be the Father's name, which he also had bestowed upon his Son. Here, the divine name stands for God's sovereign power and authority, a metonymy familiar from the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 20:1; 54:1; Pr. 18:10).¹⁹³ This same power inherent in God also had been bestowed upon Jesus, his Son (cf. 5:43; 10:25). The power of divine protection was not directed toward alleviating persecution, however. Jesus was quite clear that persecution was to be expected (cf. 15:20; 16:2; 21:18-19; 1 Th. 2:14-16; 3:2-4). Rather, this protection was to preserve the disciples from falling away from their faith (17:12; cf. 6:39; 10:28-30). Only Judas, who defected, had been lost.

That Judas is here described as the "son of destruction" once more raises the question about predestination and free will. Does this passage mean that someone (not necessarily Judas) would perform the task of conscious rejection and betrayal, and that Judas willingly filled such a role, or does it mean that Judas personally was selected by God so that his human will was bound to a previous divine decision? Calvinists and Arminians have debated the question for centuries without resolution. We agree with the conclusion of Merrill Tenney that this Semitism denotes someone abandoned to evil, not as a helpless victim against his will, but as one who, when his decision was final (cf. 13:27), had passed the point of no return.¹⁹⁴

Though Jesus knew that his followers would face severe opposition, his warnings were not given to frighten them, but rather, to assure them of the Father's love in spite of their distress. He told them about the future so that, as Paul would say later, they could be "joyful in hope" and "patient in affliction," and in the end, they

of a past event.

¹⁹³Bruce, 332.

¹⁹⁴M. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 9.164.

could "bless those who persecute" (17:13; cf. Ro. 12:12, 14; Mt. 5:11). The same joy that was in Jesus as he faced the cross could be theirs as they faced a hostile world (17:13-14)! So, Jesus did not pray for their removal from the world, but for their protection from the evil one whom he expected to face that very night (17:15; cf. 14:30). They did not belong to the unbelieving world who had rejected him (17:16). Rather, they belonged to him and his mission of grace to the world. It is in this sense, then, that Jesus prayed for his disciples to be set apart by the truth of his mission to the world (17:17).¹⁹⁵ The Father had sent his Son into the world, and now, the Son would send his apostles into the world (17:18; cf. 20:21). They were friends joined in the same mission (cf. 15:15-16). For their sake, Jesus now sets apart himself for his sacrificial work on the cross, and in doing so, his disciples would become holy instruments of his divine mission (17:19). The cross was not forced upon Jesus, but he willingly set himself apart for it (cf. 10:11, 15, 17-18; 12:27).

For the Church (17:20-26)

The final portion of the prayer stretches ahead to those who would come to faith because of the apostles' witness (17:20; cf. 15:27). Jesus prayed for their unity, for their unity would be a direct confirmation of their testimony about Jesus (17:21). Christian disunity undermines the witness that Jesus is God's Son from heaven, and it was important that the apostles maintained solidarity with each other as they formed the eyewitness link between the future church and the historical life, death and resurrection of the Lord. The glory of the Father had been revealed in his Son. The Son had passed on to the apostles the task of bearing testimony to this glory (17:22). They must be unified in their mission just as the Son and Father were unified in the same mission. The full purpose of this mission was to announce to the whole world God's redemptive love (17:23; cf. 11:51-52).

In the end, those who accepted Christ would go to the Father's house (17:24; cf. 14:1-3), where they would see the full, unrestricted glory of the Son that now was partially concealed by the incarnation. Now they could see momentary glimpses of this glory (cf. 1:14; 2:11), but in the Father's house, they would see the heavenly glory of the Son such as was his even before the creation of the universe. In the Revelation, John expresses this same idea when he says of the New Jerusalem, "The glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rv. 21:23).

So, though the hostile world had rejected the Father when they did not receive his Son (cf. 15:23), the apostles had received both the Father and his Son whom he

¹⁹⁵The verb *hagiazō* (= to make holy, to set apart for sacred use) here probably should be taken in the sense of setting them apart for their mission rather than in the sense of personal sanctify, especially in the context of what follows.

sent into the world (17:25). Now, as Jesus continued to reveal to them the Father and his mission to the world, they would share in the love the Father had toward his Son (17:26a). Jesus himself would be in them through the coming of the Spirit (17:26b; cf. 14:17, 23).

The Arrest, Trial And Execution Of Jesus (18:1--19:42)

Beginning with the arrest and trial, the Fourth Gospel merges back into the mainstream of united testimony concerning the life of Jesus. While much if not most of John up to this point has provided an independent narration of dialogue and events not recorded in the synoptics, beginning with Jesus' arrest the narratives of all four evangelists will describe the same events. John's Gospel still provides some unique material, of course, but for the most part, his narrations will fit the chronology and substance of what the reader finds in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The Olive Grove (18:1-11)

After his great prayer, Jesus led the apostles from the upper room to the east side of the city, across the deep valley of the Kidron, and up the slope on the other side (18:1). It was apparently a place that Jesus frequented often, for Judas brought a detachment of Roman soldiers and some temple police to the place to make the arrest (18:2-3).¹⁹⁶ With full knowledge of what lay ahead (cf. 12:23, 31; 13:1, 38; 17:1), Jesus confronted the arresting party (18:4). At his self-identification, in which he uses the emphatic *ego eimi* (see comments at 8:58), the group fell backward (18:5-6). Their prostration made it evident that if they were to arrest Jesus, it would be due to his permission, not their force. Only after requiring the safety of his followers would Jesus submit to arrest (18:7-9). In his concern for them, he fulfilled his own words that he would protect his own (cf. 6:39; 17:12).

Peter, meanwhile, jerked out his sword and took a vicious swing at one of the arresting party, cutting off his ear (18:10).¹⁹⁷ We may suppose that Peter aimed at the man's head. When earlier Peter had protested that he was willing to die for Jesus, he meant it (cf. 13:37)! However, the sword was not part of Jesus' mission from the Father, so Jesus reprimanded Peter. The saying, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?", is the only time this metaphor is used in the Fourth Gospel, though it certainly harmonizes with other such references in the synoptics (cf. Mt. 20:22; 26:39,

¹⁹⁶As Bruce points out, the Greek text is quite clear that the arresting party consisted of both Roman soldiers (*speira* = cohort) and members of the temple guard (*hyperetas* = servants, assistants). The former term is the Greek word used to translate the Latin "cohors," which is a tenth part of a Roman legion, cf. BAG (1979) 761.

¹⁹⁷The fact that it was the man's right ear suggests that either Peter was left-handed, or else, he struck a back-handed blow.

42//Mk. 10:38; 14:36//Lk. 22:42).¹⁹⁸

Before Annas and Caiaphas (18:12-14, 19-24)

The arresting party took Jesus first to Annas, the high priest emeritus (18:12-14). This preliminary interrogation was apparently informal, since the synoptics do not mention it. However, even though Annas had been deposed in 15 A.D. by the caprice of the Roman Procurator, he still wielded considerable influence, so much so that five of his sons and Caiaphas his son-in-law held the office of the high priest in almost unbroken succession.¹⁹⁹ Long after he had lost his office, Annas was still called "the high priest" (cf. Ac. 4:6; cf. Lk. 3:2), and John refers to him as such in 18:19-24.²⁰⁰

In the dialogue with Annas, Jesus was interrogated about his followers and his message (18:19). Jesus reminded Annas, however, that his teachings had all been given in public, so the questions were pointless (18:20-21). Nevertheless, Jesus was given a blow to the face for his response, and Annas, seeing there was nothing to be gained, sent Jesus on to the titular high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphas (18:22-24). The more formal examination by Caiaphas is described by the synoptic evangelists, but not by John, who simply mentions that Jesus was sent to Caiaphas, and later, was led from Caiaphas to Pilate (18:28).

Peter's Denials (18:15-18, 25-27)

All four gospels state that Peter was to deny Jesus three times (13:38; Mt. 26:34//Mk. 14:30//Lk. 22:34). However, it is not easy to harmonize the four accounts, since the details differ. It is unnecessary to go to the lengths of some by concluding that Jesus made two different predictions of Peter's denials and that Peter denied the Lord six times in all.²⁰¹ Such a reconstruction strains credibility beyond measure. A more modest and plausible proposal is that, while Peter denied Jesus three times, there were more than three accusers who asked Peter if he was Jesus'

¹⁹⁸The metaphor of the cup is clearly a reference to the trauma of the coming trial and execution. Why Jesus used this metaphor is less clear. It may reflect upon the metaphor in Isaiah, where the cup represents the wrath of God (cf. Is. 51:17, 21-23). If so, then Jesus was aware that in his death he was bearing God's wrath against sin so that, just as was also said, "It was Yahweh's will to crush him and cause him to suffer," and "he was crushed for our iniquities" (cf. Is. 53:10, 5). It is beyond the scope of this study to address Paul's use of the word *hilaskomai* (= to propitiate) and its analogous implications, but see L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 144ff.

¹⁹⁹D. Edwards, *ISBE* (1979) I.128.

²⁰⁰The KJV implies that the "high priest" in verses 18:19ff. was Caiaphas, not Annas, by translating an aorist verb in 18:24 as a pluperfect (i.e., "Now Annas *had sent* him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest."). This can hardly be a correct translation, and it has been corrected in the NKJV.

²⁰¹H. Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 174-176.

disciple. The evangelists simply paraphrased these repeated accusations in different ways.²⁰²

The place of Peter's denials was the courtyard outside the quarters of Annas and Caiaphas. The general location of this house was in the Upper City, and in fact, modern pilgrims to Jerusalem are shown a traditional site now buried under the structure of the church of St. Peter Gallicantu. This may be the actual place, but archaeologists have not been able to make a positive identification.²⁰³

Though according to Mark's Gospel all the disciples immediately fled at the arrest (cf. Mk. 14:50-52), Peter and the beloved disciple apparently circled back to follow the arresting party at some distance. Since the party was carrying torches and lanterns (cf. 18:3), it would not have been difficult to follow them in the darkness. The beloved disciple gained entrance because he was personally known to the high priest, and he arranged for Peter to enter as well (18:15-16). Upon entering, Peter made his first denial (18:17-18), and sometime later, his second and third (18:25-27).

It is perhaps worth noting that in the Greek text, the first two questions to Peter are formed in such a way that a negative answer was expected, and in each case, Peter took advantage of the situation by giving the expected, "No."²⁰⁴ At the third denial, all four gospels agree that the rooster immediately crowed, the very sign Jesus had predicted (cf. 13:38).

Before Pilate (18:28--19:16a)

In John's Gospel, the venue of the trial quickly moves to the Roman prefect's quarters. Pontius Pilate, known elsewhere from the writings of Josephus and Philo, was the prefect of Judea in 26-36 A.D.²⁰⁵ His normal residence was the former palace of Herod, but during times of potential disturbance, such as at Passover, he may have preferred to lodge in the Antonia Fortress with the troops. In that way, he could respond immediately to any disturbance.

Jesus' movements of the night and morning are as follows. Leaving the upper room, he and the disciples would have taken one of the stepped streets down to the Tyropoeon Valley, crossed the City of David, and exited through the Spring Gate, the shortest route to Gethsemene. After the arrest, the soldiers led him through the Potsherd Gate so as to avoid any disturbance in the respectable quarters of the City of

²⁰²Blomberg, 125.

²⁰³J. Rousseau and R. Arav, *Jesus & His World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 136-139.

²⁰⁴When questions are posed in the indicative mood with the negative particle *me*, a negative answer is expected (see the grammars).

²⁰⁵In addition to the literary corroboration of Pilate's governorship, an inscription bearing the title "[Po]ntius Pilate, [praef]ectus Iuda[ea]e" was excavated at Caesarea Maritima in 1962.

David. Then, they took him back up the stairway to the high priest's residence, where he was held for the remainder of the night. From there, he was taken to Pilate's residence for the Roman segment of his trial.²⁰⁶

The synoptics inform the reader that the Sanhedrin called for the death penalty at the hearing in the high priest's residence, but Roman acquiescence was necessary in order to carry it out. John's record says that the prefect, whose primary responsibility was to maintain public order, had the final decision in matters of execution (cf. 18:31b; 19:10), and Josephus corroborates this statement.²⁰⁷ To complicate the situation, the Jewish elders brought Jesus to Pilate on the day the Passover was to be eaten, which, in turn, meant that they could not enter his residence due to the fact that Gentile homes were considered unclean (18:28).²⁰⁸ Thus, the hearing before Pilate was necessarily a "back-and-forth" process, Pilate first speaking to the prisoner inside the residence, then walking back outside to hear the Sanhedrin prosecutors, and so forth (18:29, 33, 38; 19:4-5, 9, 13).

John's account makes it clear that Pilate was reluctant to give an execution order. If the Sanhedrin had brought Jesus up on charges of insurrection, which, given the questions about kingship (18:33), is implied in John and explicit in Luke (cf. Lk. 23:2-3), then they had to prove their allegations. Pilate seemed to suspect that the issue was more religious than political (18:29-32). He began with the formal question about charges, which seemed to confuse the Sanhedrin members. It may be that a history of the case had already been sent to Pilate ahead of time and they expected a simple execution order. Hence, their offhand answer to Pilate (18:30). Back inside, Pilate interrogated Jesus personally (18:33-38a). However, Jesus' answer was not political. His claim was to kingship in another world. Jesus might be eccentric, even crazy, but he was no threat to Rome, and Pilate knew it. When Jesus raised the issue of truth, Pilate simply waved it off with the rhetorical, and in his view unanswerable, question, "What is truth?"

Because of his misgivings, Pilate again confronted the prosecution, this time offering an alternative to execution, since he clearly believed Jesus to be innocent of the charge (18:38b-40). Pilate's admission of Jesus' innocence, the offer of his release, and the eventual release of Barabbas is recorded in all four gospels. It is an irony, to say the least, that Barabbas' name (which in Aramaic means "son of the

²⁰⁶Rousseau and Arav, 164.

²⁰⁷Antiquities, xviii.1.1. Some scholars have objected to the biblical statement that executions lay exclusively in the hands of the Roman governor in light of Stephen's martyrdom (cf. Ac. 7), but the biblical accounts are quite plausible against what is known of Roman administration, cf. A. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 35-43.

²⁰⁸J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 321.

father") is so similar to Jesus' usage of Abba to refer to God.²⁰⁹ Both were charged with sedition, both were slated for capital execution, both were well-known to the Jewish constituency, and both were under the jurisdiction of Pilate. There the similarities end, for the guilty prisoner was released, while the innocent one was sentenced to die.

The scourging presupposes that Pilate now intended to give the order for execution, even though the trial was not yet complete. After the scourging, the soldiers played "the king's game," using Jesus as a human game-piece after dressing him in mock regalia (19:1-3).²¹⁰ Presenting Jesus once more to his accusers, and hearing their insistent call for crucifixion (19:4-7), Pilate once more questioned the prisoner. He was uneasy with the accusation that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, for while such a claim was blasphemy to the Jews, it was not out of the question to the mind of a superstitious Roman. The Greco-Roman world had such men, called *theios aner*, who were believed to be divine. Perhaps Jesus was one of those! So, Pilate was fearful (19:8). His question is no longer, "What have you done?" (cf. 18:35), but "Where are you from?" (19:9). At Jesus' silence, he curtly asserted his power of life and death, but Jesus only responded that even Roman power was subordinate to God's sovereignty (19:10-11).

When it became apparent that any effort to release Jesus might create an accusation against his own office, Pilate reluctantly acquiesced and gave the death sentence (19:12-16a). It was now getting on toward noon.²¹¹

The Crucifixion (19:16b-27)

As was customary, Jesus was compelled to carry the *patibulum* (= crossbeam)

²⁰⁹Even more striking is the tradition from the early 200s A.D. that Barabbas' given name was Jesus! In the Caesarean text of Mt. 27:16-17, the reading is "Jesus Barabbas" (= Jesus, son of the father), cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1975) 67.

²¹⁰The game *Basilikos* (= "king") consisted of a square box formed by a spiraling string of smaller boxes. The opponents' markers are advanced according to the throw of dice in a race to storm the king's tower at the center. Just such a game is etched into the pavement in the basement of the Sisters of Zion Convent in Jerusalem, and this pavement has long been considered to be the *Lithostrotos*, called *Gabbatha* (cf. 19:13). Most archaeologists believe that this pavement dates to the time of Emperor Hadrian, a century or so later than Jesus, cf. D. Cole, D. Bahat and H. Shanks, *Jerusalem Archaeology Slide Set* (Washington, DC: BAS, 1983) 23.

²¹¹The Jewish reckoning of hours began with sunrise at about 6:00 A.M. Thus, "about the sixth hour" would be nearing midday. This statement, of course, is in conflict with Mark 15:25, which says that Jesus was crucified about the third hour, or 9:00 A.M. The reader should not make too much of this apparent discrepancy, given that time-reckoning in the ancient world was approximate, and Mark's Gospel, at least, seems to refer to time in quarters of the day. As such, Mark's "third hour" could mean sometime after the quarter beginning at 9:00 A.M., and John's reckoning is still within the same quarter, cf. Blomberg, 179-180. Alternatively, John may have used the Greco-Roman reckoning with the day starting at midnight, cf. A. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950) 224.

to the site of execution, where the uprights were already planted.²¹² The traditional route, the *Via Dolorosa* (= way of suffering), is marked today by the Roman Catholic fourteen stations of the cross. Jesus was executed along with two criminals (19:16b-18). Crucifixions usually consisted of three parts, the scourging, the carrying of the *patibulum*, and the nailing and lifting. At the site, the hands or wrists of the victim were either tied or nailed to the *patibulum*, which then was fixed on the upright.²¹³ Since on this occasion the *titulus* (= inscription) was fixed to the cross (19:19-22), it is more likely that Jesus' cross was dagger-shaped rather than T-shaped.

While Jesus hung on the cross, the soldiers divided his outer clothing and gambled for his inner tunic, a striking if gruesome fulfillment to Psalm 22:18 (19:23-24). The cross was low enough for conversation between the victims and the onlookers, and if it was a low cross, the victim's feet may have been no more than twelve or eighteen inches above the ground. Near the cross were Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, another woman or two, and the beloved disciple.²¹⁴ From the cross, Jesus committed the care of his mother into the hands of the beloved disciple (19:25-27), a gesture that suggests Joseph was now dead and Mary's other sons were either absent or unsympathetic.

The Death (19:28-37)

The ordeal was now nearly over. After receiving some sour wine on a sponge (cf. Ps. 69:21), Jesus uttered the words, "It is accomplished," bowed his head, and died (19:28-30). His final utterance indicated that he now had completed the mission of laying down his life for his friends (cf. 10:15; 15:13). Since it was the day when the Passover was to be eaten, and the following day was a sabbath, it was not appropriate to allow the victims to linger on. Normally, crucifixion victims might remain alive for quite some time, so on this occasion their legs were broken to hasten asphyxiation. In this way, the victims could no longer thrust themselves upward in

²¹² Golgotha (= skull), the site of the crucifixion (Jn. 19:17//Mt. 27:33//Mk. 15:22), has long been debated. The primary identifying mark is that it was outside the city wall and apparently on a hill (Jn. 19:20; He. 13:12-13). Two primary sites have been defended, Gordon's Calvary and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Gordon's Calvary, favored by some (and so-named after General Gordon of the last century), is a grassy knoll above the so-called Grotto of Jeremiah. However, the hill's resemblance to a human skull (eye-holes and rounded top) are not ancient. The rival site, based on statements by Eusebius and Jerome (late 4th century), lies within the precincts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Probability favors this site, but there can be no certainty. Of course, for those willing to abandon tradition, Golgotha has been claimed on virtually every side of the city.

²¹³ In June 1968, archaeologists uncovered in a first-century ossuary the bones of two crucified men. One of the skeletons had the tibiae and fibulae of his legs broken, while his right heel bone was pierced with a long nail still driven into a piece of olive wood. A scratch on one of the wrist bones suggests the spike driven through near the base of the hand, cf. Rousseau and Arav, 74-78.

²¹⁴ In the Greek text, it is unclear whether "Mary" and "the wife of Clopas" are the same or two different women.

order to breathe, and their lungs would collapse soon. When the soldiers came to Jesus, however, he was already dead (19:31-33). That Jesus' legs were not broken recalled yet another prophecy (19:36; Ps. 34:20), and perhaps more significantly for John, pointed to Jesus as the true Passover Lamb (cf. Ex. 12:46; Nu. 9:12).

To make sure that Jesus was dead, one of the soldiers ran a lance up through his rib cage, bursting the pericardium (19:34, 37; cf. Zec. 12:10).²¹⁵ The whole procedure makes laughable the various theories, ancient and modern, that Jesus did not really die.²¹⁶ The eye-witness testimony of the beloved disciple that Jesus really died (19:35) is crucial to the resurrection accounts.

The Burial (19:38-42)

Two men prepared Jesus' corpse for burial, Joseph of Arimathea²¹⁷ and Nicodemus. Two of the four evangelists indicate that Joseph was a Sanhedrin member (cf. Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50), and of course, Nicodemus was a member as well (cf. 3:1). Joseph was already a disciple of Jesus, though secretly (19:38). Nicodemus was a sincere seeker after the way of God, although at first he was unwilling to risk the disfavor of his peers by being seen in the presence of Jesus (cf. 3:2). Later, he argued for fairness in the Sanhedrin's treatment of Jesus (cf. 7:50-52). Now, he more openly demonstrated his respect for Jesus by assisting in his burial. Later Christian tradition says that he became a Christian.²¹⁸ We should assume that these two men did not give consent to the Sanhedrin's trial and verdict concerning Jesus.²¹⁹ When the execution was finished, they arranged for his burial in Joseph's new tomb. Normal practice was for the corpses of executed criminals to be buried in a common tomb supplied by the court, but these two men sought Pilate's permission for a private burial near the site of execution (19:38-42).

Jesus' burial was in a tomb nearby Golgotha (Jn. 19:41-42). Two very different sites vie for recognition, each associated with the two most popular sites for Golgotha. They are the site at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the site near

²¹⁵For more detail on the medical aspects of crucifixion in general and Jesus' crucifixion in particular, see W. Edwards, W. Gabel and F. Hosmer, *JAMA* (Mar. 21, 1986) 1455-1463.

²¹⁶One such suggestion, the so-called "swoon theory," was popularized earlier in this century by H. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1965).

²¹⁷Probably the same as Ramathaim (1 Sa. 1:1), a village somewhat north of Jerusalem.

²¹⁸H. Fagal, *ISBE* (1986) III.533.

²¹⁹In fact, if the judiciary rules for the Sanhedrin during the time of Jesus were the same as were later recorded in the *Mishnah*, the trial and verdict were decidedly illegal. Joseph and Nicodemus may not have been invited if their sympathies were suspected. Capital trials were forbidden to be held at night and were restricted from being held on feast days. Furthermore, a death sentence could not be given on the day of the trial but only on the next day, cf. W. Moulder, *ISBE* (1988) IV.334.

Gordon's Calvary called the Garden Tomb. This latter site is generally doubted by archaeologists. To be sure, the site is an ancient burial ground (8th-7th centuries B.C.), but it was not used again for burial purposes until the Byzantine Period.²²⁰

Easter Faith (20:1-31)

Easter faith rests upon two kinds of testimony, the witnesses to the empty tomb and the witnesses to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Each kind of testimony is important in its own way. The empty tomb narratives are important in light of the fact that Jesus' disciples either participated in the burial or knew where the corpse was interred. No account of the resurrection would have been credible if someone could simply say, "But the body is still in the tomb." Such a statement could be checked! All four gospels, not to mention Jewish tradition, agree that the corpse of Jesus was missing from the tomb.

The fact that Jesus' body was missing has been foundational to various alternative theories, such as, the speculation that the disciples stole the body (cf. Mt. 28:13), the so-called "swoon theory" that Jesus did not really die and in the cool tomb he revived, and the theory that the women mistakenly came to the wrong tomb on Easter morning. Alternative theories notwithstanding, the empty tomb is the first historical fact which underlies the biblical account of Jesus' resurrection. His body was not in the tomb because he had been raised from the dead! John's gospel, especially, emphasizes this aspect (cf. 20:8).

The testimony about Jesus' resurrection appearances to his followers answers the question which the empty tomb raises. Jesus was alive! He was seen by witnesses. These witnesses were not people who were predisposed to accept fanciful explanations, but women and men who were devastated and disillusioned by Jesus' death. They were people like Thomas whose hard-headed pragmatism forced him to say that he would not believe unless he could actually examine Jesus' resurrected body. The sheer number of witnesses to the resurrected Jesus is significant, also. The subjective interpretation that the disciples were in such a mental state that they only imagined they saw Jesus lacks credibility. One person might imagine such a thing, but it is hard to conceive of several groups of people doing so, many of them at the same moment. The notion that the disciples were in on a plot to perpetuate the resurrection story, even though they knew better, is preposterous. Long ago, Origen pointed out that folks do not risk their lives and suffer martyrdom for something they very well know is a lie (cf. Ac. 7:60; 12:2).

So, the Fourth Gospel follows the pattern of the other gospels that Jesus'

²²⁰G. Barkay, "The Garden Tomb: Was Jesus Buried Here?" *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1986) 40-57.

resurrection, which he anticipated long before (cf. 1:51; 2:19, 22; 5:21, 26; 7:33-34; 8:21; 10:17-18; 11:25-26; 13:33, 36; 14:2-3, 18-19, 22, 28-30; 16:16, 19-22, 28), rests upon the witnesses to the empty tomb and the historical appearances of Jesus to his followers. On the basis of their testimony, John urges his readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son--and that in believing one receives eternal life!²²¹

The Empty Tomb (20:1-9)

The burial of Jesus was completed in late afternoon, and there had not been time for full performance of the normal customs to honor the dead. Since the day following Passover was a sabbath, such customs could not be practiced then, either. Thus, it was early Sunday morning by the time Mary of Magdala came to visit the site (20:1).²²² She knew the place, but when she arrived she saw that the huge rolling stone had been removed. Deeply disturbed, she ran to tell Peter and the Beloved Disciple that the tomb was empty (20:2). Though the news seemed incredulous (cf. Lk. 24:10-11), the two men ran to investigate (20:3). The Beloved Disciple arrived first and peered in, and when Peter arrived he stepped into the cave to observe the linen wrappings and the facial cloth (20:4-7). Then, the other disciple joined him, and when he saw the evidence, he believed (20:8-9)!

Two issues, in particular, must be addressed in this account. One concerns the strips of linen. Sometimes it has been interpreted that the linen windings and the sweat-rag were still in the shape of the corpse, though the corpse was not there. While the text does not forbid such a construction, it is certainly more than the text says.²²³ If John wished to convey such a thing, he chose a particularly abstruse way of doing so. The second issue concerns the statement of the Beloved Disciple's faith (20:8) in contrast with the general lack of understanding among the other disciples (20:9).²²⁴ John was the first to come to Easter faith, and unlike the others, he did so even before he saw the resurrected Lord. This kind of faith--believing without having seen the risen Christ--is what John is aiming for in his readers (20:29). The larger

²²¹It is beyond the scope of this study to address the challenge of harmonizing the gospel accounts of Easter. Some scholars make no attempt at all, but regard the four accounts as hopelessly tangled and inconsistent, cf. R. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). However, it is unnecessary to take such a negative view. A much more positive and compelling assessment is offered G. Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

²²²The other gospels record that Mary was accompanied by others (Mt. 28:1/Mk. 16:1/Lk. 24:1), but John focuses upon Mary alone. Still, the "we" of 20:2 suggests the presence of the others.

²²³Hendriksen, 450.

²²⁴The "they" of 20:9 probably refers to the disciples in general. As a group, they still did not realize that the resurrection of Jesus was an event predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, a conclusion with which Luke concurs (cf. Lk. 24:45).

Christian community must also reach Easter faith without the benefit of "seeing."

Jesus and Mary of Magdala (20:10-18)

It is significant that Jesus' first post-resurrection appearances were made to his women followers. In first century Jewish culture, the testimony of women was not considered credible,²²⁵ but God had no reservations about giving them a crucial role in the foundational events of Easter faith! After Peter and the Beloved Disciple had left, Mary stood crying near the tomb (20:10-11). The explanation of the two angels seated in the tomb was not in itself convincing. She possibly did not even know the figures were angelic, so she turned away (20:12-13). When she did so, she confronted yet another figure whom she thought to be the caretaker (20:14-15).²²⁶ It was only when he called her name that she suddenly realized he was Jesus (20:16).

Jesus' words, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (20:17), have led to the speculation that Jesus may have made a priestly ascension into the heavenlies on Easter morning to complete the heavenly Yom Kippur (cf. He. 9:11-12, 23-24). This interpretation derives from comparing the Johannine passage with the words in Matthew that the women later clasped Jesus' feet (cf. Mt. 28:9) and the disciples were invited to handle him (cf. 20:27; Lk. 24:39). The validity of the theory is unclear, since the New Testament is silent on the matter. It may be that Jesus only wished Mary to realize she must not think that she could avoid losing him by clutching him. Now that his death and resurrection were complete, Mary needed to comprehend that her relationship to him would be different, since he was returning to the Father. The peculiar expression, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God," distinguishes between Jesus' own relationship to the Father and that of believers. If Jesus' Sonship were the same as that of the disciples, he would have said, "Our Father, our God." However, while others might be given the power to become sons of God (cf. 1:12), only Jesus was the Son of God by nature. So, Mary ran to the others with the news, "I have seen the Lord" (20:18)!

Other Appearances (20:19-29)

On Easter Sunday evening, the disciples were still in hiding. Though the doors were locked, Jesus appeared among them, showing them his hands and wounded side (20:19-20). What he had indicated to them earlier--that they would share in the Father's mission to the world (15:14-17)--he now makes even more explicit (20:21). His commission on Easter is the Johannine counterpart to Matthew's and Luke's great

²²⁵Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 374-375.

²²⁶It seems to be a pattern that at first sight the disciples of Jesus did not recognize him (cf. 21:4; Lk. 24:16, 37; Mk. 16:12; Mt. 28:17).

commission statements in Galilee and Judea at the time of ascension (cf. Mt. 28:19-20; Lk. 24:46-48; Ac. 1:8).

Earlier, Jesus had announced that the messianic gift of the Spirit would be available only after his glorification (cf. 7:37-39). In the upper room discourse, Jesus repeatedly promised that the Spirit would be sent (14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 13-15). Now, in a majestic moment, Jesus blew upon his apostles with the imperative, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). This moment, sometimes called "the Johannine Pentecost," seems to describe the bestowal of the Spirit on the apostles. It may be granted, of course, that some interpret this passage as a symbolism of what would happen later at Pentecost, but the language of the text is so against such an interpretation that it has not won the view of many scholars.²²⁷ It is far more natural to interpret what happened here as the giving of the Spirit after Jesus' glorification, just as he promised. Such a bestowal of the Spirit need not conflict with Luke's Pentecost so long as one recognizes that the work of the Spirit is occasional and ongoing in the life of the church.

This bestowal of the Spirit on the apostles qualified them for their work. Because of the Spirit who confirmed Jesus' glorification, they could now boldly proclaim the forgiveness of sins on the basis of the finished work of the cross. It is significant that the verbs in 20:23 (and also in Mt. 16:19; 18:18) are perfect tenses, so that the meaning is: "If you forgive the sins of any, they have been (and continue to be) forgiven; if you retain (the sins) of any, they have been (and continue to be) retained."²²⁸ The apostles were not authorized to pronounce absolution at will, but rather, to pronounce absolution to those who had accepted the gospel on the grounds of Christ's completed work. The perfect tense indicates that absolution is pronounced, not in order to effect forgiveness, but in order to announce the forgiveness already given by God.

Thomas Didymas (= the twin) was absent from the group on Easter, but when he heard what had happened, he was unconvinced (20:24-25).²²⁹ A week later the group was together again, this time with Thomas present. Jesus invited his apostles to examine him physically so that they might believe (20:26-27). Thomas' humble confession of faith ranks as one of the great affirmations in the New Testament. He

²²⁷Bruce, 392; Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 1038. For a lengthy exegetical and theological treatment of this passage, see G. Burge, *The Anointed Community: the Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 114-149. It is of some interest to note that the idea of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who contended that "the Johannine Pentecost" was only figurative, was condemned in 553 A.D. at the second Council of Constantinople.

²²⁸Hendriksen, 461.

²²⁹Hence, his popular nickname "doubting Thomas," though it should be remembered that his doubts were not substantially different than the others, cf. Lk. 24:11.

recognized Jesus as God, a title Jesus did not deny. It is the same identification with which John began his gospel (20:28; 1:1). In fact, these two affirmations that Jesus is God frame the entire gospel, and it is to this confession that the evangelist's witness about the life of Jesus leads.²³⁰ Thomas, however, had the advantage of seeing the resurrected Jesus. Easter faith for Christians would be without such objective evidence. Hence, the exposure of weak faith in the early sections of the gospel as that which is based primarily on miraculous signs. "Sign-faith" is not what John is calling for. Rather, he calls for faith without signs--faith which is grounded in the testimony of the apostles and the apostolic community (20:29).

The Burden of John's Gospel (20:30-31)

The section of the Fourth Gospel labeled the "Book of Glory" ends with a concluding statement concerning the purpose of the record. John's record has provided seven signs, even though many others were available (20:30). These seven signs and the discourses surrounding them testified to the inner meaning of Jesus, the preexistent Logos who was made flesh and lived in the world. The glorification of Jesus by death and resurrection heralded the profound confession that Jesus was and is God, or to put it in the phraseology of the Nicene Creed, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

The Greek textual variants, *pisteuete* (= may continue to believe) and *pisteusete* (= may come to faith), both have strong early support. One implies the readers were Christians who needed to be confirmed in their faith (so NEB), the other that they were non-Christians who needed to find faith (so most English Versions). In the end, the issue may be more academic than practical. Certainly, it is clear enough that John writes so that faith will be a personal reality in his readers. The heart of that faith is the answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" John's answer is that he is the Messiah, God's Son, and that in such a confession of faith is eternal life (20:31).

The Epilogue (John 21)

The careful reader will notice that John's Gospel appears to have two endings (20:30-31; 21:24-25). While the witness of the Fourth Gospel is that of the Beloved Disciple, it is clear that other hands were involved in the composition of the ending, since the text uses the first person "we" as distinct from the Beloved Disciple

²³⁰O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 308.

(21:24b). Several theories have been offered to account for this anomaly. The most critical school holds that the entire gospel was written by second generation Christians, a so-called "Johannine Circle," who, in turn, depended upon the tradition passed down to them by the previous generation. A more traditional approach leaves the primary authorship to the Beloved Disciple, usually identified as John bar Zebedee, but suggests that the epilogue was composed by friends or close associates with John's approval. Yet another approach is that after its original composition the gospel was redacted by others, and this editorial process is reflected in the language of the gospel, but especially, in the epilogue.

While the question of authorship remains in debate, the theme of the epilogue seems clear enough. It emphasizes Peter's full reinstatement after his denial of the Lord, and it clarifies the future of the Beloved Disciple. Peter would suffer martyrdom, while it was rumored that the Beloved Disciple would live to see the return of the Lord. Of course, as this gospel plainly testifies, Jesus made no such promise to John. Still, it is hard to escape the impression that the Beloved Disciple would have a long tenure of leadership in the early church. If the Beloved Disciple was indeed John, Church tradition verifies that, in fact, he did have a lengthy ministry before death.

The Miraculous Catch of Fish (21:1-14)

If the synoptic gospels indicated that Jesus would see his disciples in Galilee after Easter (cf. Mt. 28:7//Mk. 16:7), the Fourth Gospel recounts a specific appearance of the Lord by the sea. This appearance is listed as the "third" appearance to the apostles after Easter (21:14), the first two being those described in chapter 20 on consecutive Sundays.²³¹ Seven disciples had returned to their fishing boats in Galilee (21:1-3). Five are named, one of which was the Beloved Disciple. Peter's initiative to go fishing, and the willingness of the others to follow his lead, need not be taken as an abandonment of Jesus' apostolic commission, though some interpreters understand it in this way. It is clear, however, that Peter was still the leader of the group. Where he went, they went!

After a fruitless night of fishing,²³² they saw a figure on the beach early in the morning (21:4). The exchange which followed is almost identical to one described in the synoptics early in Jesus' ministry (cf. Lk. 5:1-11), and no doubt the three disciples who had been present on this previous occasion were forcibly reminded of the similarity (21:5-6). The Beloved Disciple immediately recognized the figure as Jesus,

²³¹Of course, we know that Jesus made other appearances, but not to the group as a whole.

²³²The description in 21:6 indicates that they were fishing with throw nets. For general descriptions of Galilean fishing in the period, see Arav and Rousseau, 93-97.

and Peter, who had been fishing while stripped to his loin-cloth, flung about him his fisherman's cloak and plunged into the water to make for shore (21:7). When they all arrived at the beach, they saw that Jesus had prepared a breakfast of fish and bread on the fire (21:8-9). Peter waded back out into the water and dragged the throw net, now heavy with fish, to the shore (21:10-11).²³³ This invitation to share a meal with the Lord after Easter was a reminder of all the lessons they had learned after the feeding of the 5000 (cf. Jn. 6). It was a vivid testimony to the reality that Jesus was truly alive from the dead! Later, Peter would remind a Gentile soldier that Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were made to "witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (cf. Ac. 10:41).

Jesus Forgives Peter (21:15-23)

The heart of the epilogue must surely be Peter's reconciliation with Jesus. From the tradition preserved by Paul, we gather that Jesus appeared to Peter earlier (1 Co. 15:3-8), since Paul seems to list the appearances in chronology. Nothing further is known about this earlier appearance, but from the context of the pericope in John, it appears that Peter's denials had not been completely resolved. After the breakfast, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him (21:15-17). Almost certainly, these three questions must have recalled the three denials. The first question is somewhat ambiguous, "Do you love me more than these?" The word "these" may well have been accompanied by a clarifying gesture from Jesus, but whether it referred to the other disciples or the implements of fishing is unclear to the reader. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus wished Peter to declare himself.

Much has been made of the different verbs used in this dialogue. In the first two questions, Jesus used *agapao* (= to love) while Peter responded with *phileo* (= to love). In the third question, Jesus used *phileo*, and Peter responds again with *phileo*. Some commentators have concluded that the Fourth Gospel intends a clear distinction between the verbs, as though the dialogue in the first two questions should be either,

"Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"I am your friend!" (TCNT)

Or,

"Are you my friend?"

"I love you" (Fenton)

²³³The recorded number of fish make the incident vivid, but there is no need to resort to allegorical interpretations of the number 153. For examples of such interpretations, see Hendriksen, 483-484, Note #300.

This distinction is followed by a number of English translators (Weymouth, Montgomery, Goodspeed, Knox, Berkeley, Williams, Phillips, NEBmg).²³⁴ On the other hand, many translators see the verbs only as stylistic variations with no substantial difference in meaning (so KJV, RSV, NEB, JB, TEV, ASV, NASB, NAB). Opinions can be quite strong, ranging from John Stott who argues that there is no difference whatsoever to R. C. Trench who criticizes any translation which makes no distinction as a version that "either does not care, or is not able, to reproduce the variation in words as it exists in the original."²³⁵ Suffice it to say that if there is a distinction, it probably is more subtle than popularly assumed. The important thing, surely, is that Peter now declares his full loyalty to Jesus, and the sting of his denials are enveloped in forgiveness and reconciliation. Peter is instructed to care for the Lord's lambs and sheep, and once again, the original text uses two verbs, *bosko* (= feed) and *poimano* (= tend), and two nouns, *arnia* (= lambs) and *probatia* (= little sheep). Peter's future among the disciples must be in the role of a leader, and there is no doubt that Peter took this call seriously (cf. 1 Pe. 5:1-4). At the same time, Peter would suffer martyrdom, just as did Jesus (21:18-19). The tradition of the early church suggests that Peter suffered martyrdom by crucifixion under Caesar Nero in about 64 A.D. Jesus' final words to Peter on this occasion were the same as his first call to Peter in the synoptic tradition, "Follow me" (cf. Mt. 4:19/Mk. 1:17)! Later, Peter's advice to a suffering Christian community was the same--the Lord had left "an example that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pe. 2:21).

Peter now asked Jesus about the future of the Beloved Disciple, but the Lord only deflected Peter's question with the ambiguous, "If he lives until I return, what does that matter? You must follow me" (21:20-22). The disciples were not above stretching Jesus' question into a prediction, but the editorial comment shows that this was unnecessary (21:23).

The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple (21:24-25)

The epilogue ends with the statement that the testimony of the Beloved Disciple is true, and it was supported by those around him in the Christian community, probably his disciples (21:24).²³⁶ Jesus' actions in his short, public

²³⁴However, it should be pointed out, as in the two examples above, that they all do not distinguish between them in the same way. Some, for instance, think that *agapao* is the more distant word while *phileo* conveys more intimacy. Others conclude exactly the opposite that *agapao* refers to the higher love springing from God while *phileo* refers to the lesser natural love of human affection.

²³⁵J. Stott, "The Words for Love in John xxi.15ff.," *CLW*, 39 (1945-46) 71-72; R. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 43.

²³⁶This circle of disciples may have included Polycarp, a known disciple of John the Apostle, cf. Eusebius,

ministry were more than could be counted (21:25). Thus, the testimony of the Beloved Disciple had to be abridged, but it was quite sufficient, nonetheless.