

# **That You May Believe**

## **The Gospel of John**

**Today's Disciple Commentary Series**

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Published by JPT Books

That You May Believe: The Gospel of John  
Today's Disciple Commentary Series

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# Introduction to the Series

This series started out as personal Bible study notes. It was not originally intended to go further. It was originally intended simply as a means for the author to demonstrate some understanding of God's Word. Although having studied the Scriptures for 30+ years, 1 John was the first attempt at a truly in-depth study of a complete book followed by pulling the results into something akin to a book, which has now been reformatted and made freely available here.

This series proceeds under several important understandings. First, that the Bible is the Word of God, and is, as stated in many modern creeds, "the final authority on faith and practice." While you as the reader may take a different view, know that such a view contrasts sharply with the writers of the Bible themselves. And bringing such a view into a study of Scripture will necessarily color your interpretation.

Second, that the Bible is true and accurate in what it purports to teach. If you are seeking to prove (or disprove) the authenticity of the Bible, this is not the series for you. The accuracy of the Bible is assumed, so no attempt has been made to defend it.

Third, and perhaps most important of all, that the central message of the Bible is that of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The events and teaching of the Old Testament lead up to the gospel, and the books of Acts-Revelation spring from the gospel. If you are unfamiliar with the Gospel, then you are encouraged to read the Gospels, particularly John, before beginning any other book of Scripture.

Every effort has been made to remain faithful to the text of Scripture and to the original intent of the authors. Therefore, what you will see in this series is "plain sense interpretation." The series is not based on a specific translation, nor does it reflect any

one tradition of Christianity. As much as possible, the author has allowed the text to speak for itself.

Of course, these commentaries cannot (and certainly *should not*) replace the individual study of Scripture itself. At best, a commentary can give some guidance on how one should think about Scripture and put things into perspective. However, one should never fall into the trap of taking doctrine from commentaries or other secondhand sources when it comes to Scripture. In this, the Reformers were eloquent in their simple statement of *sola scriptura*.

## **A Note on Formatting and Content**

Commentaries in this series are not designed to be full verse-by-verse commentaries. Not every verse is given the same amount of attention. This is not to suggest that some verses are unimportant or less important than others. If the Holy Spirit chose to allow any words into Scripture, then they certainly do have relevance. Rather, the idea behind the format is to concentrate on the overall picture and thought patterns of the authors.

This series was deliberately written to appeal to one who may not have a great foundation in Scripture. It was not designed to be “scholarly” in nature (though careful research has been done at all points). It contains notes that help explain some of the concepts, such as technical or theological terms along with important information regarding meaning of words in the original languages. Rather than placing them in the text, footnotes are given to this information. This allows the reader to come back to those notes later but does not interrupt the train of thought. While attention is given to difficult or controversial passages (e.g., John 7:53-8:11), no attempt has been made to claim “the final argument” on any question. Rather the treatment of controversies in this series is meant to stimulate your own thinking on the subject.

In the end, any commentary or book is only as helpful as the Holy Spirit allows it to be. If, during your use of this you find enlightenment through the Holy Spirit, that is the only thing a true servant of Christ can ask.

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# Introduction to John's Gospel

The gospel of John is one of the best known and best-loved books of the Bible. It contains many well-known passages, such as John 3:16, called the “gospel in a nutshell,” as well as the famous story of the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11). It offers an uncomplicated look at the life of Christ and the message of the Gospel. More than any other, John's gospel gives a clear explanation on the nature of true belief and salvation. If one only had John's gospel to read and no other books, the spiritual riches from the book would never be exhausted.

## Authorship and Date

The fourth gospel is commonly believed to have been written by the apostle John. Though some have disputed the claim over the years, the evidence is strong, both externally (through church history and tradition) and internally. The classic argument for John's authorship of this Gospel takes the form of concentric circles, starting from the general and proceeding to the specific – the actual author. We know that the author of John was: a) a Jew, b) a Jew of Palestine, c) an eyewitness of what he describes, d) an apostle, e) one of the three “inner apostles” – meaning Peter, James and John, and f) the apostle John.<sup>1</sup>

The most common view of the date of writing holds that the gospel was written between 80-90 A.D., probably from Ephesus. This comes from Irenaeus, an early church father, who wrote in the second century. Irenaeus' information is significant because he was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself knew John personally. Though there are some questions related to the destruction of the Temple when dating John's gospel, this view seems to be most likely.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), loc. 128-131, Kindle Edition.

## Purpose

Like all the writers of the New Testament, John wrote for a specific purpose. He specifically states that his purpose is evangelical in nature: “[S]o that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). John’s intent is to show that Jesus is not just the Son of David, not just the Son of Man, but the eternal Son of God. He does this through recounting seven “signs” as proof. The signs are: *turning the water to wine* (2:1-2); *healing the royal official’s son* (4:43-54); *healing the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda* (5:1-9); *the feeding of the 5,000* (6:1-15); *Jesus walking on the water* (6:16-21); *healing the man born blind* (9:1-34); *raising Lazarus from the dead* (11:1-57).<sup>2</sup>

## Themes

There are many themes running throughout John’s gospel. Many of them are set in contrasts. The two most obvious themes revolve around light vs. dark (1:4-5; 3:19-20) and belief vs. unbelief (John 9:35-41; 12:35-43). Another theme, that of the Holy Spirit, is shown by the similarities between earthly symbols and the Spirit (water and the Spirit, wind and the Spirit, etc.). In fact, John’s gospel is the only gospel that gives us detailed information about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

## Outline

Many different ways to outline John’s gospel exist. We have chosen a simple chronological approach. As the life of Jesus unfolds, one gets the sense that Jesus is marching toward an unyielding destiny, and He is just as unyielding, refusing to turn from it. Our basic outline then looks like this:

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<sup>2</sup> Some see an eighth sign in Jesus’ own resurrection. Indeed, this is the ultimate sign that He is the Son of God. However, John does not indicate that this is one of the signs he refers to, so most choose to not include it in the list of John’s signs.

- I. Preparation of the Ministry of the Word (1:1-2:12)
- II. The Public Ministry of the Word--Year 1 (2:13-4:54)
- III. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 2 (Ch. 5)
- IV. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Galilee (Ch. 6)
- V. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Judea (7:1-12:50)
- VI. The Word Ministers to His Own (13:1-17:26)
- VII: The Word Glorifies the Father (18:1-19:42)
- VIII: The End of the Earthly Ministry of the Word (20:1-21:25)



# I. Preparation of the Ministry of the Word (1:1-2:12)

[Read John 1:1-2:12](#)

The first part of John's Gospel introduces us to "the Word," the phrase John uses to describe Christ. John does not immediately name Jesus as the Word, but the development of the theme of the Word along with the immediate testimony of John the Baptizer leave no doubt as to the identity of the Word.

## A) Revelation of the Word and the Light (1:1-5)

Similar to Mark's Gospel, John does not start his Gospel with the birth of Christ. However, whereas Mark started with the preaching of John the Baptizer, John takes us all the way back to "the beginning," bringing to mind the words of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." There are a few important things that John tells us about the Word:

- *The Word "was with God."* This would seem to imply that the Word (whomever he is) is different from God, and indeed, the Word has a distinct personality and will (though He later tells us that He only does as the Father bids Him, the phrase "the Word" [Greek *logos*] refers to not only "words" as communication but also conveys the personality of the speaker).
- *The Word "was God."* Though possessing a unique personality and will, the Word "was God," implying not only equality but unity of purpose and essence.
- *The Word is Creator.* John tells us, "He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him" (vv. 2-3a, ESV). Since only God is Creator (Genesis 1:1), John clearly establishes the deity of the Word. Since He is the Creator, he is therefore uncreated.
- *The Word has life by His own existence.* Verse 4 tells us, "He had life in Himself, and His life was the light for all men."

As the uncreated Word, not only does He have life, but He is the source of all life. And it is that eternal life that Christ has that is the light (eternal hope) of men. That light was so strong that not even the darkness of human sin could overcome it (v. 5).

## **B) Introduction of the Witness (1:6-13)**

John next introduces us to the witness, a man “whose name was John [the Baptizer]” (v. 6).<sup>3</sup> He was sent by God, in the language of the prophets of old. As He would later confess that he was not the Light, only a witness. John contrasts “the witness to the Light” with the True Light. The world, John says, did not recognize the true Light--the very One who created the world! The world did not know Him (v. 10), and His own people (the Jewish nation) did not receive Him (v. 11).

But, John says, there were people who *did* receive the Light. To those He gave the right to become “children of God” (v. 12). These children are not earthly children, in that they were not born of flesh and blood or of a man’s will, but “born of God.” We see this contrast even in the preaching of John the Baptizer. Many did not receive his word, and thus did not know the One who stood among them. But many did receive his word and prepared their hearts for the Light.

## **C) Identification of the Light (1:14-18)**

Next John turns to the identification of the Light. All that he has written before connects with what he writes now, so that the connection is plain to see. First, John says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (v. 14a). So, the uncreated, begotten of the Father, Creator of the Universe put on human skin and frailty and stooped to walk among His creation. This was not merely taking the “form” of a man; John asserts that God actually became man, with all the attendant needs, desires and emotions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These comments refer to John as “the Baptizer” to avoid confusion, as it is misleading to refer to him as “the Baptist.”

<sup>4</sup> We learn in this and the other Gospels that Jesus did indeed eat, drink, sleep, weep, and show anger, for example. And of course He bled when wounded.

Second, John reminds his readers that he is writing as an eyewitness (v. 14b). He asserts the same thing in his first letter: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1, ESV).<sup>5</sup>

Third, we are told that the Word was full of “grace and truth,” indicating that these two concepts are not opposing forces, but rather united in the Person of the Word. John does, however, seem to make a distinction between “the law,” which came through Moses, and “grace and truth,” which he says comes through Jesus Christ--thereby identifying Christ as the Word made flesh.

Finally, John tells us that Christ came for the purpose of revealing the Father. Though there were men who walked with God throughout history (Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, for example), none have been said to have known God fully. Christ came for that purpose--to make God fully known to humanity.

#### **D) Testimony of the Witness (1:19-34)**

Before turning to the ministry of the Word, John tells of the testimony of John the Baptizer, the one sent to prepare the way. John was baptizing in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River, and “the Jews sent priests and Levites”--the religious authorities of the day.<sup>6</sup> They wanted to see what this was all about, and more importantly wanted to see if it represented a threat to the established order. Their questioning reveals their motive.

- “*Are you the Christ?* The Messiah, originally it meant the one who would save Israel from their sin (Isa. 53); however, by

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<sup>5</sup> Here John links the same two ideas--Christ was from the beginning and the apostles have seen and touched him, implying the Incarnation.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the word “Jews” in John’s Gospel seems to signify that attitudes had hardened against the disciples of Christ by the time he wrote. The priests were descended from Aaron and represented God to the people and the people to God, they were also known as scholars of the Law. The Levites were those responsible for maintaining the Temple.

the time of Christ it had diminished to the person who would lead Israel out of bondage to Rome and restore the kingdom--thus a political figure.

- *Are you Elijah?* The leaders referred to a prophecy in Micah that Elijah would return before the coming of the Lord.<sup>7</sup> Jesus would later identify John the Baptizer as Elijah (Matt. 11:14), but also predicted that Elijah “will come again” (Matt. 17:11). John refuses to claim the title for himself.
- *Are you the Prophet?* The leaders referred to a prophecy given to Moses by God that God would raise up a prophet like Moses for His people “and they will listen to him” (Deut. 18:15-18).

Once John disclaimed all the titles, the leaders were confused. They gave him a chance to say who he was himself, and he replied, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said” (John 1:23, ESV). He only claimed that He was from God and was preparing the way for the coming of the Lord--which they should have immediately understood as a reference to Elijah.

The leaders were unconvinced. They asked him, “Why are you baptizing then?” They were really asking, “What right do you have to baptize? You have no authority.” His reply contrasted his own ministry with the One coming after Him. “I baptize with water,” he said (v. 26), meaning that his baptism was only a token baptism. The real “baptizing” would be done by the one who stood in their midst that they did not know. In fact, that One would baptize with the Holy Spirit (v. 33).

The next day, he was even more specific. He saw Jesus walking toward him and said two things outright that, had the leaders been around and listening, would probably have made them arrest Jesus on the spot. First, he says, “Look! Here comes the Lamb of God, who will take away the sin of the world” (v. 29). The Jew who knew his history would have immediately recognized the significance of the assertion. He was saying that

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<sup>7</sup> See Micah 4:6. This is, in fact, the last words of the Old Testament.

Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would, by His death, atone for the sins of the world (and note he said “the world,” not just Israel).

John the Baptizer linked this back to his statements the previous day, and then made the second assertion. This one was even more bold: “I am telling you the truth; I have seen Him, and He [Jesus] is the Son of God” (v. 34). How did he know this? He tells us that God showed him that “The person on whom you see the Spirit descend on in the form of a dove is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (v. 33). Though the Baptizer, near the end of his life, would have his own doubts, his witness here is strong and unequivocal.

### **E) Calling of the First Disciples (1:35-51)**

There are two more steps in John’s introduction of the Word and His preparation for public ministry. The first step comes in the calling of the first disciples. It’s noteworthy that John includes these events but does not bother to name all the disciples (later to be called apostles) as other Gospels do. John has a specific purpose in writing, and he includes events to illustrate that purpose.

The first event involves the curiosity of two disciples of John the Baptizer. As Jesus walking toward him and two of his disciples, he repeated an earlier phrase “Behold, the Lamb of God” (v. 36, ESV).<sup>8</sup> John had apparently taught them enough that they wanted to know more and decided to follow Jesus. The question that Jesus asked of them, “What are you seeking” (v. 38) was meant to see if they only had only idle curiosity or if they were true “seekers.” Their answer (really a question), evidently satisfied Him, and He invited them to where He was staying. It was late in the afternoon, so they probably stayed overnight with Him.<sup>9</sup> And they brought a guest with them.

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<sup>8</sup> John did not repeat the second half of his testimony here (“that takes away the sin of the world”). He apparently was more concerned with reminding his disciples of the title of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> In Jewish reckoning, the day began at sunrise (about 6 a.m.), so the “tenth hour” would be about 4 p.m.

John writes that one of the two who followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. As soon as they knew where Jesus was staying, Andrew went and found Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41). Presumably he based his conclusion on what John the Baptizer had taught them, since they had yet to talk with Jesus. Not only did Jesus welcome the uninvited guest Simon, but he changed his name! Previously, he had been called Simon, but Jesus tells him, "Your name was Simon, now you will be known as Cephas" (v. 42). Here, as in most of the Scriptures, a name is important. John translates the name to Peter, which means a rock.<sup>10</sup> For Peter, it would be a prophetic name.

The next day, Jesus decided to take initiative. He went to Galilee and found Philip, and simply said "Follow Me" (v. 43). What went through Philip's mind, we don't know, but it must have taken courage to suddenly abandon all that he had to follow Jesus. Apparently, Jesus made such an impression that Philip found his brother Nathanael and told him "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v. 45, NIV).<sup>11</sup>

Nathanael's response was skeptical. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It seems likely that Nazareth did not have a good reputation at that time, given Nathanael's response. Philip, however, did not argue with him. He simply said, "Come and see." In other words, "Judge for yourself!" A very good response to someone who is skeptical of Christ.

Based on the exchange of vv. 47-51, many commentators suggest that Nathanael was reading the story of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:1-17). Whether or not that was the case, Jesus won him over when He told Nathanael, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (v. 48, NIV). Nathanael marvels at this and proclaims that Christ is the "Son of God . . .

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<sup>10</sup> Greek *petros*. The KJV, being literal, translated John's statement as "which is by interpretation a stone."

<sup>11</sup> It is likely that Nathanael was a student of the law, since Philip referred to the Law and the prophets. Also, the phrase "under the fig tree" (v. 48) was used in literature of the time to describe meditation on the Law.

the King of Israel" (v. 49). One thing is certain here, in that Jesus, when telling Nathanael about the "greater things" he would see, foretold how He would be the mediator between God and man.

### **F) Sign #1: The Wedding at Cana (2:1-12)**

The final phase in John's Gospel of preparation for the public ministry of Jesus takes place at a wedding to which He, His mother and His disciples had been invited. This event is rightfully placed in His "preparation" time, since it really was not a public miracle (as will be noted shortly), but it does serve as a bridge to what comes next, since John identifies it as the first of Christ's signs that reveal His glory. With Cana most likely having been a rather small village (probably about nine miles from Nazareth), such weddings were often community celebrations.

As such, Mary's words to Jesus, "They have no more wine" (v. 3), had a ring of urgency. Such a situation would bring great embarrassment to the newly married couple that would probably haunt them their entire lives. His response to her, though seeming harsh to modern ears, was actually very polite in the culture of the day. He says that his "hour" (the time when His purpose for being on the earth would find fulfillment) had not yet come (v. 4).

Mary's response seems to indicate two things: First, that she understood that Jesus was no longer under her authority, and second that He had authority to act. She simply said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you" (v. 5, which seems to have an authoritative ring in itself).

Jesus made a lot of wine, about 120 gallons. If it was then diluted in the traditional way (three parts water to one part wine), that would provide enough wine to last several days. It is noteworthy here that the only people who knew where the "best" wine had come from were the servants (and presumably the disciples, based on v. 11), hence why this event is not truly part of His public ministry--He did not declare Himself. And because of this miracle, "his disciples believed in him" (v. 11), but it is not recorded that anyone else did likewise. Thus, His time of preparation was over, and His public ministry began.



## II. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 1 (2:13-4:54)

[Read John 2:13-4:54](#)

At this point, Jesus begins His public ministry. From reading John's Gospel, one can get the sense that Jesus' time is a time of setting His face toward a specific and unyielding goal. Part II of John's gospel is all about revealing the true nature of the Father to His Chosen People--but not only to the Jews but to the Samaritans and Gentiles as well, as evident by the exchange with the woman at the well (4:4-26) and the healing of the royal official's son (who was probably a Gentile, see 4:46-54).

### **A) Cleansing the Temple (2:13-25)<sup>12</sup>**

Jesus begins His ministry with a bang, as it were. He travels to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast (the first of three in His public ministry). While there, He sees "those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there" (v. 14, ESV). If a person or family did not have the necessary sacrificial animals, they were allowed to purchase them--this was allowed for the benefit of pilgrims under the Law. The "money-changers" refer to those who exchanged foreign currency for Tyrian currency for the payment of the Temple tax (required of all adult males). The moneychangers were using this as an opportunity to make a profit, and this is what Jesus objected to, that they were turning the house of God into "a house of trade" (v.16).

It should be noted that there is no record of Christ using the "whip of cords" on a person or that He actually hit an animal with

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<sup>12</sup> There is debate over this event, and where it should fall in the narrative of Christ's life. John's Gospel places a Temple cleaning at the start of Christ's public ministry; the other Gospels place one during the last week of Christ's life (Passion week). However, the details of the two events are somewhat different, so it is entirely possible (even probable) that there were in fact two cleansings of the Temple.

it. The scene in the Temple court must have been chaotic, however, with the moneychangers trying to get their money off the ground, the animals running to and fro, and the leaders yelling at Jesus.

In typical fashion for the religious leaders of the day, they demanded a sign, i.e., some symbol that would substantiate Jesus' right to do what He did. This would be a common demand throughout His public ministry. Each time a sign was asked for, Jesus always pointed to His death and resurrection. Here, he states, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19).<sup>13</sup>

If the disciples could not understand the concepts of His death and resurrection, the Jewish leaders seem to have had no chance at all, for they were clearly confused. They thought He was referring to Herod's Temple, completed some 46 years prior (v. 20). John (writing in the vision of hindsight) explains that He was referring to His death and resurrection. Thus, when He was raised, this event came to the disciples' mind and they believed both the Old Testament scriptures written about Him and the word that Jesus had spoken (vv. 21-22).

Though John is not specific about the "signs" Jesus performed during this Passover, he nonetheless states that many people believed in Jesus because of those signs (v. 23). Jesus, however, knowing all things, knew that the faith of men was weak and limited, especially those who believed Him because of signs (v. 25).

## **B) Nicodemus and The New Birth (3:1-21)<sup>14</sup>**

This section contains the first of three "personal interviews" with Jesus. Here, we see Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Later we will see

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<sup>13</sup> In Matthew 12:38-41, Jesus tells the leaders that the only sign they would be given would be "the sign of Jonah." As He elaborates, it is clear that He is referring to His death and resurrection.

<sup>14</sup> Commentators treat this passage in several ways. Some hold that Jesus' quotation ends at v. 15, and vv. 16-21 contains explanatory comments by John. Some hold that vv. 16-21 are part of Jesus' words, but were not directed at Nicodemus. Finally, some hold that the entire passage (vv. 1-21) should be considered as one event. That is the view taken here. In any case, the message of vv. 16-21 is an essential part of the Gospel message.

the Samaritan woman at the well and the (probably Gentile) royal official. Together, these three represent the mission of the Son to the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles--thus, the entire world.

Much has been made over the years about Nicodemus coming to Jesus "by night." There need not be any negative connotations about this, however. As a member of the Sanhedrin and an important teacher, Nicodemus would have been busy during the day. That being said, he is named as a "secret disciple," and his words to the Sanhedrin in defense of Jesus in John 7 show a great deal of caution. In any event, based on later accounts, this encounter impacted him greatly.

He starts with a simple greeting, "Rabbi," a courteous expression of respect, meaning "Teacher." Throughout the brief dialog, there is no hint of disrespect in Nicodemus, though there is obvious confusion. The use of "we" in v. 2 suggests that he is linking himself to the people who "believed in Jesus' name" as a result of the signs they had seen (2:23). He acknowledges at least that Christ is a "teacher come from God," and he, like the people, bases his conclusion on the fact that no one could do such things apart from God (v.2).<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' reply seems a bit cryptic, particularly since there was no question asked. The use of "truly, truly" here is a phrase common in John's Gospel, usually signifying a new revelation of the mind of God.<sup>16</sup> He tells Nicodemus that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. His reply seems to say, "Nicodemus, if you want to see the kingdom of God, mental assent is not enough. There must be a fundamental change in your nature, through the new birth."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This is not an altogether accurate statement, since Jesus taught that false Messiahs would arise and deceive many by signs, and He taught against those who did such signs but were not submitted to Him in obedience (see Matt. 24:24, Luke 6:46-50).

<sup>16</sup> Greek *amen*, a transliteration of the same Hebrew word, spoken by God to mean "it is and shall be so," and spoken by men to mean "let it be so." Christ using the double *amen* in John's Gospel may be a revelation of his being both God and man. See *VED*, s.v. "Amen."

<sup>17</sup> The phrase translated "born again" (v. 3, ESV following the KJV, Greek *gennao anothēn*), has the meaning of a second birth, which is why Nicodemus is confused. Jesus, however, makes clear that this "new" or "second birth" is a spiritual birth, not a physical

Apparently, Nicodemus takes this “second birth” to be a literal one and scoffs at the idea: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born” (v. 4, ESV). Jesus makes it clear, however, that He is not talking about a birth from flesh, for “[t]hat which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6). This helps explain the meaning of verse 5, which has been debated over the centuries: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” One traditional interpretation of this verse is that one has to be baptized with water to be saved. However, this interpretation is untenable, in that it contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture that salvation is by faith alone.

In the whole passage of John 3:3-9, it is clear Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth (otherwise, Nicodemus would not be so confused). Therefore, v. 5 must be taken with the context in mind. The key to the verse is found in the word translated “and.” The Greek word for this is *kai*, which is often just a connective word. However, in many instances it can (and should) be translated by “even” or “indeed.” Translated this way, the verse would read, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water, even [*or* indeed] the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” The interpretation of this then is that Jesus is using an earthly symbol (water), something Nicodemus would understand, to represent a spiritual concept or entity (the Holy Spirit).

To conclude His explanation of the new birth, Jesus likens the new birth (those born of the Spirit) to the blowing of the wind (v. 8). We cannot see the wind, only the results of it blowing. Likewise, we cannot see the Spirit change a person on the inside, but we can see the results of the new birth. One obvious conclusion to be drawn from this passage is that one who has been born again will experience change, as 1 John makes clear.

After Nicodemus again demonstrates a lack of understanding, Jesus seems to say, “How can you call yourself a teacher of Israel? I’ve spoken to you of earthly things [concepts

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one. See *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), s.v., “again” (hereafter VED).

easier to understand] and you don't believe, so how can you believe if I tell you of the truly heavenly concepts" (v. 12).

Whether or not verses 16-21 are part of Jesus' words, it is clear by the context that they are linked, for they form a natural progression. Jesus links His own death ("lifting up") to the result ("whoever believes in Him may have eternal life"). Then, He tells why this has to happen--the love of God. God loved the world--His creation--so much that He gave His Son so that whoever believes might not be judged or perish but would instead have eternal life. Then the contrast is given: those who believe in Christ are not condemned, but those who do not believe are "already" condemned. The idea is that all stand condemned, but those who believe in Christ are taken from the state of condemnation to the state of having eternal life.

And it is not Christ that condemns them, for He did not come to judge or condemn, but to save. The unbeliever is condemned because he walks in the darkness, doing the things that are fit only for darkness, and refuses to allow his deeds to be exposed to the light. This prevents him from experiencing the new birth and having the eternal life of which Christ speaks. This concept of the new birth is central to an understanding of the Gospel, so it would be helpful to read the essay on this topic found in the Appendix.

### **C) John the Baptizer's Final Witness (3:22-36)<sup>18</sup>**

Even though John does not tell us specifically where Jesus and His disciples went, it must have been relatively close to the location of John the Baptizer, since the author somewhat links their two baptisms (vv. 22-23).<sup>19</sup> The mention of "a Jew," probably

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<sup>18</sup> Like vv. 16-21, there is debate over whether vv. 31-36 represent the words of John the Baptizer, Jesus, or the apostle John's reflections on the event. Regardless of how this passage is linked to the previous verses, the overall teaching of Scripture is not affected. In this instance, it seems most likely that vv. 31-36 are John's comments on the witness of John the Baptizer, since the style of these verses is not consistent with how the Baptizer often preached and spoke.

<sup>19</sup> Contrary to views on both sides of the mode of baptism issue, verse 23 does not make a case for one side or the other. While the verse does say "there was much water," the name "Aenon" literally means "springs." ESV renders the verse "plentiful water," which

refers to the Jewish leadership, since that is how John normally refers to them. He records that there was a discussion between this Jew and some of the Baptizer's disciples about "purification." What was the discussion about?

If we link verse 26 to this discussion, then we might have an idea. The disciples of John the Baptizer said to him, "Teacher, the One that you identified as the Messiah is baptizing also, and now everyone is going to Him to be baptized instead of you!" They felt that Jesus' popularity was eclipsing the Baptizer's. Perhaps the "Jew" had asked which of the two baptisms was really valid.

As he did earlier, the Baptizer disclaims any right to take credit. He reminded his disciples that he told them his job was only to prepare the way. He compared himself to the friend of the bridegroom. The bride, he says, belongs to the bridegroom, not the friend (the "bride" here refers to anyone who receives Christ, not specifically to the church or Israel). The friend expresses joy that the Bridegroom has now come, and unashamedly steps back, to give place. He pointedly says, "He must increase, I must decrease." To emphasize the point, the apostle John adds his own thoughts in verses 31-36. Though the Baptizer's ministry was given by God, nevertheless he, being of the earth, speaks in an earthly way. The one from above (Christ), however, is above all and has the right to declare what He has seen and heard.

Since Christ has testified of God, then, John says that whoever receives His testimony "takes sides" with God. Not only do they confess that what God says is true, but also they experience that very fact themselves (v. 33). And the testimony of God is that He loves the Son and "have given all things into His hand" (v. 35). Therefore, John concludes, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (v. 36).

#### **D) The Woman at the Well (4:1-26)**

After the discussion about baptism, Jesus decides to leave Judea and return to Galilee. He apparently does this because the

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may simply mean that John needed space to baptize all the people that were coming to him (though more and more began to go to Jesus and the disciples).

Pharisees learned His popularity was on the rise and was surpassing John the Baptizer's. In order to avoid any unnecessary confrontation, Jesus decided to move on to Galilee, where He had previously been welcomed.

The direct path to Galilee would take Jesus and the disciples through Samaria, and Jews universally avoided that area, in order to avoid being defiled. Jesus, however, "had to" pass through Samaria. He "had to" in the sense that He was to be the Savior of the world (John 3:16), not just the Jews. So, with His mission in mind, He and the disciples traveled to Samaria, and ended up near the village of Sychar, where Jacob's well was. His disciples sensibly went into the village to buy food, and Jesus sat beside the well, being tired. It was likely hot, since it was about noon (the sixth hour), and probably during the late spring or summer, and He would have been thirsty.

We know little about the Samaritan woman who came to draw water. Midday would have been an odd time to draw water, being the hottest part of the day. She either came at this time of the day because she needed more water, or because she did not want to meet the other women of the village. Based on what Jesus reveals about her, it is likely she was shunned because of her lifestyle.

In any event, Jesus politely asks for a drink of water. As He often did, Christ starts with the earthly, physical things before moving to the spiritual. The woman exhibits a bit of sarcasm in her reply--by the time of Christ there was deep animosity between the Jews and Samaria (who the Jews considered half-bred and idolaters). Her reply almost says, "You Jews stay away from us Samaritans--until you need something" (v. 9).<sup>20</sup>

It is noteworthy that Jesus refuses to respond in kind, but instead moves to the spiritual. It is almost as though He may have smiled and said, "Ma'am, if you only knew...." If she only knew Who was speaking to her ("the gift of God"), she would ask and would receive not just physical water but living water--a phrase to

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<sup>20</sup> Whether verse 8 is part of her reply or John's interjection to explain the situation, the result is the same. The literal meaning of the construction is of the sense "Jews use nothing that the Samaritans have used."

be repeated later, just before another famous encounter with a woman (John 7:37-38). Again, Jesus uses the earthly to explain the spiritual. He speaks of a spring of water that, unlike Jacob's well, quenches a true thirst once-for-all. This well will never run dry, as it is constantly fed from a spring outside the well.

Like Nicodemus, the woman is focused on the physical--and as He did with the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus insists on lifting the conversation higher, to the realm of the spiritual. The woman pointedly asks, "Just how are you going to get this living water? If you can do that, give me some too so I won't have to come here anymore" (vv. 11-12, 15). The woman is still caught up in the physical need, though her desire to no longer have to visit the well may also be linked to the very reason she is here at noon.

Before answering, Jesus tells the woman to go and get her husband (v. 16). He does this for two main reasons. First, it was socially improper at the time for Him to talk with a woman alone without her husband present. Second, and more importantly, He used it to expose her real need. She abruptly replies, "I have no husband," and Jesus reaches in and exposes the dark truth: "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true" (vv. 17-18, ESV).

One can almost hear the contrast between the truth of her soul and the living water He offers her. She was seeking something that only He can provide. And because she never found what she truly needed, the cycle continued over and over, through five husbands and her current "non-husband." It is important to note here that Christ does not reveal her character in order to judge her. Rather, He does so to help her confront the real need of her soul--Himself.

The woman, however, shifts the conversation to a topic she is more comfortable with--religion. She says, in effect, "Since you seem to be a prophet, answer this for me. Where is the right place to worship God? Here, or in Jerusalem as you Jews assert" (vv. 19-20). Religious discussions of this nature are always easier than dealing with the emptiness inside the human soul. Jesus, however, refuses to engage in the debate, though He does seem to

vindicate the Jews, at least to some extent. In telling the woman that “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (v. 21), Jesus is indicating that the presence of God will no longer reside in a single earthly place (Acts 17:24).

His reference to salvation being “from the Jews” (John 4:24) reiterates that fact that God chose the Jewish nation to be His own and to be His representatives on the earth. In addition, of course, the words have a direct reference to Himself. He sees Samaritan worship as, at best, confused (“you worship what you do not know”), but in the same breath allows that all humankind—including Samaritans--will be able to worship God, as long as they do so in “spirit and truth” (vv. 23, 24).<sup>21</sup> What does this phrase mean? In the larger context of John’s Gospel, it implies two things: First, that true worship of God is more than just outward appearance, but springs from inside (i.e., the spirit). Second, that true worship is “in truth,” i.e., without hypocrisy or falsehood. In direct application to the woman, it also means the worshiper deals honestly with God, not evading or skirting the issues, as she had done earlier.

The woman’s answer comes across as a bit flippant, as though to say, “Whatever. When Messiah [the Christ] comes, He will explain everything to us” (v. 25). Jesus isn’t offended by her dismissive statement but gives the first public confession of His identity to her: “I am [he] that speaks to you” (v. 26). Since “he” is not present in the original Greek, the phrase could rightly be rendered “I am that speaks to you.” Christ spoke the same construction (Greek *ego eimi*, “I am”) to the Pharisees, and it is clear they understood His meaning enough to pick up stones (see 8:58-59).

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<sup>21</sup> The reference to “God is spirit” (v. 24) is more than a definition or description of God (it is at best a woefully incomplete one anyway). Instead the thought is that since God is spirit (not encased in physical material as the creation is), man must worship “in” or “by” the spirit, the means of communing with God. The term for spirit in this verse (Greek *pneuma*) can mean either the Holy Spirit or man’s spirit. However, in order to have a right spirit to worship God, man must first be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, so both can be seen in this construction.

The woman must have pondered that for a bit, as the disciples arrived. She does finally make the connection between her assertion that He is a prophet and His self-confessed identity. There need not be an analogy in the woman's leaving her water jar--though the context suggests that she hurried back to the village and carrying it would have slowed her down. She may have left it for Jesus' use after all that. In any event, she returned to the village, and she told the people, "There's a man at the well who told me everything I've done" (v. 29). The implication seems to be "... and He still associated with me!" Though not a ringing endorsement, she tentatively asks, "Could this be the Christ?" It seems that the people who once shunned the woman did not hesitate to act on her information, for they immediately left the village and headed for Jesus.

As they were coming, the disciples urged Jesus to eat some food. He startled them by saying "I have My own food" (v. 32). Again, Jesus is speaking of more than just physical sustenance, for He has to correct the disciples' misunderstanding. He expands on a statement He made to His mother at the Temple approximately 18 years ago. Not only must He be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49), but also He esteems His Father's business more highly than any earthly food.

Jesus must have pointed at the people coming toward them as He explained. One can envision His gesturing with His arm toward the oncoming crowd: "Look at the harvest!" He tells His disciples that much sowing has already been done, and now the reaping can begin, indeed it has already begun.

The pattern of the Samaritans is one that is repeated over and over in the New Testament. One person gives witness to another (or others). Those people believe, first because of the testimony they hear. But that is not enough. The faith must become theirs. In this instance, after hearing the teaching of Christ for themselves, they said to the woman. "Now we believe for ourselves! He really is the Savior of the world" (v. 42). It is noteworthy that they mentioned "the world," since Jesus has travelled outside of Jewish lands to proclaim His message--this in

fact is a central theme of John's Gospel, in that salvation is for all, not just for the Jews.

### **E) Sign #2: The Royal Official's Son (4:43-54)**

After staying with the Samaritans two days, Jesus completes His original trip and returns to Galilee. John's parenthetical note in verse 44 seems to be one of setting the scene, and thus is linked to the events forthcoming. John indicates that the Galileans had been at the Feast in John 2, and thus would have seen the "signs" He performed. It is likely that they hoped to see Him perform more signs. Because of that, the Galileans were happy to welcome Him home, as it were, but later, when He refused to perform signs and miracles for the sake of displaying His power, they shunned Him.

While in Cana (v. 46), a "royal official" came from Capernaum. In all likelihood, this would have been a Gentile official in Herod's court. This official's son was very sick, "at the point of death" (v. 48, ESV). He approached Jesus and asked that Jesus heal his son. Jesus' reply seems rather impolite and insensitive. However, His response, in addition to being a reaction to the Galileans' curiosity, sought to see if there was more than just the desire for a miracle. The "you" of v. 48 (both instances) is plural, indicating that Jesus was speaking to a group (probably linking the official to the Galileans as a whole).

The official pleads with Jesus, making no excuses, defenses, or arguments--only a simple statement of desperation: "Sir, please come down and heal my son before he dies" (v. 49). In return, Jesus simply says, "Go, for your son lives." He made no dramatic motions or pronouncements (e.g., "Lazarus! Come forth!"), only what seems to be a simple statement of fact. The official is then caught in somewhat of a dilemma of faith. He could demand some assurance from Jesus (a sign, as it were, to authenticate Jesus' word), or he could take Jesus at His word and go home, believing that his son was healed. He chose the latter--arguably the harder of the two choices--and left to return home.

In following Jesus' instruction to return home, the official exercised faith (for true faith is obedient faith). He had no way of

knowing with 100% certainty that he would find his son even alive, let alone healed. It was not saving faith at this point, however, only the faith that Jesus had healed his son. Along the way, he was met by servants who had rushed to tell him some amazing news. “Your son is healed and is getting better” (v. 51). Out of curiosity perhaps or a sense of confirmation, he asked when his son began to get better. “At the seventh hour [about 1 p.m.] yesterday, that’s when the fever left him,” they replied (v. 52). The official realized that was when Jesus told him, “Go, for your son lives.” John then records, “And he and everyone in his household believed in Jesus” (v. 53), and notes this is the second sign. The belief evidenced in verse 53 is saving faith, not just because of the signs Jesus did, but it is the same type of faith John writes of in 1:12-13.

# III. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 2 (Ch. 5)

[Read John 5](#)

The first year of Jesus' ministry has now come to a close. While there were many that believed in Him, many more--particularly the Jewish leaders--watched Him closely trying to find ways to discredit Him. We will see this trend continue in the second year of His ministry.

## **A) Sign #3: The Healing at the Pool (5:1-9)**

Some time after healing the royal official's son, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a "Feast of the Jews." The Feast is not named, and the language John uses to denote the passage of time (lit. "after these things") is vague enough that it is not possible to know how much time elapsed. John describes the Pool of Bethesda by the Sheep Gate.<sup>22</sup> Around this pool lay a multitude of people suffering from all manner of affliction. At various times the waters would be agitated and, according to tradition, the first to step into the waters when that happened would be healed of whatever ailed him.<sup>23</sup>

In the midst of this crowd lay a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (what condition he had or whether it was a condition from birth we do not know). Like many people that Jesus healed (physically and/or spiritually), we know very

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<sup>22</sup> John's use of the verb "is," as opposed to "was," has caused debate regarding the date that his Gospel was written. If the gospel was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., one might expect that he would write "There was in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate . . . ." However, there could be many reasons for the construction. John may have been looking forward to when Jerusalem would again be a city and have a Temple (linking it back to the past). It's also possible that he began the book before the destruction but did not complete it until later (the traditional date of his gospel is between 85-95 A.D.)

<sup>23</sup> Verses 3b-4, which are bracketed in many modern versions as non-original (or placed in the footnotes, e.g., ESV), state that an angel of the Lord stirred the water from time to time. Most scholars believe this to be a non-original passage that was added later.

little about him.<sup>24</sup> Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be healed” (v. 6). At first, this seems a rather obvious (if insensitive) question. Certainly no one would *want* to lay there thirty-eight years. Yet, Jesus is looking for more than just a “yes” or “no.” The man, instead of answering directly, shifts the blame. “I have no one to help me into the water [indicating that perhaps others who had been healed did have such aid]” (v. 7). He had lain so long that he despaired of hope, lost his will.

Instead of criticizing the man (as many are prone to do today), Jesus simply says, “Get up! Take your bedroll and go” (v. 8). John records that the man did not hesitate, but immediately stood up, not the halting rise of someone who had been injured but as though it had always been natural for him to do so. He grabbed his bedroll and began to walk. Notice that Jesus not only healed the physical condition but also cured the will, for without the will the man would have been unable to obey the command.

## **B) The Jews Oppose Jesus (5:10-18)**

Because it was a Sabbath when this miracle occurred, the Jewish leaders were indignant. “What are you doing? It’s the Sabbath, and you are not allowed to carry your bedroll on the Sabbath” (v. 9). They interpreted his actions as a form of work, in violation of the Fourth Commandment (Ex. 20:8-10). By the time of Christ, the Jews had built up a large number of commandments and traditions in order to avoid breaking even the smallest part of the Law--so much so that the Law was called a burden and a yoke.<sup>25</sup>

There is not a hint of thankfulness in the man, so, attempting to shift the blame again, he replies to the Jews, “The man who healed me, He told me to take up my bed and walk [so it becomes Jesus’ fault that the man is breaking the Law]” (v. 11). The Jews ask him, “Who is this man that would dare to tell another to break the Sabbath?” The man does not know, for Jesus had slipped back into the crowds (as was often the case in these miracles in the Temple).

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<sup>24</sup> But see comments around verse 14.

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 15:10 as an example.

John's use of the phrase "Jesus found him" in verse 14 suggests that Jesus purposely sought out the man. The reason for the search is obvious from His words: he was concerned about the man's spiritual condition. Jesus tells him, "Look, you have been healed. Stop sinning so that something worse will not happen to you." These words seem to indicate that the man's condition was a direct result of sin, whether a "consequence" (e.g., a drunk driver being injured or killed today) or a divine judgment of God. Either is possible and would merit the same response from Jesus. Jesus would later teach that not all disease is a result of sin (see John 9), so one must be careful to not build doctrine on a single passage. Jesus, however, knowing all, pointedly links the two in this incident.

Judging by his response, the man may have been offended. Instead of submitting in obedience, he goes back to the Jewish leaders and reports that it was Jesus who healed him, as if to cause trouble for Him, with some success. The Pharisees "persecute" Jesus, according to John (v. 16), though he is not specific as to what form that took.<sup>26</sup> In reply, Jesus gives an answer that explicitly gives His claim to deity, and it is clear that the leaders understood His claim: "My Father is working even now, and I am also working" (v. 17). The leaders rightly took this as a claim to be equal with God (v. 18). Therefore, they sought "all the more" to kill Him.

### **C) The Son Equal With the Father (5:19-47)**

Jesus did not just claim equality with God, but also *unity*. He described His unity as that of sonship (see His many references to "the Son"). He then proceeds to elaborate on the nature of His sonship:

- *The Father shows the Son all His works, so that the Son may also do them* (vv. 19-20). As He often does, Jesus claims to do nothing apart from His Father.
- *The Father has given all authority to the Son* (vv. 21-23). Jesus asserts that the Father has given the Son authority to judge,

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<sup>26</sup> Greek *dioko*, "to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away; harass, trouble, molest one."

that is “to give life to whomever He pleases.” The Father has given this authority “so that all may honor the Son,” meaning that he is due the same honor as the Father. In fact, whoever does not honor the Son, Jesus says, does not honor the Father.

Therefore, because of Jesus’ unique relationship, He declares that whoever hears (obeys) His word will live (“has crossed from death to life,” v. 24). Since Jesus only does what pleases the Father, even His judgment is true (v. 30).

Jesus then proves His case by calling witnesses, as it were. The first witness is John the Baptizer (vv. 33-35). Jesus knows better than to entrust Himself to human testimony (2:25), but He mentions John so that the leaders, being human like John, could relate and accept his testimony. Yet Jesus has an even stronger witness than John, the Father Himself. The Father testified of Jesus at His baptism (see Matthew 3:13-16) and would testify audibly several times more.<sup>27</sup> The final witness is the Scriptures that the leaders cling to. Jesus states that the Scriptures testify of Him, but the leaders are stubborn and spiritually blind, so that they will not go to Him to be saved. In fact, Jesus implies that they cannot believe Him as long as they seek human glory over the glory from the Father.

Having finished His case, Jesus notes that He does not accuse the unbelieving Jews before the Father (for He had not come to condemn). Their accuser, he says, would be Moses and the Scriptures, since Moses wrote of Him. Thus, since they do not believe (or obey) what Moses wrote, they will not believe Jesus (vv. 45-47).

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<sup>27</sup> John’s Gospel does not mention the Father’s voice at the baptism, but it does include the detail of the dove landing on Jesus, the sign by which the Baptizer knew Christ. John’s Gospel also mentions another time where the Father testified audibly of Jesus (John 12:28), but does not include the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).

## IV. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Galilee (Ch. 6)

[Read John 6](#)

### A) Sign #4: The Feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15)

Again, John signals an unknown passage of time, though verse 4 indicates that the time was close to the Passover (this would be the second of Jesus' public ministry).<sup>28</sup> Jesus (presumably with the disciples) crossed to "the other side" of Lake Galilee. Most likely they crossed to the north shore, and if we align John's Gospel with the others, we find that Jesus had withdrawn so that He and the disciples could rest (see Matt. 14:13-14; Mark 6:31-32). However, a large crowd followed them over. John makes no bones about why they followed--they saw the signs that He was doing (v. 2). He does not call them disciples and does not indicate that they "believed in His name," so we might call them, in modern language, "Jesus groupies."

Jesus sat on the mountain, likely to rest--this phrase is often used elsewhere to denote Him teaching, but no mention of teaching is given. In fact, He looks up and sees the crowd walking toward them. John's interjection of verse 4 seems, at first glance, to interrupt the flow. However, John always writes as he does with a specific purpose, and thus, he is linking these events with the Passover.

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<sup>28</sup> Since John names this feast, but does not name the Feast in chapter 5, and also names the last Passover in Jesus' public ministry, it is almost certain that the Feast of John 5 is not the Passover, though to suggest any other specific feast would merely be speculation, since not enough information is given. It is noteworthy that this is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. The accounts in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 9 give additional details that John omits. For example, we learn from the other accounts that this happened sometime after the death of John the Baptizer, and that it was after the return of the Twelve He commissioned as apostles.

Jesus poses a question to Philip, one of the first disciples and the one who brought Nathanael (see John 1:43-51): “Where can we get bread to feed all of these people” (v. 5). John realizes (probably later) that Jesus already knew what was to be done, so the question was asked to “test” Philip, to see how he would respond (v. 6).<sup>29</sup>

Philip is ready with an answer, but it falls short of the answer Jesus might have desired (though of course He already knew the answer). Philip blurts out, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite” (v. 7, NIV).<sup>30</sup> The extreme amount of money that Philip estimates would suggest a large measure of incredulity and, Jesus would say, a lack of faith.

Trying to be somewhat helpful, Andrew tells of the boy who apparently brought his own lunch (and perhaps dinner)--five loaves of bread and two fish. It is rather an amusing statement, when one considers the amount of food versus the five-thousand-plus crowd.<sup>31</sup> His own words echo this in verse 8: “But how far will that go among so many?”

Jesus doesn’t argue about the amount of food present. He simply tells the disciples to have the people sit in an orderly manner. Then Jesus took the food and gave thanks for it and distributed it among the people. It is clear that this miracle is akin to the story of the flour and oil of 1 Kings 17:7-16. The more that was given to the people, the more was produced, so that in the

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<sup>29</sup> Greek *peirazo*, “to try, make trial of, test: for the purpose of ascertaining his quality, or what he thinks, or how he will behave himself.”

<sup>30</sup> The phrase “half a year’s wages” is literally “two hundred *denarii*,” which would be about 200 days of labor for a common laborer or field worker, the *denarii* being about a day’s wage. The NIV and similar versions translate this into a phrase that modern readers might understand but has no real value since “half a year’s wages” today can mean a wide range of amounts. For example, for someone making \$10.00 per hour, a “day’s wage” on an 8 hour day would be \$80.00, but laborers often worked longer than eight hours in a day. But, half a year’s wages (literally 200 days) would be \$16,000.

<sup>31</sup> John is clear that the 5,000 is only 5,000 *men*. It was customary that only the men should be counted, however, which leaves open the question of the presence of women and children. If there were women and children, the crowd would have been much larger. According to all accounts, there was at least one “little boy” (Greek *paidarion*, lit. “little boy, a lad”) and probably women also, since Jesus said, “tell the *people* to sit” (Greek *anthropos*, lit. “people”). But note that only the *men* are recorded as having sat (Greek *aner*, lit. “male”).

end, they had more than they started with. It is equally clear that all were filled, they ate as much as they wanted (v. 11).

Many have argued over the centuries that the only “miracle” here was that the people all shared their food--those who had gave to those who did not. This sharing was prompted, the argument goes, by the generosity of the boy. Yet the text does not bear this out in any measure. All four Gospels record this as an actual miracle by Jesus. To suggest anything less is to rob the text of meaning, particularly since Jesus refers to this event when He speaks to the crowd in verses 26-27. While the generosity of the boy may (and should) serve as an example, and the gathering of the leftovers should serve as an example of not wasting, those teachings are implicit and do not take away from the miraculous nature of the event.

The crowd certainly believed that a miracle had occurred, for they started shouting that Jesus was the Prophet (see Deut. 18:15-18). Jesus, knowing all things, understood that they wanted to make him king by force. As that was not to be His destiny, Jesus “withdrew again to the mountain by Himself” (v. 15, ESV).<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the disciples went back to the shore and got into the boat to go back to the other side of the lake.

## **B) Sign #5: Jesus Walks on the Water (6:16-21)**

Unfortunately for the disciples, a storm was brewing. The wind began blowing hard, making huge waves on the sea. They had only rowed a few miles, the implication being that they were rowing as hard as they could but making little progress. They were in danger of capsizing. As terrible as the wind and waves were, what they saw next probably frightened them more--Jesus walking on the water right toward them (v. 19). Of course, they didn’t know at first that it was Jesus.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting, though, that they were able to clearly hear His voice--and understand that

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew’s account states that Jesus dismissed the crowd before withdrawing to the mountain by Himself, and states that Jesus had sent the disciples ahead of Him to the other side. Though John is silent on these details, there is no conflict, simply a case of John omitting details that were not important to his purpose, as he is equally silent on the healings of Gennesaret, which Matthew includes (Matt. 14:34-36).

<sup>33</sup> Matthew records that they thought they were seeing a ghost or spirit (Matt. 14:26).

it was His voice, when He comforted them: “It is I! Don’t be afraid” (v. 20).<sup>34</sup>

As soon as they heard His voice, they calmed and “were happy to see Him” (v. 21), almost implying the thought of “Wow, are we ever glad to see you [perhaps through chattering teeth]!” As other accounts in His life show, Jesus could have calmed the sea, but there is no record of Him doing so this time. Instead, by John’s account, the boat arrived “immediately” to their destination, the idea being that the disciples did not simply row the rest of the way.

### **C) The Jews Ask For a Sign (6:22-34)**

The next day, while Jesus and the disciples were at Capernaum, the crowd tried to figure out how Jesus had managed to leave the area. They knew that the disciples had started out without Jesus, and they knew (or at least were reasonably certain) that He did not take a different boat (this seems to be implication of verses 23-24). So, getting into the boats there, they went to the other side to look for Him.

They were undoubtedly surprised to find Jesus with His disciples in Capernaum, as evidenced by the tone of their question in verse 25: “Teacher, when [and how?] did you get here?” The miracle of walking on the water must have been solely for the disciples’ benefit, for He doesn’t disclose how He came to be at Capernaum. In fact, He doesn’t answer their question at all. Rather, He tells them, “I know that you were looking for Me because you were hungry, and you were filled with the food that was provided. In the same way, seek the food that gives you eternal life (not just physical life), which I, the Son of Man, will give you. For God the Father has given Me the seal of His approval” (vv. 26-27).

The crowd then asks a rather sensible question: “If we are to work and seek eternal food, what is the work that God requires?” It is the same question as the Philippian jailer asked Paul and

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, there is no suggestion that He shouted or raised His voice, and He must have been at least far enough away for Peter to walk toward Him (i.e., He was not right beside the boat, see Matthew 14:29-30).

Silas: “What must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30, NIV). It is the same question the expert in the law and the rich young ruler asked Jesus: “What must I do to inherit eternal life” (Luke 10:25; 18:18). Jesus answers just as sensibly and simply: “This is the work of God, to believe in the One that He has sent” (v. 29).

In typical fashion for the time, the Jews ask for a sign. Since He had provided them bread to eat the previous day, they reminded Jesus that Moses gave the children of Israel manna to eat in the wilderness. (They seem to have conveniently forgotten that Jesus had already performed a sign for them when He fed them!) As He did with the woman at the well, He refuses to keep the discussion on the purely physical plane. Jesus tells them that Moses, while he did (through God’s power) provide manna (i.e., physical nourishment), he did not give them the “true bread,” that bread that is spiritual and leads to eternal life. But, in contrast to Moses’ ministry, God has now given the world the true bread, Jesus Himself (v. 33).

There is a sharp contrast here (and elsewhere) between Jesus and the Jews regarding the definition of *believe* or *belief*. For the Jews, to believe meant mental assent based on Jesus’ credentials, which He should show by doing signs (i.e., “that we may see and believe,” v. 30). For Jesus, however, belief was more than mental assent, and it had little or nothing to do with signs. For Him, belief was commitment, placing one’s life and trust in the One that the Father has sent. For the Jews, belief was passive; to Jesus, belief is always active.

#### **D) Jesus the Bread of Life (6:35-65)**

Jesus then makes His claim very clear. “I am the Bread of Life,” He asserts. Whoever comes to Him will never again hunger or thirst. He is the one that will fill every genuine need of the human soul. But, because the Jews had a faulty idea of what belief meant, Jesus could rightly say in verse 36, “You have seen Me but have not believed” (implying that even though they had seen the miracles establishing His credentials, they had not believed, therefore invalidating their definition of “belief”). In verses 37-40 we have a passage that many have debated about over the

centuries regarding the nature of God's sovereignty and human freedom. Note these points about the passage:

- *Salvation is initiated by God* (vv. 37a). Jesus says that those that the Father "gives" Him "will come" to Him. This is a determinative construction. Jesus is asserting here that salvation begins with the Father. It's not as if God gives a nudge to a person which they may or may not heed. Rather, it is the sense that the Father enlightens the person and brings them to Jesus (cf. v. 37), and they *will* come to Him.
- *There is a genuine invitation and choice in salvation* (v. 37b). Here we see the other side of the coin. Jesus says that "whoever" comes to Him would never be cast out ("drive away," NIV). The implication is that all who truly come to Christ and trust in Him, relinquishing their old life, will be saved--an unequivocal statement, not one of mere hopefulness.
- *Jesus asserts that none that come to Him will be lost* (vv. 38-40). He bases this on the fact that it is God's will that none should be lost, but that He "will raise them up at the last day" (v. 39b, NIV). Again, the "will raise them up" is determinative. It is not a "might," but a definite. And, it is the Father's will that whoever comes to Jesus will have eternal life and *will* be raised up at the last day.

This suggests strongly that those who the Father gives to the Son *will* be raised up, like an unbroken chain. It is similar to Paul's argument in Romans 8:28-30, showing an unbroken chain from foreknowledge to predestination to calling to justification and finally to glorification.

While we believe this to be the correct interpretation of this passage and the doctrine of "eternal security" is true, a word of caution is order here. One must not build doctrine on a single passage but consider the whole counsel of the Word of God. There are warnings about falling away (e.g., Heb. 6:4-6), about reverting to the Law for a means of righteousness (Gal. 5) and others. When taken together, these passages suggest either 1) that it is possible that once a person is saved, he or she can ultimately be lost, or 2)

that many who profess to be believers (and even live within the church) were never really regenerated. Again, we believe the latter to be the correct interpretation of these passages.

After Jesus utters these words, the Jews start “grumbling” among themselves. By the words used, the sense is, “Hey, we know this man! He is the son of Joseph! Who does he think he is, saying he came down from heaven” (vv. 41-42)? As has been a common saying over the years, “familiarity breeds contempt” would be an accurate characterization of the people.<sup>35</sup> Jesus silences their grumbling and tells them that, interestingly, they cannot come to Him unless the Father “draws” them (the literal translation here would be “drags”).<sup>36</sup> The implication of verses 44-47 seems to be that the Father teaches and brings people to Christ (v. 45), and all who hear and listen to the Father come to Christ and is given eternal life. This is a similar sequence to what is presented in verses 37-40.

In comparing Himself (the bread of life) to the manna that their ancestors ate, Jesus reminded the people that even though the Israelites in the wilderness ate the manna (that was given by God), they still died. On the other hand, Jesus asserts that what He provides to a person will cause such a one to never die (spiritually speaking). Then He stuns the Jews by stating, “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (v. 51).

It’s clear here that Jesus is *not* suggesting that people would literally eat His flesh and drink His blood. He is speaking of spiritual realities using earthly things, as was His habit. Here he is describing the new birth (see John 3) in a different way, by using the previous subject (bread). One is united to Christ and partakes of His flesh and blood (meaning His death, symbolized in the Lord’s Supper). Jesus promises that all who are united to Him will be raised up at the last day (vv. 54, 58).

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<sup>35</sup> Though not specifically stated in Scripture, Jesus described the principle Himself when He said a prophet has no honor in his own hometown, and the principle can be seen in His family thinking Him insane.

<sup>36</sup> Greek *helko*, “to drag (literally or figuratively); draw; metaph., to draw by inward power, lead, impel.”

Neither the crowd nor many of Jesus' disciples were very happy with this. John reports that even the disciples didn't understand: "This saying is too offensive for anyone to listen to" (v. 60, the idea of offense being suggested by Jesus' question in verse 61). Jesus, knowing their attitude asked a question that is similar to the one He asked of Nicodemus in chapter 3. If the disciples could not understand this teaching, how would they understand his resurrection and ascension (v. 62, where His resurrection is implied). He acknowledges that there are some that do not believe (knowing their thoughts) and reminds them that in order to have life they must have an awakening by the Spirit. Earthly words (flesh) profit nothing, so He asserts that His words are "spirit and life" (v. 63). As He speaks words of spirit and life, the Father, through the Holy Spirit, awakens those to come to the Son (v. 65, repeating v. 37).

#### **E) Reactions to Jesus' Teaching (6:66-71)**

John reports that many of the disciples, instead of seeking to understand more, "turned back and no longer walked with Him" (v. 66, ESV). Jesus asks the Twelve if they are going to leave Him also. Simon Peter, apparently answering for them all, seems to shrug his shoulders and reply, "Where would we go? You are the One with the words of life and we know that you are the Christ sent by God" (vv. 68-69). Jesus, in turn, seems to ruminate on the fact that even though all Twelve are still with Him (those He chose), one of them would betray Him--that one of course being Judas Iscariot (vv. 70-71).

## V. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Judea (7:1-12:50)

[Read John 7:1-12:50](#)

### A) Jesus' Time in Not Yet (7:1-9)

It was almost time for the Feast of Tabernacles, the time when obedient Jews lived in handmade shelters to commemorate the time that Israel wandered in the wilderness. It would be early fall (September or October).<sup>37</sup> Jesus “went around” in Galilee, likely healing people, though this fact is not recorded by John. He chose to avoid Judea and Jerusalem because the Jewish leaders were already seeking a way to kill Him. Knowing that His “hour” was not yet at hand, He preserved the Father’s will.

His brothers, however, had no concept of the Father’s will for Jesus. They urged Him to go to the Feast--not because they wanted the leaders to kill Him, but rather (as John reports) because they did not believe in Him (v. 5). They reasoned that since He wanted to become a public figure (v. 4), He should go to Jerusalem where all the influential people were. Either they were unaware of the Jewish leader’s opposition to Him (which seems unlikely), or they simply ignored it. The disciples’ show a stronger concern for His safety than His own family, when they try to dissuade Him from going back to Judea (11:8).

Jesus simply distinguishes Himself from His brothers--His time had not yet arrived (by this He meant the right time for Him to go up to the Feast, see comments on v. 24), but for them any time was okay, since they were part of the world (the implication of v. 7a). Jesus, however, testifies that the works of “the world” are evil, therefore the world hates Him. In this scene, we see another evidence of the statement He made, that a prophet has no

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<sup>37</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles is called Feast of Booths in some translations because the people lived in booths during the time. See the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), notes on 7:2 (hereafter *IBBC*).

honor in his own hometown (or country, see 4:44). Now He might extend that saying to include His own family. Jesus decides to stay in Galilee.

## **B) Jesus Teaches in the Temple (7:10-29)**

After His brothers leave for the Feast, Jesus decides to indeed go to Jerusalem--but not openly (v.10). Based on His conversation with His brothers, it may be that His brothers wanted to make a show of His arrival. However, Jesus seeks to avoid unwelcome publicity--He seeks to do only as the Father leads Him, and the Father would decide when and where Jesus would declare Himself.

Jesus knew the intent of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, as described by John. They were eagerly looking for Jesus, likely asking people, "Have you seen Him? Where is He" (v. 11)? The ordinary people were divided. Some said He was a good man, others decided He was nothing more than a deceiver. But everyone kept their opinions to hushed whispers for fear of the leaders. About halfway through the Feast, Jesus went up to the Temple courts to begin to teach (the implication being that He was in Jerusalem for the first half of the feast, among the crowds, but was unrecognized).<sup>38</sup> The crowd is amazed at His teaching. Like many men and women of God both before and since, Jesus had no "formal" training, meaning He did not attend rabbinical schools.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus assures the listeners that His teaching is not His own--again He only does and says what is commanded by His Father. In fact, He tells the crowd that "if anyone chooses to do the will of God" such a person would learn firsthand the source of His

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<sup>38</sup> As an observant Jew, come to fulfill the Law of God to the full, the suggestion that Jesus remained in true seclusion during the feast seems at odds with both His mission and the tone of the text. Jesus would have observed the Feast, and thus would have participated, knowing that all of those things were only events pointing to Himself.

<sup>39</sup> It has been suggested that Jesus received training by the Essenes, an ascetic group that John the Baptizer may have been part of. However, the evidence of this is scanty. The indication from Scripture is that Jesus lived with Mary and Joseph, and Joseph would have trained Him in the trade of carpentry. It is not impossible to suppose that Jesus began His public ministry sometime (shortly) after Joseph's death, for he is never mentioned in the Gospels after Jesus begins His public ministry (and note that Jesus' mother was at the wedding in Cana, but not His father).

teaching. The idea of choosing to do the will of God means a conscious act of the will, followed by obedience.<sup>40</sup> In addition to this idea of true obedience, the idea that one must have his spiritual eyes opened by God to understand spiritual things is a key teaching in John's Gospel.

Jesus contrasts His obedience to the Father with their lack of obedience. These experts in the Law given by Moses were failing to keep that which they taught and proclaimed. Since Jesus accused the crowd (as a whole) of trying to kill Him, it is likely that there were scribes and/or Pharisees in the crowd. The ordinary people of the crowd thought He was demon-possessed, obviously not knowing of the decisions of the leadership to put Jesus to death (vv. 19-20).

The "one miracle" Jesus refers to here may be the healing at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-18), since that was the last time He was in Jerusalem. He argues that if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so as not to violate that law, then it is also lawful for Him to restore the whole body of a man on the Sabbath. His teaching here is along the lines of, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NIV). The idea behind the Sabbath was to give man a rest, not burden Him with more commands to keep. The people, Jesus insists they should stop making superficial judgments but look at the situation objectively and through spiritual eyes (v. 24).<sup>41</sup>

Then some in the crowd, aware of the leaders' intentions admit that the leaders are trying to kill Jesus (v. 25). They wonder if the Jewish leaders have perhaps changed their minds and concluded that He is the Messiah--but dismiss the idea that He could be. They based their conclusion on the fact that they knew where Jesus was from, but, according to them, no one would

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<sup>40</sup> Greek *thelo*, "desire, intend, to be resolved or determined, to purpose." The NLT translation of "wants" is insufficient, since that falls short of a conscious act of the will. The way Jesus and the Gospel writers view it, having a "desire" is not enough.

<sup>41</sup> The NIV translation of "instead judge correctly," lacks the depth of contrast in Jesus' words. He accused them of judging only according to outward appearance, instead of judging by the intent of the Lawgiver (NASB translates it "righteous judgment").

know where Messiah was from. Such thinking showed their ignorance of prophetic Scripture.<sup>42</sup>

Jesus' admission that the people knew Him and where He was from is only in the earthly sense. It is clear they did not know or believe His true identity. He asserts, once again, that He did not come on His own authority, but came from the Father and in His name and authority. The people do not know the One who sent Jesus, for if they knew the Father, then they would believe Jesus.

### **C) The Controversy Over Jesus (7:30-8:1)**

Jesus' repetition that He came from the Father caused the crowd to attempt to seize Him. However, "His time had not yet come" (v. 30), which prevented them. We are not told Here what stopped them. However, Jesus' "hour" is a significant theme in John's Gospel, and not only does it prevent Him from any independent activity (2:4), but it also assured Him of protection before the appointed "hour."<sup>43</sup>

When John writes that many in the crowd believed in Jesus (v. 31), that belief should not be considered true saving faith, for they contrasted Jesus with Messiah! The question seems to have a sense of "Is this as good as it will get?" Therefore, not seeing any other choice they reluctantly put their hopes in Jesus as the Promised One.

Of course, the leaders, needing to suppress such thinking, immediately sent Temple guards to arrest Jesus. The guards found Him still teaching the crowd. In fact, He was telling them that He was soon to leave (which might have been good news for the leaders), but that they would be unable to follow Him. Again, being limited to the physical, they thought perhaps He meant He was going to some earthly place (among the Greeks), though surely they could have followed Him there! Jesus, however, meant that He would be returning to the Father, going to heaven,

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<sup>42</sup> See for example Micah 5:2, interpreted by Matt. 2:5. It is noteworthy that the leaders of Israel knew the prophecies about Messiah (like where He would be born) but missed the One that fulfilled them.

<sup>43</sup> John 7:6 may be read in this light also. However, Jesus may have meant that it was not the right time (yet) for Him to go up to the Feast, which fits more with the context rather than a general statement that His time had not come.

and that they, in their spiritual condition, would be unable to follow (unless of course they believed in Him).

It is unclear how much of the dialogue preceding verse 37 took place between the halfway point of the feast (when Jesus arrived) and the last day.<sup>44</sup> The Feast, according to the Old Testament, was to run for seven days. By the time of Jesus, an eighth day had been added, and it's not certain on which day Jesus' declaration in verses 37-38 occurred. In either case, His words would have been particularly appropriate at this time, as the High Priest would have poured the water out on the ground (the Feast was associated with an abundance of rainfall).<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to the earthly water that was poured out and would eventually evaporate, Jesus declares that any who come to Him thirsty would be eternally filled, by a river of living water. John interprets these statements for the reader, indicating that Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, pointing out that the Spirit had not at that time been given, since Jesus had not yet risen from the dead (cf. 16:7-11).

Again, the people were divided and clashed over Jesus. Some believed Him to be the Prophet, others acknowledged He was the Christ. Others, however, refused to believe, citing the fact that Jesus came from Galilee and (correctly) noting that the Messiah was to come from King David's line and Bethlehem--they obviously missed that part of Jesus' story (vv. 40-43). John records that some people wanted to seize Jesus (obviously the latter group), but no one was able to do so. We are not told why they did not lay a hand on Him--but the context seems to echo John's earlier assertions, "His hour had not yet come." Frustrated and confused, the Temple guards returned empty-handed to the leaders.

The Pharisees are, to say the least, annoyed at the guards' inability or reluctance to arrest Jesus. The implication of verse 46 seems to be at least some measure of belief among the guards,

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<sup>44</sup> However, it seems unlikely that the Temple guards sent to arrest Jesus would have stood around for days on end. It may be that the order for the arrest happened at the end of day 6 or 7, and the scene then picks up the next day.

<sup>45</sup> *IBBC*, see notes on 7:37.

perhaps indicating they wanted more information before making up their mind. The Pharisees would have none of it. They accuse the guards of being deceived and the people of being under a curse--not knowing that they themselves were under the same curse, the curse of the Law that they so strictly enforced.

Nicodemus' defense of Jesus is somewhat cautious but does indicate that Jesus made an impact on him in their meeting (ch. 3). He simply reminds the Pharisees that their law does not condemn anyone without giving that person the opportunity to be heard--which has yet to happen.<sup>46</sup> The Pharisees simply turn on him and accuse him of being from Galilee also (the implication being that he was just like Jesus). They apparently forgot that a prophet did come from Galilee, that of Jonah! John concludes the Feast week by simply noting, "Then everyone went to his own home."

#### **D) The Woman Taken in Adultery (8:2-11)<sup>47</sup>**

Though there is debate surrounding this passage's authenticity (or at least its inclusion at this point in the Gospel), the story indeed fits neatly into the narrative (see the footnote and the Appendix for more information). John 7:53-8:1 completes the Feast of Tabernacles with the words, "They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives" (ESV). Since the observant Jews would have been living in booths during the Feast, it is natural now that they return to their homes. Jesus, however, having "no place to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20), goes instead to the Mount of Olives, as He often did when visiting Jerusalem.

##### *1. Setting of the Trap (8:2-6a)*

The next day, we are told that Jesus returned to the Temple courts in the early morning. Coming from the Mount of Olives,

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<sup>46</sup> The later actions of Nicodemus in John 19:38-42 seem to confirm that He was a true disciple of Jesus.

<sup>47</sup> There is debate among scholars as to the authenticity of this passage and its place in the Gospel. However, a strong case can be made that it was part of the original Gospel but was removed, as noted in the essay in the Appendix. Much of this material is adapted from "Caught in the Act: An Exegesis of John 7:53-8:11," an unpublished paper by the present author.

this would have placed Him in the Court of the Women. John notes that “all the people” came to Him, and He “sat down” and taught them. Though this phrase has fed the fire of criticism, it is simply John’s attention to detail. Jesus was teaching in the manner of the rabbis of the day--even if His teaching could not be compared with theirs. As the rabbis expounded the Law, Jesus was expounding on the Kingdom. The scene is now set.

While teaching the people, Jesus is interrupted (rather rudely) by a boisterous crowd of “scribes and Pharisees,” dragging a woman along with them. Though that construction is used nowhere else in John, it is particularly appropriate the he use it here, since the controversy was supposedly over the Law’s application and the scribes were the “experts” in the Law. The push the woman, who is not named, into the center with Jesus, and gather round. The sense seems to be that the two are surrounded on all sides. Then the Pharisees lodge their complaint.

They begin with a title of respect: *Teacher*.<sup>48</sup> It is almost as if they are trying to place His teaching alongside their own. However, as previous encounters evidence, they had little respect for Jesus at all. They accuse the woman standing before Him: “She was caught in the very act of adultery! Now, the Law demands that she be stoned. But.... what do You say” (vv. 4-5)? John comments here that this was a “test,” or trap, in order to bring a charge against Him.

Before proceeding, a few observations are in order here. First, the Law demanded death for both the man and woman. The man was conspicuously absent. It is noteworthy that in all His encounters with women who are labeled “sinful,” no judgment is made of the men involved. This shows the double standard of the time. Second, the construction “in the act of adultery” has the sense of a door being kicked in and finding the woman in the midst of the act, rather than a husband discovering her unfaithfulness and lodging a charge.<sup>49</sup> It also suggests that perhaps the man is not present because he cooperated with the leaders, setting up the woman and attempting to trap Jesus.

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<sup>48</sup> Greek *didaskalos*, “teacher, instructor, particularly of the things of God.”

<sup>49</sup> The Greek construction suggests rather strongly that she was married.

In any event, Jesus now has a choice (according to the leaders). He can refuse to condemn the woman, in which case the leaders' scorn of Him would seem to be justified since He is an enemy of the Law. On the other hand, He can insist that the penalty be carried out, and likely lose the support of the common people, since His reputation for compassion is well-known. The trap has been cleverly set.

## 2. *Jesus' Response to the Trap (8:6a-8)*

One might wonder if Jesus pondered the situation for a moment. Whether He did or not, He said not a word to the woman's accusers, only bent down and began to *write with His finger*! There have been many suggestions on the content and purpose of His writing. It may have been simply a delaying tactic, to draw the eyes of everyone off the woman. There is absolutely no way to know what He wrote on the ground--and any such suggestion would be pure speculation. Why? Because *it was the act of writing itself* that was important here, rather than what Jesus wrote. Consider this:

- The discussion centered around the Law (specifically the seventh commandment forbidding adultery).
- Those in the crowd familiar with their history would remember that the Ten Commandments were written "with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18).
- John specifically mentions Jesus writing "with His finger."

This gives the strong suggestion that Jesus is identifying Himself as the Lawgiver, the One who wrote the Law and is in the best position to interpret it. (In this context, it may be possible that Jesus wrote the Ten Commandment [lit. "ten words"], but as noted above that is unwarranted speculation.)

The crowd seems to have missed the point of the writing, growing impatient and continuing to question Jesus. "Tell us, Teacher! What should we do with her?" Finally, Jesus stood up and gave His reply, one of the best-known statements in all the Gospels: "She should be stoned according to the Law. But, the

first ones to cast the stones should be the ones without sin" (v. 7). Often misinterpreted, this verse does not support the idea that sin can only be judged by one who is perfect.<sup>50</sup> Rather, this verse calls for justice--true impartial justice.

The leaders had brought this woman to Jesus under false pretenses. They were not concerned with the administration of justice--that much is clear from the fact that the man is conspicuously absent. They were concerned only with a way to trap Jesus (v. 6). Further, if the supposition that they induced a man to set the woman up is true, then they were indeed partakers of the sin (the modern legal terms for this are "conspiracy" and "accessory before the fact").

### 3. *The Results (8:9-11)*

The ones who sought to trap Jesus now had the trap turned around on them. The staunch observers of the law could not carry out an execution and claim to be righteous, knowing that they had brought the charge under false pretense, and were likely a party to it (at least some were, John does not distinguish individuals within the group). Though John records that "the older ones" left first (another one of those eyewitness details), it is not certain why.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that they recognized the impossibility of making a claim of righteousness in order to carry out the sentence.

In any case, the woman now stands alone with Jesus (and presumably some witnesses, including the disciples). As one writer says, Jesus now "gives the woman a chance to interpret her own situation."<sup>52</sup> He asks her, "Woman [that same term of respect], where are those who accused you? Is there no one left to condemn you" (v. 10). To which she answers, "No one, Lord." Her use of the word "Lord" here (Greek *kyrios*), most likely has the meaning "Sir," rather than that of "My Lord and my God"

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<sup>50</sup> This is often the same misinterpretation of Matt. 7:7, "Judge not, lest you be judged."

<sup>51</sup> Though the KJV and NKJV contain the words "being convicted in their conscience," most modern versions remove those words or place them in the margin. Nevertheless, it is probable that the departing crowd was indeed convicted.

<sup>52</sup> Gail O'Day, "John 7:53-8:11: A study in misreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 4 (1992), 633.

(20:28). With all of her accusers gone, one wonders, though, if she believed Jesus had the authority to judge her. If so, then she now awaited His judgment. And so He replies, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more.”

These words are some of the best known in the entire Gospel--indeed in the entire New Testament. However, they have sparked considerable division within and without the church. Often one group will emphasize one part of the statement while minimizing the other:

- “*Neither do I condemn you.*” While some commentators see this as simply Jesus passing no judgement whatsoever, since He had no civil authority, the idea is that Jesus, as the Lawgiver had more right to judge her (and thus condemn her) than anyone else.<sup>53</sup> As He did with the woman who anointed His head with oil and the tax collector Zacchaeus, He chooses to forgive the sin. If this were not true, then the second half of His statement makes little sense and indeed invites the idea that Jesus is simply “overlooking” the sin.
- “*Go and sin no more.*” This is a simple, direct statement, tied to what has gone before. Because He forgave her, she is to now use that grace as an empowerment to live a pure life. Incidentally, we are not told if this adultery was a one-time event or, as in the case of the woman in John 4, a habitual practice.<sup>54</sup> In any case, the command is the same.

These two statements are inextricably linked. The second statement without the first leads to legalism. The first statement only leads to license. However, the two statements combined lead to liberty--the kind of liberty that is only found in Christ.

## **E) The Jews Dispute with Jesus (8:12-59)**

### **1. His Testimony (8:12-20)**

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<sup>53</sup> See for example, MacDonald's *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996). Somewhat paradoxically, however, he later states that Jesus did forgive the woman's sin (hereafter *BBC*).

<sup>54</sup> The NIV translation, “leave your life of sin,” almost has the connotation of her being a habitual whore, though the Greek has no such undertones (*apo ho nyn meketi hamartano*, lit. “from now on, no more sin”).

Having failed to arrest Jesus (ch. 7) and having failed to trap Him on a point of Law (8:2-11), the leaders now try to discredit His testimony. After the confrontation over the woman caught in adultery, He speaks again to the people and announces that He is the promised Light, and that anyone who follows Him would not only walk in the light but have eternal life (v. 12).

The Jewish leaders immediately argue, not about the content of His testimony, but rather about the fact that He is offering it Himself: "You are appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid" (v. 13). The leaders are here referring to the Law, which required the testimony of two or more witnesses before a crime could be proved (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15-19).<sup>55</sup> It is doubtful that the Law was intended to apply in such a situation as this; the Jews seem to have expanded that to almost any statement, whether of a legal nature or otherwise.

Jesus replies that His testimony is valid and true, though He is testifying of Himself. He bases this on an understanding of His identity and mission ("I know where I came from and where I am going"). The Jews, however, have no idea of His true identity. And since they are of the world, they judge by worldly standards (v. 15a). Jesus, however, has not come to pass judgment, reinforcing the idea that the mission of His first advent was to save, not judge. However, even if He did judge, he points out, His judgment would be true because He only judges according to the judgment of His Father that sent Him.

Since the Jews bring up the Law, Jesus admits that there are two witnesses that testify of Him. The first is Himself; the second is the Father, who testifies of Jesus (vv. 17-18). The leaders then ask, "Where is your father?" It is clear that in this exchange they were thinking of an earthly father. The question may also have had a tinge of insinuation that He was illegitimate, as evidenced by verses 31-48. John concludes this exchange by noting that Jesus

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<sup>55</sup> This is why, at the trial of Jesus, the leaders needed at least two witnesses to testify to a crime that Jesus committed. It is noteworthy to mention that, even though the text mentions false witnesses against Jesus (Matt. 26:60), the Sanhedrin dispensed with the penalty found in Deut. 19:15-19, perhaps because they realized their own complicity in the matter. Jesus quoted this law in speaking of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20.

spoke these words while in the Treasury--a natural place for Him to have been if He entered the Temple from the Mount of Olives, since He would have been in the Court of the Women (see previous section). John also notes, again, that no one laid hands on Jesus, since the time was not yet.

## 2. *His Identity* (8:21-59)

The topic of discussion now shifts from the testimony of Jesus to His very identity. He begins by telling the Jews that He would soon be leaving them, and that they, being in sin, would die in their sin and could not follow Him. When He said these words earlier in chapter 7, He didn't mention their sin. Now, He makes it clear. The Jews are still confused. Earlier they had wondered if He would go teach the Jews among the Gentiles (7:35). Now, the Jews wonder if Jesus is going to commit suicide--perhaps they were hoping that such would be the case, since the leaders were already trying to plan His death.

The Jews obviously missed the point of Jesus' statement entirely. They could not follow Him because He would be returning the Father that sent Him, and because of a) their unbelief and b) their sin, they were not able to follow Him. First, they would have to comprehend who He is, something they have singularly failed to do. Then, they would have to place their faith in Him as Savior, since mental assent is insufficient. They could do neither, however, and thus remained blind to His identity and their sin.

Jesus' answer to the Jews' question show that He was thinking of His own identity and special relationship with the Father. In saying that He was from above, He clearly intends to say that He was sent from God (and thus would be returning to God). His contrasting that the Jews are from below will be significant in the later discussion of His (and their) parentage). Since He is God's Son, Jesus asserts that unless they "believe that I am he," they would die in their sin (v. 24).

The Greek construction (*egō eimi*, lit. "I am") may suggest the Sacred Name of God, since "he" is not in the original. However, the Jews don't seem to have understood it this way,

since they do not react the same way they do in v. 58 to the same construction. They may have understood Him to say, “unless you believe that I am [who I claim to be].” This naturally prompts the Jews to ask, “Well, who are you” (v. 25), which prompts Jesus to reply, “Just who I have been telling you from the beginning” (this seems to support the above reading of v. 24).

Jesus then tells the Jews that when He has been “lifted up” (v. 28), they would know who He is and that He has come from the Father. The idea of His being lifted up is a recurring theme in the Gospel, and it most clearly refers to Jesus’ death on the cross. However, the phrase rendered “lifted up” can also mean “exalted.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, we may see the idea that Jesus is exalted and glorified through the cross here. With this statement, John records that “many believed in Him” (v. 30).

The “belief” that these Jews had should probably be seen as mere mental assent. Based on the dispute that follows, it seems unlikely that these same individuals who accused Jesus of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed could have true saving faith. To those Jews who did believe in Him, He gave this exhortation to commit: “If you abide in [keep, follow] My word, then you will show yourselves truly to be My disciples” (v. 31), followed by the eternal benefit: “then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (v. 32). Here Jesus was probably not trying to quench whatever small flicker of faith may have been present; rather, He was teaching them the necessity of true commitment. Mental assent to His identity and teaching is not enough; there must be a commitment to follow Him.

These same Jews then seem to reject their own faith and instead cling to their lineage, in declaring “We are descended from Abraham, and we have never been slaves to anyone! How can You say we will be set free” (v. 33)? This reminds one of what John the Baptizer told the Pharisees who came to him in the desert: “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Matt. 3:9, NIV). They seem to

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<sup>56</sup> Greek *hypsōō*, “to lift up on high, to exalt; to elevate (literally or figuratively).”

have forgotten this statement, that simply meant that being Abraham's physical descendants wasn't good enough; they had to be "inward" Jews not Jews on the outside. They also seem to have forgotten that their ancestors were enslaved in Egypt, oppressed by the Philistines, and exiled to Babylon. And of course, their own generation was under bondage to Rome (not that they were slaves but were a conquered people). Indeed, most of Israel's history is one of bondage to some foreign power or other--as a result of the nation's disobedience.

However, once again, Jesus is speaking of spiritual realities while the Jews are unable to move from the physical reality (and then misunderstanding their own history). Jesus tells them that everyone who sins is a slave to sin.<sup>57</sup> The idea here is one of voluntary servitude, which is why Paul would later command, "You once offered yourselves as slaves of sin, but now (because of your faith in Christ), offer yourselves as slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:19). Jesus reminds His audience that a slave, while he may be "in the house" (working), does not live in the house forever. However, a son does live in the house forever. And since the owner of the house or his children (the Son) can free a slave, if the Son set them free, they would truly be free.

Jesus acknowledges that the Jews came from Abraham in the physical sense.<sup>58</sup> "But," He continues, they want to kill Him because "My word finds no place in you" (v. 37). The implication is that if the Jews had really been the (spiritual) children of Abraham, they would listen to and obey Jesus' word. He contrasts His own works that He does through the Father with the works that they do, which they have heard from their father (v. 38). Here Jesus does not specifically name their "father," though He will.

The Jews immediately object and repeat that Abraham is their father. To this Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, you would have the same attitudes he did" (v. 39). It is significant that Jesus used the word denoting "children" here, different from the "offspring" of verse 37. Here it has the broader

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<sup>57</sup> Greek *doulos*, "bondservant." This is the term by which Paul often described himself, as a bondservant of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:1).

<sup>58</sup> Here the use of the Greek *sperma* is meant to suggest physical lineage.

meaning of “spiritual” children, and not just children of the flesh.<sup>59</sup>

What are the works Abraham did that Jesus is referring to? He gives the opposite of that when He tells the Jews, “Here I am, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God, and you are trying to kill me,” and pointedly observes, “This is not what Abraham did” (v. 40). The implication, then, is that, as we learn from Abraham’s life, he heard God’s word and exercised faith through his obedience. Since they are not doing the works of Abraham, their “father,” Jesus pointedly tells them, “You are doing the work of your real father” (v. 41a). To this the Jews protest, “We are not born of fornication! Our father is God” (v. 41b).<sup>60</sup> Though the Greek construction here does not necessarily indicate so, it could be inferred that the Jews are making a veiled slur against Jesus, since by this time the story of His birth would probably have surfaced.

If God were their Father, Jesus points out, they would love Him and obey His word, since He came from God. As it is, they are not only unable to obey, but also they are unable to even understand His teachings (v. 43). Indeed He is speaking a different language than they, His is of the Father, theirs is of their father. To clarify matters even more, Jesus bluntly states, “The devil is your father and you belong to him, wanting to carry out his desires” (v. 44). The desires of the devil, Jesus lists, are murder (he was a murderer from the beginning) and deceit (there is no truth in him). These desires come from his own character, meaning that he is the exact opposite of God in character (though not in power, as some would suggest). As God is holy, good and just, the devil is evil, full of murder, hate and deceit. To be labeled children of the devil, then, would be horrifying to these who claim to be children of Abraham and God. Jesus proves His point by stating, “Whoever belongs to God hears what God says” (v. 47a).

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<sup>59</sup> Greek *teknon*, denoting children, whether physical or spiritual/relational. It is the same word John uses to describe children of God as a result of the new birth in 1:12.

<sup>60</sup> Greek *porneia*, “sexual immorality; fornication.” The NIV renders it, “We are not illegitimate children.”

Therefore, since they do not hear and obey His word, they do not belong to God.

The statements of Jesus only serve to further harden Jewish opposition to Him. The accusation that He is a Samaritan is founded on the idea that He, like the Samaritans, does not hold to their rigid (and often contradictory) interpretations of the Law. John notes three occasions (including this event) where the Jews accuse him of demon-possession (7:20; 8:48-52; 10:20). In this context it has a similar meaning to suggesting He is crazy or insane--perhaps essentially linking the two allegations together.

Jesus denies the allegations, though He only specifically denies "having a demon." In noting that He is seeking the honor of the Father (v. 50), He disclaims any selfish motives. The Jews, on the other hand are out to disgrace Him for purely selfish reasons. To prove His point, He invites the Jews to test His words: "Whoever obeys my words will never taste death" (v. 51).

The Jews are indignant, asserting again the charge that He is crazy or demon-possessed. Their attitude is, "Just who do you think you are to promise such a thing?" Jesus' answer may seem to be off-topic here, but in fact He is again stating the idea that since He is not seeking His own glory, His words can be trusted. He asserts again that He does know the Father, and even says that if He claimed to not know the Father, He would be a liar--like the Jews (v. 55).

It is clear that the Jews are confused by Jesus' statement in verse 56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." They question if Jesus has seen Abraham, being less than fifty years old. Even though, as God-incarnate, Jesus of course has seen (and knew intimately) Abraham, the thrust of the statement is centered around Abraham's faith. Abraham believed the promises of God, including the promise of a coming Redeemer (Gen. 3:16). Thus, he looked forward in faith to that day and could rejoice in it. (Note that Jesus said Abraham rejoiced at seeing the day, not that Abraham saw Christ Himself.)

Jesus' assertion here in verse 58 is a clear use of the Sacred Name: "Before Abraham was, I am." Even though the

construction is the same as previous times, it is clear that the Jews understood the meaning of it here, for they immediately pick up stones to stone Him for alleged blasphemy, but Jesus slips away from the crowd and leaves the Temple, as His hour had not come.

## **F) Sign #6: Healing of the Man Born Blind (9:1-34)**

### *1. The Healing (9:1-12)*

John's transitional phrase in 9:1, "As He passed by" (ESV), could be interpreted to mean that the events of chapter 9 follow immediately after the debate with the Jews at the end of chapter 8. However, this is not necessarily the case, and there are no points of reference to indicate the passage of time, so the only thing that is known is that it follows the events of chapter 8 chronologically.<sup>61</sup> In any case, in addition to being the sixth of John's "signs," this event has theological significance in looking at disease, sin and healing.

As Jesus (and presumably the disciples) walked along, He came to a man who was born blind. The man was apparently well-known in the area--such people would have been taken to the Temple to sit outside and beg for alms (cp. Acts 3:1-10). Immediately, he attracts the attention of the disciples who ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents" (v. 2). Their assumption, like the Jews of the day, was based on an interpretation of Ex. 34:7 that held that any disease or infirmity was a result of sin. In this case, logically one would assume it was the parents' sin, since the man was blind from birth.<sup>62</sup>

Jesus, however, answers that his blindness is not the result of sin, either his or the parents. Rather, he was born blind "so that God's work might be displayed in him" (v. 3). Such a statement is certainly contrary to established Jewish interpretation, and it

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<sup>61</sup> Greek *paragō*, "to pass by." The NIV and NLT translate John's phrase as "As He walked along," still giving no indication of a specific amount of time that may have passed.

<sup>62</sup> Exodus 34:7 is part of God's self-description to Moses. It reads, "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" (NIV). However, the same (and complete) description is found in Exodus 20:5 (part of the Ten Commandments), and it adds "of those who hate me." In contrast, the statement continues, "but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." Thus, the description in 34:7 should be read along with this for an understanding of the intent.

should give the modern believer pause also, as the idea that most or all disease, sickness or infirmity is a direct result of sin in the believer's life. Jesus clearly dispels such a broad idea. In John's Gospel, the works of God are always tied to His glory, i.e., God receives glory through a particular event. This event proves to be no different.

Jesus immediately spits into the dirt, makes mud from the dirt and saliva and anoints the eyes of the blind man with the mud (v. 6). Is there theological significance in this specific detail? John does not include such small details as this without a purpose. When one considers that Adam was created from the ground, and that the earth was cursed because of him, it becomes at least plausible that Jesus is here tying this act back to the act of creation, as in a renewal. Jesus sends the man to the pool of Siloam to wash his eyes. Unlike the cleansing of the lepers who were healed on the way to the priests (Luke 17:11-19), this man was apparently not healed until he completed Jesus' instructions, for "he went to the pool and washed, and returned able to see" (v. 7).

Apparently, the blind man was well known as a blind beggar, for the people started asking, "How can this man, who was born blind, now see" (v. 8). Some, however, wanting to discount such an apparent miracle, argued that the man only looked like the blind beggar. But the man himself acknowledged, "Yes, I am the one that was blind" (v. 9). And of course, the first question to him is, "How did you get your sight?" The man answers plainly and simply: "The man that is called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes with it, told me to go wash in the pool of Siloam. I went and washed as He said, and now I see" (v. 11). The man is not ashamed to name Jesus as the One who healed him. Just as Peter and John did in Acts 4, he simply testified to what he saw and heard--and experienced.

## *2. Initial Questioning by the Pharisees (9:13-17)*

Since the day on which Jesus healed the man was a Sabbath, it is no surprise that the people took the formerly blind man to the Pharisees (they considered such an act "work," in violation of the

fourth commandment, see Ex. 20:8-11). The Pharisees, as evidenced by this and other conversations, were more concerned with their own interpretation of the law than the fact that a miracle of mercy had been done. They asked the man how he was healed, and he repeated the story.

As was common in the ministry of Jesus, this caused a division among the Jews. Some immediately asserted, "He is a sinner because He is doing these things on the Sabbath." Others, showing at least some objectivity, question how a supposed sinner could do such miracles (v. 16). Though the question has some merit and does show at least an attempt at open-mindedness, it should be remembered that Jesus Himself warned of false prophets and teachers who could perform miracles to deceive His people. Even Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform some true miracles. Nevertheless, at least some of the Pharisees attempted to be fair.

One wonders at the motives behind asking the formerly blind man what He thinks of the One who healed him, since as John notes, anyone who confesses Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Whatever their reasoning, they ask for his opinion, and he acknowledges that Jesus "is a prophet," though not going all the way to claiming Him as Messiah (similar to the woman at the well in ch. 4).

### *3. Questioning of the Parents (9:18-23)*

Perhaps thinking the man is just a supporter of Jesus, the Pharisees, in unbelief, call his parents. The tone of the questioning seems to be one of hostility and menace. "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How is he able to see now" (v. 19, seeming to imply that the *parents* might have had a hand in the healing).

The man's parents are understandably frightened. They knew that the Jewish leaders had decided that "if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (v. 22, ESV). Because of this fear, while they acknowledge him as their son and acknowledge that he had been born blind, they put the responsibility back to him to say what happened to him.

#### 4. *Questioning the Formerly Blind Man a Second Time (9:24-34)*

So, the Pharisees call the man before them once more, and this time the tone, as with the parents, seems to be one of aggression and hostility: "Give the glory to God! We know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner" (v. 25). The phrase, "Give the glory to God" may simply be interpreted as give "God" the glory, as opposed to "Jesus," and it may include a solemn charge to tell the truth about what happened to him (similar to the High Priest placing Jesus under oath at His trial, Matt. 26:63).

Unlike his parents, the once-blind man seems unafraid of the challenge. His reply is short and direct: "I don't know if He is a sinner or not. I only know that I once was blind but now I can see" (v. 26). Out of frustration with the whole affair, the leaders ask him again how he was healed. The man's reply contains more than a trace of impatience mixed with sarcasm: "I already told you how it happened, but you didn't listen! Why are you asking me again? Do you want to become His disciples" (v. 27).

His somewhat snide comment enrages the Pharisees, and John reports that "they reviled him." Though the NLT translates this as "they cursed him," that translation is unsupported. The NIV renders it more accurately as "they hurled insults at him." They tell him, "*You* are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses" (v. 28, emphasis added). According to the Pharisees, it was obvious from Scripture that God spoke to Moses, but as for Jesus, "we don't even know where He comes from" (v. 29), which is one truth they have spoken during the entire ministry of Jesus. They certainly did not know Jesus, or where He came from. The Pharisees' intent here is to set themselves apart (and above) as the law-abiding party, but all they succeed in doing is being outshone in their analysis by the formerly blind man.

"That is remarkable," the man exclaims. His argument is simple and logical. The Pharisees don't know where Jesus came from, yet He has healed the man's blindness. He points out that "God doesn't listen to sinners, but only to those who do His will"

(v. 31).<sup>63</sup> Since it was unheard of for one born blind to be healed, the logical conclusion must be that “if He were not from God, He could do nothing” (v. 33).

This of course enrages the Pharisees. They accuse him of being “steeped in sin from birth” (v. 34, NIV). Besides the obvious theological idea that all are born into sin (as a result of the Fall), the tone suggests something more personal, almost as if they are accusing him of being an illegitimate child or something similar. They throw him out--excommunicating him from the synagogue. This would have been a very serious matter, as it meant being cut off from the promises of Israel and alienation from his family and friends. Other than being stoned to death for a crime, this was the worst thing that could happen to a Jew.

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<sup>63</sup> This statement should not be taken out of context or to an extreme position. It is clear that God “hears” sinners who pray, especially those who pray to receive salvation. Yet, as a general principle, God inclines His ear to those who walk in His will, which is the man’s point.

### 5. *The Man's Belief vs. the Pharisees' Unbelief (9:35-41)*

As He did after healing the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), Jesus seeks out the formerly blind man after hearing that he had been put out of the synagogue. However, this man's response is far different. Jesus asks him pointedly, "Do you believe in the Son of Man" (v. 35). Instead of directly answering yes or no, the man shows commitment in asking, "Who is He, sir, so that I may believe in Him?" Jesus rewards the commitment by declaring, "You are speaking with Him" (v. 37). John then records the simple yet profound statement, "He [the man] said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshiped Him." It is noteworthy to point out that in both verse 36 and verse 38, the man used the word *kyrios*, which can mean "Lord" or simply "sir." The first use of the word reflects the simple polite "sir," while the second contains within it the true meaning of "Lord," when one adds in the worship that he gives at the same time.

The belief of the formerly blind man and now disciple of Jesus contrasts sharply with the unbelief of the Pharisees. As He often does, Jesus uses the physical as a means to discuss the spiritual. He states, "For judgment I came into the world, to open the eyes of the blind and to cause those who see to be blinded" (v. 39). Though the Son's mission is to save the lost and not condemn (cp. 8:15, "I judge no one"), it was for the "purpose" of judgment that He came into the world. He came so that the secrets of men's hearts might be laid bare, by showing the truth of what it means to obey God's will, not just in some outward standard. As such, those who think they are already right with God would be blinded to the truth, yet those who confess that they fall short of the standard would be made to see.

Apparently, some Pharisees were either walking with Him or came upon the scene and overheard His pronouncement. Their reply is one of both incredulity and sarcasm: "Are you really saying that we, the keepers of the Law, are blind" (v. 40). Jesus acknowledges that they say they can see, but what they see is a dim reflection, and because they claim they can see clearly, their sin and blindness remain.

## G) Jesus and His Sheep (10:1-21)

There is no transitional phrase here, and it seems to be a continuation of Jesus' statements at the end of chapter 9. The NIV's inclusion of "you Pharisees" is an obvious attempt to "help" the reader link the two passages. The phrase is not in the Greek, though it may be implied by the context. Verse 22 gives a better clue, when John mentions, "At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter" (ESV). Based on this, it seems that some time had passed between the healing of the blind man and the events of chapter 10. However, based on the comments in verse 21, the event was still fresh in their mind--perhaps only a small amount of time had passed. In any event, the events are linked by the continuing and increasing opposition of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus uses a sheep pen to describe His relationship to His disciples. The sheep pen was a common sight in Palestine, and thus would have been familiar to His listeners. It would have been a stone or mud-brick enclosure partially roofed, or perhaps a cave in the hills. Either would have had a single point of entry and was designed to protect the sheep from wolves and thieves. The roofing was often made of briars to prevent thieves from trying to climb over the wall.<sup>64</sup>

### 1. *Jesus as the Door (10:1-10)*

Jesus begins by stating that anyone who attempts to enter the sheep pen by means other than the door (or gate) is a thief and robber. In contrast, the shepherd enters by the door. These two things (shepherd and door) are the themes of this discourse. It was common that several families would share a single sheep pen, and thus Jesus indicates, "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 3, ESV). The emphasis here is on the shepherd's "own" sheep. Only the sheep that belong to the shepherd would respond to the call. A true shepherd would name his individual sheep and could summon

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<sup>64</sup> See Tremper Longman III and David E Garland's *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), notes on 10:1-3 (hereafter *EBC*).

them by name. But, the sheep would not respond to a stranger's (or a different shepherd's) call. In fact, they would scatter in panic if a stranger attempted to mimic the call of their shepherd, since they could detect the difference (v. 5).

John records the failure (again) of Jesus' listeners to understand what He is teaching in verse 6, so Jesus has to explain. He states, "I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers" (vv. 7-8).<sup>65</sup> Here Jesus is comparing Himself to false teachers and messiahs who through deceit or violence seek to have the sheep. He likely has in mind the very Pharisees He is speaking to, and possibly the Romans who control Israel.

In this context, Jesus' reference to being the door to the sheep has at least three implications: First, as the door, anyone who wants to be saved must come through the door (i.e., through Christ). No other way will suffice and indeed is essentially trying to trick God. Second, as the door, Jesus protects His sheep from others--the false messiahs and teachers. Anyone who wants to influence or teach the sheep will do so through Jesus. Third, as the door, Jesus offers "pasture" (all needs met) and "abundant life" (true eternal life, both in quantity and quality). In contrast, the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy the sheep (vv. 9-10).

As was discussed in John 3, the concept of eternal life is central the Gospel. Eternal life as described here is primarily spiritual in nature with the expectation that it will be extended to the body in the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15). Until that time, while believers do have eternal life because of their union with Christ, believers are still subject to the normal bodily processes such as aging, disease and death. To suggest otherwise renders the idea of eternal life (as contrasted with spiritual death) meaningless.

## *2. Jesus as the Good Shepherd (10:11-18)*

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<sup>65</sup> By this Jesus was not intending to suggest that Moses, David, or the OT prophets were false messiahs (thieves and robbers). He did not come to supplant the Old Testament, but rather to fulfill it. In this context, the ministries of Moses, David and the prophets should be considered at worst to be incomplete shadows of what was to come.

Not only does Jesus portray Himself as the door to the sheep pen, but also as the Good Shepherd of the sheep (v. 11). The image of a shepherd is not unique to the New Testament, it finds its roots in the Old Testament (e.g., Psalm 23, Jer. 23:1-3), and the disciples would have been very familiar with the image, since shepherding was a common occupation in the land. It suggests both protection for the sheep and a sacrificial attitude (“lays down his life for the sheep”).

As with the door, Jesus contrasts his role here with others. Here he contrasts the shepherd, who owns the sheep, with the “hired hand” (“hireling,” KJV). This was mostly likely referring to the religious leaders of the day. As a hired hand is only concerned with his pay, the religious leaders had an attitude of seeking the rewards that they believed God owed them for their supposed righteousness in keeping the law. When danger comes, the hired hand flees, since he has no personal investment in the sheep. The shepherd, however, loves his sheep, and shows courageous leadership, ready to lay down his life for the sheep (vv. 13-14).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He has a relationship with His sheep. He knows each one individually, and they know Him. The knowledge He refers to is in the same way that He knows the Father and the Father knows Him (vv. 14-15; cf. v. 3). As the Good Shepherd, He desires to bring all of His sheep together, even those outside that “fold.” While this may be a reference to the Jews in other lands (the Dispersion), it certainly holds within it the idea that the Gospel will go out to the Gentiles (v.16).

Not only does the Good Shepherd lay down His life for the sheep, but He does so voluntarily. Jesus tells His listeners that He has been given authority to lay down His life and take it up again. This, He says, is why the Father loves Him, and what makes Him the “Good” Shepherd (vv. 17-18).

### *3. Reaction to Jesus (10:19-21)*

In a consistent pattern, the words of Jesus cause a division among the people. Some simply dismiss him as being insane and demonized (see comments on 8:48). Others objected, taking a

similar line of reasoning as the formerly blind man of chapter 9. How could a demonized and insane man do such a miracle as opening the eyes of the blind?

Division is often spoken of in the ministry of Jesus. Indeed, He testified that He came to bring a sword instead of peace (Matt. 10:34-36). The sword here, however, should be seen as an instrument of dividing right from wrong, rather than an instrument of violence. His ministry calls all to take sides, those who believe in Him and those who reject Him. These divisions continue to the present time and will continue up until the time of the Millennial Reign.

## **H) More Questions about Jesus (10:22-39)**

The scene now shifts to the Feast of Dedication (now known as Hanukkah). This celebration is not found in the Old Testament; it was established to commemorate the purification of the Temple after the Maccabean Revolt. Antiochus IV Epiphanes had captured Jerusalem in 168 B.C. and plundered the Temple treasury (much like the Babylonians and Egyptians had done in the Old Testament) and defiled the altar by sacrificing a sow to Jupiter on it. This triggered the Maccabean revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus. The revolt was successful in liberating the Jewish people, and the Temple was cleansed and purified.<sup>66</sup>

### *1. The Jews Question Jesus (10:22-30)*

As Jesus is walking about in the Temple, the Jews gather around him. The tone of frustration is evident in their question: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v. 24, ESV). They seem to have forgotten that He did tell them on numerous occasions, through the miracles He performed. He reminds them of that very fact and asserts that the miracles (“works”) He did in the Father’s name are the evidence of His identity.

The Jews, however, did not believe the miracles, and indeed *could not* believe. After revelation is rejected, future revelation is

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<sup>66</sup> EBC, notes on 10:22.

denied--miracles would continue to be performed, but their meaning would be lost to the Jews. The Jews did not believe the words of Jesus because they were not His sheep, those whom the Father had given Him (6:37). The proof that they were not His sheep lay in the fact that His sheep follow Him (v. 27). In fact, as His sheep, they have eternal life, and would never perish (as opposed to those who would die in their sin, 8:24). Since the Father has given them to Jesus and since the Father is greater than all, and since Jesus and the Father are one (v. 30), His sheep find assurance that they are protected in Him.

## *2. The Jews Try to Stone Jesus (10:31-39)*

At Jesus' assertion that "I and the Father are one" (v. 30), the Jews again attempt to stone Jesus. He asks them pointedly, "For which of the good works that I have done from the Father are you going to stone me" (v. 32). The Jews reply that the charge is blasphemy, in that "you, being just a man, have made yourself to be God" (v. 33). It is clear that the Jewish leaders understood Jesus claim to be God, both here and in 8:58-59. If Jesus had in fact not meant to claim that He was God, He could have and would have corrected His hearers. However, He made no such correction, showing that they understood exactly what He was claiming.

To this Jesus replies with an argument based on Psalm 82:6. In it, God is seen to address created beings and calling them "gods" and "sons of the Most High." Whether those beings are angelic or human is not apparent. However, if those terms can be applied to humans or angelic beings, how then can it be blasphemy if He, the One who came from God and is higher than humans and angels, called Himself the Son of God? In the midst of the argument Jesus states, "and the Scripture cannot be broken" (v. 35), indicating His high regard for the Old Testament and its authority. Indeed, He did not come to abolish it, but rather to fulfill it.

Jesus concludes His argument by appealing to the works He has done in the Father's name. If His works are of the Father, the Jews should believe His claim, if not, they should not. But since

His works are of the Father, the Jews should at least look at the evidence that the works show, that He and the Father are one (the meaning of “the Father is in me, and I in the Father,” v. 38b). However, again the Jews refuse to believe and attempt to seize Him, but he slips away and out of the Temple, for His hour had yet to come.

### **I) Jesus in Perea (10:40-42)**

After slipping out of the Temple, Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John the Baptizer was baptizing in the beginning. His own public ministry had begun there with the declaration of the Baptizer’s declaration of His identity as “the Lamb of God” (a title that He was soon to fulfill). His public ministry has now come full circle--and will now come to a close with the resurrection of Lazarus (ch. 11).

In that place, John reports that many believed in Him. The tone suggests that it was true faith, in that they were not ashamed of Him. They had begun with the Baptizer’s testimony, but even though he never performed any “signs,” they have come to realize that all he taught about Jesus was true (v. 41).

### **J) Sign #7: The Resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-57)**

This would be the last sign that Jesus would perform--and His greatest. All seven signs, when taken together, will show that He is Lord of all creation, from the natural events (such as storms and disease) to this most powerful of signs, raising the dead.

#### *1. The Illness of Lazarus (11:1-4)*

John identifies Lazarus as a resident of Bethany, with his sisters Mary and Martha. He goes on to note that it was this Mary that anointed the Lord with oil and wiped His feet with her hair (which will occur in chapter 12). Though we are given no details in John’s gospel, it seems that Lazarus, Mary and Martha were close friends of Jesus, based on the comment in verse 5.

Lazarus falls ill during the time Jesus is in Perea, across the Jordan. Mary and Martha quickly send word to Him, “The one You love is sick” (v. 3). Jesus affirms that the sickness of Lazarus

will not end in death but will lead only to the glory of the Father and the Son.

## 2. *Jesus Delays then Returns to Bethany (11:5-16)*

Based on John's statement in verse 5 that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, one may well wonder about the next statement: "Therefore, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, *He stayed two days longer* in Perea [the place He was]" (v. 6, emphasis added). The implication seems clear: *Because* Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha, He stayed two full days longer rather than immediately return to Bethany. Yet, the answer is apparent when one reads verse 4 carefully: "This sickness . . . is for the glory of God, that His Son may be glorified through it."

Had Jesus immediately intervened and healed the sickness, much would have been missed. Not only the "teachable moment" with Martha, but also the display of Jesus' utter humanity as He wept openly, reminding us that He has experienced the same types of loss that we have, and thus can sympathize with us as our High Priest (Heb. 4:15). Jesus did love His three close friends, but He loved them so much that He wanted to give them the best, not just "good."

The disciples are understandably shocked with the announcement that Jesus was going back to Judea: "Teacher, the Jews were just about to stone you! Why are you returning there again" (v. 8). The disciples were certainly concerned for His safety, and perhaps for their own as well. His answer in verses 9-10, at first, doesn't seem to make sense in the context. However, to Jesus, walking in the light of day meant He was to continue to do the work to which His Father entrusted Him (similar to His comments in 9:4). Since He was doing that work, He was protected until "His hour had come." Nothing could harm Him until His work was complete.

Then He tells the disciples that Lazarus was asleep (v. 11), by which He meant that Lazarus has died. The disciples, though, are slow to catch on here, for they assume Jesus means natural sleep, in which case, "[I]f he sleeps, he will get well" (v. 12). To Jesus, however, "death" really could be compared to "sleep,"

since it would not be eternal (cp. v. 25). Jesus tells them plainly that Lazarus has died, then adds, “and for your sake I was not there, so that you may believe” (v. 15). He intends to teach the same lesson to Mary, Martha and these disciples. Thomas’ statement, “Let us go with Him, that we may die with Him,” reveals two things: First it reveals Thomas’ fear that the Jews would succeed in seizing and killing Jesus, and secondly, and more importantly, it reveals a sense of loyalty not shown in the other disciples, a willingness to share the perceived peril (notwithstanding Peter’s assertions that he was willing to die).

### 3. *Jesus Comforts Martha and Mary (11:17-37)*

Upon arriving in Judea, Jesus learns that Lazarus has already been in the tomb four days. This detail is important, as it shows that there was no trickery involved in such a miracle. Since Bethany was so close to Jerusalem, it is possible that the family was well known, since John records that many Jews came to comfort them (vv. 17-18).

It seems that someone saw Jesus and told Martha instead of Jesus sending word that He had arrived, for “[she] heard that Jesus was coming” (v. 20). We are not told why Mary did not accompany her to meet Jesus. However, her attitude can be deduced from verse 32, where she falls at His feet; clearly she is overcome with grief, and perhaps some resentment.

Martha, in her own grief, blurts out, “If only you had been here! Then my brother would not have died” (v. 21). But then, she seems to calm: “Even now, though, I know that God will give you whatever You ask of Him” (v. 22). The implication, of course, is that Jesus should ask for Lazarus to be restored. Seeming to ignore the implied request, Jesus engages her in a dialogue, starting with an assertion that Lazarus would rise again.

Martha admits this to be true, with perhaps a touch of frustration and impatience: “Yes, *I know* He will rise again--in the resurrection at the Last Day” (v. 24, implying that such a length of time would not be soon enough for her). Jesus, however, turns the conversation around to Himself, proclaiming that He is the very Resurrection and the Life (i.e., the Source of all true life). Though

one who believes in Him may die (i.e. “fall asleep), he will live and never die.

Martha acknowledges His words and her faith shows through in her profession that He is the Messiah, the Son of God (v. 27). With a new understanding (it seems), she returns to the house and calls Mary aside, and tells her that Jesus is nearby and wants to see her. Mary leaves the house abruptly--so much so that the people think she must be overcome with grief and is going to the tomb to mourn. Instead, she runs to Jesus, who had remained where Mary had met Him.

Mary utters the same words as Martha upon seeing Jesus, yet with some subtle differences. First, she called Him “Lord,” whereas there is no record of Martha doing so until the end of the conversation. Second, John records that Mary “fell at His feet.” The tone suggests both grief and worship, perhaps the same type of crying out that Job experienced during His own agony.

Unlike Martha, who seems to have reacted somewhat coldly to Jesus, Mary is not engaged in conversation. Instead, Jesus is moved by her weeping and the weeping of those who have come with her. John writes that Jesus “groaned” in the spirit, and was deeply troubled (v. 33).<sup>67</sup> He simply asks, “Where did you bury him” (v. 34). He is invited to see the tomb and then John records the shortest verse in the English Bible: “Jesus wept.”<sup>68</sup> Even in the midst of death, there was a division among the Jews regarding Jesus. Some acknowledge the depth of Jesus’ love for Lazarus, both others, in a tone filled with unbelief and scorn criticize what they have seen: “If He could open the eyes of the blind, couldn’t He have kept this man, whom He seems to love so much, from dying” (vv. 36-37).

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<sup>67</sup> Greek *embrimaomai*, “groan; groaning.” The NIV and ESV rendering “deeply moved” fails to convey the sense of Jesus’ feelings here. The RV marginal reading “was indignant” is an overstatement and out of context.

<sup>68</sup> The words John uses for Jesus’ weeping and the weeping of Mary and the Jews are different. Jesus “wept” (Greek *dakruon*), suggesting sadness at the pain he sees around Him. Mary and the Jews “were mourning” (Greek *klaio*), indicating “mourning for the dead”.

#### 4. *Jesus Raises Lazarus (11:38-44)*

Jesus arrives at the tomb with Mary, Martha, and the rest. It was a common tomb of the day, a hole cut into a cave with a stone rolled over the entrance. Lazarus' body would be laid in a main room (the front part of the tomb) and then later, after about a year, when only bones remained, the remains would be placed into a box and placed into carved out niches in the smaller back room.<sup>69</sup> Jesus Himself would be laid in a very similar tomb not too far into the future.

Jesus commands that stone should be removed. Martha objects, both because of the odor and probably at the idea of exposing a dead body--some would fear ritual defilement. However, this act will serve as an act of faith for what is about to happen. As with His first miracle, turning the water to wine, He allows man to do what man can do, and then does what only He can do. He reminds Martha that through her belief she would see the glory of God, and she acquiesces.

The picture one gets of Mary and Martha from this scene is that Martha is the careful, analytical thinker, needing to see the evidence before believing, concerned with the practicalities of things. Mary, on the other hand, leads with her heart (as she would do in chapter 12), and indeed does have faith. This may be one reason why Jesus challenged Martha's faith as He did.

Jesus prays to the Father audibly, so that the people around Him will have a point of contact. There is no record of Him praying to the Father verbally, but no doubt He is in constant communication with the Father, as He consistently maintains that He does only what the Father wills. After thanking the Father for hearing Him, Jesus calls out loudly, "Lazarus! Come out!" He had previously stated that a time would come when the dead would hear the Son call and come out of the tomb, and this was a demonstration of His words (5:28). Lazarus appears at the entrance still bound in grave clothes, and Jesus tells the people to unbind him and let him go.

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<sup>69</sup> IBBC, notes on 11:38.

While we must never forget that this was an actual event in the life of Jesus and should not over-spiritualize or analogize it, there is one striking spiritual parallel. When one is born again (John 3), his spirit is made alive. Yet, it is also necessary to remove the “grave clothes,” meaning the old ways of thinking, and “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Heb. 12:1, NIV). Failure to do that will mean that a believer will continue to stumble, whereas he was saved that he might be free.

#### *5. The Decision to Kill Jesus (11:45-53)*

As was true in almost all of Jesus’ miracles (with the exceptions of turning the water to wine and walking on the water), the result was a division and controversy. Here, John records that because of the sign, many of the Jews believed in Jesus. Whether their faith was true and genuine is not known. Jesus does not comment on it as He sometimes did (cp. 8:31-32). However, some of the Jews went to the Pharisees to report the incident.

The Pharisees, in turn, call what looks to be an emergency meeting. Obviously the gist of the meeting (or perhaps a written transcript) was given to John, since he does not record himself or Jesus as being present (cp. 7:45-52). The mood in the meeting seems somewhat panicked. John must have derived a sense of irony from the leaders’ admission that Jesus was in fact performing many signs, and this latest one was the greatest of all. However, instead of acknowledging the evidence for what it was, they were worried that “everyone will believe in Him,” and then the Romans would see it as a popular uprising, and crush the nation and destroy the Temple--which actually did happen in A.D. 70. The irony is that the Temple was destroyed not because the Jews believed in Jesus, but rather because the Jewish nation *rejected Him*.

Caiaphas, the high priest that year addressed the group. He condemned the lax approach and indecisiveness of the leaders (v. 49). He then pointed out to them that it “would be better for all of you that one man should die rather than the whole nation being

destroyed” (v. 50). His argument is based on “the greater good.” In fact, John interprets his statements as an unintended prophecy, saying that Jesus would die not only for the Jewish nation but also for all of the children of God (vv. 50-52). Thus, Jesus’ death would in fact be “the greatest good.” From that moment on, the leaders seek to find a way to put Jesus to death, not knowing that they were unintentionally carrying out God’s plan for Jesus (v. 53).

#### *6. Jesus Withdraws to Ephraim (11:53-57)*

Jesus knew the leaders were out to get Him--either He was told or He knew in the same way He “knew all men” (2:24). He therefore decides to move to the little village of Ephraim near the wilderness. This was in part to protect the disciples from any unnecessary confrontations as well as to prepare for the final week of His life.

Meanwhile, the Passover--the last during His earthly life--was drawing near. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims (and even non-Jews, see 12: , where some Greeks request to see Jesus). Would converge on Jerusalem. Many had heard of Him and the signs He performed. They obviously wondered if He would show up, especially when the news spread that the Sanhedrin was looking for Him in order to arrest Him. (vv. 56-57). Jesus, however, would arrive when the time was right.

#### **K) Jesus is Anointed at Bethany (12:1-11)<sup>70</sup>**

After some time, Jesus returns to Bethany (John is unclear on how much time might have passed, though it would not have been very long). It is now six days before the Passover (v. 1). Lazarus and his sisters gave a dinner for Jesus there; John notes that Mary was serving, while Jesus was one of those at the table with Jesus, considered a high honor among many. Unlike in the previous anointing (Luke 10), Martha does not appear frustrated

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<sup>70</sup> There is debate about this passage when compared to the account in Luke 10, due to inconsistencies in the text. However, the simplest understanding is that the passages represent two different anointings, one relatively early in Jesus’ ministry (Luke 10), and this passage, at the end of His ministry. This is borne out by the context surrounding each passage as well.

with Mary, indeed nothing is spoken about her not helping; perhaps she learned what Jesus was trying to teach her.

At any rate, during the dinner Mary approaches Jesus with a bottle of liquid perfume, nard. Perfumes were expensive in that area because they had to be imported (cf. the statement of Judas, “a year’s wages”). Thus, this gift was a great sacrifice to the Mary, no doubt given in gratitude and devotion for the restoration of Lazarus.

As with many extravagant gifts given to the Lord, there was an objector--in this case, one of Jesus’ own disciples, Judas Iscariot (who John notes was later to betray Him). He disguises his objection in moral terms: “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and given to the poor” (v. 5). The objection sounds reasonable, but then John notes the real reason behind it: Judas was a thief, and as treasurer of the group, he would have access to the money (v. 6).

Jesus rebuffs Judas, reminding them that the poor would always be around, but He would not. The idea is similar to, “Seek the LORD while He may be found” (Isa. 55:6). In addition, He again anticipates His death in stating that Mary’s act of devotion was meant to (prophetically) prepare Him for burial. She seems to be the only one that understood His impending death, even though He had often warned them. This act, then, serves as a fitting closure to His public ministry.

Apparently, a large number of Jews came to Lazarus’ home to see both Jesus and Lazarus, having learned that He was there (v. 9). They wanted to see both the one raised from the dead and the One who raised him. Because many had believed in Jesus because of the resurrection of Lazarus (and John suggests that more continued to believe after the event), the Jewish leaders decided to kill not only Jesus, but Lazarus, to stop this movement from spreading (vv. 10-11). The lines were now drawn.

## **L) Jesus Enters Jerusalem (12:12-50)**

### ***1. The Triumphal Entry (12:12-19)***

The next day, after the dinner, we are told the Jesus came to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, John does not tell us how the donkey was acquired, as it did not

fit in his purpose. He condenses the whole episode somewhat, though the point stands out clearly. Jesus comes to Jerusalem as the long-awaited Messiah--though the people have a different idea of what the Messiah's role will be. They are still hoping for a political savior who will overthrow the Romans and refound the Kingdom of Israel, while Jesus came for an entirely different reason, to set men free from sin through His death.

The crowd comes out to meet Jesus due in part, John tells us, to the testimony of those who were present at the resurrection of Lazarus (vv. 17-18). This certainly would have emboldened them to think of Him as "the King of Israel" (v. 13). John notes that this fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy found in Zech. 9:9, which indicates that Messiah will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. It's only after Jesus rises from the dead that these prophecies make sense to the disciples (vv. 15-16). The Pharisees see the crowd cheering Jesus and complain among themselves, "This is getting us nowhere! The whole world has gone after Him" (v. 19).<sup>71</sup>

## 2. *Jesus Predicts His Death (12:20-36)*

Among the many people that had come to Jerusalem to observe the Passover were a group of "Greeks." As in other places in the Gospels, these would not necessarily have been actual "Greeks" (i.e., from Greece).<sup>72</sup> Rather it refers in a broader sense to the Gentiles (non-Jews), and particularly to those who had adopted Greek culture and thought (called *Hellenizers*). Most likely these were "God-fearers," those who worshiped the One God of Israel, yet had not submitted fully to circumcision and the Mosaic Law. We are told that they came to Philip and asked to see Jesus (v. 21).<sup>73</sup>

It is likely that they sought out Philip because of his Greek-sounding name, and possibly because he was from Bethsaida,

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<sup>71</sup> Luke tells us that the Pharisees called to Jesus to rebuke His disciples for such a display, and He answered, "If they keep silent, the very stones will cry out" (Luke 19:39-40).

<sup>72</sup> Greek *hellēn*, meaning "Greeks or Gentiles;" cp. *hellēnistēs* in Acts 6:5, rendered "Hellenists" or "Greek-speaking Jews" (KJV, "Greeks").

<sup>73</sup> Paul mentions such a group in Acts 13:16, and Cornelius is described as one who fears God in Acts 10:2.

which had many Hellenistic cities around the area.<sup>74</sup> Thus, they were hoping for a connection to Jesus. Philip in turn tells Andrew of the request, and both of them present the request to Jesus.

At first glance, Jesus' reply seems to ignore the request altogether. Yet, it seems that the request itself signaled to Jesus that his hour had come to be glorified (v. 23). He had promised to bring other sheep into the fold (10:16), and the time had finally come to accomplish that. Though it may seem strange to speak of His death as glorification, this was the very reason He came to His people--to die for them and set them free. And thus, because He is fulfilling the Father's will, He will be glorified along with the Father.

Verse 24 lays down the principle by which He has lived His life. Jesus has laid down His life voluntarily, seeking nothing but the Father's will--and shortly will literally lay down His life. And in doing so, there will be a great harvest. He takes that same principle and extends it to those who would be His disciples: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v. 25). The idea that a disciple must "hate" his life does not mean actual moral hatred. Rather it means that the disciple of Jesus will abandon all for Him, even his very life. This is a common theme in Jesus' teaching about salvation and discipleship. Those who do so, Jesus promises, will have two rewards: First, they will be with Jesus, where He is--by the Father's side in heaven. Second, those who serve Him will be honored by the Father (v. 26).

Jesus then lets His disciples know that such a life, such a choice of dying to self-will is not always easy. "My soul is in anguish," He says, "and what shall I say, 'Father save me from this hour'" (v. 27a). At this moment He is at a crisis point--the same point that Adam was at in the Garden of Gethsemane. The point of decision, whether to abandon what the Father has called Him to, or press ahead, continuing to live in dependence and surrender. He decides forcefully on the latter. "But for His

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<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to remember that Philip told Nathanael to "Come and see [Jesus]" (1:46), and now others are asking him that they might "see Jesus." Like many elements of John's Gospel, Philip has now come full circle.

purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your Name" (vv. 27b-28a).<sup>75</sup> More than any other scene, this shows Jesus' full humanity. We have seen indignation, anger, and sorrow. Now we see a temptation to abandon God's will and purpose when the cost is high. This shows us that temptation itself is not sin, for Jesus was indeed tempted to abandon the plan. Yet, He resisted temptation, whereas Adam gave into the temptation.

The test having been passed, the Father once again speaks on behalf of His Son. His voice came from heaven and declared, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (v. 28b). As usual, there was a division. Some said that it thundered (the rationalists of the group, they probably did not understand the words that were spoken). Some admitted that perhaps an angel spoke to Jesus (v. 29). Jesus quickly corrects that statement, telling the crowd that the voice came for their benefit, not for His. The voice came for their sake because Jesus knew the Father, and knew that He was fulfilling the Father's plan; therefore, He did not need the audible voice to reassure Him. For the Jews, however, the voice could serve as confirmation of all that Jesus had said up to this point, if only they had the ears to hear.

Now the hour has come, judgment has come to the world--all sin will be judged in the death of Christ. Not only will all sins be judged by the cross, but also the ruler of the earth (Satan) will be defeated. Finally, not only will Satan be defeated, when Christ is lifted up (speaking of His crucifixion), all men will be drawn to Him (vv. 31-32).

The Jews of course do not understand His statement at all. They seize on the last statement and ask, "The Law of Moses says that the Messiah will remain forever! How then can the Son of Man be lifted up? Who is the 'Son of Man'" (v. 34). Though He in this instance did not mention "the Son of Man," many in the crowd would have heard Him teach about the Son of Man, and it is clear in His teaching that He is referring to Himself. The Jews

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<sup>75</sup> Some suggest that Jesus actually prayed "Father save me from this hour" (similar to the Synoptic accounts of His prayer in the Garden (e.g., Matt. 26:39, "May this cup be taken from Me"). If this is true in John's Gospel, then Jesus did pray and then immediately repudiate the prayer.

ask Him once again for a clear statement of His identity, which He has given them on numerous occasions (cf. 8:58)

This time, Jesus gives them no answer to their question. Instead He exhorts them to believe and walk in the light, meaning His teachings that He had given up to this point. He had given them all the instruction and information He could. For if they reject the Light that was given to them, they will have no more light. Jesus thus closes His public ministry on the same themes with which He opened it: a command to “Follow Me” (1:43; 12:26) and a command to believe and walk in the light (3:19-21; 12:35-36). His teaching now over, Jesus now departs in preparation for the days ahead.

### *3. A Summary of Jesus' Ministry (12:37-50)*

Though John wrote this as a summary of this particular event, it serves as a concise and accurate summary of the entire ministry of Jesus. Even though Jesus did many signs from the Father, the Jews would not believe in Him. This, John says, is accordance with Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 53:1). And since the Jews would not believe the revelation given, they were blinded and denied further revelation, which also fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6:10. However, some, even among the leaders, did believe, writes John (v. 42). But, they kept their faith secret for fear of the Pharisees; they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (v. 43). To those who do believe in Him--even the ones in secret--they will see the Father because He came to reveal the Father. They will also have eternal light and life, for He came so that those who believe would no longer stay in darkness (vv. 44-46). To those who refuse to believe, Jesus did not come to judge them. Yet, they will have a judge--the words He spoke to them will be their judge (vv. 47-48). Those words will be their judge because they come from the Father; Jesus has not spoken on his own, but only what He was given by the Father.

## VI. The Word Ministers to His Own (13:1-17:26)

[Read John 13:1-17:26](#)

Having completed His public ministry, Jesus now begins to minister to His disciples, providing final instructions and teaching, preparing them for the time to come. His hour is approaching quickly, and one gets the sense of urgency in the next several chapters in this section. These events all took place on the same night, most likely Thursday night before the Passover. In order to properly understand some of the events to follow a brief explanation of the setting is in order here.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* arrangement, there was not one long table. Instead, three tables would have been arranged in a U-shape, with the center open to allow servants to bring food (of course, there is no mention of servants in John's account, and there is no reason to think that any were present). The tables would have been low to the floor, and the guests "lay on their left sides on mats and rested themselves on pillows that fit snugly close to the table."<sup>77</sup> The side of the table closest to the door was reserved for those of least importance (this was a practice both among the Jews and the Romans). The host (or king) was all the way around on the other side, with as much distance as possible between himself and the door (this apparently was done for security reasons).<sup>78</sup>

Usually about four people could fit on each table in such an arrangement. "The host and guest of honor . . . sat in the second seat from the end of the table on the side furthest from the door. The guest of honor sat just behind him and a good friend sat just

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<sup>76</sup> Much of the material that follows has been adapted from Ron Cantrell, *The Feasts of the Lord: God's Prophetic Rehearsals* (San Antonio, TX: n.p, 2008), Kindle Edition.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, loc. 2494-2500.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, loc. 2531-2537.

in front of the host, providing more security.<sup>79</sup> This is of course not to imply that Jesus felt afraid or wanted “security.” He was simply following the custom of the day. Since John was the one who leaned against Jesus, he would have sat in the seat for the “friend,” and thus Judas would have been in the seat for the guest of honor. In this arrangement, Jesus would have had no trouble washing His disciples’ feet or dipping the bread and handing it to His betrayer.

This major section of John’s Gospel deals with Jesus preparing His disciples for His imminent departure and return to the Father. If one were asked to select a theme for this section, it would be “abiding in Christ,” for really everything that is talked about flows from that statement.

### **A) An Example of Servant Love: Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet (13:1-17)**

As John ended Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem with a fitting summary of His public ministry, he now begins his description of Jesus’ most intimate time with His disciples with an apt summary. Jesus now knew that His hour had come, the culmination of His life. He had brought light to the world and especially to His own in the world. Now, John says, having done all according to the Father’s will, He loved His own right up until the time He would depart from them for a time (v. 1). The rest of the next several chapters is an expansion on this summary.

Jesus begins by showing, in practical terms, what love--His love--looks like. He and the disciples are sharing what is traditionally known as “the last supper” (so called because it was the last meal made with any type of leaven before Passover),<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* loc. 2544-2546.

<sup>80</sup> Whether John is referring to the Passover meal or the Last Supper is not entirely clear; his account condenses details that the Synoptic writers expand on. There has been much debate on what night of the week this event took place on. Passover was a Sabbath festival so it would have been celebrated Friday evening. We know from this and the Synoptic accounts that Jesus was crucified on Friday because the priests “wanted to be able to eat the Passover” (18:28). However, Jesus, an apostate in the eyes of the leaders, may not have been allowed to celebrate the “official” Passover and thus celebrated it early with His disciples (and Jesus also knew that He would be crucified the next day). In any event, John’s account, not specifying which meal simply reflects that his purpose in writing is different.

John relates that by this time “the devil had already prompted Judas (Simon’s son) to betray Jesus.” It is commonly believed that Judas may have been a member of the Zealots, who wanted the Romans driven out of Israel. They would have wanted Jesus to assume the role of King immediately. It is thought that Judas wanted to force Jesus into such an action, and thus the betrayal. But, in receiving the thirty pieces of silver, he literally sold himself to the devil.

With Jesus knowing all of this, He proceeds to wash the feet of His disciples--including Judas. In doing so, it is evident He is assuming the role of a servant, and Peter objects to such an action. His question, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet” (v. 7) is one of unbelief rather than just a simple question. Jesus assures him that he will understand what is happening later (likely after the resurrection, John notes frequently that the disciples didn’t understand His teachings until after He was risen from the dead). The idea that Jesus, the Teacher and Lord, should wash his feet offends Peter. Perhaps his attitude is similar to John the Baptizer’s: “I need to be baptized by You! Why then do You come to me” (Matt. 3:14, the difference between Peter and the Baptizer being this: Peter did not offer instead to wash Jesus’ feet).

Jesus tells Peter that it is necessary that He wash Peter’s feet; otherwise “you have no part with Me” (v. 8, NIV). We see an echo of these words in John’s later writings, when he says in 1 John 1:7-9, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin . . . [and] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (ESV). This prompts Peter’s impulsive reply: “If You are going to wash my feet, then my hands and head need washing so I will be totally clean” (v. 9, paraphrased). Jesus replies that Peter is already clean; indeed all the disciples (save one, who John identifies as Judas) are clean, and thus only need to wash their feet.

The picture here is of a person who gets up in the morning and takes a bath. The whole body is now cleansed. In Jesus’ day, it was common for people’s feet to be very dirty after walking along the roads, as they wore sandals. Therefore, they would need their

feet washed, especially when entering someone's home (cf. Luke 7:44). As applied spiritually, one who is "clean" has experienced the new birth of chapter 3, and thus only needs cleansing from walking in a fallen world and stumbling into sin. This is accomplished by confessing our sins, according to 1 John 1:9.

After completing His task, Jesus addresses the disciples. He has given them an example to follow. If He, their Teacher and Lord could stoop to the position of a servant to wash His disciples' feet, then they should do likewise for each other. To refuse to do so would be saying that the disciple is greater than the teacher. The goal of the disciple, however, is to be like his teacher. Therefore, if the disciples follow the example He has given, they will be blessed (v. 17).

While some in the church see verse 15 as sanctioning foot washing as a continual ordinance of the church, the thrust of the passage argues against a mere outward understanding. While the word translated "example" can mean something done for imitation, the focus of Jesus' words is on the attitude behind the act.<sup>81</sup> It is certainly not sufficient to perform the act of foot washing as a ritual without a genuine servant attitude. That would be no different than the Pharisees' "observance" of the law. Of course, the text does not argue *against* the practice specifically, but on balance, the context does not support the idea of foot washing as a binding ordinance on the church.

## **B) The Identity of Jesus' Betrayer (13:18-30)**

Having completed His example of servanthood and true *agape* love, Jesus resumes His place at the table. He indicates that one of the disciples has already turned against Him (v. 18).<sup>82</sup> He is telling the disciples this before it happens so that they will know He is the Messiah. And in knowing that, they can have certainty

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<sup>81</sup> Greek *hypodeigma*, "copy; example." Compare Heb. 8:5, where it is translated "copy" (ESV),

<sup>82</sup> The phrase in Greek is literally "has lifted up his heel against me" (so rendered in ESV). This is an interesting construction, given the prophecy of God to the serpent in the Garden of Eden: "I will put strife between you and the woman, and between her seed and your seed, he [the seed of the woman] shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

that those who receive the testimony of the disciples receives Jesus Himself, and also receives the Father. The language suggests a close relationship between Jesus, His disciples and the Father.

Jesus is then “troubled” in spirit (the same phrase used in chapter 11 at the resurrection of Lazarus). It is not that the betrayal of Judas was unexpected. On the contrary, Jesus had already predicted it some time ago (see 6:64). Now that the time has come, however, the bitterness of the betrayal weighs heavy on Jesus, showing yet again that He is fully human. Jesus then lets the disciples know that one of them would betray Him (v. 21). The tone suggests that there was no hysteria in His pronouncement (at least not from Jesus), but that He calmly stated the fact.

The disciples are both shocked and uncertain (v. 22). Shocked, because they had not taken His previous warning of betrayal to heart, and now that the time has arrived the blunt statement has hit them all the more. Uncertain because they could not fathom which of them would do such a thing. One wonders if some of the disciples, instead of asking, “Who is it” may have instead asked silently, “Could it be me?”

Peter decides to find out. He signals to “the disciple whom Jesus loved, who reclined against Him” to ask Jesus about the identity of the betrayer. This identification has long held to be John. In the arrangement of the meal (see above), John would have been in the place of the “friend,” and so it was easy for him to lean against Jesus and enquire. Peter alone would have been able to make eye contact with John due to their placement (which is why it is possible that Peter was at the “lowest” place, the place closest to the door).

John does ask Jesus, “Lord, who is it” (v. 25). Jesus’ reply, though quite clear in its meaning, apparently was missed by all the other disciples but John (possibly Jesus spoke in low tones). John notes that “Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot” (v. 26, ESV). It was common for the host of a meal to give a piece of bread dipped in the communal bowl to a friend or guest. Thus Judas would have had to recline at the table with Jesus and John--

otherwise he would not have been close enough. Jesus' reply and actions must have been understood by John, yet he apparently did not communicate this to Peter, for whatever reason.<sup>83</sup>

Up until that point Judas had been planning to betray Jesus. We are told that Satan had prompted Judas to betray Jesus (v. 2, literally "the devil had put it into the heart of Judas"). When Jesus offered Him the morsel of bread, that was his last chance to change his mind. He could have refused the bread, and thus repudiated the plan he had (most likely without any explanation). However, when he accepted the bread from Jesus, he crossed a line of no return, for now "Satan entered him" (v. 27a).

The statement of Jesus to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly" (v. 27b) simply was Jesus' way of dismissing Judas to the task that he had set for himself. In other words, it is a statement of resignation: "Get on with this business and be done with it." The disciples as a whole don't know what this is about; their own minds suggesting rather harmless explanations, since they obviously had not heard Jesus' reply to John's question earlier.

John records that Judas, after receiving the bread, "immediately went out," and then points out "it was night." Night had come, and for Jesus the time was drawing close at hand now. Judas, however, had entered a true spiritual night, from which there would be no end.

### **C) Jesus Gives a New Commandment (13:31-35)**

With Judas having departed to carry out his plan of betrayal, Jesus is now ready to give final instructions to His disciples. He begins by noting that "Now is the Son of Man is glorified, and God [the Father] is glorified in Him" (v. 31). He speaks as though the act has already happened, though the crucifixion is yet some time away. However, with the final piece in place, the certainty of prophetic fulfillment is assured, and

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<sup>83</sup> It could be that John also did not understand, being blinded spiritually in order to prevent some attempt at intervention. However, John seems to be more spiritually "in tune" with Jesus than the other disciples, so it also could be that he understood, painful though it was, that prophecy must be fulfilled and thus kept silent.

Jesus can indeed speak as though it has already happened. Thus, He begins the instruction.

He begins by reminding them that He will be departing soon, and as He told the Jewish leaders, they are not able to follow Him (v. 33). However, the reason is different. The leaders are not able to follow Him due to unbelief. The disciples will only experience a delay in following Him (v. 36). Since He is going away, the disciples are given a new command--love one another. They are to love one another just as He loved them (v. 34). As He has just demonstrated, this love is different than the kind of "love" they have known before. They are to love sacrificially, as He has done and will do; they are not to be ashamed to be the servant of others. If they behave this way, then all will see and know that they are truly His disciples (v. 35).

#### **D) Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial (13:36-39)**

Peter, responding to Jesus' earlier comment asks for clarification on where He is going. Jesus does not tell him specifically, but John makes it clear in other passages that He is referring to His return to the Father. Jesus assures Peter (and the rest) that they will follow Him, only "later." (v. 36). Peter, as impulsive as ever, objects: "Why can't I follow you *now*? I would give up my very life for you" (v. 37, emphasis added). Jesus replies simply, "Will you really give up your life for Me? Actually, Peter, you will deny that you know Me three times before the rooster crows in the morning" (v. 38, paraphrase). Jesus concludes that little conversation at that point, making no more comments about it.

#### **E) Jesus Will Return For His Disciples (14:1-4)**

Some think these verses are linked to 13:36-39, being addressed only to Peter. However, the Greek for "you" is plural (so rendered in NIV), so it is clear that Jesus is addressing all of the disciples. He is encouraging them that, even though He will go away, He will come back for them. He begins with an encouragement: As they believe in God (the Father), they should also believe in Him and His word.

His next statement is one of the most beloved (and most incorrectly translated) in the New Testament. Rendered in the KJV as “[i]n my Father's house are many mansions,” the phrase is more properly translated, “In My Father’s house are many *rooms*” (v. 2a, emphasis added).<sup>84</sup> The translation is most appropriate here because Jesus is bringing to mind the traditional Jewish wedding. In that time, after the betrothal, the groom returned to his father’s house to prepare a place for he and his bride to live, this would have been a room in the family home, or a house within a compound, where the groom’s parents also lived (hence why either “dwelling place” or “room” would be an appropriate translation).

If it were not true that His Father’s house had many rooms, Jesus says, He would have told them, since He is going to prepare a place for them (v. 2b).<sup>85</sup> Therefore, since He is shortly going to prepare a place for them, the disciples can be assured that He will return for them, so that they will be together (v. 3). This is not a statement referring to a general resurrection; rather, just as the bridegroom returns personally for his bride, Jesus will return personally for His children. Jesus reminds them that they know the way to where He is going (v. 4).

## **F) Jesus the Way to the Father (14:5-14)**

Thomas disagrees, “Since we don’t know where You are going, how could we know the way” (v. 5). This indicates that the disciples have no more understanding of Jesus’ mission than do His Jewish antagonists. The reply of Jesus seems to suggest surprise at the lack of understanding (of course Jesus, as God-incarnate, is never surprised). “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me” (v. 6). This is perhaps the definitive statement of the Christian faith. Whereas others might see Jesus as a great teacher, a great example, He Himself claims to be the answer to all:

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<sup>84</sup> Greek *monē*, “rooms; dwelling place.”

<sup>85</sup> Rendered as a question in the ESV and NIV (“If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”) the context indicates that it is better rendered as a statement, as in NKJV: “. . . if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

- *The way* - Literally “road,” Jesus is here proclaiming Himself the “highway,” the only route to the Father. If one seeks to find the Father, he must go through Him (and also according to His way), or be eternally frustrated, hence “no one comes to the Father but through Me.”
- *The truth* - Note here that Jesus says He is “the truth,” not a means to discovering truth. He is the very source and embodiment of truth. It means more than just being “truthful;” rather it means that no truth exists independently from Him.
- *The life* - As with “truth,” Jesus asserts that He is the source and embodiment of all life. Indeed John wrote that He created everything and gave life and light to men. As with “truth,” there is no life independent of Christ.

This statement settles any argument about Jesus versus other religions. Many other religions teach that there are many ways to God [some even include Christianity]. Yet, Jesus says that there is only *one* way--through Himself. Therefore, one side must be right and one wrong. If Jesus is right, then all other religions fail to deliver. If “all roads lead to God” is correct, then Jesus Himself is a liar since He claims to be the only way, and thus Christianity is not true.

Since Jesus is the way, and since they know Him, they also know the Father. In fact, having seen Jesus, the disciples have seen the Father (v. 7). Jesus asserted that He has provided an adequate presentation of the Father in His own being. Philip, however, seems to think differently. His question--or demand--to see the Father seems to suggest that he wants to have an experience of God similar to Moses and Jacob (v. 7). In this question, Philip shows the lack of understanding that Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus.

Jesus reminds them that He had been with them for a long time now, and that anyone who has seen Him (this would be better translated as “has had an experiential knowledge”) has seen the Father since 1) His mission was to show the Father to the world; 2) He was only speaking and working as the Father

commanded Him--indeed it is the Father doing the works (v. 10). As He told the Jews, the disciples should at least believe the works He had done to show that He and the Father were one.

Indeed, Jesus promises that His disciples, by believing in Him, will “do greater works,” after Jesus has returned to the Father (v. 12). In what sense would the disciples do “greater works”? Certainly there can be no greater miracle than raising the dead. The most appropriate interpretation seems to be “greater in number,” and that has certainly been the case, both in the number of those receiving Christ and the miracles that the early church performed. Jesus thus was expecting that His works would continue through His disciples by the Holy Spirit, whom He would send after His ascension.

Because of His love for His disciples and the Father, the disciples are assured that whatever they ask in His name will be granted. Contrary to some modern views, this is not a “blank check.” There are at least two qualifiers:<sup>86</sup>

- The request must be “in His name.” Simply adding “in the Name of Jesus” to a prayer is not what is meant here. Rather the request must be according to His name and all that it stands for. If one asks something that is at odds with the character of Christ, he may be assured that the answer would be “no.”
- The request must glorify the Father. A request to benefit oneself, or even another, is not sufficient. The request must be solely directed to the glory of the Father.

In reality, as we know the Father more and more, His desires become ours, so that we can indeed pray according to the Name of Christ and for the glory of the Father.

## **G) Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit (14:15-31)**

Jesus now returns to His overall intention, that of preparing His disciples with final instructions before His departure. As He

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<sup>86</sup> There are some other qualifiers stated elsewhere (see 1 John 5). However, they fall into these two broad categories listed here: The Person of Christ (His name), and the Glory of the Father.

has said previously that loving one another would be the mark of a true disciple, now He says that keeping His commandments will be the mark of the disciple's love for Him (v. 15). Though the construction of verses 15-16 might suggest a conditional link (i.e., "If you love me, keep my commands and I will . . . [but if you don't keep My commands, I won't]), the context suggests otherwise.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Jesus promises that He will send another Helper to the disciples, to both "be in" them and help them (v. 16).<sup>88</sup>

This Helper is the Spirit of Truth, Jesus says (v. 17a). Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the embodiment and Source of truth (thus the united nature of the Godhead). Though the world cannot recognize Him or His work, the disciples will know Him intimately, as He will indwell them (v. 17b). Because of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will not be left alone as "orphans."<sup>89</sup> Jesus will come to them through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And because of the Spirit's ministry, the disciples will continue to see Jesus, even when the world no longer sees Him (both physically and spiritually, vv. 18-19).

Though they may not understand now, when the Spirit comes, the disciples will realize the nature of the intimate nature of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit (and now the disciples (v. 20). Those who are in this intimate relationship are the ones who keep the commands of Jesus, and in turn experience the love of the Father and see the Son (through the ministry of the Spirit). Though obedience may be said to be a condition of experiencing God's love, obedience is not the cause of His love. Obedience flows from a love for God and that obedience is the proof of our love for Him, and that obedience leads to an experiential knowledge of His love for us.

We know little of the Judas who asks the question in verse 22, except that he is identified as "not Judas Iscariot" by John (and

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<sup>87</sup> Although it is certainly true that those who do not love Christ do not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

<sup>88</sup> Greek *paraklētos*, "one summoned, called to one's side, esp. called to one's aid." It may be variously translated as helper, *advocate*, or *counselor* depending on the context.

<sup>89</sup> Greek *orphanos*, "bereft of a father; orphans." The same word is alternately translated as "fatherless."

since Iscariot had already left, that would be unlikely anyway, see 13:30). He might be identified as the same as Thaddeus of Matthew 10:3 (pp. Mark 3:18). Other than that his name is mentioned only in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13).<sup>90</sup> In any event, his question to Jesus again focuses on the physical senses: “Lord, how can You show yourself only to us and not to the world?” The question indicates that he is only thinking in the physical realm, rather than the spiritual.

Jesus’ answer supports this, as He indicates that those who love Him (obeying His commandments) will see Him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (vv. 23-24). As He had already said, the world cannot recognize the Spirit--because of being outside of that relationship (v. 17b). In fact the ministry of the Spirit is to be the representative of Jesus to the disciples, just as the disciples are the delegated representative of Christ to the world (“in My name,” v. 26, cf. vv. 13, 14). The Spirit’s function is to instruct believers, and will bring to mind the teachings and commandments of Christ (v. 26).

Lest the disciples continue to be anxious about His coming departure, Jesus says that, in addition to the Holy Spirit, whom He will send, He is leaving the disciples “peace” (v. 27). This peace, He says, is not like the world’s peace. The peace of Christ does not deny the presence of trials, suffering or pain, rather it focuses on our security in Him, knowing that all things are worked together for our ultimate good and His glory, and that He will never leave nor forsake us. In contrast, one only finds peace in the world by ignoring or minimizing problems and/or by inflating the ego. Therefore, Jesus says, since we have His peace, we may rest in Him, and our hearts need not be troubled.

Why should the disciples be glad that Jesus is going away and will come back to them (v. 28)? He reminds them that He is returning to the Father, who is “greater.” The Father is greater in authority, though not in essence. Jesus’ leaving and returning to the Father means that His mission will have been completed--His mission to restore mankind to right relationship with the Father.

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<sup>90</sup> The Matthew and Mark lists of the disciples do not include another Judas, which is why Judas son of James is thought to have another name, Thaddeus.

Since we know that the disciples already placed their faith in Jesus, verse 29 should be interpreted in this sense: The disciples placed their faith in Jesus, but after He is crucified, they will reach a crisis point, wondering if everything was real, their hopes seemingly dashed. But Jesus has already told them what will happen so that they will remember and come through the crisis of faith to a deeper faith in Him (v. 29).

Indeed, it will seem to the disciples that Jesus has been defeated and the “the ruler of this world” (Satan) has won. Yet, Jesus says that Satan has no claim on Jesus, since He always does as the Father commands. Though temptations were all around Jesus, there was nothing in His character that Satan could lay claim to and thus use against Jesus (vv. 30-31).

After finishing this discussion, Jesus simply says, “Let us go.” It seems that the rest of the discourses in chapters 15-17 happen on the way to Gethsemane, since John 18:1 mentions that Jesus and the disciples crossed the Kidron Valley to the garden, where He will be arrested.

## **H) The Vine, the Branches, and the Fruit (15:1-11)**

Jesus now returns to a subject He touched on earlier, that of the relationship between the believer, Himself and the Father. He depicts Himself as the true vine, to which a believer is grafted after being born again. The Father, then, is the gardener (v. 1, lit. “vinedresser”). Jesus describes two types of people, both of which are said to be “in Me.” There are those who bear fruit and those who do not.

To the former group, He says that the Father prunes or cleans those branches that bear fruit.<sup>91</sup> This is done by trimming back the branch and removing useless shoots of dead wood. These useless shoots limit the branch’s ability to bear fruit since the branch must use energy to maintain them. These shoots are similar to the latter group, the branches that do not bear fruit.

Such branches, Jesus says, are “taken away” or “cut away.” Though the word translated “takes away” can also be translated

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<sup>91</sup> Greek *kathairō*, “purge, prune, cleanse from filth.” It comes from the root *katharos*, “pure; clean.”

“lift up,” this translation is not appropriate in the context, due to the implied contrast. The branch that bears fruit is disciplined, while the branch that does not bear fruit is removed, lest it hinder the other branches from bearing fruit. Jesus is clear on two points here:

- Fruit-bearing is a normal part of the Christian experience. One who has genuinely been born again *will* begin to produce fruit. It is only natural that he do so. Therefore, if one claims to be a Christian, but there has never been any evidence of fruit-bearing, then the assumption must be made that the person was never truly saved.
- It is only possible to bear fruit by abiding in Christ. “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (v. 4, NIV). Human effort, no matter how strong or sincere, can never produce the fruit that God desires.

Jesus expands on these ideas by pointedly telling the disciples that if they remain in Him, they *will* bear fruit (indeed, “much” fruit, v. 5). However, if one does not remain in Jesus, he is like a branch that is dead wood; such a branch is cut off the vine, being useless and is thrown away to be burned in the fire later (v. 6). Those who do remain in Him, however, bearing fruit, bring glory to the Father and prove that they really are Jesus’ disciples (vv. 7-8).

How does one remain in Jesus? By keeping His commandments (v. 10). It must be stressed here that Jesus is talking about the evidence of salvation, rather than attaining salvation (or even maintaining salvation). Jesus has taught that a true disciple will obey His commands and remain in Him. Thus, that disciple will bear fruit, since he continues to abide in Jesus. While this does not mean perfection, it does mean that Jesus talks about two and only two types of people, true genuine disciples and those who profess salvation without the evidence thereof.

This passage has caused much confusion among Christians. Some hold that this section teaches that it is possible for a person who has been truly saved to end up lost, “losing” or “failing to

maintain” his salvation. Others who reject this idea state that the branch that is “taken away” or “lifted up” (the alternate translation of v. 2) is a believer who is being disciplined (either through restoration or through death).<sup>92</sup> Both of those ideas are based, they say, on the fact that Jesus describes that branch as “in Me.”

However, it must be pointed out again that Jesus only recognizes two classes of people: His true and genuine disciples, who bear fruit and everyone else. Included in that latter category are those who profess to be Christians but have never shown the evidence (that evidence being *fruit*). We see time and time again in John’s Gospel where people are said to have believed but later show that they never really did. In fact, Jesus addresses such a group in John 8. We read in verse 30, “Even as he spoke, many believed in him” (NIV). John tells us that Jesus addressed that group: “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching [lit. “abide in Me”], you are really my disciples’” (v. 31, NIV). He is saying that to claim belief is not enough; it must have evidence to back it up. Based on such considerations, it seems logical and consistent that the branch described in 15:2, 6 is a person who is in the church having professed Christ but lacks any fruit.<sup>93</sup>

### **I) The Proof of Salvation: Love One Another (15:12-17)**

If the disciples are to remain in Jesus to bear fruit by keeping His commandments, Jesus now tells them of the essential command--that upon which all else hangs. They are to love one another (v. 12). And not only are they to “love” one another, but love as He has loved them--sacrificially, with an attitude of serving, and without pretense or expecting anything in return. The greatest form of love, He elaborates, is one who lays down his life for a friend--a truth that he will soon demonstrate. He now

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<sup>92</sup> See for example *BBC*, notes on 15:2, 6.

<sup>93</sup> It must be pointed out here that there is a difference between a person who professes Christ yet has never shown any evidence of fruit and the person who professes Christ, is abiding in Him and bringing forth fruit but later become unfruitful. Such a person is the branch that is “purged” or “cleansed,” referring to spiritual discipline, the goal of which is that he may bear more fruit.

calls the disciples “friends,” rather than servants because He has shown them the things that the Father has commanded Him (v. 15).

Not only does Jesus call the disciples His friends, but He also chose them to be His friends (v. 16a). He chose them and called them for the purpose of bearing fruit--fruit that continues to abide. And as that fruit abides, the disciples may have confidence that their requests will be heard and granted by the Father (v. 16b).

## **J) The World Hates the Disciples (15:18-25)**

The importance of the disciples’ relationship to Jesus and remaining in Him becomes clear as He warns them of the hatred of the world. Indeed, the disciples should not be surprised that the world would hate them, since it hated Jesus (v. 18). They are not “of the world,” He says, indicating that a fundamental change has taken place within them (linking back to the new birth of chapter 3). If they were still of the world, the world would love them. But Jesus chose them out of (from the midst of) the world. Literally, He took them from one realm (the world) into another realm (not of the world). Even though they were once of the world, they now have nothing in common with it.<sup>94</sup>

Since Jesus has previously taught them that a servant is not greater than his master, the servant can expect the same treatment as the master. Therefore, if the world persecuted Jesus, it will also persecute His disciples. On the other hand, if one kept Jesus’ words, he would also abide in the disciples’ word (v. 20). This persecution and hatred of Jesus and His disciples is because they never knew the Father. For whoever hates Jesus also hates the Father that sent Him (vv. 21, 23).

Jesus has maintained that the world (and particularly here the Jewish nation) was ignorant of the Father (even though the Jews claimed to worship Him). Now, however, they have no

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<sup>94</sup> It is interesting to note the contrast between the “love” of the world (Greek *phileō*) and the love which the disciples are to display as evidence of being disciples of Jesus (Greek *agapaō*). While the love of the world is often based on what people have in common or what “you can do for me,” the love of God is all-encompassing, loving the person regardless of anything else, giving sacrificially, always striving for the best for the other person.

excuse for their ignorance since He has spoken to them the words of the Father (v. 22) and done the works of the Father in their midst (v. 24).

It must be said here that the persecution and hatred of the world is because of bearing witness of the Name of Christ. Trivial things such as not finding a parking space, being corrected by an employer for a sloppy job do not fall into that category. While the world will hate Christians because they testify of Christ, sometimes people hate “Christians” because said Christians are simply ill-mannered, obtuse or obnoxious. But, the follower of Christ who has the fruit of the Spirit and bears witness to the Name will indeed be “hated without a cause” (v. 25).

### **K) The Ministry of the Advocate (15:26-16:15)**

In the midst of such persecution, however, the disciples need not be afraid, for they will not be alone. The *paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, will be with them. He will testify about Jesus, so must the disciples testify about Him (vv. 26,27). Jesus is warning them now about this so that they will not be surprised when it happens. He warns the disciples that they will be killed by those who think they are doing service to God (e.g., Paul before his conversion on the Damascus Road). They will be excommunicated from the synagogue (a serious thing to a Jew in that day).

Here, even though Jesus references Jewish institutions and seems to have in mind (at least in the short-term) Jewish opposition, He is clearly also looking forward since He says “the world” (the entire system that is in rebellion against God) will persecute the disciples. Thus, we continue to see widespread persecution of Christians even in Gentile nations today.

There was no need for Jesus to teach on these subjects earlier in His ministry for He was with the disciples, guiding and instructing them. Now, however, He is going away to the Father and the disciples will need Another to come alongside and teach them (16:4b-5a). The disciples are sorrowful and anxious that He is leaving, being more concerned about their own future than His (v. 6). They do not want to be alone--a natural human sentiment--especially if they are to be persecuted!

Yet, Jesus' departure to the Father is for the ultimate good of the disciples. For only when He has returned to the Father can He send the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth (v. 7). Indeed, by sending the Holy Spirit, the disciples will be equipped for a global ministry, rather than the localized ministry that had experienced to this point. Then Jesus details the work of the Spirit.

### *1. His Ministry to the World – Conviction (16:8-11)*

Jesus describes the work of the Spirit toward the world in one word: conviction. He will convict the world regarding sin, righteousness and judgment. To convict the world of sin is to say that the Spirit brings forth in a person a sense of guilt that cannot be excused. In this role, He functions much as Nathan the prophet did to David, saying, "You are the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). He convicts those of sin because the root or essence of sin is unbelief. By this Jesus means not simply a disagreement in opinion, but an utter rejection of both the messenger and message of God.

Not only does the Spirit convict of sin, but He will also convict the world of righteousness--the absolute and unyielding standard of God. Without a standard of righteousness there would be no sin, after all. Jesus, in all of his deeds, thoughts and words embodied the full righteousness of the Father.

Finally, the Spirit convicts the world (or convinces) of judgment. After sin (self-will and the failure to meet the standard of righteousness) is exposed, the condemnation always follows. Because Jesus has lived a perfect life, not falling to the temptations of Satan ("the prince of the world") now stands condemned along with all of his followers and indeed the entire world.

### *2. His Ministry to the Disciples – Instruction and Guidance (16:12-13)*

To the disciples, the Holy Spirit has a different function. He will guide them into all truth. Jesus has much that He wishes to teach them, but they are not able to bear it now (perhaps because of their grief and spiritual immaturity). Therefore, He is sending the Spirit to teach the disciples the things He cannot. The Spirit's instruction will be from the Father, both of present realities and future happenings.

This ministry of the Spirit, it must be pointed out, is still in effect today. Even with the close of the canon, He still teaches us the things of God, using the Word of God as His curriculum. And it must be so, for the Bible is, in its essence, a spiritual book, needing to be spiritually discerned. The illumination of the Holy Spirit is still necessary, for without His work, the Bible becomes yet another book of letters. And, as Paul reminds us, “The letter kills, but the Spirit brings life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

### *3. His Ministry to the Son – Revealing the Son (16:14-15)*

The last function of the Spirit is as important as the first two. He glorifies and reveals the Son to the disciples, just as the Son reveals the Father. In turn, the disciples are to reveal Christ to the world. The Spirit receives the words of Christ, who likewise receives them from the Father. And the Spirit teaches the words of Christ to the disciples, glorifying Jesus in the process.

### **L) Grief Turned to Joy (16:16-33)**

Jesus now repeats an earlier theme--His imminent departure. However, this time He puts it in different terms: In a little while the disciples would not see Him, but a little while later, they would again see Him (v. 16).<sup>95</sup> This reference is to His death and resurrection, as opposed to them seeing Him through the ministry of the Spirit. Here Jesus is saying the disciples would literally see Him. Thus, it can only refer to His resurrection (or perhaps His second coming, though the Greek seems to indicate the former). This statement (among others) causes more confusion for the disciples.

It seems that the disciples talked among themselves in verses 17-18, as though the discourse of Jesus was not one continual time of Jesus’ talking, but was perhaps broken by periods of silence, and in such a period after the statement of verse 1 the disciples conferred among themselves. They were confused, not able to make the connection between Jesus’ leaving and returning to the Father.

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<sup>95</sup> Greek *mikros*, “a little,” denoting “least, small [in size, stature or time].”

Jesus, knowing their questions, answers in such a way as to explain the period between his resurrection and ascension. After He returns (the resurrection), the disciples' grief will be turned to joy. They will be grieving over the shattered dreams, disappointments and fear for their own safety. When they see that He is alive, though, all of His teachings will be confirmed; they will know that He is all that He claimed. He likens the process to a woman in labor. The disciples, like the mother in labor, are in pain. Yet when Jesus is raised from the dead, they, like the mother whose baby has arrived will rejoice and forget their former pain (vv. 20-22).

"In that day" refers to the time after His resurrection. At that point the disciples will have direct access to the Father (hence "you will not ask Me for anything," v. 23). They will ask the Father directly in the name of Jesus (according to His will and character, as well as their union with Him). As was noted earlier, this is not simply a "formula" to add onto the end of a prayer. Rather, the name of Jesus represents all that He is. Thus, we ask in accordance with His will and character.

In that day, Jesus continues, He will no longer speak in figurative language, but will speak plainly of the Father to them (v. 25). Because the disciples believed in Christ and believe that He came from God, the Father loves them and thus will hear their prayers directly. And, because He came from the Father (as they know), He must also return to the Father.

Jesus' straightforward declaration that He has come from the Father and is going back to the Father seems to satisfy the disciples' questions. Their confusion was a result of Jesus' use of figurative language. Now, however, they realize "you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions" (v. 30, NIV). The asking of questions was often a method of instruction used by philosophers as well as Jewish rabbis. The disciples are thus saying, "You already know all things, and do not need anyone to teach you."

Jesus' question, "Do you now believe" evidences some skepticism regarding the faith of the disciples, since He already knows of their failures (He has already told Peter of his own

denial, 13:37). In fact, He tells them, they would leave Him all alone (v. 32). The tone does suggest some disappointment at what He knows is coming, even if it must happen in fulfillment of Scripture. Being fully human, Jesus still feels the pain of rejection and abandonment. Yet, His consolation is that He is really not alone, for the Father is with Him, and in that He takes comfort and courage.

All of these things He has told the disciples ahead of time so that they will not be surprised when they take place. And, knowing what is happening, they may have peace in Him (as the are united to Him). Since they are in the world (but not of the world), they will undoubtedly have trouble. But, because they are in Christ, they can take comfort because He has overcome the world.

### **M) The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus (17:1-26)**

John has given us a glimpse into this most intimate time between Jesus and His closest disciples. He now concludes this time by sharing what is commonly known as the High Priestly prayer of Jesus (the idea being taken from Hebrews which teaches that Jesus is the Great High Priest). It indeed is a priest's prayer, praying on behalf of others. Not only do we learn much from the content about Jesus' heart, but the prayer itself is a wonderful model and example for us to follow. Note that in this prayer, Jesus first prays for glory (for Himself and the Father), then prays for those eleven disciples, then for all believers. Likewise, as we pray today, our first focus should be to bring glory to the Father and Christ, then present our needs, and finally go beyond our own needs.

#### *1. The Prayer for Glory (17:1-5)*

Jesus begins His prayer with a simple request: glory. He asks that the Father would glorify Him--but only so that He in turn might glorify the Father (v. 1). Jesus has fulfilled the purpose of the Father, by giving eternal life to all whom the Father gave Him. This eternal life is defined thusly: To know the Father as the

only true God, and to know Jesus, who was sent by the Father (vv. 2-3).

Even though His death and resurrection are still some time away, Jesus can now speak as though it has in fact been completed (v. 4), and so requests that He receive back the glory He had with the Father in the beginning (v. 5). Verse 5 suggests strongly the answer to the question of Christ's nature. He did not strip Himself of His attributes, and thus cease to be God. Rather, *He veiled His glory*, taking on actual humanity.

## 2. The Prayer for the Disciples (17:6-19)

The disciples are, in Jesus' words, first and foremost the Father's, for the Father gave those to Jesus, and they have obeyed (kept) the words given to them by the Father through Jesus (v. 6). They kept the word of the Father in that they believed in the One that was sent, namely Jesus. They believe that Jesus came from the Father, and therefore He prays for them. He pointedly says that He is not praying for "the world" (that system that is hostile to and in direct opposition to God). Though Jesus says that He has received glory through the disciples, this may again be a case of speaking about future events as though they have already happened.

Since Jesus will soon be leaving the world and thus leaving the disciples in the world, He prays that they be kept by the Father (lit. "by your Name"). While Jesus was in the world, He protected them personally, keeping all safe save "the son of destruction" (v. 12), that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (v. 12).<sup>96</sup> Though the text literally says "doomed to destruction" when speaking of Judas, it does not suggest that Judas was carried along against his will. Rather it means that Judas, having made his choice to betray Jesus, crossed a line that was a point of no return, now utterly given over to evil.

Just as Jesus is "not of the world," so too are the disciples no longer "of the world." Thus, the world will hate and persecute

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<sup>96</sup> It is likely here that Jesus is referring both to Scriptures that speak of the betrayal and condemnation of Judas as well as others that speak of the fact that He has lost none of those that were given Him.

them, as He previously warned them. Therefore, Jesus asks that the Father protect them from the evil one. This protection obviously does not mean that nothing will befall the disciples, for we know that all of them were beaten, tortured and rejected, and all save John were killed for their faith. This protection, rather means that they are protected against anything that would hinder God's will in their life. Nothing would happen to the disciples that the Father has not allowed. And in the midst of this, Jesus prays that "their joy might be complete" (v. 13). Through the joy that Jesus has, which now will dwell within the disciples, they can have joy and even rejoice in their sufferings (Rom. 5:3).

Because the disciples belong to the Father, and because they now have a mission to fulfill even as Jesus fulfilled His, the prayer is made that they be *sanctified*. The word means "set apart," usually for a special purpose. Thus, the disciples are to be set apart to God from the world. This is both a fact (it happened at the moment of salvation) and an ongoing charge. The means of sanctification in both instances is "the truth" (v. 17). Here Jesus may be referring to both the word of the Father ("your word is truth") and Himself ("I am . . . the truth," 14:6). Having been set apart, then, Jesus will send them out into the world to complete the mission that has now begun.

### *3. The Prayer for All Believers (17:20-26)*

Jesus now concludes His prayer by praying for all who would come to Him through the message of these disciples. This prayer, then, clearly extends to all present-day and future believers. He asks for two specific things: unity and endurance.

Jesus first asks that the believers may be "one," meaning that they might be one in purpose and love. This does not erase individuality, of course. Rather, as Paul shows in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, it is a case of individuality working to bring true unity. Jesus wants that special relationship ("I in you and you in me") to extend to all disciples ("I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity," v. 23). If that happens, the world will indeed know that Jesus came from the Father and declared the love of the Father to them (v. 25).

## VII. The Word Glorifies the Father (18:1-19:42)

[Read John 18:1-19:42](#)

The hour is at hand, and Jesus and the disciples make their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Thus begins what is commonly called the Passion of Christ, referring to His death and resurrection. The events in the next three chapters generally parallel accounts in the Synoptic Gospels (though John is the only one to mention Jesus' appearing before Annas, 18:12-23), though there are differences in style and what details are included.

### A) The Arrest of Jesus (18:1-14)

After Jesus finished praying, John records that He "left with His disciples" and went to the garden at Gethsemane (v. 1). It seems, then, that the discourse of chapters 15-16 take place in the same place that they shared the meal, Jesus' statement at the end of chapter 14 notwithstanding. Of course, it may simply be that they did not actually leave there, somewhat like two friends talking into the night, and one says, "Well, I better go, it's getting late," but not actually leaving for several more hours. Jesus had a great affection for His disciples, even beyond His ministry, and so it is not out of the realm of possibility that He simply wanted more time with them.

Once they reach Gethsemane, Judas arrives at some point, guiding Pharisees, temple officers and "a band of soldiers" (v. 3). These were likely Roman soldiers, though exactly how many is not immediately clear. The Greek word used is *speira*, which typically denotes a "cohort," about 600 men. However, the same word is often used to denote a smaller unit, a *maniple*, usually numbering about 120 men.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> IBBC, notes on 18:1-3.

Either number seems extreme for the arrest of a single person. However, the Romans often used such tactics in the case of a riot, especially in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, when Jewish nationalistic spirit was highest. It's likely that the Temple authorities requested assistance from the garrison at the Fortress of Antonia, due to the Temple guards' inability or unwillingness to arrest Jesus previously (see chapter 7).

In an attempt to protect His disciples, Jesus immediately goes out to the group voluntarily. It was dark, and the torches and lanterns might not have provided very much light (note that John's gospel does not indicate Judas' kiss as the identification of Jesus, only that he "stood with them"). Jesus therefore asks, "Who are you looking for" (v. 4). Obviously the whole group did not reply, but the reply is simple and straightforward: "Jesus of Nazareth," to which Jesus replies, "I am He" (v. 5). This is one of those instances where "he" is absent in the Greek. Therefore, it may rightly be rendered, "I am." Judging from the reaction by the group, there may be merit in translating it that way, showing His divine nature (normally people do not fall down on the ground when someone says "I am he").

Jesus asks them again who they were seeking (perhaps trying to help them regain their composure). Again, they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." In order to protect the disciples, He tells them, "I told you that I am the one you are looking for. So, now let these others [the disciples] go" (vv. 7-8). John notes that this was a fulfillment of Jesus' own words, in that He had kept all the ones that the Father gave Him (6:39, cf. 17:12).

Peter, realizing what is happening, draws his sword and apparently slashes rather wildly, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant. John identifies him as Malchus, it's possible he knew the man on sight (cf. v. 15, where John is said to be known by the high priest). Jesus rebukes Peter for his rash action, saying, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me" (v. 11, NIV). The "cup" represents not only the suffering of Jesus but also the entirety of His mission. He has passed His own time of struggle to submit to the Father's will, though John did not record it. Had He wished, He could have indeed prevented any of this from

happening. Yet, He was obedient to the revealed will of the Father until the end.<sup>98</sup>

The soldiers then arrest Jesus and bind him, taking him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. Annas, as a former high priest, apparently held much influence over those who succeeded him.<sup>99</sup> John is the only gospel writer to include the questioning before Annas, and it seems to be some sort of a “preliminary hearing,” to make sure the case against Jesus would stand up when He was officially tried before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas. John here finds it necessary to remind the reader that Caiaphas had advised that it would be good if one man died for the nation (vv. 13-14, see 11:49-52).

## **B) The Hearing Before Annas (18:15-27)**

### *1. Peter Denies Christ Once (18:15-18)*

Before recounting the questioning of Jesus by Annas, John pauses a moment to point us back to Peter. We learn here that Peter and “another disciple” were following the group that arrested Jesus (v. 15). When they reached the home of Annas, John was admitted to the courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside because “this disciple . . . was known to the high priest” (v. 15b). It is commonly supposed that the other disciple is indeed John, and that he may have been related to the family of the high priest. There is no reason to doubt that John is referred to here, since he uses similar terms throughout the gospel to identify himself while identifying others by name. That he was a relative of the high priest’s family is speculation, but would explain his easy admittance.

As John brings Peter into the courtyard, the servant at the gate asks Peter, “You aren’t one of His disciples, too, are you” (v. 17a). The tone almost suggests incredulity, as in “*Surely* you aren’t one of this man’s disciples,” indicating that a negative answer is expected. Peter gives the blunt reply, “I am not” (v. 17b). He

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<sup>98</sup> Though John does not record it, the other gospels state that the disciples fled at this point. From John’s account it appears that Peter and John fled initially, then followed at a distance (cf. Matt. 26:56, 58).

<sup>99</sup> Luke goes so far as to make it seem that they ruled together, when he mentions “the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas” (Luke 3:2).

moves inside and edges close to the fire to keep warm, as it was cold. Such fires probably gave off a dim light so it is likely that Peter stayed just at the edge of the firelight hoping not to be recognized.

## *2. Annas Questions Jesus (18:19-24)*

John indicates that the questioning of Jesus by Annas took place while Peter was outside. Annas “questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching” (v. 19). The tone suggests that Annas was looking for incriminating statements from Jesus, and hopefully names of others he could use as witnesses against Him. Jesus’ reply indicates that such questioning was unnecessary since He never taught in secret, but did all things openly. Therefore, there would be many witnesses who could narrate what had been done and said (vv. 20-21).

Jesus’ reply seems very disrespectful to the high priest, so he “slapped Him in the face,” and asked Him, “Is this the way you are supposed to answer the high priest” (v. 22). The act was illegal, in that no sentence had been pronounced against Jesus, and under Jewish law (unlike Roman law) a prisoner not yet condemned was not subject to abuse. Thus, Jesus says, “If I said something wrong, testify what was wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why should you strike Me” (v. 23). Nothing is done about the illegal act, and instead Annas summarily sends Jesus to Caiaphas, probably to another room in the same building. John records nothing of the latter stages of Jesus’ trial before the Jewish leaders.<sup>100</sup>

## *3. Peter Denies Christ Two More Times (18:25-27)*

While the trial of Jesus was proceeding, Peter was still outside, at the fire. He is asked a second time whether he is a disciple of Jesus, and like the first question, this one also expected a negative response (v. 25a). His earlier denial had now put him into a position from which he could not easily escape, so he issues a second, probably more emphatic, denial (v. 25b). However,

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<sup>100</sup> Matthew tells us of the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57-68).

another servant of the high priest (John notes that he is a relative of Malchus, who lost his ear to Peter's sword) challenged Peter's assertion. This question, "Didn't I see you with Him in the garden" presupposes an affirmative response. However, Peter denies it again, being unable to lose face, no matter what answer is given. And, as Jesus predicted, the rooster immediately crows.

Much has been written about Peter's denial of Christ over the centuries. Much of it, especially in modern commentaries, is somewhat overly moralistic. Peter is reproved for "following at a distance" (yet he and John were the only two disciples, so far as we know, to follow Him at all). He is rebuked for falling asleep while Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (though the other disciples did as well and none denied Jesus, so far as we know). And he is chastised for "consorting with the enemies of Christ"<sup>101</sup> in sitting at the fire (yet one could hardly suppose his motive for that would be anything other than to find out what was happening--and to stay warm in doing so).

We should remember that Peter is no greater or less than us. Jesus told him ahead of time what would happen, most likely as a way to show Peter an area of pride in his life. The word for "deny" is used in the NT as the opposite of "confess." We are told to confess Jesus, but deny ourselves (our own ambitions and interests). Here, Peter does the opposite. He denies Jesus, placing his own self-interest as paramount. We are told in Luke's account that Jesus turned and looked at Peter at the moment of the rooster's crow. Though we do not know what type of look it was, it was enough that Peter remembered the words of Jesus and wept bitterly. Both Peter and Judas expressed guilt and sorrow for what they had done, but Peter's response was far different. For him, it was a turning point, and he endured to the end, suffering crucifixion as Jesus did (only with his head downward at his own request).

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<sup>101</sup> BBC, notes on 18:18.

## C) Jesus' Trial Before Pilate (18:28-19:16a)

John now turns to the trial of Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea and Jerusalem. It is the most detailed account of the four gospels (leaving out only the mention of Herod). It comes across more as an interview than an actual trial, and the emphasis here is not as much on the legal charges but rather on Pilate's shifting attitude toward Jesus.

### 1. *The Jews Bring Jesus Before Pilate (18:28-32)*

At this point, the trial of Jesus moves from the Sanhedrin to Pilate. The Sanhedrin has already condemned Jesus (though this is not recorded in John). It is rather ironic that the Jewish leaders would not enter the Praetorium (Pilate's residence) to meet with the governor for fear of ceremonial defilement when they had just condemned an innocent man to death based on false testimony (v. 28)

Pilate's initial question, "What charges are you bringing against this man," was the normal one under Roman law. The answer, obviously, should have been a statement of crimes that Roman law recognized. However, the answer of the high priest was elusive: "If this man were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you" (vv. 29-30). The implication of the statement is that the Jewish leadership knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crime under Roman law.

Pilate therefore replies that if they had no charges to bring against Jesus under the law of Rome, they should try Jesus according to their own law. This the Jewish leaders had already done (in a manner of speaking). Yet, they had now right to enforce the death sentence already pronounced against Jesus, so they had to transfer the case to Rome. John notes here that this was to fulfill Jesus' own words regarding the manner of His death.

### 2. *The First Questioning (18:33-37)*

Pilate withdraws into the palace, probably the audience chamber and summons Jesus. He asks Jesus outright, "Are you the King of the Jews" (v. 33). The tone may be one of surprise, with Pilate being unable to reconcile the calm demeanor of Jesus

who certainly did not look the part of a pretender to the vacant Jewish throne, with the charges brought against Him. This private audience may show that Pilate did not trust the priests, and we are told in Matthew's account that Pilate knew that Jesus had been handed over because of envy (Matt. 27:18).

Jesus' reply may seem a bit disrespectful; however, the tone is simply one that is inquiring about Pilate's stance: Was he making inquiry about Jesus because he really wished to know, or was the questioning simply part of a legal procedure? This question by Jesus seems to have irritated Pilate. No doubt the governor was used to having his questions answered rather than being challenged. His answer to Jesus implies that his questioning was not because of any personal interest. Rather, he wanted to know what Jesus had done to arouse the hatred of the Jews (vv. 34-35).

Jesus then acknowledges that He is a king, in speaking of His kingdom. However, this kingdom is different than any Pilate had ever encountered, in that it "is not of this world" (v. 36). For if His had been a worldly kingdom, His servants would have fought to prevent Jesus' arrest (of course Peter did try, but Jesus rebuked him, further emphasizing the point). Rather than get into the finer points of Jesus' statement, Pilate focuses on the central question, that of Jesus' kingship. "So you *are* a king then" (v. 37, emphasis added).

Jesus again affirms the statement, this time more directly.<sup>102</sup> Then He goes back to His mission: to bear witness to the truth. These statements link back throughout John's gospel to Jesus' identification of His mission. It is clear He knew His destiny from the beginning. Since "everyone who is of the truth heeds [His] words," the implication is that Pilate should also listen to Jesus' words if he truly wants to seek truth.

### *3. Pilate Finds No Fault in Jesus (18:38-19:8)*

The tone of Pilate's question, "What is truth" (v. 38a) is somewhat difficult to interpret. It does not, however, seem to be

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<sup>102</sup> The statement "You say . . ." (Greek *legō*) is in fact an affirmative answer

an honest question. Given the context, it seems that it is most likely a response of irritation, since he simply could not understand Jesus. He returns outside to the Jews and pronounces: "I find no guilt in Him" (v. 38b). It was a legal pronouncement, and at that point, Jesus should have been released.<sup>103</sup> Pilate, however, seeks to release Jesus not on the basis of his own inquiry but on the basis of a Passover custom (v. 39). He proposed to release Jesus to them, hoping that would satisfy the people. (He probably knew that the crowd often was at odds with the Jewish leadership.)

However, Pilate's plan did not work, and further put him into a corner. The priests and other leaders encouraged the crowd to ask for the release of another, Barabbas, a criminal destined for execution--John notes that he is a "robber" (v. 40).<sup>104</sup> So, Pilate took Jesus and had Him scourged (19:1). This punishment was done by a heavy rawhide strap called a *flagellum*, which was loaded with bits of zinc, iron and bone. The punishment was often used as a prelude to crucifixion, but also as a means of extracting information from non-Roman citizens--which is why Paul objected when he was going to be flogged in Acts 22:24-25. Says one biographer of the practice, "[T]he weight and lacerating of the scourge could kill a man. A survivor would have torn nerves and damaged kidneys, and might even be out of his mind."<sup>105</sup> The flogging plus the humiliation at the hands of the Roman soldiers (vv. 2-3) may have been Pilate's attempt to punish Jesus to the satisfaction of the Jews--and perhaps to deride the idea that *any* man would save Israel from Rome.

Thus, Pilate brings Jesus out to the crowd and again pronounces that he has found no guilt in Jesus (v. 4). When Jesus appears, Pilate says, "Behold the man" (v. 5). The tone suggests

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<sup>103</sup> The phrase *heuriskō autos aitia* has the denotation that one, after having inquired into a case and ascertained the facts, finds no basis for a charge, or find no fault in the accused.

<sup>104</sup> Greek *lēstēs*, literally "robber; brigand." Notably Jesus used the same word in John 10 to describe one who comes into the sheep pen any other way besides through Himself.

<sup>105</sup> John Pollock, *The Apostle: The Life of Paul* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2012), 247.

either derision or an attempt to stir up compassion from the crowd (as in, “Does this man really look like a revolutionary?”) The plan again backfires, for when the leaders see Jesus, they are enraged (the sight of Jesus dressed in a mock royal outfit may have had something to do with the rage). They “cried out” that He should be crucified (v. 6a). By this time, Pilate seems to be thoroughly disgusted with the whole affair--with Jesus as well as the Jewish leaders. His statement to the leaders, that they should crucify Jesus themselves shows traces of sarcasm, since he, for the third time has pronounced Jesus guiltless.

The Jews, however, switch tactics: “According to our law, He must die because He made Himself the Son of God” (v. 7). Pilate would have understood the implications of such a charge. Pilate may have considered the fact that Jesus *was* divine--not in the manner of the Jewish God *Yahweh*, but in the manner of the Roman gods. Indeed, such a man might easily supplant him or even Caesar, so therefore Pilate was “even more afraid” (v. 8, ESV).

#### *4. Pilate Questions Jesus Again (19:9-11)*

Pilate’s anger flares at Jesus’ silence, and he asks, rather arrogantly, “Don’t you realize that I have your life in my hands, the power to release or crucify you” (v. 10, paraphrase). Pilate supposed he held supreme authority, but Jesus denies this: Pilate is merely an instrument to be used in the plan of the Father. Thus, those who handed Jesus over are guilty of the greater sin (v. 11).

#### *5. Pilate Seeks to Release Jesus (19:12-16a)*

Because of his own fear, Pilate determined from that moment on to release Jesus. He had already tried in two different ways--the “custom of the feast” and the flogging. The Jewish leaders would have none of it: “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar” (v. 12). There are two clear implications here. First, the Jews accused Jesus being a “king,” a rival to Caesar, which under Roman law carried the death penalty. Second, the Jews implied that Pilate could be charged as Jesus’ accomplice, by perhaps

making an alliance with Him. The “Caesar” at the time (Caesar had become a title for Emperor) was Tiberius, notoriously suspicious of anyone who might be a rival.<sup>106</sup>

Pilate is now in a most difficult position. Either choice will likely mean the end of his political career--and perhaps his life. If he exonerates Jesus, he will only exacerbate the tensions with the Jewish leadership--and perhaps face a charge of treason. If he condemns Jesus, he will be making a travesty of strict Roman justice--and could perhaps face a charge of malfeasance of office.<sup>107</sup> In any event, his decision could no longer be postponed. He went out to the crowd and sat on the bench used for official judgments and brought Jesus out.

John here notes that it was “the day of the Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour.” Since Jesus was crucified before sunset on a Sabbath (see 19:31), and since the chief priests did not enter the Praetorium fearing ritual defilement ahead of the Passover (see 18:28), John’s statement should be taken at face value. Therefore, Jesus shared the meal with His disciples on Thursday evening, was arrested later that same evening, and was tried before the Sanhedrin and Pilate early Friday morning. By mentioning the sixth hour, it is possible that John is simply stressing that all proceeding and the execution were completed by or before noon.

Pilate’s words to the Jews, “Here is your king” (v. 14), show a total lack of understanding for the Jewish mindset, and a terrible miscalculation on his part.<sup>108</sup> The Jewish leaders respond as they had earlier, with a cry to crucify Jesus. Pilate asks, “Do you want me to crucify your king?” His words show bitterness at having been placed into this position, and the reply of the Jewish leaders is equally ironic: “We have no king but Caesar” (v. 15). The leadership of the Jews, hating the Romans and longing for

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<sup>106</sup> EBC, notes on 19:12.

<sup>107</sup> The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Pilate was indeed recalled to Rome, but some three years later, for his mishandling of a riot by the Samaritans in A.D. 36. His ultimate fate remains unknown. (See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.89).

<sup>108</sup> Both Josephus and Philo (another Jewish historian) tell us that Pilate received numerous reprimands for often provoking the hostility of the Jews over what could be considered essentially trivial matters to a Roman, but most important to Jews.

independence, preferred Caesar as king over the One sent by God as their Savior. Giving in finally to the Jews, Pilate orders that Jesus be crucified (v. 16a).

A study of Pilate's interactions with Jesus and the Jewish leadership reveals a man backed into an impossible corner to be condemned no matter what action he takes. Pilate as arbiter of Roman justice was torn between political, psychological and spiritual needs. He constantly traveled back and forth between Jesus and the leadership, almost as though he were a negotiator seeking some sort of compromise. While the Jews exploited his political vulnerabilities to their advantage, Jesus sought only his good. When Pilate asked "What is truth" (18:38), his vacillating attitude made it impossible to accept the idea that the Truth was standing before him.

#### **D) The Crucifixion of Jesus (19:16b-27)**

After Jesus is condemned to crucifixion, the soldiers take Him from the Praetorium to the place of execution. The normal execution squad would be four legionnaires and a centurion (cf. v. 23). The condemned was required to carry his own crossbeam. Jesus, in His weakened state, was not able to carry it the full distance, and we are told in the Synoptics that "Simon of Cyrene" was impressed into service by the guards to carry the beam. They take Jesus along with two others, to "the Place of the Skull." The place was named so either because of skulls found there (due to multiple crucifixions perhaps), which seems unlikely, or because it looked like a skull, perhaps it was a hill with caves dug in the side. In any case, John simply reports, "There they crucified [Jesus], along with two others, one on either side of Him" (v. 18). We are told in other accounts that the two crucified with Jesus are thieves (Matthew 27:38). Besides these details, John gives no other specific on the process of crucifixion, since his readers would have been familiar with it.

However, John does point out the sign that Pilate has placed over the head of Jesus: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (v. 19). It was common that a sign was placed over the condemned listing his name and his crime. In this case, it seems that Pilate

placed the sign as a form of revenge on the Jewish leadership for forcing his decision. The sign proclaimed what the Jewish leadership had denied. Because it was written in Aramaic (the language of the common locals), Latin (the official language of Roman government) and Greek (the language of commerce), anyone passing by could read the sign and see that Rome had crucified the “King of the Jews” as a common criminal (vv. 19-20). The Jewish leaders, of course, were insulted and offended by the sign and asked that it show only that “King of the Jews” was only a claim by Jesus (v. 21). Pilate, having discharged his duty to Rome and sure now that he would avoid any charge of malfeasance of the case, resumes his hostile and flippant attitude: “What I have written, I have written” (v. 22).

After crucifying Jesus, the soldiers divided His clothing, as was their custom--whether or not it was “legal” in a technical sense. Jesus wardrobe would have consisted of “a turban or headdress; an outer robe; a sash or girdle, the folds of which would provide pockets; sandals; and a fairly long tunic woven in one piece, that was an undergarment.”<sup>109</sup> The first four items were divided easily enough among the soldiers, while the tunic was not, being in a single piece (this was to avoid violating the Mosaic injunction about wearing clothing of different materials). To decide who would receive it, the soldiers “cast lots,” using dice made from bone (vv. 23-24).

John’s inclusion of these details is based on fulfillment of Psalm 22, which is a startling picture of the crucifixion. In addition to the prophecy that Jesus’ clothing would be divided among those who crucified Him, the Psalm also contains Jesus’ fourth saying from the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me” (Ps. 22:1, see Matt. 27:46). Such fulfillment quotations served to strengthen John’s case that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.<sup>110</sup>

As John’s Gospel is full of sharp contrasts--love versus hate, faith versus unbelief, light versus darkness--he now presents

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<sup>109</sup> *EBC*, notes on 19:23.

<sup>110</sup> While Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of David, heir to David’s throne, and Luke presents Him as the Son of Man, John presents Him as the eternal Son of God, thus he includes details to support that claim.

another one here. We see the callous attitude of the guards who gamble over the clothing of the Man above them while waiting for Him to die. In sharp contrast stands the picture of the women at the cross, full of grief and compassion. We are told that there are four of them--Mary (the mother of Jesus), her sister (possibly Salome, the mother of James and John), "Mary, the wife of Clopas" (who is unknown outside of this reference), and Mary Magdalene (or Mary of Magdala).<sup>111</sup> We also see that John is present (the unnamed disciple, as is his trademark). In that horrifying time of suffering for Jesus, He shows tender concern for the welfare of His mother, and thus says, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" (vv. 26-27). He either consigns the care of Mary to John because of John's faithfulness or because none of His brothers are present and John is the nearest relative available. It seems that John may have immediately taken Mary to his home in Jerusalem, which would account for the omission of details that are present in the other gospels, such as Jesus' dialogue with the thieves.<sup>112</sup>

### **E) The Death of Jesus (19:28-37)**

John's comment in verse 28, "Knowing that all had been accomplished," reinforces the idea that Jesus' entire life was one of consistently carrying out the plan of the Father. He has previously stated in 17:4 that he had "accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (ESV). He could speak then as though it already had been completed, since He knew it *would* be completed. The extreme conditions that Jesus suffered under--pain, nervous tension, loss of blood and exposure to the elements--would have created a severe thirst. And so, He was given sour wine to drink from a sponge (v. 29).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Luke 8:1-3 lists Mary Magdalene as one of those women who supported Jesus and the disciples out of their means, we learn there that Jesus had cast out seven demons from her. However, outside of that, there is little known of her, and certainly nothing that supports the idea of her being a prostitute or of loose moral character.

<sup>112</sup> We know that Mary is present in Jerusalem at the time of the prayer session preceding Pentecost (Acts 1:14), along with His brothers. So, it is possible that she stayed in Jerusalem during the time between His crucifixion and Pentecost.

<sup>113</sup> The drink Jesus was offered at the start, "wine mixed with gall" (Matt. 27:34, or "myrrh," Mark 15:23) may have acted as an agent to deaden the pain, which Jesus refused in

After receiving the drink, Jesus gave His last word from the cross: “It is finished.” The synoptics make it clear that He shouted or cried out loudly, not a mere statement. Then, “He gave up His spirit” (v. 30). The text is clear that Jesus voluntarily gave up, or “dismissed” His spirit.<sup>114</sup> This links back to His own assertion that He would lay down His life voluntarily, that no one would take it from Him (10:18). Thus, Jesus is dead--and His death is voluntary.

Two factors contributed to the Jewish leaders asking for the criminals to be removed. First, it was the Preparation of the Passover (which would begin at sunset), thus it would be a special Sabbath. Second, Jewish law forbade the bodies of hanged criminals to be left overnight, it was considered defiling the land (Deut. 21:22-23; cp. Joshua 8:29). Therefore, the leaders asked Pilate “to have their legs broken and that they be taken away” (v. 31). Breaking the legs was done to hasten death--by asphyxiation. The crucified would have to push with his legs to take a full breath--in considerable pain. Breaking the legs prevented him from doing so. The Romans would often leave the crucified on the cross for days--both as a warning to others and because it could take days for him to die. This instance seems to be a case of the Romans accommodating Jewish law.

The soldiers thus broke the legs of both of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus, but when they came to Jesus they found that He was already dead (vv. 32-33). Instead of breaking His legs, then, one of them took a spear and pierced His side (probably piercing His heart), and John records “there came out blood and water” (v. 34). Whatever the medical significance of this phrase, it is clear that Jesus was already dead--and the stab was merely confirmation not the cause of death. Those who discount the resurrection with an argument that Jesus was not really dead but merely swooned have to seriously contend with this statement.

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order to experience to full wrath of God. Another explanation is that this drink was so bitter because of the myrrh (gall is used by Matthew to describe the taste, rather than the content) that Jesus could not drink it.

<sup>114</sup> Greek *diaparatribē*, “to give into the hands of another,” hence Luke’s account states, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Verses 35-37 seem to be John giving his assertion that he saw these things and that what he is writing is the truth, “so that you also may believe.” This accords well with his overall purpose of the gospel (cp. 20:31) as well as his practice of objectivity. To make his point, again he appeals to Scripture showing that it was prophesied that none of Jesus’ bones would be broken (see Ps. 34:20; cp. Ex. 12:46, commanding that the bones of the Passover lamb must not be broken) and that “They will look on him whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10).

## **F) The Burial of Jesus (19:38-42)**

The body of Jesus probably was destined for a common grave, which was common for a criminal--especially if there was no family available or if the family was unable or unwilling to provide a burial. And Jesus’ family was likely to be unwilling simply “for fear of the Jews,” a common theme in John’s gospel. However, we read that Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body. We know little of this man except that he is wealthy (Matt. 27:57), is a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50), and is a “good and upright man . . . waiting for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51). John further tells us that Joseph is a disciple of Jesus, but in secret for fear of the Jews (v. 38). He stood to lose much by associating with Jesus, even after Jesus’ death, for Jesus’ had been accused of subversion both toward the Jews and Rome.<sup>115</sup>

With Joseph is Nicodemus, the one who went to Jesus at night (John 3:1-21) and gave a cautious defense of Him before the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-52). The actions of the men show that their faith has now matured to true faith. Nicodemus brought with him the spices and aloes that would be needed. John records them as about 75 Roman pounds (v. 39, about 100 English pounds). Since spices were so expensive, this is an indication of the wealth of Nicodemus and the reverence he has for Jesus (much like Mary’s anointing of Jesus in John 12 with the nard).

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<sup>115</sup> Mark’s account states that he went “boldly” before Pilate and asked for the body (Mark 15:43).

The actual burial process is not totally certain. John records that they “bound [the body of Jesus] in linen clothes with the spices” according to Jewish custom. The spices may have been placed in the folds of the cloth to harden, or they may have been made into a paste (mixed with oil) and rubbed on the body. In any case, Jesus’ body would have been bound just like Lazarus, whom He raised (chapter 11). The tomb Jesus was laid in was likely Joseph’s private family tomb. It was up until then unused, and was close to the tomb. Because it was nearby and the time until the Sabbath was drawing near, they laid His body in the tomb, and a stone would have been rolled across the entrance (cp. Matt. 27:60).

John is also silent on other details surrounding the burial, possibly because they are not as relevant to his purpose in writing. We are told that Mary Magdalene and “Mary the mother of Joseph” followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb, and thus they knew where the body of Jesus was laid and that the Jewish leaders feared that the disciples would steal the body and thus falsely proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, so a guard was posted (see Matt. 27:61-66).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Luke further tells us that the women went home and prepared more spices so that they could also have a part in the burial of Jesus, intending to complete the tasks on Sunday (after the Sabbath, see Luke 23:56).

## VIII. The End of the Earthly Ministry of the Word (20:1-21:25)

[Read John 20:1-21:25](#)

We know nothing of the time between Jesus' burial and Sunday morning. Like the time between the Old and New Testaments, it is a time of silence. The disciples' hopes and dreams had seemingly been dashed. After all, they had given up their whole lives to follow Jesus. Now, though, they sit, each in his or her own thoughts. There is something to be learned in this time and that is this: Most if not all believers will face a similar time in their faith journey--a time when hopes and dreams are shattered and God is silent in the face of questions. Yet, as the next scenes show, He will show Himself again, in His time, after allowing us to throw ourselves more fully upon Him.

From the accounts it seems that the disciples did continue to meet together--if only for supposed protection in numbers (cf. 20:19, "the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders"). As obedient Jews, they would no doubt have observed the Sabbath. Whether they participated in the Feast is uncertain, but it is doubtful that they made themselves publicly visible.

### A) The Resurrection (20:1-10)

Here again John omits details that, while the reader might like to know, would be incidental to his purpose in writing.<sup>117</sup> He deals not so much with the actual process of resurrection (how it happened) but rather on its effects. He begins with Mary Magdalene who discovers the empty tomb.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Also, as the last gospel written (as is commonly believed), his readers were likely already familiar with such details anyway.

<sup>118</sup> We are told in other accounts that other women are with her. But again, John's purpose is to focus on her. Luke's account tells us that they ran to Peter and John to tell them of the discovery.

She, along with the other Mary and Salome had planned to journey to the tomb after the Sabbath to complete burial rights. When she arrives at the tomb, she sees to her astonishment that the stone has been rolled away (v. 1).<sup>119</sup> She apparently does not enter the tomb at this point, but assumes that the body of Jesus is gone, so she runs to Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (commonly believed to be John) and blurts out, “They took the body of the Lord, and we don’t know where they put Him” (v. 2).<sup>120</sup> The tone seems a bit hysterical, as might be understandable. She does not clarify who she means by “they” (either the Romans or the Jewish leaders, apparently).<sup>121</sup>

Peter and John act just as impulsively, running to the tomb (vv. 3-4). John apparently outruns Peter (perhaps he was smaller, thinner, or just faster). He reaches the tomb first and peeks inside, but does not enter. He sees the strips of cloth lying in the same position as they had been, and seems to assume that the body is still there, maybe the women made a mistake--it was still dark after all. Since he seems to believe that Jesus’ body is still there, he does not enter the tomb, either out of respect for the dead or fear of ritual defilement.

Peter finally catches up and barges into the tomb. He sees the same linen strips, but also sees the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head, “still in its place, separate from the linen” (v. 7). The image here is that the grave clothes were undisturbed--as though they still contained Jesus’ body--and there is a space between the head wrapping and the bindings, as though the body had simply passed through the material. John finally ventures in and “saw and believed” (v. 8). The “belief” manifested here should be seen as understanding that Jesus’ body was not there, not necessarily that He had risen from the dead, for John is quick to remind us, “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead” (v. 9). The tone of verse 10

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<sup>119</sup> Mark tells us (16:3-4) that the women were wondering how they would get the stone rolled away, only to discover that it had already been rolled away, with the extra comment that “it was very large.”

<sup>120</sup> The “we” in this verse underscores the fact that she was with others when she made the discovery.

<sup>121</sup> By using “they” she is clearly not implicating the disciples in removing the body.

seems to indicate that Peter and John and presumably the women (other than Mary Magdalene) left the tomb and returned to where they had been staying, maybe mentally scratching their heads in puzzlement.

### **B) Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)**

Mary Magdalene, however, remains at the tomb, weeping. It is obvious that she was profoundly affected by Jesus' ministry, even after her deliverance.<sup>122</sup> She looks into the tomb and sees two men, who John identifies as angels, seated where Jesus' body had lain. She would be looking into the large open front room at this point (see comments on 11:38-44). The angels ask Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping" (v. 13a). She simply says through her tears that "they" have taken "my Lord" away, and she doesn't know where He has been placed (v. 13b). Again she does not indicate who "they" refers to; however, it doubtless refers to either the Jewish leaders (unlikely) or the Romans (more probable).<sup>123</sup>

Mary turns from the tomb, thinking to either leave or to search for Jesus' body (John is not clear). Standing behind her was a man she thinks is the caretaker of the garden, but John identifies as Jesus (v. 14). Doubtless her grief and tears clouded her vision, in addition to the semi-darkness of the morning. He also asks her why she is crying, but adds, "Who are you looking for" (v. 15a). Jesus of course knows what she seeks but asks the question as a means to allow her to express herself. Mary's reply is one of grief rather than frustration as the NIV rendering might suggest. It is more a pleading: "Sir, if you took His body away, *please* tell me where it is, and I will get Him" (v. 15b). Such was her love for Jesus that she did not consider how she would move His body by herself.

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<sup>122</sup> We are given no specifics about the events surrounding Jesus' delivering her from the demons, only that it did happen at some point. While we may conclude that Jesus and Mary had a close relationship, such a conclusion would not extend beyond that point. There is never a suggestion in the text that they were married or had a sexual relationship, and such ideas go against the very teaching of Jesus Himself.

<sup>123</sup> The Jews would not have moved the body because to do so would have meant ritual defilement. There was no reason for the Romans to have removed the body, having sealed the tomb and posted a guard (Matt. 27:62-64), though there was a day in between before the tomb was sealed.

Not only did Mary not recognize Jesus' appearance, she apparently does not recognize His voice at first, judging by her reaction to His question. However, His next word opens her eyes, both physically and spiritually. He simply says her name: "Mary" (v. 16a). The tone seems to be one of compassion and love, rather than rebuke. It only takes Him speaking her name to pierce her grief and darkness, similar to when He speaks Saul's name in Acts 9. John notes that she "turned toward Him" (perhaps she had not really stopped and was brushing past Him) and cried out, "Rabboni," the Aramaic word for "Teacher" (akin to the Hebrew "Rabbi").

The injunction to Mary that she not "hold on to Me" (v. 17) suggests that she prostrated herself and clasped His feet as other women had done (Matt. 28:9). The likely meaning of this statement is that she did not have to worry about Him immediately disappearing, for He planned to remain with His disciples a little while longer (as is noted in John 21 and the Synoptic accounts). He tells her to inform "His brothers" that He is ascending "to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (v. 17b). The statements signify a relationship that is different than before. No longer are the disciples merely servants, but friends. And no longer are they merely friends, but now brothers.

Mary obeys instantly; the tone suggests that she ran to the disciples, telling them that she had seen the Lord and passing along what He commanded her to tell them (v. 18). There is no suggestion by John whether the disciples believed her report.<sup>124</sup>

## **C) Jesus Appears to His Disciples (20:19-29)**

### ***1. The First Appearance (20:19-23)***

The scene now shifts to a gathering of the disciples. It is now later on that same day, Sunday (the first day of the week). It has been suggested that it took place in the Upper Room, where they

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<sup>124</sup> Luke's account includes a separate appearance by Jesus to other women along with Mary Magdalene, and it was said that they told the apostles that they had seen the Lord, and "their words seemed as idle talk to the apostles, so they did not believe the report" (Luke 24:11). However, Luke's account seems to say that the other women saw Jesus before Peter went to the tomb.

had celebrated the Passover with Jesus on Thursday evening. However, the text is silent on this, so one should be dogmatic about it. Wherever they were gathered, it was large enough to hold all of them, and if as commonly supposed, they were meeting the same place on the day of Pentecost, it would have had to be large indeed.<sup>125</sup>

In any event, John notes that they were all together, “with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders” (v. 19a). This seems to lend support to the idea that the disciples did not believe the report of the women that they had seen Jesus, for once they encountered the Risen Christ they became bold in their witness.

Suddenly, Jesus is in the midst of them--literally appearing out of nowhere. The text is clear that He did not come through the door, nor did He walk through the wall, as a spirit might have done.<sup>126</sup> The resurrection body of Jesus clearly has properties that His pre-resurrection body did not have--such as not being stopped by walls or locked doors. Yet, it is a real physical body--He invites the disciples to touch him (Luke 24:39, which John does not record), and He invites Thomas to touch Him (see comments on vv. 24-29 below). In addition, He is able to eat food (Luke 24:41-43).

John does not report the fright that must have gripped the disciples, when Jesus appears and says, “Peace be with you” (v. 19b). His greeting was intended to calm their fear, and his act of showing them the scars in His hands and side confirmed His identity, at which they were “overjoyed,” reports John (v. 20). They were overjoyed just to see Jesus again, but also because now they realize that His words have all been true and He indeed conquered death.

Jesus’ second statement of “Peace be with you” reassures the disciples and opens their re-commissioning: “As the Father sent me, so also I am sending you” (v. 21). This commissioning was to tell the disciples that they still have a part to play. As He served the Father and bore witness of Him, Jesus expects the

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<sup>125</sup> Unless the meetings preceding Pentecost were outdoors, which seems unlikely, given the religious and political climate at the time.

<sup>126</sup> Luke’s account tells us that they did in fact think it was a spirit.

disciples to do the same now, and they will not be alone, for He bestows the Holy Spirit on them (v. 22). Their ministry would be like Jesus' own, the exposing of hearts and pronouncing the forgiveness of sins for those who receive Him. This authority is not their own. No earthly leader has the power to forgive sins. But, based on the Word of God, one who is in relationship with Christ may declare that another's sins are forgiven based on the teaching of the Word.<sup>127</sup> So we see here the Person of the disciples' ministry (the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ), the Power of their ministry (the Holy Spirit), and the Purpose of their ministry (preaching the forgiveness of sins to all who accept Christ).

## *2. The Second Appearance (20:24-29)*

For reasons that John does not explain, Thomas is notably absent from this gathering. In his two previous appearances in the gospel (11:16; 14:5), he comes across not as a doubter (as is commonly ascribed to him) but rather as a practical rational man. He seeks that which is concrete (like a map showing the way to the Father, 14:5), and he is ready to do whatever is practically necessary, even if it means dying (11:16)--which actually happened to him, according to tradition. The other disciples, filled with joy, tell him of their encounter with the Lord (v. 25a). Thomas, however, tries to throw a wet blanket on their fire: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (v. 25b, NIV). In contrast to others who are rebuked for their unbelief or are not denied further light, Jesus honors Thomas' plea.

John notes that "after eight days" the disciples met again, with Thomas among them (v. 26, ESV). By Jewish reckoning this would be the next Sunday after the resurrection since they would count Resurrection Sunday as the first day. Again the doors are

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<sup>127</sup> An example of this is when someone comes to a believer with a heavy conscience burdened with sin. If in the midst of that conversation, the sinner earnestly confesses and repents of his sin and turns to Christ, the believer may pronounce his sins forgiven--but he does so on the authority of Christ, not his own authority, and he is pronouncing something that has already happened.

locked (though there is no mention of “the fear of the Jews,” perhaps simply to duplicate the setting for Thomas). Again Jesus appears and stands in the midst and declares, “Peace be to you!” Though He says this to all, He then turns to Thomas.

Instead of rebuking Thomas, Jesus invites him to “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side” (v. 27a, NIV). It is noteworthy that Jesus responds to Thomas in the very same words that he used. The next statement is intended not as a rebuke but rather in the tone of “You asked for evidence, here it is. Accept the evidence before you and believe” (v. 27b, paraphrase).

With the evidence now presented, Thomas, being intellectually honest, accepts that which has been put before him and does the only thing he can: He confesses, “My Lord and my God” (v. 28). While it may seem that Thomas did not exercise true faith (having believed upon evidence), it must be remembered that the Lord is gracious and often accommodates our weaknesses. Jesus often pointed to the works that He performed and urged people to believe because of them (10:28; 14:11). It is similar to the man who cried out, “Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Jesus’ reply to Thomas, “You have believed after seeing. Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed” (v. 29) should not be construed as a rebuke, but rather as a comparative statement of fact. Thomas, having seen and believed Jesus was blessed (as indeed were all the other disciples who believed only after seeing). Therefore, those who believe without having seen are much more blessed.

#### **D) John’s Concluding Statement of Purpose (20:30-31)**

Verses 30-31 seem to be the original ending of John’s writing. He reminds his readers that Jesus did many more signs than those he has recorded. But he chose these signs to show that Jesus is the Son of God, and that the reader, in learning of the evidence might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and thus have life and be saved. This is the core, the central idea, of John’s gospel: *Obtaining eternal life through believing in His name*. If one

only had this book to read apart from any other book in the Bible, he would have all he needed for faith and life.

### **E) The Appendix: The Fates of Peter and John (21:1-25)**

The final chapter of John's gospel seems to be a later addition, probably by John himself or perhaps by another individual. It accords well with the rest of the gospel, using similar language and themes. It was written to show the results of belief in Jesus--the reinstatement of Peter after his denial and to dispel a rumor that apparently started concerning what would happen to "the beloved disciple."

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

The opening phrase, "afterward" or "after these things" (ESV) indicates an unspecified amount of time, though it need not be a long time. In fact, since verse 14 says that this is the third appearance of Jesus to His disciples (not counting the encounter with Mary Magdalene), it must have taken place between the events of 20:24-29 and the ascension (Luke 24:50-53, which John does not record).<sup>128</sup> The word translated "appeared" and "happened" (NIV) are both the same word. The word is a characteristic word in John's gospel, appearing some eight times.<sup>129</sup> In most cases it is linked to the self-revelation of Jesus (e.g., 1:31; 2:11; 9:3). The word also appears in John's first letter, where he links it both with Jesus' incarnation (e.g., 1 John 1:2; 3:5) and His imminent return (1 John 2:28; 3:2). In that regard, this chapter is all about Jesus' manifesting (making known) the purpose of the disciples (specifically here Peter and John).

John tells us that several of the disciples were together in Galilee, likely having gone there after being told that they would see Him there (Matt. 28:7). Several of the disciples that are named appear elsewhere in the gospel (Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and John as one of the "sons of Zebedee," the other of course being

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<sup>128</sup> While John does not record the ascension, Luke likewise does not record Jesus' "second appearance" involving Thomas, or this encounter.

<sup>129</sup> Greek *phaneroō*, "to manifest; to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown."

James who does not appear individually in the book). The other two could possibly be Andrew and Philip, but this is not certain. The tone of the passage seems to indicate that Peter has already come to a place of leadership among the disciples, so when he decides to go fishing, the others join him.

Many have commented that Peter's assertion that he was going fishing marks a return to the life he knew before encountering Jesus, as though he were deserting or backsliding. While the phrase translated "am going fishing" can have the sense of drawing away, it need not be understood like that here. The fact is they had been told to go to Galilee and wait for Jesus, and they went fishing to pass the time; there is certainly no moral injunction against making a living while waiting on the Lord's command (unless He commands otherwise). Unfortunately for the disciples, their night of labor was fruitless (v. 3).<sup>130</sup>

As dawn breaks, Jesus is standing on the shore, but, as John notes, the disciples did not recognize Him. It being early morning the mist on the lake could have made recognition difficult, and they were likely focused on the frustrating night. Jesus calls out, "Children, haven't you caught any fish" (v. 5a). The phrase "children" is one of affection here.<sup>131</sup> The question is phrased in such a way to expect a negative answer, showing that Jesus knew they had failed to catch any fish before the question was asked--their "no" only confirmed it. Jesus then calls out that they should cast their net on the right side of the boat and they would find fish there. Whether or not Jesus supernaturally knew there were fish there or could see them from shore, it is certain that the *number* of fish present was a miracle, since the tone is one of awe and surprise. The disciples probably decided that since they had spent all night, one more try wouldn't hurt anything.

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<sup>130</sup> Greek *hypagō halieuō*. The EBC notes, "... perhaps they were discouraged by Jesus' death and decided to return to their old occupation of fishing. The kingdom had not arrived, and they had to make a living" (notes on 21:2). However, John records that they knew Jesus was alive and that He had already commissioned them (20:20-21). It seems unlikely that they would be discouraged.

<sup>131</sup> Greek *paidion*, "a little child" (either male or female, the form is neuter). The NIV rendering of "friends" is not warranted and does not carry the same connotation.

John records that immediately the net was swarming with fish, so many that they could not bring the net in. Something about this seems to open John's eyes, either Jesus' voice, or the result--it is remarkably similar to Luke 5:1-11.<sup>132</sup> He tells Peter that it is Jesus who is on the shore. Peter, acting in his characteristically impulsive way, puts on his cloak (he had taken it off, leaving only the tunic) and jumps into the water (v. 7). He apparently swims to shore, since John reports that they are about one hundred yards from shore.<sup>133</sup> The other disciples row the boat to shore, towing the net full of fish, since they were not able to bring it aboard.

Jesus invites them to bring some of the fish and have breakfast, and John notes here that none asked Him, "Who are you," since they all knew it was the Lord by now (v. 12). The context of verse 13 seems to indicate that Jesus' actions in breaking the bread and fish served as a link back to the last meal they had shared together. We are told here that this was now the third appearance to the disciples after the resurrection.

## *2. The Restoration of Peter (21:15-17)*

We are not told if Jesus took Peter aside privately for this conversation or whether it was in front of everyone, and it would be best not to speculate. It is interesting that Jesus never brings up the actual denials of Peter. Rather, He frames the discussion in positive questions (question that expect an affirmative response). Whether He intended this as a model for the church to follow is unknown and is a matter that church leadership should consider prayerfully.

The three questions by Jesus are to negate the three denials by Peter. Each time, Jesus simply asks, "Simon son of John, do you

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<sup>132</sup> In Luke's account (at the start of Jesus' ministry), the number of fish is not recorded. However, it must have been more than the number recorded here, since the fish "filled both boats so full that they began to sink" (Luke 5:7b).

<sup>133</sup> The KJV rendering, "for he was naked," is inaccurate. The Jews were strict in not exposing their nakedness in public (dating back to the Mosaic Law), hence the wearing of a tunic as an undergarment. Some have suggested Peter walked on the water, but this does not accord with "jumping into the water" (in the account of him walking on the water, he "stepped out of the boat"), and surely John would have recorded such an event as he did in chapter 6. Finally, Peter doesn't seem to have the faith that would have been necessary to do so here, at least until Jesus restores him.

love Me” (vv. 15a, 16a, 17a). In the first two instances, Jesus uses the word *agapaō*, the divine love of God, manifested through Christ that sacrifices self for his purpose. However, Peter answers with *phileō*, which denotes “tender affection,” such as the love that the Father has for the Son (John 3:35; 5:20). The two words are never used interchangeably or indiscriminately, so one gets the sense that Peter is, at the moment, unable or unwilling to commit to “love” in the way that Jesus presents it.

Jesus’ addition of “more than these” in verse 15 is somewhat ambiguous. There are three possible meanings to this: 1) “Do you love Me more than these other men love me?” 2) “Do you love Me more than you love these other men?” 3) “Do you love Me more than these things [boats and fishing, things of the world]?” In light of Peter’s earlier promise to never fall away from Christ regardless of what the others might do and given the context of this discussion, it seems that the first option is probably in view.

For the third exchange, Jesus changes the word “love” to match Peter. He uses *phileō*, as a seeming concession to Peter. Jesus meets Peter where he is and starts from that point. We learn later that Peter did indeed manifest the *agapaō* of God, and was willing to die for his faith, crucified upside down, history tells us. This scene is meant to encourage the believer, reminding him that Christ came to restore the broken and fallen and He always starts at the point of need, where the believer is, in order to lead the believer to a higher calling.

In each successive instance, Peter responds affirmatively, “Lord, You know I love [*phileō*] You.” The third time, John notes that Peter was “grieved” (or “sorry”) after the third question (v. 1).<sup>134</sup> Peter may have been grieved because he was faced with his own denial or because it seemed that Jesus did not believe his first two affirmations of love. However, as mentioned above, Jesus asks three times to negate each denial by Peter.

After each affirmation of love by Peter, Jesus gives a command: *Feed My lambs* (v. 15b), *Take care of My sheep* (v. 16b), and *feed My lambs* (v. 17b). Each command is to restore Peter’s

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<sup>134</sup> Greek *lypeō*, “to grieve, to make sorry.”

calling, and the second command builds upon the first. First, Peter is told to “feed My lambs.” Lambs are the young and need someone to feed them and guide them. Second, Peter is told to “take care [tend] My sheep.” Sheep are older, wiser, and still need a shepherd. The word may literally be translated “to shepherd.”<sup>135</sup> We should note that the progression from verse 16 (shepherd my sheep) to verse 17 (feed my sheep) seems to be one of stepping back. Jesus, in restoring Peter is giving him charge to “feed” the sheep. Later, as he gets older, he will shepherd them (see 1 Peter 5:1-2, where he calls himself an “elder,” such an office having the charge to “shepherd” the flock).

### 3. *The Fates of Peter and John 21:18-23*)

In restoring Peter, Jesus reminded him that he still had a purpose. Jesus now gives Peter a glimpse into his own future. He says that one day Peter will be led by another. Another would dress him and lead him where he did not want to go (v. 18). This seems ambiguous, but John interprets it for the reader. Jesus is here showing how Peter would die and thus glorify God (v. 19). Peter’s death would not be simply from old age, rather it would be a death “in the line of duty,” suggesting imprisonment before death. Though this seems a morose and forbidding thing to say, Jesus probably means it as encouragement, as a way to say, “Peter, I have restored you, and here is how you will know you have been restored: You will fulfill your purpose and will remain faithful to the end, dying for My name.” Then Jesus gives the solemn command, “Follow Me” (v. 19b).

Human nature being what it is, Peter sees John and wonders about his fate (again John describes himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and as the one who leaned against Jesus at the Passover meal to inquire about the identity of the betrayer, v. 20). Apparently, Jesus and Peter were walking, and John was following, perhaps close enough to be seen but out of earshot.

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<sup>135</sup> The phrase in v. 15 translated “feed My lambs” is *boskō ho arnion*, lit. “pasture My little lambs.” In verse 16 the phrase is *poimainō ho probaton*, lit. “shepherd my sheep.” The distinction between the two is that the latter construction implies overall guidance, whereas the former implies feeding (pasturing), such as a teacher might do.

Peter turns and see him, then asks Jesus, “Lord, what about him” (v. 21). Jesus’ reply is a mild rebuke. “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what business of that of yours? You follow me [and do not concern yourself with things outside of your own calling]” (v. 22). This is where the rumor apparently started that this disciple (John) would not die, but John corrects the record in reminding the reader that what Jesus said was merely a hypothetical (“If I want him to remain alive,” which does not presuppose an outcome). This by itself may be seen as evidence that John was still alive at the time of the writing of this appendix, and perhaps that he actually wrote or dictated it.

#### *4. Final Thoughts (21:24-25)*

The final verses of John’s gospel are written in the sense of someone attesting to the truth of his testimony. It is clear that John’s gospel was written primarily for second-generation Christians who were historically remote from the events described, and thus such an attestation would be appropriate. The use of “we” in verse 24 does not necessarily show that John was not the source of the content, it merely shows that John attested the authenticity of the writing and a group (probably the church at Ephesus) supported the assertion.



# APPENDICES

Appendix A: Faith, The New Birth and Eternal Life: The Message of the Gospel

Appendix B: The Woman Caught in Adultery: Its Place in the Gospel

Appendix C: Questions for Further Reflection and Study



# Appendix A: Faith, The New Birth and Eternal Life: The Message of the Gospel

There has been much confusion over the years--indeed, over the centuries--concerning the nature of salvation and what it means to be a Christian. Some today consider themselves to be Christians because they live in America(!), attend church regularly, live by the "Golden Rule," or simply try to live right and be good people. Even some in the church have maintained that faith in Christ is not enough, that one must maintain his salvation through obedience to Christ. John's Gospel, however, shines a clear light on the subject, and makes it plain that the true definition of a Christian is one who has experienced the new birth of John 3.

## A) Faith: The Requirement of Salvation

John sets out the requirement for salvation very clearly. "To all who believe in [Jesus'] name, to those he gave the right to become children of God, born not of flesh and blood nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13). Thus, the requirement for a man to be saved – the *only* requirement – is "believing in His name." Put another way, *faith* in Christ is the requirement for salvation.

What, then, does it mean to place one's faith in Christ? Fortunately, John's gospel gives a clear picture of what it means to believe. To believe in Christ is to 1) believe He is all that He says about Himself (i.e., that He is the Son of God come in the flesh to save the world); and 2) place all that we are into His hands, turning over ourselves and lives to His care. Faith always has two components – belief and acting upon that belief. If one states that he has faith but refuses to act upon that belief, he cannot truly be said to have faith. Two examples of this will illustrate the point.

## 1. *The Healing of the Royal Official's Son (4:46-54)*

As Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Samaria, they were met by an “official,” probably a member of Herod’s royal court. This official’s son was ill, at the point of death. He requested that Jesus come and heal his son. Jesus at first seems to rebuke the man, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe” (v. 48). In reality, Jesus was testing the man’s faith. After pleading with Jesus again, Jesus simply says, “Go your way, your son lives” (v. 50). At this point, John records, “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke and went home” (v. 51). How do we know that he believed (had faith)? *Because He acted according to the belief.* Had he insisted that Jesus physically be present and heal his son, that would have negated any claim of faith.<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that after the official found his son alive, John reports that “he believed with all his household” (v. 53). This seems to be a case of his faith being strengthened to the point of saving faith, for that is the construction John ordinarily uses to denote true saving faith.

## 2. *Jesus’ Conversation With the Jews in John 8*

As Jesus is speaking with the Jewish leaders in John 8 (after the incident with the woman caught in adultery), John notes that, “As He was speaking, many of the people believed in him” (8:30). Jesus however, knowing all men (see 2:24-25), challenged their belief (hoping to see genuine faith). He speaks specifically to “the Jews that had believed Him” (8:31a) and says, “If you abide in My word, *then you are truly My disciples*” (v. 31b, emphasis added). Here, mental assent or even verbal confession is not enough. For, as Jesus continues, when one abides in Jesus’ word (exercises faith), then he is set free (v. 32).

James makes a similar argument: “Therefore, submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). First, one places faith in God (faith always entails

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<sup>136</sup> A similar incident is recorded by Matthew, but in this instance the one requesting help specifically tells Jesus that He need not come physically, for he knows that Jesus has authority and is confident that Jesus can heal from a distance. Jesus commends the man’s faith (see Matt. 8:5-13).

submission to God). Second, in the exercising of that faith, in submission to God, he resists the devil and the worldly entanglements. Only then, James says, will the devil flee. Even Paul, the most strident defender of justification by faith alone, teaches that true faith always results in action. This is why his letters always consist of two parts — doctrinal and practical. Faith without action is dead indeed, but works without faith amount to legalism.

So, then, the question must be asked: How does one know they have true faith? By the results. If one claims to believe on Jesus as the Son of God to salvation, then they will necessarily place their lives into His care and turn from any other avenue by which they might seek identity, security or salvation.

## **B) The New Birth and Eternal Life**

Jesus makes it clear: “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (3:3). What does this phrase mean? Jesus disclaims the idea that it means a second physical birth. If it does not refer to a physical birth, then it must necessarily refer to a spiritual birth--which is why some translate the phrase as “born from above,” but that is not a necessary translation. Jesus equates being born again with being born by the Spirit (3:5), and comments that as flesh gives birth to flesh (a natural birth), so the Spirit gives birth to spirit (3:6). Jesus does not tell us by what process this is accomplished, but He does tell us that we can see the results of it (3:8).

This necessarily leads to a question: What does it mean to be born again (i.e., what is the nature of the new birth)? To answer this question, it is necessary to first understand the idea of “eternal life” that is so prevalent in John’s Gospel. Eternal life refers to both duration and the state of a person’s spiritual life. Though the body may die (this due to the Fall), man’s spirit will live on forever. Thus, in the broadest sense all have “eternal life,” in the sense of duration. However, eternal life also has a relational component. In the Bible, eternal life implies that one is in right relationship with God, as Adam was before the Fall. After the Fall, all are born in a state of eternal separation from God--thus,

without “eternal life,” in the biblical sense. The reason is that the spirit within us is “dead” from birth, due to sin. The new birth, then, quickens, or brings to life, our spirit, so that we can now have “eternal life.”

In this sense, eternal life is not something a believer *will receive*, but something that is *already present* within him. Some speak of this as a “positional” truth, meaning that it has not actually happened yet. But that interpretation is at odds with how Scripture views eternal life. The believer has eternal life now because his relationship has been restored with his Creator through the death and resurrection of Christ. Scripture consistently teaches that the believer “has” eternal life at the moment he trusts Christ for his salvation, as John 3:36 declares, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Again, John says in 1 John 5:12: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

What then, is salvation about? It is not about keeping the law or living right. It is not even about pitting “relationship” against “religion,” a popular evangelical theme of the modern era. It is about a fundamental change in the life, identity, and very nature of the believer. Once we were “dead” in our sins. We had a nature that sought to live independently in all things, and was hostile to the things of God. Now, we have a new nature, one that longs to be in fellowship with God and longs to obey and please Him. The new birth certainly has an element of obedience in it, in that the believer will in fact seek to live according to God’s word. But that is because *it is who he is*. And the new birth certainly has the idea of “relationship” within it--as opposed to dead works of “religion.” But again, that relationship is based on a fundamental change in the identity of the believer. The clear teaching of Scripture is that those who have truly experienced the new birth *will* change. Those who claim to be a believer of Christ yet show no change in attitude or behavior are simply “talking the talk,” meaning no change in their nature occurred. In short, then, a Christian, a Christ-follower, is one who has experienced the new birth through placing their faith in Christ.

## Appendix B:

# The Woman Caught in Adultery: Its Place in the Gospel

The story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) is at the same time one of best known and loved passages of John's Gospel as well as one of the most disputed. There is serious debate among scholars as to its authenticity (whether it portrays an accurate event in the life of Christ) and its placement in the Gospel. Most modern translations and commentaries treat it as a later insertion. However, a good case can be made that the passage is original and fits smoothly into the narrative of John 7-8. Part I of this essay will summarize the argument for considering John 7:53-8:11 as an original part of John's Gospel, and Part II will show that the internal evidence supports such a conclusion.

### Part I: The Originality and Authenticity of John 7:53-8:11<sup>137</sup>

As we know, we have no original manuscripts of the Biblical texts. What we have are copies of copies of copies, passed down by generations of copyists. When it comes to this passage, the majority stance seems to be that the passage was "inserted" in the text later by an unknown editor or editors, and that it was not written by the Apostle John.

However, this stance fails to take into account the mindset of the Jewish and early Christian scribes when dealing with sacred text. By the end of the second century, a very conservative trend had set in, hardening opinions against deliberate alteration of the text, probably as a reaction to the mishandling of the text by early

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<sup>137</sup> Much of the information in this section comes from a series of articles by Zane Hodges written in 1979 and 1980 concerning the debate. See "The woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11): exposition," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 545 (January 1980): 41-53 (hereafter *Exposition*) and "The woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11): the text," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 544 (October 1979): 318-332 (hereafter *Text*).

heretics. Therefore, “the vast majority of deliberate changes in the New Testament text were older than A D 200. In other words, they came into being in the period A D 50-200.”<sup>138</sup> In fact, John’s warning in Revelation 22:18-19 is likely a result of his knowledge that the New Testament texts had already been tampered with.

The earliest manuscripts date from Egypt; and the amount of agreement between them suggests that they came from a single exemplar. Thus, this exemplar could be responsible for numerous descendant texts that omit the passage. Given the feeling of the early church against tampering with the text, it must be questioned how the passage could have been ‘inserted’ into the text. “If after A.D. 200 a relatively conservative tendency set in which made it increasingly difficult to alter significantly the text in hand, the possibility that the disrupted passage was repeatedly and independently inserted into the manuscript tradition by scribes and editors in many scriptoria must rate rather low on the scale of probability.”<sup>139</sup>

Several of the earliest church Fathers who do mention the passage are aware of its controversial nature as well as its acceptance. Jerome (ca. 420) writes, “in the Gospel according to John in many manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, is found the story of the adulterous woman who was accused before the Lord.”<sup>140</sup> It is possible, then, that the silence of many early Fathers may have to do with both a “commentary tradition,” as well as the inherent controversial nature of the passage.<sup>141</sup> What this means is that, simply put, the more commentaries and translators assert that the passage is not authentic, the more will continue to do so.

Augustine (ca. 430) gives a strong clue concerning the disappearance of this story when he writes, “Certain persons of little faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given impunity in sinning, removed

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<sup>138</sup> G. D. Kilpatrick, cited by Hodges, in *Text*, 321.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Cited by Hodges, *Text*, 330.

<sup>141</sup> It should be noted that the modern trend is to continue that “commentary tradition,” when versions like the NIV, ESV and RV make the judgment for the reader that the text is not authentic.

from their manuscripts the Lord's act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if He who had said 'sin no more' had granted permission to sin."<sup>142</sup> Based on this, then, it is quite likely that instead of being "inserted" later, the passage was actually "removed" early in the life of the church (i.e., before the "conservative trend" noted earlier had set in). The passage may have been removed by what may be referred to as "legalistically minded" members of the church due to the controversial nature of the passage.<sup>143</sup> As Hodges suggests, "Once the ancient exemplar from which the pericope was removed had been copied for a generation or so, its descendants would offer testimony to its absence from their texts while they remained obviously mute about the reasons for this absence. . . . A snowball effect would thereby be produced which was bound to leave its impact on the history of transmission."<sup>144</sup>

While this is not a conclusive argument, it does at least satisfactorily answer the question of how the passage came to be absent from many texts. In addition, it should be pointed out that if the text is not original or does not belong at this place in the Gospel, then it truly has no context in which to rightly interpret it. However, when read in the broader context of John 7-8, the passage does find support for originality--a subject to which we now turn.

## **Part II--Internal Evidence of Originality**

### *A) Contextual Evidence*

When one considers the passage before and after, far from being an interruption, it serves rather to be a bridge between the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus' testimony as the Light of the World. As noted in the section below, this passage follows naturally after John 7, with 7:53-8:1 serving as the transition from the end of the Feast to the next day.

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<sup>142</sup> Cited by Hodges, *Text*, 330-331.

<sup>143</sup> It must be remembered that in the first 70 years of the church, one of the biggest challenges was escaping legalism and understanding the place of morality in the new believers' lives.

<sup>144</sup> Cited by Hodges, *Text*, 332.

After the events of this passage, we read that Jesus identifies Himself as the Light of the World (8:12). The Pharisees challenge Him on this: ““You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true” (v. 13). Their contention was that under the Law, only the testimony of two witnesses is valid. In going back to John 7:53-8:11, we see that the controversy was about the Law, and specifically (in Jesus’ eyes) *the character of the witnesses against the woman*. Having failed to arrest Jesus (ch. 7), and then having failed to trap Him using the Law, the leaders now turn to a simple attempt at discrediting Him. Thus, we see that this passage plays a key role in the sequence of events.

### *B) Details in the Text*

#### 1. “They went each to his own house . . .” (7:53)

As discussed previously, John 7 is set during the Feast of Tabernacles. As part of the Feast, observant Jews lived in tents or booths for the week-long celebration. At the end of John 7, we see an exchange between the Temple guards and the Pharisees (including Nicodemus). While one commentary notes that this poses a problem (because “Jesus was not present at the meeting of the Sanhedrin mentioned in 7:45-52), it actually poses little difficulty. There are many events in the Scriptures where the author apparently received information from another. Indeed, Jesus was not present for many of the Sanhedrin’s meetings; the only one we know Him to have been present for is when He was condemned to death.<sup>145</sup>

In fact, the opposite conclusion would be warranted. At the end of the Feast, this discussion took place, and then “everyone went home,” as they would have done at the end of the Feast. But notice 8:1, “. . . but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” Why would He do this? Because as He pointed out, the Son of Man had no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). Later in John we learn that He had a habit of passing the night on the Mount during His time

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<sup>145</sup> EBC, notes on 7:53. Jesus also was not present at the meeting in 11:47-52. The content of the meetings was obviously given to John by at least a sympathetic source. Another (more general) example of this would be Acts 17:16-34 (Paul’s preaching in Athens). In fact, much of Acts and Luke was written not by an eyewitness, but by one who interviewed others to learn of the events.

in Jerusalem. Thus, the verses of 7:53-8:1, instead of breaking the narrative actually help the narrative flow.

## 2. “He sat down and taught them” (8:2)

Many commentators object to this as an original part of the Gospel because the construction appears nowhere else in John’s Gospel. However, this really proves little. It is simply a case of John noting specific details that are relevant to each event he records. Remember that John wrote with a purpose: “[T]hat you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Therefore, like all writers do, he chose what details to include to advance that purpose. This detail is no different.

Note that the leaders addressed Him as “teacher.” Common practice was for the scribes (the teachers of the Law) to sit in the Temple courts and teach, expounding the Law. In the same manner, Jesus assumed the same position. He would soon be challenged in His right to teach about the Law by the “scribes,” the experts in the Law. Thus it is perfectly appropriate for John to include what most would see as a minute detail.<sup>146</sup>

## 3. “The scribes and Pharisees . . . ” (8:3)

Like John’s reference to Jesus sitting down to teach, this phrase is found nowhere else in John, though it is frequent in the other Gospels. However, too much ought not to be made of this. In each Gospel, the writers reference the Jewish leaders in various ways: Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and Pharisees, etc. John does the same thing. He refers to “the Jews,” “the Pharisees,” and “the scribes and Pharisees.” In each case, how he references the group depends on what is happening.

For example, when John mentions “the Jews,” the sense seems to be the nation as a whole that has wandered away from

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<sup>146</sup> Indeed, this is not the only “minute” detail that John draws attention to in His Gospel. We learn that Jesus *sat down* at the well in John 4, that Nicodemus came to Jesus *by night*, and the size of the water pots used at the wedding in Cana (John 2). We also learn in John 9 that Jesus used mud to heal the man born blind. Each of the Gospel writers include small details in their writing, as any good author would; the details included and omitted however, vary from author to author.

God. In mentioning “priests and Levites” in John 1, the question has to do with baptism, a typical priestly function. And when he mentioned the Pharisees in the same passage, the question was still about John’s authority to baptize.<sup>147</sup> And finally, in 8:6, he mentions “the scribes and Pharisees,” the controversy is over the application of the Mosaic law--of which the scribes were the supposed experts, the lawyers of the day. Again, then, John’s use of the phrase would be perfectly appropriate here and in no way contrary to the rest of the Gospel.

#### 4. “They said this to test Him . . .” (8:6)

This phrase merits special attention. The leaders had set a trap, according to John’s interpretation of events. He writes, “This they said to test Him.” A careful student of John’s Gospel will note immediately that this construction only appears one other time in any of the Gospels--in John 6:6. In fact the phraseology is identical between 6:6 and 8:6. If this is not almost a “signature” of John’s authorship, one would be hard-pressed to find one.<sup>148</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen, there is indeed sufficient evidence to consider this story as part of the original Gospel of John. Since the events recorded obviously take place at the Temple, there are few other places in the Gospels where the story would fit logically, and even fewer places (none, actually) where the story would fit into the narrative. The places suggested by some commentaries and the NIV brackets simply do not fit. Regardless of one’s feelings about the content or teaching of the passage, its present placement is exactly where it was intended.

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<sup>147</sup> It must be remembered that “Pharisee” was not an office, as much as a group that held to particularly strict interpretations of the Law. Here John seems to suggest that the Pharisees were composed of “priests and Levites.”

<sup>148</sup> In both places, 6:6 and 8:6, the construction is *lego peirazo autos*, “[They/He] was saying to test him.” There are similar phrases in the other Gospels (cp. Matt. 19:3; 22:35; Mark 8:11; 10:2; Luke 11:16). However, they are not identical.

## **Appendix C:**

### **Questions for Further Reflection and Study**

The study questions that follow are designed to help you think more deeply about John's gospel and how its teachings might be applied to your life and those around you.

#### **I. Preparation of the Ministry of the Word (1:1-2:12)**

1) What do we learn about "The Word" (Jesus) in 1:1-3? Why is this important for understanding who He is?

2) John 1:14 says that the Word "dwelt among us" (lit. *tabernacled*). Why was it necessary for Jesus to become human and dwell among His people?

3) John's call to His disciples was often a simple "Follow Me," as in 1:43. What do you think made the disciples follow such a simple command?

#### **II. The Public Ministry of the Word--Year 1 (2:13-4:54)**

1) In John 2:13-17, Jesus drove out the money-changers and those selling pigeons in the Temple, accusing them of turning the Father's house into "a house of trade" (2:16). Do you think this passage has any relevance to what type of activities are carried on in a church? If so, how might it apply?

2) What obstacles might have hindered Nicodemus in John 3 from understanding the teaching of Jesus on the new birth?

3) When Jesus talked to the woman at the well (4:1-26), He told her that she had had five husbands and the man she was then living with was not her husband? Why do you think He brought that up? Do you think the conversation changed her in any way? If so, how?

### **III. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 2 (Ch. 5)**

1) Why do you think the man at the Pool (John 5) could have been offended by Jesus after he was healed?

2) What are some implications of the idea that Jesus is equal with God the Father?

3) In John 5:28-29, Jesus says, “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice [Jesus, the Son of Man] and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” In context of the gospel, what would be “good” versus “bad”? Are we judged on works according to this verse?

### **IV. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Galilee (Ch. 6)**

1) What principle(s) might be gleaned from the events of John 6:1-15?

2) Why do you think the Jews constantly asked for a sign from Jesus? Do you think they would have believed in Him if they have received such a sign?

3) How do you think we partake of Jesus as the bread of life? What does that mean?

### **V. The Public Ministry of the Word: Year 3, Judea (7:1-11-57)**

1) Why do you think Jesus' brothers might have wanted him to go to Jerusalem? What do His interactions with His family show about how we are to relate to our family?

2) In reading John 8:2-11, what truths can we learn about how we are to handle those who have fallen into sexual sin?

3) In all of His discussions with the Jews, what do you think Jesus' primary or most important point was?

4) In healing the man born blind in John 9, what does Jesus teach us about sin, disease, and healing?

5) If Jesus' sheep do know and hear His voice, why does it seem that so many go astray? How do we know that we are hearing His voice?

6) The Resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 is the seventh and last of John's signs. Why do you think John finished with this sign? What seems to be the progression in the signs he selected?

## **VI. The Word Ministers to His Own (13:1-17:26)**

- 1) Why is the act of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet such an important teaching, central to the idea of true love?
- 2) Why is the commandment Jesus gives in John 13:31-35 a "new" commandment?
- 3) How do we know that we are abiding in Jesus? How does one abide in Him?
- 4) Why is our love for one another a proof of our salvation?
- 5) If the world hates us because we are disciples of Jesus' what comfort can we take in the midst of that?
- 6) Jesus prayed for His disciples, and all future believers in John 17. How can we apply His prayer for us to our lives?

## **VII: The Word Glorifies the Father (18:1-19:42)**

- 1) Why would the Jewish leaders have needed to arrest Jesus at night and conduct His trials in secret?
- 2) Peter denied Christ three after promising to remain faithful. What do you think he felt as he went outside and "wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75)? What lesson can we learn from Peter's fall?

### **VIII: The End of the Earthly Ministry of the Word (20:1-21:25)**

1) Jesus appeared to Thomas a week after he declared that he would only believe after seeing the evidence. What lesson can be learned from this?

2) If John 21 was written to dispel a rumor concerning the fate of the apostle John, why do you think it was necessary to include Jesus' restoration of Peter? What lesson can we learn from this, when reading it with the account of Peter's denials?



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