

John

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Christian writers of the second and third centuries attributed this Gospel to John, the son of Zebedee, a disciple of Jesus, but there is little other evidence to support this assertion. The narrator's voice interrupts the story of Jesus' crucifixion at 19:35, following the issue of blood and water from Jesus' side, to note, "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth." Again in chapter 21, the narrator intervenes with a closing comment, referring to a disciple who is present with the resurrected Jesus: "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true" (21:24). The presence of an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' death and resurrection is identified on the basis of the Gospel's witness. At the same time, however, the eyewitness is referred to in the third person – "his testimony is true" (21:24) – so it seems unlikely that the author of the Gospel and this disciple are the same person. The "we" of 21:24 points to a later group that claimed this disciple as the source of its authority and traditions about Jesus. Who then is this disciple? In 19:26 and 21:20 he is identified as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (see 13:23; 21:7). P3

It is best not to assume that John is necessarily later than Matthew or Luke. They may all be in roughly the same range: 75-85 CE being a likely period for Matthew, Luke, and John. P5

The importance of imagery from Jewish Scriptures and tradition is a key to understanding the kind of community for whom the Gospel was originally written. John speaks from within the Jewish tradition. He has an impressive command of the Jewish Scriptures and draws on their imagery, characters, and stories as a basis for understanding who Jesus is. John occasionally quotes the Scriptures directly, pointing to Jesus' life as a fulfillment of the promises God has made in the past. He also utilizes the images of the important Jewish festivals – especially Passover and the Festival of Booths – to shed light on Jesus' identity. John's familiarity with and attention to the important stories of Judaism suggests a deep grounding in the Jewish faith. There are many indications, however, of conflict with other Jews over the affirmation that Jesus was the Messiah. One of John's common designations for the crowd that follows Jesus is simply "the Jews." Many of the Jews in the Gospel believe in Jesus, but there is clearly a division and increasing acrimony as time progresses. The division among the Jews is an important part of the portrayal of Jesus' life, but it also reflects the experiences of Christians in the time the Gospel was written. John's community also seems likely to have experienced conflict from within their Jewish community, as reflected in references in the Gospel to people "being thrown out of the synagogue," for example in chapter 9. "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue." P5-6

It is not clear that in Jesus' lifetime there would have been a concerted effort to throw Jesus' followers out. The most likely reason John includes this language is to reflect the experience of the later community into the stories of Jesus. Prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Roman troops in 70 CE, some Jewish Christians combined their Christian worship practices with Jewish worship practices (see Acts 2:46-47). But after the Temple was destroyed, Jewish and Jewish Christian worship life changed

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dramatically. Scripture and its interpretation became one of the defining marks of Jewish religious life, and teaching and interpreting Scripture was the domain of the Pharisees (rabbis) and the synagogue. By making the synagogue experience part of the life and teachings of Jesus, the Gospel allows the Christian community to see its own life experiences reflected in the life of Jesus and those around him. Again, this practice is not entirely different from what is found in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' criticism of the scribes and Pharisees (for instance, Matt. 23) occurs within the lifetime of Jesus, but it also reflects the situation of later Christians. After the fall of the Temple, the scribes and Pharisees held a great deal of authority as the interpreters of the Law. Matthew directs Jesus' harshest criticisms at these groups (rather than the priests or the Sadducees). This reflection of the religious climate after the year 70 is another indication that Matthew and John are roughly contemporaneous. P6-7

There is a stark contrast in John between belief and unbelief. Such stark contrasts are a common feature of the Gospel. From the opening verses, John identifies Jesus as the "light that shines in the darkness" (1:5). There is a tone of opposition here between the light and the world. See also 3:19-20. The love/hate and light/dark imagery sets a tone of sharp contrast or opposition. Likewise in 3:31, there is a contrast between those who believe and those who disobey. Modern scholars think of John's Gospel as highly dualistic, insisting on a sharp dichotomy between heaven and earth, light and dark, life and death, belief and unbelief. John paints a picture of a world that humans experience as one of competing powers, particularly death and darkness. The presence of Jesus in the world sheds light on these competing powers and on human captivity to them. Jesus' words and actions offer an alternative way of understanding the state of the world, one in which light has already conquered darkness and death no longer reigns. And Jesus is not merely a vehicle for this message of freedom: it is in Jesus himself that freedom from captivity is to be found. The presence of Jesus makes available new life for all. P14-15

Jewish tradition and Scripture are crucial to John's portrayal of Jesus. The examples above have pointed to the frequency of Jewish imagery: the temple, Jewish festivals, the "King of the Jews," and differences between Jews and Samaritans lend meaning to the Gospel. Jesus' "I am" sayings, for which this Gospel is well known, also draw on familiar imagery from Jewish Scripture. In chapter 6, "I am the bread of life" draws explicitly on the manna story. In chapter 10 there is the image of Jesus as the shepherd (10:11, 14), which picks up on a variety of Old Testament imagery, perhaps especially the image of God as shepherd in Ezekiel 34. Likewise, the vine and branches metaphors of chapter 15 connect with the language of Isaiah 5, where a figure carefully cultivates a vineyard, only to have it yield wild grapes. P15

John's metaphors are an important means through which the reader comprehends Jesus' true identity. John begins the Gospel story with the image of Jesus as God's Word, through whom all things came into being. This metaphor expresses a number of things that are important to the Gospel's understanding of Jesus: he is the presence of God on earth, he shares in God's creative and life-giving power; his speech comes from God and takes on characteristics of God's word in Scripture. The metaphor of the Word expresses all of these things without saying any of them explicitly. Part of the richness

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and complexity of this Gospel's portrayal of Jesus comes from this ability of a single metaphor to convey many important concepts at once. And John does not stop with the use of one metaphor; others are added as the story of Jesus continues. He is the Son of God, the new temple, the manna in the wilderness, the shepherd and king of Israel, and many other things. There is not a single overarching way of understanding Jesus, but many ways, each of which can contribute something to the reader's understanding of Jesus. Jesus' purpose is also expressed metaphorically in John: he comes to bring "life" or "eternal life." "Life" is a distinctively Johannine expression. The noun occurs thirty six times in John, compared to seven in Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. P16-17

The opening words of John 1:1, "In the beginning," intentionally recall Genesis. (Note that these words are repeated in v. 2.0 Because the books of the Hebrew Scriptures were known by their opening words, the first words of John not only echo Genesis 1:1, but evoke the whole book of Genesis. There is little doubt that John wants his readers to understand that the story that they are about to read is a story of a new creation of the same importance as the first creation of Genesis. It is a dramatic opening phrase and a dramatic beginning. For many contemporary Christians, John's statement that "the Word was with God and the Word was God" is hard to understand. John begins with language that is not restricted to any one religious setting. "Word" or logos would have been familiar to John's Jewish and non-Jewish readers. Logos figured prominently in Greek philosophy of the time, for example, where it was used to speak of the rational principle that governed the universe. Among Jewish writers, most especially Philo (a Jewish contemporary of the author of the Fourth Gospel), logos was used to speak of the creative plan of God that governs the world. God and God's Word also have a prominent role in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the creation account in Genesis 1, the world is called into being solely through the power of God's word. Throughout Israel's subsequent history with God, Israel continues to come to know God through God's word. God spoke through the law at Sinai and through the prophets. In Jewish wisdom traditions such as Proverbs, Wisdom is depicted as being with God "before the beginning of the earth" and at the time of creation (see Prov. 8:22-31). John draws on all these traditions and ways of knowing God when he writes about the Word in verses 1-2. The metaphor of Jesus as Word expresses how Jesus provides unique and unprecedented access to God. As God's self-expression, the Word can take many different forms and sound many different sounds. In a few verses the hymn will turn to the specific form the Word takes for the Christian community. P23-24

The prologue's account of creation also introduces a note of tension. In the created order, light and life have an opposite, darkness. To witness is to tell the world what one has seen. John will witness that Jesus is the light, the presence of God shining in the world. P25

The story of God and the Word is no longer a cosmic story, but is an intimately human story. The incarnation is the key to the Gospel of John, because for the Fourth Evangelist, the fact that God now chooses to express Godself through a human being is the ultimate good news. The Word's dwelling in the world is again witnessed to by John the Baptist, but the witness does not end with him. Verses 16-17 celebrate what "we have all received." Verse 17 also places the gift of grace and truth through the Word-made-

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flesh next to the gift of the law through Moses (Exod. 20:34). This relationship between God's revelation to Moses and God's revelation in Jesus is also a recurring theme in John. P26-27

Christians assume that the words "lamb of God" point to Jesus as a sacrifice offered for the purification of sin. But in Jewish temple practices, a bull, a sheep, or a goat (see Lev. 4-5), not a lamb, was the animal offered for a sin sacrifice. The lamb is the animal offered at Passover, and the Passover lamb is not offered as a sacrifice for sin but to commemorate Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Ex 12:1-13). John the Baptist is not pointing to Jesus as a sacrifice for human sins but as a symbol of deliverance and liberation. The singular noun "sin" is crucial to understanding John's words and to seeing Jesus as the liberating lamb of the Passover tradition. Most Christian Eucharistic liturgies contain the plural (sins of the world), not the singular, and this change in number completely changes the meaning of John's words. As a singular noun, "sin" points to the world's collective alienation from God. "Sins" in the plural evokes a catalog of individual misdeeds and "sinful" behaviors, which is not what John is saying here. As the Passover Lamb, Jesus liberates the world from slavery to "sin" by bringing the world into new and fresh contact with the presence of God, so that human alienation from God can end. P31

At the end of John 1, there are several interpretive comments such as "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher)" and "Messiah (which is translated Anointed)" and "Cephas (which is translated Peter)". These comments seem to indicate that by the time this gospel was written, non-Jews had become part of the community and it was no longer just a faction of Judaism.

This pattern of discipleship, that those who have received someone else's witness become witnesses themselves to Jesus, continues through the rest of chapter 1, as each new disciple in turn goes and tells someone else. Each new disciple who comes to Jesus also has a new name or title for him: "Rabbi" (v 38), "the Messiah" (v 41), "him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (v 45), "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth" (v 45), "Son of God" (v 34, 49), "King of Israel" (v 49). In the remainder of the Gospel, the reader will find further clarification of these titles: how Jesus acts as a rabbi, for example, or what it means for Jesus to be "King of Israel." Nathanael's reaction introduces a theme that will be repeated throughout the Gospel: people's preconceptions about Jesus can stand in the way of a full experience of Jesus. Even those who are the closest to Jesus can let their preconceived ideas get in the way of a fresh encounter with the Word-made-flesh. Martha is so sure about her understanding of the resurrection that she is not prepared for what Jesus will do for her brother Lazarus (11:39-40). P32-33

Because John narrates a longer ministry (3 years instead of the 1 year in the Synoptics), Jesus celebrates three Passovers in John (2:13; 6:1; 13:1). P37

Nicodemus comes to Jesus "by night," but his visit nonetheless indicates an openness to the light of the world (1:4-5). Light symbolizes the presence of God; darkness and night, God's absence (see also 3:19-21; 8:12; 13:30). The theme of "children of God" (1:12-13)

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surfaces again here, as the main theme in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is new birth and new life (3:3-8, 11-15). P41

Jesus' offer of new life is not for an afterlife, but for this life. "Life" is an important term in John's Gospel. It is the most common word Jesus uses to describe the gift he brings to those who believe. John only twice refers to the "kingdom of God" (3:3, 5). Likewise, the term "salvation" appears only once in the Gospel (4:22). The parallel Johannine term is "Life." About half of the time, the word "life" is modified by the adjective "eternal." John seems to switch easily between the terms "life" and "eternal life" without distinction (see esp. 3:36; 6:33-51). Christians often think of the phrase "eternal life" as a reference to life after death. There are instances in John where the phrase carries this connotation. However, John speaks most commonly of "eternal life" as a characteristic of the *present* life of the believer. This is seen in the present-tense verbs that describe this life. A number of Jesus' "I am" statements emphasize the "life" that Jesus brings (6:35, 38; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6), a life that is to be found in Jesus even as he speaks these words. "Eternal life" is a metaphor for living now in the unending presence of God. "Eternal life" is John's way of talking about the "kingdom of God": life lived according to God's categories. P45

The verses about the Samaritan woman at the well provide another example of Jesus' ability to see and know all things in the Gospel of John, as in the story of Nathanael. Jesus says that the time of fulfillment "is now here" (v 23); future expectations are already under way in the present (see 5:25). In John, the "last things" (eschatology) are not solely defined by the progression of time; believers do not have to wait until some distant future to experience the "last things," the fullness of God's kingdom. Johannine eschatology holds present hopes and future expectations together through the incarnate presence of God in Jesus. His words in verse 26 are best translated simply as "I am," not "I am he" as the NRSV does. The addition of a predicate nominative ("he" masks the direct connection of Jesus' words to the divine name of Exodus 3:14 ("I am who I am"). With these words, Jesus identifies himself as the one in whom God is known. P55

The Samaritan woman leaves her water jar at the well (v 28), symbolically confirming that she no longer needs it to draw water because she has received the living water that she requested in verse 15. Like the disciples in chapter 1, her testimony about Jesus brings others to see him. P55

In chapter 4, the metaphor of the harvest, like the language of eternal life and hour, points to the inbreaking of the eschatological present. Through its imagery, it draws a new picture that repeats the heart of what Jesus has told the Samaritan woman, that "an hour is coming and is now here" (v 23). In conventional agricultural patterns, there is a delay between the season of sowing and the season of reaping (9 35), but in God's hour, the expected delay between sowing and reaping has vanished (v 36). The joy of the harvest is also already available for the one who plants (sows). P56

The confession that concludes this story, "this is truly the Savior of the world" (v 42) highlights the universality of Jesus' mission. Jesus is not the Savior of the Jewish people alone or the Samaritan people alone. The story of Jesus' visit to Samaria in 4:1-42 is one

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that transforms conventional expectations. Jesus openly challenges and breaks open two boundaries in this text: the boundary between “chosen people” and “rejected people,” and between male and female. The message of this text is still relevant for the church. Jesus crosses the boundaries society creates and asks his disciples to participate in this work. The Samaritan woman’s story challenges our distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders.” P57

The story of the “royal official” underscores a theme that was illustrated by the immediately preceding story with the Samaritans. Jesus is the “Savior of the world,” not just of “his own.” To be a “royal official” probably meant that the man worked for the Roman governor and was quite possibly a Gentile himself. The openness on the official’s part is an interesting contrast to the resistance with which Nicodemus, a Jewish official, greeted Jesus. The outsider may have less to protect than those of the religious establishment. P59

John 5:1-18. Whereas the royal official sought Jesus out and asked for a healing for his son, the man in this story does not know who Jesus is, does not even request a healing, yet Jesus heals him. This healing challenges many assumptions popular today that establish faith as a prerequisite for healing. This story puts the emphasis on Jesus as healer and turns upside down notions of the “worthiness” of the one who is healed. The Sabbath setting of the story – by waiting to disclose this detail until now, John makes Jesus’ response to the man’s situation of need the central issue in verses 2-9. The Sabbath question comes to the fore only now, as “the Jews” discover the healed man carrying his mat. They ignore the first part of the man’s statement, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk’” (v 11), responding to only the latter part: “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” (v 12). Likewise, when the man returns to announce to them who has made him well, the Jews begin “persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath” (v 16). By contrast, verses 14-15 restate the issue that is important to the healing story: the man has been “made well.” Jesus says, “Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” However, Jesus has not made any reference to the reason for the man’s initial condition of illness. He later rejects this kind of reasoning with regard to the man born blind. A better reading of these words may be that Jesus now urges the man to live his life in a way that reflects his having been “Made well”: he is to be spiritually and physically “well.” P64-65

Throughout John, Jesus regularly refers to God as the one who has sent him. Jesus is God’s emissary to the world. In the ancient Mediterranean world, to dishonor the one sent is the same as dishonoring the sender. From this perspective, the Jews’ resolve to persecute Jesus dishonors the very God they claim to defend. P67

It may be best to think of “the Jews” as one of the characters in John’s story, alongside other individual characters like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, and other group characters like the Pharisees and the crowd. Like other characters, their actions are highly ambiguous. Like Nicodemus, however, the descriptions of “the Jews” are highly ironic, because the designation suggest that this group, of all people, should understand who Jesus is. They have the testimony of the law and the prophets (5:39-47) and should be able to recognize and understand what God is doing in Jesus. p70

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In the story of Jesus feeding the 5000, John has shaped this story in ways that connect Jesus with the figure of Moses. The mountain location, which John records twice, would have reminded readers of Moses going up the mountain to receive God's law. Jesus' question to Philip in verse 5 echoes the words of Moses in Numbers 11:13, "Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?" The exodus connections suggest all that just as the incarnation of the Word is a new creation ("in the beginning...", John 1:1), the life and ministry of Jesus also now re-create and regenerate the exodus. The liberation and freedom of the exodus is now newly available in the gracious abundance of Jesus. p72

The story of Jesus walking on water in ch 6. Unlike the parallel accounts in Mark and Matthew, the disciples do not mistake Jesus for a ghost. John states clearly that "they saw Jesus walking on the sea" and were terrified. Their fear is not simple fright then, but is a recognition that they are in the presence of God (see Ps. 77:16; Ex 3:6; 15:14; 20:18-20; 34:30; Job 23:15). Water is traditionally a symbol of chaos, over which God alone has power. When Jesus walks on the sea, it becomes apparent that he, like God, can calm the chaos of the sea. Jesus' words in verse 20 confirm what his actions demonstrate. His first words ("It is I," in the NRSV) are identical to those of 4:26, which we translated, "I am." The same translation should be used here. As Jesus walks on water, calming the chaotic and showing again how he shares fully in God's work, he says, "I am." These words make a direct connection with the name of God. His following words, "Do not be afraid," are a response to the disciples fear and also echo words appropriate to a close encounter with God. Jesus appears to the disciples as the One who led Israel through the waters. It is a powerful moment, in which the disciples glimpse the fullness of God's presence in Jesus. p73

In the discourse following the feeding of the 5000, "Eternal life," as we have already seen in the Gospel, does not speak of immortality or a future life in heaven, but is a metaphor for living now in the unending presence of God. "It is not Moses who gave (past tense)...but my Father who gives (present tense)." As a result, this verse tells the listener to understand the Scripture as something that is currently happening in their presence. The gift of manna is present now in Jesus: "I am the bread of life." In these verses a primary metaphor is that of Jesus as manna, the "bread from heaven." This interpretation draws on a number of contemporary Jewish understandings of the manna story. In some Jewish writings, the signs that were expected of the second Moses included manna. The manna was also understood as a metaphor for the Torah (or God's wisdom). The manna that fed the people in the wilderness was compared to God's wisdom or word: "God humbled you by letting you hunger and by feeding you with manna, which your ancestors did not know, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3 LXX; see Wis 16:26). Many of the attributes of the "bread of life" in Jesus discourse pick up on these associations between manna and Wisdom or Torah. Food is used as a metaphor for that which Wisdom offers to those who seek her: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Prov 9:5-6; see Sir 24:19; Isa 55:1-2). John's language of "coming to" Jesus, and of teaching and learning reflects the language of the Wisdom traditions.

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The Greek word kurios can be translated as “sir,” yet it is also the early Christian designation for Jesus as “Lord.” Yet when Jesus identifies himself as this bread in verse 35, the people shift their tone. They begin to “complain” or “grumble” against him. The wavering character of the crowd is part of the way John portrays the crowd as the Israelites in the exodus. The Israelites also had seen the great things God had done (Ex 14:31). Yet not long after, they grumbled against God (Ex 15:24; 16:2, 7-12). Yet like Israel in the wilderness, those who trust in God will be led to new life in Jesus. p77

At the same time, however, these verses introduce language reminiscent of the Eucharist. This reference to the Eucharist does not replace or supersede the subject of the manna. Instead, these verses extend the metaphor about Jesus as the manna to the Eucharist. The Scripture verse “he gave them bread from heaven to eat” also applies to that common meal. Jesus, the life-giving manna, is available to Christians in the Eucharist. P78

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the central event of the Last Supper is the institution of the Eucharist, or “Lord’s Supper”. In John, the central event of that last meal is the foot washing, and there is no explicit institution of the Eucharist. This absence does not mean that the Eucharist is unimportant to John, or even that John has no institution of the Eucharist. Rather, the evangelist has taken a well-known church tradition and transformed it. The discourse in John 6 is the place where institution of the Eucharist is lodged, because for John, all of Jesus’ life “institutes” the sacrament of the Eucharist, not one particular event at the end of Jesus’ life. In the “I am” sayings of chapter 6 Jesus says that he is the manna, the food that gives life, and it is through eating his flesh and drinking his blood in the Eucharist that the believer is able to share fully in this food. To share in the Eucharistic meal is not to remember or commemorate one particular event, but is to share in all of Jesus’ life, including ultimately his death. John 6 can make an important contribution to contemporary understanding of the Eucharist, especially for Protestant churches that think of the Eucharist solely as a meal that marks Jesus’ death. The Eucharist is a meal of celebration, of sharing in the abundant presence of God in the world. P 79

They hear the crowd “grumbling things against him,” a designation that again highlights the connection between the crowd and the Israelites. The NRSV translation “Muttering such things” is not helpful. By using the word “muttering” to translate the Greek gongyzo, it disguises the connection between this grumbling and the previous instances, which are translated “complaining.” The grumbling here continues the portrayal of the crowd as the Israelites of the wilderness. They have seen the great things that God has done, yet they fail to trust in God. P 85

The story of the woman caught in adultery appears in brackets in the NRSV because it is not included in the oldest Greek manuscripts of John. P89

Jesus the Light of the World. Light is a common symbol of the presence of God and was also an important part of the Tabernacles celebration. During the Festival of Booths, lampstands symbolizing the light of God were lit at the temple. As a pillar of light (fire),

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God guided the Israelites in the desert (Ex 13:21). Metaphorically, the law was also a light by which God guided the people (Ps 119:105; Prov 6:23; Wis 18:4). As at 7:37-38, with this "I am" saying Jesus declares himself to be the light that the festival celebrates. The pillar of fire was surely in view here, but the metaphor of God's word as a light also contributes to an understanding of God's presence in Jesus as light. P90

Freedom from slavery to Sin. Jesus' words in verse 24, "I am he," should be read as "I am." When Jesus speaks this way, he is making a direct connection with the divine name, Exodus 3:14, in order to identify himself as the one in whom God is visible and made known. Jesus' words set up a parallel between "sin" and a lack of belief in Jesus as the "I am." "Sin" is not presented as a catalogue of individual faults but is the condition of not recognizing God in Jesus. p93

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free": the much quoted words of verse 32 are not about truth in the abstract, but the truth of God as revealed in Jesus. The Jews who believed in Jesus appear offended rather than intrigued by this claim. They assert that they "have never been slaves to anyone." The irony of this claim, made by the celebrants of the festival marking God's liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, should not be lost on the reader. P94

Jesus' words in verse 58 are again an absolute "I am" through which he identifies himself with the divine name and expresses his unity with God. The response of the Jews is to pick up stones to throw at him, the punishment prescribed for blasphemy in the Old Testament. The accusation of blasphemy, first seen in chapter 5, again comes to the fore as a reason to execute Jesus. Yet the attempt at stoning also indicates that Jesus' audience recognize the import of the "I am" saying. They do not attack him because they misunderstand his words but because they do understand. The social and historical context outlined in the introduction provides the necessary historical backdrop for reading John's antagonistic language about "the Jews" in John 8. The argument here is an intra-family dispute – two siblings arguing over who will best represent the family story. Clarifying as this context may be for the Gospel's first readers, it still leaves hard questions for the contemporary Christian: is it necessary for one faith group to exclude others so absolutely and with such invective in order to secure and establish its own community identity? For John's community, which seems to have sensed itself to be the outcast and marginalized member of the family, hearing such strident language in the mouth of Jesus may have restored its sense of power and dignity. They were a minority community compared to the establishment Jewish community of their day, and they experienced a power in their words that surpassed the relative powerlessness of their numbers. The long history of Christian anti-Semitism and of Christian proselytizing of people of the Jewish faith bears witness to the distorted history to which words like those in John 8 have given rise. The Gospel of John, deeply shaped as it is by the fabric and texture of Jewish Scripture and liturgical traditions, is not an ally for Christian anti-Semitism. P95-96

Jesus heals the blind man. Scholars suggest that the phrase "put out of the synagogue" (see also 12:42; 16:2) refers to events at the time the Gospel was written and highlights the tension, perceived or real, between Johannine Christians and the religious

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authorities of their day. By placing this tension within the stories of the life of Jesus, John's readers are able to see their own experience in the story of the blind man. P100

Shepherding was a common pastime in ancient societies, and this figure of speech certainly draws on aspects of that occupation that were commonly known. More important for understanding Jesus' words, however, are the Old Testament traditions upon which he draws. In Ezekiel 34, the kings of Israel are depicted as bad shepherds who endanger the flock. In all likelihood, the Pharisees are used to thinking of themselves as shepherds, not as bandits. Yet Jesus' words interpret their response to the healing of the blind man in precisely these terms. The Pharisees endanger the flock, as demonstrated in their behavior to the blind man. [They are also looking out for their own interests while thinking they are being faithful]. P105

The image of sheep finding pasture echoes the promises God made in Ezekiel: "I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel (Ezek 34:14). As the gate leading to the pasture, Jesus is the way the sheep must pass to attain the food of God's promise. The words, "I am the good shepherd" bring Jesus into a different kind of relationship with the text of Ezekiel 34. These words claim a new relationship between Jesus and the sheep. Because of the background of Ezekiel 34, they also assert a particular relationship between Jesus and God. God has said, "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ezek 34:15), and Jesus identifies himself as that shepherd. By implication, the metaphor says a good deal about Jesus' relationship to God. As in chapter 6, where Jesus appeared as the "I am," the one with power to make a way through the waters, so here Jesus makes the words of God in Scripture his own, and in doing so aligns himself with God's role. P105-106

Although the image of a shepherd may evoke a small and specific flock, Jesus expands the understanding of who these sheep are. Jesus is willing to die for the sake of "his own," but he specifies that he also has "other sheep that do not belong to this fold" (v16). The inclusion of others in Jesus' flock has been hinted at in the inclusion of the Samaritans (ch 4), and is mentioned again in 11:52 and 12:32 These sheep listen to Jesus' voice, a mark of faithfulness to Jesus and his word. P107

He lays down his life in order to take it up again. Jesus is not a victim in death, but freely chooses to lay down his life. P107

The Feast of Dedication (Hannukah) takes place in early December. We have noted the importance of the "cleansing" of the temple in chapter 2 as an inaugural act of Jesus' ministry. That story ends by drawing a metaphorical connection between Jesus' body and the Jerusalem temple. This story makes the point that Jesus' entire ministry has revealed God's presence to the world. God's presence, which resides in the temple, has been shown to reside in Jesus. The location and timing of this story evoke the "rededication" of God's presence in Jesus. P109

In Chapter 11, Martha's words evoke another "I am" statement from Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and

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everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” The first half (“those who believe...even though they die”) expresses the effect of belief in Jesus on the death of the believer: the believer’s future is not determined by death. The second half (“everyone who lives and believes”) indicates the effect of belief in Jesus on the life of the believer. The eternal life that characterizes belief in Jesus begins even now and extends beyond the grave. John draws on the notion of the future life lived in the presence of God, but wants the reader to understand that this kind of life is exactly what Jesus makes available for believers in the present. Martha’s confession of verse 27 is one of the dramatic high points of the Gospel. The NRSV translates Jesus’ responses to Mary’s tears as “greatly disturbed” and “deeply moved”, words that suggest Jesus’ deep compassion. The Greek verbs used here, however, usually communicate agitation, indignation, and even anger. Jesus is responding to the power of death he sees around him. These verses highlight the bitter cost and power of death in human lives. P116-117

The signs that Jesus has done, rather than effecting faith among the leaders, are a cause for concern. Jerusalem was part of the Roman Empire, governed by Roman rulers. Were Jesus to attract more of a following and create a disturbance, the Romans might hold the Jewish religious leaders responsible and take away their power. P119

Mary’s act is also portrayed in a way that prefigures Jesus’ own act of washing the disciples’ feet. The word “wipe” is the same verb used to describe Jesus’ wiping of his disciples’ feet at the foot washing. The washing and wiping of feet at a dinner builds an important connection with the second foot washing. Just as the foot washing is Jesus’ act of love to his disciples, the anointing is Mary’s act of love toward Jesus. Jesus’ command to his disciples, to “wash one another’s feet” is anticipated and enacted by Mary here. P123

Palm branches were a symbol of national triumph and victory (1 Macc 13:51; 2 Macc 10:7). John adds the appellation “King of Israel” to the quote from Psalm 118:26: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!” Kingship is an important theme in John (see 1:49; 6:14-15), as the nature of power is redefined by Jesus. Jesus’ act of riding a donkey portrays him as the humble king of Zechariah 9:9. P124-125

John 12:42 says, “Many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.” Responses out of fear of what other humans may do indicate a lack of trust in God. Such divided loyalties inhibit discipleship. While the specific fear of being thrown out of the synagogue is perhaps best understood historically in terms of the religious climate at the time the Gospel was written, such attention to human rewards applies to every era in which the gospel has been preached. P129-130

In the Synoptic Gospels, the final meal takes place on the first evening of Passover. In those accounts, Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper occurs as part of the Passover meal. In John, the meal occurs on the evening before Passover begins, and there is no institution. The foot washing, not the Eucharist, is the centerpiece of the final meal in John. As we have seen in chapter 6, the Eucharist is a celebration of all of Jesus’ life and

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is not exclusively associated with “the night of his betrayal.” The Greek phrase “to the end” can also be translated “fully” or “to the utmost.” Like other occasions of double meaning (for example 3:3, 5), both meanings may be heard here, because it is in loving his own “to the end” that Jesus loves them “to the utmost.” Jesus loves as much as it is possible to love. By washing the disciples feet, Jesus combines the role of slave and host. As host, Jesus welcomes his disciples into his “home,” his dwelling with the Father (1:1; 14:2). Yet the step-by-step narration of Jesus’ removing his clothes, putting on a towel, washing the feet, and wiping them with his towel suggests the humility of a slave. His actions define what kind of host Jesus is. The foot washing not only invites the disciples into a particular relationship with Jesus but sets an example for their relationships to others. The disciples are to imitate the foot washing because to do so continues what Jesus has done for them and extends his offer of love. Jesus acts out this particular example of love and service even for one who will turn against him. The love that Jesus performs and to which he calls his disciples is extended even to one who rejects Jesus and does not receive his word. P136-138

The reader is positioned to understand the significance of the detail that follows Judas’ departure: “And it was night.” Judas acts in darkness, like the darkness of 3:19-21 or 11:10. Darkness arrives, but the light still shines in it (see 1:5). P140

John 14-17 is often called the “farewell discourse,” because it resembles the common literary form of the farewell or last testament of a famous man (for example, Deuteronomy, Gen 49, Josh 22-24). As it is presented by John, it specifically resembles the address of Moses in Deuteronomy. In the context of Deuteronomy, Moses’ speech is addressed to the wilderness travelers who have not yet entered the promised land, but it was written down for a later group of people who had lived in that land for some time. It invites the later readers to see themselves as members of this band of Israelites about to enter the land and re-presents the covenant at Sinai as being addressed to the later audience for their own time. John’s Gospel also performs these functions and specifically incorporates the perspective of later followers within the narrative time of Jesus’ life and ministry. P142

Although Jesus is “going”, faith in him makes possible a new kind of relationship with God. Jesus’ reference to his “Father’s house” continues the theme of hospitality from the foot washing. Reading verses 1-4 primarily as a reference to believers’ future place in heaven limits what Jesus is saying here. Jesus’ hour creates new possibilities for relationship with God in the present life of the believer. Like the shepherd imagery, this language is familiar from the Old Testament. The “way” is usually associated with God’s law and God’s wisdom: “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth” (Ps 86:11; Ps 119:1,3,5, 27, 33; Prov 2:8, 12, 13, 20). John affirms this basic sentiment and specifies that Jesus, God’s Word, is that way to life. As God’s own Word, Jesus is the way, truth, and life. P145

The call to remember and keep the commandments is a familiar aspect of Moses’ farewell discourse (see Deut 6:5; 10:12; 11:1-18, 13). Jesus likewise calls on his disciples to keep his commandments: most specifically, the disciple is to love as Jesus loved. P147

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The farewell discourse positions the Paraclete as the link between the historical ministry of Jesus and the future life of the church after Jesus' death. Two central roles of the Paraclete emerge from the five Paraclete passages (14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; 16:12-15) as ways of extending the revelation of God in Jesus into the future: the Paraclete as the ongoing presence of Jesus in the postresurrection community and the Paraclete as teacher and witness. As the ongoing presence of Jesus, the Paraclete abides with the disciples and is not seen or known by the world. As teacher and witness, the Spirit continues to speak as Jesus has spoken and aids the disciples' interpretation of the events of Jesus' life. P148

John's language again draws on Old Testament imagery, perhaps especially Isaiah 5:1-7, in which Israel is depicted as God's vineyard. Despite God's care, however, this vineyard has not yielded good grapes (see Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10-14; Hos 10:1). To "bear fruit" is a common image in the Old Testament to speak of the community's faithfulness in response to God's word (for example, Ps 1:3). P152

In these verses the main term used to describe that resistance is "hate" (Greek *miseo*). Hate is the opposite of love; both are theological, not emotional, terms. Since for John, love is sharing fully in the presence and works of Jesus, hate means living apart from the presence and works of Jesus. The behavior of the world comes from their lack of understanding. Their responses to Jesus show not only that they do not understand Jesus but that they do not know God as revealed by Jesus (v21). P154

Jesus instructs his followers to expect that such conflicts as John portrayed around the blind man's testimony about Jesus will continue in the lives of the disciples. Such exclusion from the community would be portrayed as an act of faithfulness to God. Exclusion is a sign of the inevitable hostility of the world which is itself alienated from God. Interpreters of John 15 often note a striking difference between the love of disciples for one another (v 1-17) and the hatred of the world (v 18-25). The statements of this chapter give a picture of opposition: between love and hate, between the Christian community and the world. The believer is commanded to love as Jesus loves. The only time hatred is mentioned as an action of the disciples is in the phrase "Hate one's life in the world." Disciples are never called to hate the world but to hate their own attachments to the world and the separation from Jesus that those attachments imply. Yet even if the community's love for one another were to be seen as love only for other believers, where does one draw the line between believers and unbelievers? Clearly Jesus' enactment of this love includes both Judas and Peter. Jesus' actions at the Last Supper include Judas, whose feet Jesus washed and whom Jesus fed, showing him the love of both host and servant. His love includes Peter, who will deny him three times. A similar ambiguity exists on the side of "the world." Who is the world? In chapter 15, the world seems defined by its hatred of Jesus' followers. Yet elsewhere in the farewell discourse, we will see the hope that the world may come to believe. What is more, God's own love for the world is identified as the reason for sending Jesus into it (3:16; 17:23). This is the same world that "came into being through" God's word (1:10). Keeping all of this in mind, "the world" is not a lost cause, a place of hatred that is cut off from God, but is the location of Jesus' own work and ministry. P156-157

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Jesus' departure benefits the disciples primarily because he will send the Spirit to them after he goes. Like Jesus, who teaches and is the "way" to God, the Spirit carries on the work of instructing the disciples in God's truth. The Spirit of truth will enable them to hear afresh the teachings of Jesus even after Jesus' departure. The Spirit speaks the "many things" that Jesus does not say during his life. Through the community's later reflection on the life of Jesus and the Scripture, the disciples learned things that they were not able to understand during Jesus' life. This promise also extends beyond the limits of the Gospel story, as it points to the power and possibility of ongoing revelation. The Spirit will bring the teaching of Jesus forward into times and places far removed from the first century. The childbirth image illustrates how the disciples pain and sorrow at Jesus' death are temporary and will be transformed into permanent joy. The disciples' questions will cease, yet they will continue to ask things of God in Jesus' name. p158-160

At the moment of his hour, Jesus entrusts the future of the community to God. The prayer highlights the unity of Father, Son, and believing community. The words and work of believers are to be shaped by Jesus' life and death. As the one God sent, Jesus prays for those whom he likewise sends into the world. P162

In verse 20, Jesus' prayer turns explicitly to later believers: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." Jesus' prayer for those who believe is a prayer for unity and oneness that is grounded in the unity of Jesus and the Father (v 21). The community's oneness serves as a witness to the world. In a break from 15:18 – 16:4, the "world" is not portrayed here as actively hating the community's witness, but as receiving it. Jesus asks that the world may know that God sent Jesus as an extension of God's love. Love defines the community's relationship to one another and with God and Jesus. Jesus' prayer culminates with this statement of the radical indwelling of God in believers. This is a communal future vision of God's new age, not a private vision about individual believers. Jesus' death and departure do not end his work; as the discourse has made clear, that work continues in the community and through the presence of the Holy Spirit. P164-166

The character of Jesus' prayer in chapter 17 is very different from the Synoptic prayers of the garden. John highlights that Jesus knows "all that was to happen to him." Like the prayer of chapter 17, Jesus' will and that of the Father coincide. In contrast to the Synoptics, where Jesus prays that the cup might pass from him, Jesus will describe the cup as a gift from the Father which he welcomes. The large group of soldiers sent to arrest Jesus is a reminder of the crowd's response to Jesus on his arrival into Jerusalem. There is much irony both in the size of the garrison and their equipment. Laden with torches and lamps, they come to arrest "the light of the world." They carry weapons, but Jesus' will to carry out God's work renders them unnecessary. Although the size of the detachment shows that the authorities view Jesus as a threat to the peace, no troops are necessary. Jesus takes the initiative and identifies himself to the soldiers. He does not wait passively to be arrested. Jesus' reply to the soldiers, "I am he", boldly states that he is the one they seek. Yet it is also important that these words be read without the predicate "he" supplied. Jesus again claims to be the "I am." In this self-identification, Jesus makes a direct connection with the divine name to identify himself as the presence

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of God in the world. Jesus repeats this self-identification in verses 6 and 8. The response of the soldiers ironically confirms Jesus' identity: they fall to the ground, a conventional response of people in the presence of God. Peter's attempt to fight shows once again that he does not understand. P170-171

Peter's "I am not" contrasts sharply with Jesus' self-identification, "I am." P173

The Jewish leadership and the Roman leader Pilate each work to protect their own political self-interests throughout the trial. "They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover." As noted in chapter 13, John's chronology for Jesus' final days is different from the Synoptic accounts. P174-175

The word "followers" in 18:36 is the same word that has been translated "police" earlier. Jesus' own "police" do not use the means of defense that the Roman detachment brought with them to the garden. Jesus' power comes from God, not military might or a human institution. P177

The narration of the scene closes with the comment "Now Barabbas was a bandit." Although Barabbas's activities in the Synoptics might be described as those of a bandit, for John the particular word "bandit" has been used earlier in the Gospel, and that earlier usage and context are evoked here. The bandit is the one who enters the sheepfold by another way, to whom the sheep will not listen. Given a choice between the good shepherd king who protects the flock and the bandit, the Jewish authorities have selected the bandit. P178

"It was about noon." This is the time when the slaughter of the Passover lambs would have begun in the temple. "We have no king but the emperor," flies in the face of Israel's claim that God alone is king. Wayne Meeks has pointed out that the language of this verse is an ironic twisting of the Nismat, a hymn sung at the conclusion of the Passover Seder meal. A portion of the Nismat reads:

From everlasting to everlasting you are God;
Besides you we have no king, redeemer, or savior,
No liberator, deliverer, provider,
None who takes pity in every time of distress and trouble.
We have no king but you.

The presentation of Jesus as both Passover offering and King is part of John's unique contribution to our understanding of the death of Jesus. Jesus is not the Passover lamb because of his suffering or sacrifice but because his death is a reenactment of God's Passover (see Ex 12). The Passover lamb was not a sacrifice of atonement, as many commentators on John imply, but a communal meal that marked the people as God's own and prepared them to follow God out of slavery and into the wilderness. P182-183

Jesus carries the cross "by himself." It was common practice for a criminal to carry his own cross to his execution, although the other Gospel writers record that Simon of Cyrene was compelled by soldiers to carry Jesus' cross. For John, this detail has

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theological significance. Jesus again demonstrates that he is in total command of the events of the hour. His death is the completion of the work God sent Jesus to do. P185

Some interpreters see an allusion to the Passover ritual described in Exodus 12:22: "Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin." In Exodus the hyssop is used to mark the doors of the Israelites; it literally marks them as those whom God will pass over in the slaying of the firstborn sons. The symbolism of the blood and water is much debated among interpreters of John. It may signify Jesus' gift of life through "living water" (see 4:10, 12-14; 7:37-38) and his blood (6:53-55). P188

Because the word "apostle" literally means "one sent," some scholars consider Mary to be the first apostle. She is not simply entrusted with a message about a meeting spot in Galilee (see Matt 28:9-10; Mark 16:7), but with the proclamation of the joyful completion of Jesus' work on earth. P194

In the next scene, the disciples are gathered behind locked doors. Their fearful conduct indicates that they have not credited Mary's report. Now Jesus commissions the entire faith community to continue the work God sent him to do. The gift of the Holy Spirit is part of this commissioning. The connection between the Spirit and Jesus' breath ("he breathed on them") recalls God's breath of life in Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:9 and suggests a new creation. P195

Thomas does not believe the announcement. In rejecting verbal witness to the resurrection, however, Thomas is no different from all the disciples, who earlier had not accepted Mary's verbal witness and had locked themselves away. They "see the Lord" only after Jesus has shown them his hands and his side. Thomas demands no more than what the other disciples needed to change their fear to joy. P196

The consensus of scholarly opinion is that chapter 21 is a secondary addition to the Gospel and should be read as an epilogue. Yet it is important to note that all of the most ancient manuscripts of John contain this chapter (unlike 7:53 – 8:11). P199

Some interpreters have made much of the fact that two verbs for "love" are used in John 21:15-25 (in Greek, *phileo* and *agapao*). The supposed difference between these two loves has been the stuff of many sermons: *phileo*, "brotherly love," is supposedly a less exalted form of love, while *agapao* is a detached and selfless love of the other. More recent scholarship challenges the ability to make such distinctions of meaning between these two verbs. If there is any distinction in their meaning, it is not important to the author of the Fourth Gospel. As in these verses, John employs both of these verbs throughout the Gospel with no distinction in meaning. P203

The "many other things that Jesus did" are not only those contained within his life and resurrection appearances, but those that flow out of his abiding presence with those who believe and follow him. P204