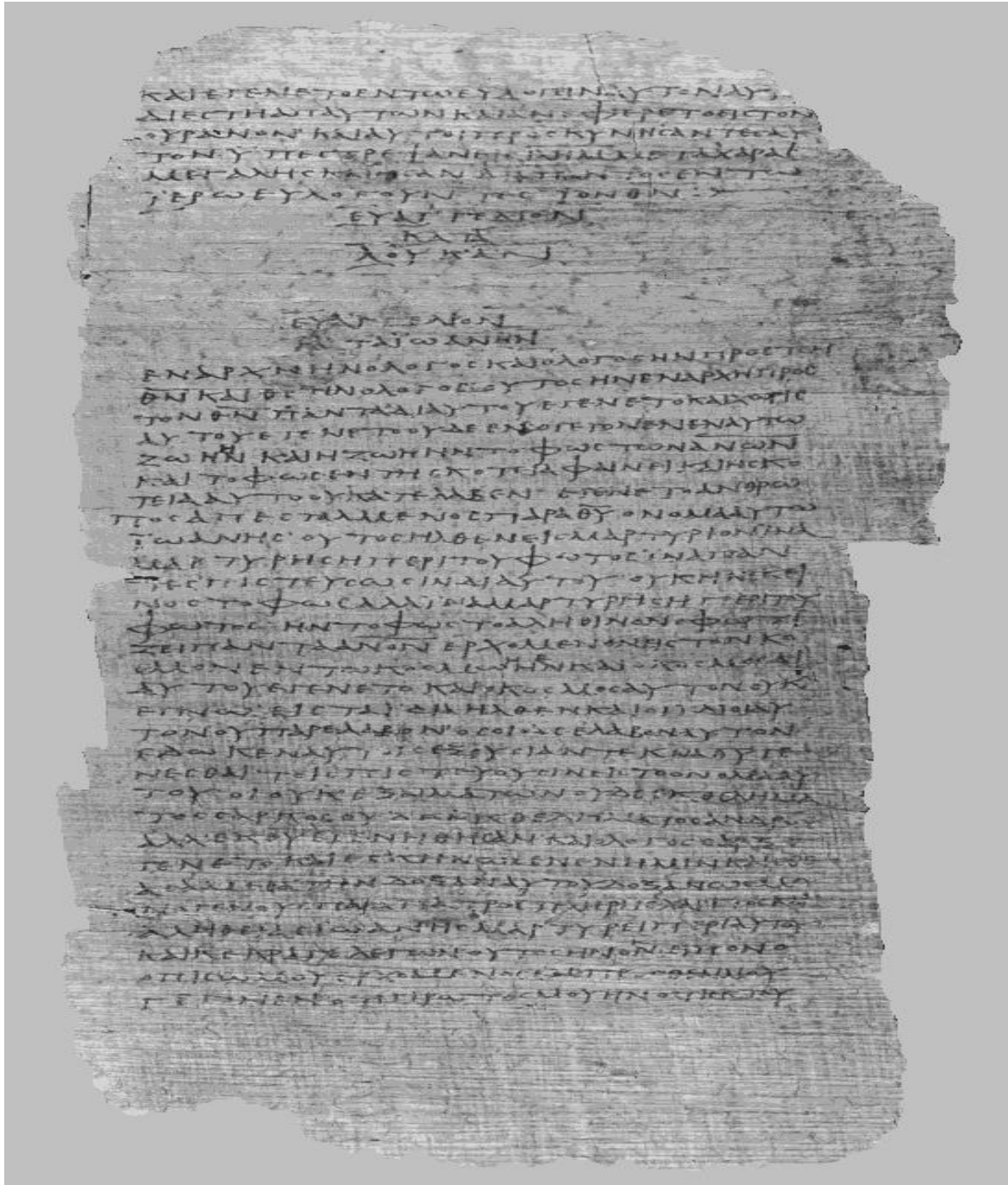


The Fourth Gospel: *A Glimpse into its Beauty*



Bodmer Papyri P⁷⁵ of the opening of John, ca ~200 AD

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The decision to use the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the bible in this writing, is because of the fact that the RSV is a fairly static translation, adhering as close as possible to the original Hebrew/Greek texts. It is also a very ecumenical translation, with a Bible Committee represented by scholars from various Protestant denominations, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox.

Preface

The fourth Gospel is a superbly rich text. Having God as its author, it possesses grace and perfection, as well as literary elegance at its finest.

In this piece of writing, I have attempted to shy away from deep doctrinal discourses, and have focused more on attempting to present a clear picture of how to understand this Gospel in its original historical context. Furthermore, a mere literal reading of this Gospel does injustice to God's word, which is loaded with wisdom in all forefronts. Thus, I have also focused on its symbolic aspects. The perfection of God's word becomes more evident as we dig deeper and understand the full meaning of this Gospel.

Text

The best considered text of the Gospel of John is probably the Codex Vaticanus. However, two other popular codices, Sinaiticus and Bezae, often contain texts not found in Vaticanus (this is particularly true of chapters 1-7). These codices all date from the fourth and fifth centuries. A number of Greek papyri from the second to the seventh centuries have supplemented the above codices. Most important of the papyri are P52 and P66/P75 (Bodmer Papyri). P52 dates back to around 130 AD, P66 to around the beginning of the third century, and P75 to around 200 AD. P75 is very close to Vaticanus, whereas P66 shows very close similarities to Sinaiticus/Bezae.

The discoveries of various fragments of the Gospel has led the way for establishing the original Greek text. In its recent form, the Gospel may be lengthier than the earliest Greek manuscripts. Quotations from the early church writers and ancient translations like the Syriac support this theory. There has been a tendency, on the part of a scribe, to add explanatory phrases to clarify a concise or sometimes obscure verse. In time, such additions crept into the manuscripts themselves.

Recent discoveries have also led to the conclusion that certain texts of the Gospel, as we know it today, are not supported by the older manuscripts. The most significant is the pericope about the adulteress woman (7:53-8:11), as well as 5:4, which are absent in the oldest and best manuscripts.

Authorship

None of the four Gospels name their author. The fourth Gospel mentions an eyewitness at the cross (19:35) who is the disciple whom Jesus loved (19:26). In John 21:20,24, it is claimed that this unnamed disciple bears witness and “has written these things.”

The earliest identification that John, son of Zebedee, is the author of the Gospel, was made by St. Iranaeus around 180 AD. As a child, Iranaeus had known Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who is supposed to have known John. Obtaining this information as a child or during his early years may have also been problematic, for Iranaeus is known to have confused the apostle John, son of Zebedee, with a presbyter from Asia Minor known as John. Church historian Eusebius (260-341 AD) recognized Iranaeus’ confusion.

Today, it is recognized that such late second-century surmises regarding people who had lived a century before were often simplified, and that traditions regarding authorship were often more concerned with the authority behind a biblical writing rather than the physical writer.

Close scrutiny of the text does not exactly support the complete authorship of John, son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles. In John 21:2, there is mention of “Zebedee’s sons” (from the Synoptics, we know them to be James and John)¹. In John 21:7,20,24, however, the author is merely referred to as the “beloved disciple.” Had the author been John, son of Zebedee, it only seems logical that the Gospel would have referred to the “beloved disciple” as “one of Zebedee’s sons.” Furthermore, we find the beloved disciple by the cross of Jesus during His crucifixion.² Yet, from the Synoptics, we also know that none of the twelve were at the crucifixion scene.

The exact identity of this Gospel’s physical author is inconsequential. What is of importance is that Divine Providence gifted us with this Gospel, handed down throughout the centuries till its present form today. Having been written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this Gospel has God as its author. As such, the importance of the identity of the actual physical writer becomes of little import, in contrast to the divine authority behind it.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to those who have influenced and contributed to my knowledge of this Gospel. They are too many to name. Particularly valuable are the insights, writings, and criticisms of parts of this writing from some of the people I truly admire: Dr. Neal Flanagan, Dr. PHEME Perkins, and the late Dr. Raymond Brown – all of whom have somehow helped shape biblical scholarship of the fourth Gospel within this century. Numerous people, in their unique way, have also served as inspiration to the writing of this text: Most important of all, to Jesus, my Lord and Master, and to the Holy Spirit, my source of truth.

¹ Matthew 4:21

² John 19:26-27

Reading/Study Suggestion

The most effective way to read this text is to first read a whole section of scripture, and return to read each verse along with the notes written for the section. So, to study the Wedding in Cana, for example, it is best if one reads 2:1-12 in its entirety, then, return to read verse 1, along with the notes for it, and so on. This allows the reader to obtain the background for the whole section, and to return and study each verse in detail.

The prologue of the Gospel (1:1-18) can only be fully understood after the whole Gospel has been read. Thus, it is best to just hastily cover this section at first, and return to it in detail after the whole Gospel has been studied.

Finally, prayer should accompany our studies. With prayer, we are drawn closer to our God, who fills us with the Spirit, through whom the mystery of God's redemptive word can gradually unfold within us. As such, we can come to a deeper and a more profound understanding of what Jesus' words truly mean, as opposed to those who first heard him in Galilee and Jerusalem.

εν αρχη ην ο λογος,

και ο

λογος ην προς τον θεον,

και

θεος ην ο λογος.

ουτος ην εν αρχη προς τον θεον.

παντα δι αυτου εγενετο και χωρις αυτου εγενετο ουδε εν.

ο γεγονεν εν αυτω ζωη ην και η ζωη ην το φως των ανθρωπων.

The Gospel of John

Chapter 1

The Word of Life

- ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- ² He was in the beginning with God;
- ³ all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In origin, this was probably an early Christian hymn. It is poetic and manifests “staircase parallelism.” The last word of a phrase is the same as the first word of the following phrase.

The prologue of the Gospel of John can best be understood, if viewed within the framework of Genesis³. The first words of the Old Testament also begin with the same phrase: “In the beginning.” In the Genesis creation account, God created through His word. It is through the mere utterance of “Let there be ...” that things came into being.

Before anything existed, God and His Word existed. All of creation came to be through His Word. Note the distinction, in verse 1, of the Word from God. “The Word was with God” indicates that the Word is a separate entity. Yet, the following phrase indicates that “the Word was God.” In Greek, the lack of a definite article in this latter phrase would signify predication rather than identification.

It is through the Word that God created. It is also through the Word that God speaks to us. The will of God is revealed through the Word. The Word, in turn, came to this world clothed in flesh. When the Word, the revealer of God (the Father) came as flesh, He came as Jesus Christ. He was God.

- ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The Greek rendering of the first phrase of this verse can be interpreted as: “In Him, life can be found” or “In Him was the source of life.” This life, in turn, was the light given by God for us to walk in (it is important to recall that light was the first gift of creation).

Taken in the complete context of this gospel, the notion of life and light takes on a soteriological meaning (cf. John 11:25, 12:46). In the Word Incarnate’s words: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

³ Genesis 1:1-5

5

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

This is an important theme in this gospel, which also stemmed from Genesis. In John, darkness symbolizes sin, evil, or ignorance. Despite the rejection of the light through sin, the light holds the ultimate victory. The darkness has never conquered the light. This echoes Genesis 3:15, where the woman's seed was foretold to be victorious over the serpent.

6

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7

He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.

8

He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

Verses 6-8 interrupt the poetry of the prologue. Not only does it interrupt the poetry, but these prosaic verses also interrupt the consecutive thought of verses 5 and 9. Certain biblical scholars contend that, perhaps, at one point in time, verses 6-8 were located elsewhere in the gospel, most likely after verse 19.

Note that John the Baptist was sent from God. He was sent, just as Jesus was sent for a divine mission. Verse 7 reflects a popular Johannine presentation of Jesus. John the Baptist is presented as coming for testimony. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He is presented as being on trial. All give testimony to Jesus: John the Baptist, his works, scripture, the Samaritan woman, the crowds, the Spirit, the disciples... The Baptist's role as a witness emphasizes his subordinate role to the light.

9

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

10

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.

11

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.

Verses 9-11 summarize the first half of this gospel (John 1:1-12:50). This first half is about the rejection of Jesus by the darkness and by His own people.

In verses 9-13, certain theologians see pre-incarnational old testament events. "He was in the world ... and his own people received him not" is seen by some as the tabernacle (and temple), which was the seat of divine presence among the chosen people. Yet, through sin, the divine presence was not received and respected.

The insertion of John the Baptist in verses 6-8 would make one to logically reason, however, that verses 9-13 describes Jesus, the Word incarnate Himself. Moses and the prophets prepared His people for His coming. Yet, when He came to His own land, He was rejected by His own people.

12

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God;

13

who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Verses 12-13 summarize the second half of this gospel (John 13:1-21:25). The second half is, in turn, about the salvation of those who believed. All those who believed became His new chosen people – and more so, for they became children of God. God’s new chosen people are the ones given by the Father to the Son. “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (John 6:65).

14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

Before Christ came, the tabernacle⁴ and its later successor, the temple⁵, became God’s place of presence among His people.⁶ When God became man, He made his dwelling with us (this is literally translated as: “He pitched his tent/tabernacle in our midst”). In Jesus, God’s presence and glory is now supremely localized. This glory of Jesus was preexistent with the Father. “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:5).

Jesus was full of grace and truth. This parallels the description of the God who drew up the old covenant. He was “abounding in loving kindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). Kindness was a technical term used to describe Yahweh’s mercy in choosing the people of Israel. Truthfulness describes God’s faithfulness in His promises from the covenant with His chosen people. Jesus, in turn, mirrors the characteristics of Yahweh, who made the old covenant. In Him and in the new covenant He has established, we can also find kindness and truthfulness.

15

(John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'")

This breaks the poetic flow, once again, of verses 14 and 16, and alludes to the words in John 1:30. The words of the Baptist are, for the first time, presented as giving witness to the superiority and preexistence of Jesus.

16

And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.

God graced us with His presence on earth in the tabernacle and temple. Then, He has graced us, ever more, by sending us His only son, who now forever gifts us with His everlasting presence. God, in His kindness, graced His people with the promises in the old covenant. As a further sign of His love, He has now bestowed on His people a new and everlasting covenant – a covenant sealed with the blood of His own son.

⁴ Exodus 40:34

⁵ 1 Kings 8:10-11,27

⁶ Exodus 25:8-9

¹⁷

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In the old covenant, Moses received the law, engraved in stone, as a symbol of God's kindness to His people. In the new covenant, the word of God, engraved in the flesh of Jesus, is an ensuing gift that manifests God's unparalleled graciousness.⁷

¹⁸

No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

Moses never saw the face of God. For that matter, no one else has seen the face of God. Now, Jesus, the son who existed with God before the world came to be, who has seen Him and has known Him through all eternity, reveals Him to us. This Gospel is the beautiful story of this revelation.

John the Baptist's Testimony

¹⁹

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

The ministry of Jesus opens up with the witness of the Baptist, and closes with the witness of the beloved disciple beneath the cross. One of the notable characteristics of the fourth gospel is its way of packaging a section or narration, using similar events in the beginning and the end. This provides a beautiful and symbolic means of tying together a section through inclusion.

Throughout the fourth gospel, the use of the word "Jews" do not imply the Jewish people, per se. Rather, "Jews" refer to those of Jewish birth who reject Jesus. Often, this word refers to hostile authorities, both Pharisees and Sadducees, in Jerusalem, particularly. Note that the "priests and Levites" that were sent would have been Sadducees.

²⁰

He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

Heb: Māšîah first appears in Daniel 9:25 as a future anointed agent of Yahweh. In Luke 3:15, the people wonder whether John is the messiah. Here, he confesses that he is not.

²¹

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No."

John denies the role of Elijah, whom Malachi had prophesized would come before the day of the Lord.⁸ In the Synoptics, however, Jesus identifies John's role with that of Elijah.⁹ John further denies that he is the Mosaic prophet¹⁰ whom the Jews expected¹¹ prior to the messiah.

⁷ Jeremiah 31:31-33

⁸ Malachi 4:5-6

⁹ Matthew 11:14, Mark 9:11-12

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 18:15,18

¹¹ John 6:14, 7:40, DSS 1QS 9:11

22

They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

23

He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

When the Baptist was questioned as to his identity, the only role he claims in all the four Gospels is that he is the Isaian voice in the desert. In this Gospel, the Baptist answers with a re-interpreted and re-punctuated version of Isaiah 40:3, which differs from the original Hebrew text, the quoted verse in the Synoptics, and the Septuagint. He replaces "prepare" with "make straight," and omits the second phrase. In doing so, the Baptist's role as a witness is more powerfully conveyed.

24

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

Some biblical scholars contend that, perhaps, this is a mistake by some biblical translators, who misunderstood the Greek grammatical construction. This verse should rather read: "Some Pharisees were also sent."

25

They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

26

John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know,

27

even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

John is, in turn, questioned on his authority to baptize, if he has no role in the messianic plan. This question presupposes that baptism was an expression of repentance and purification, which is associated with the messianic times.¹²

In the Synoptics, Jesus' baptism is distinguished from John the Baptist's, in that Jesus' baptism is identified with "the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8) or with "the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16). Once again, the Baptist emphasizes his subordinate role. The Baptist's subordinate nature is further exemplified by his unworthiness to untie Christ's sandals. Untying sandals is a task fit for a slave (and a lot of slaves were even exempted from this task). In saying such, John identifies his role as even inferior to that of a slave.

28

This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

This Bethany is not the town near Jerusalem. It is a town in the trans-Jordan with no remaining trace. Its current location is unknown. As such, certain Greek manuscripts have Bethabara, "the place of crossing over," a town which existed and is attested to in the Talmud.

¹² Ezekiel 36:25-26, Zechariah 13:1-3

The Baptist's Testimony

²⁹

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

The next day (day two), the Baptist presents Jesus as the Lamb of God. Throughout the bible, such an expression only occurs here and in verse 36.

He is the servant of God described in Isaiah who is led without complaint, "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers" (Isaiah 53:7) – one who "bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). At the same time, Jesus is also the paschal Lamb who will die at the very same moment the paschal lambs were being killed in the temple. As the original paschal lambs delivered the Israelites from death,¹³ so will the Lamb of God deliver the world from sin and death.

³⁰

This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.'

³¹

I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

The pre-existence of Christ is a major theme in the fourth Gospel. Yet, though Christ existed before him, the Baptist knew not of His identity. Through baptism, the identity of Christ is revealed (v. 33). In this Gospel, the essence of the Baptist's baptism is not the forgiveness of sins, but rather, making Christ known to himself and Israel.

³²

And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.

³³

I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

³⁴

And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The dove is a symbol of the new creation (Genesis 8:8). When the Spirit descended on Him, it remained on Him – a reference to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. This initiates the use of a special verb for John the Evangelist. "To rest/remain" (Greek: menein) emphasizes the permanency of the relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as the Son and Christians. The Spirit remains on Jesus, who, in turn, dispenses the Spirit to His disciples.¹⁴

Unlike in the Synoptics,¹⁵ there is no mention in John of a heavenly voice that reveals Jesus' identity. Instead, the Baptist, himself, bears witness to Him.

¹³ Exodus 12

¹⁴ John 7:39, 16:7

¹⁵ Mark 1:10-11, Matthew 3:16-17, Luke 3:22

The First Disciples of Jesus

³⁵

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples;

³⁶

and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

This is day three. The efficacy of the Baptist's witness is manifested, when two of his disciples follow Jesus.

³⁸

Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

³⁹

He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

The calling of the first disciples portrays the genuine notion of vocation. The initial question of one who wishes to follow is: "What is it that you seek?" This, in turn, is followed by the command: "Come and see." In the fourth gospel, "seeing," in the true sense, entails "believing" (cf. John 6:40). Both "coming to Jesus" (cf. John 6:35,37,45) and "seeing" (cf. John 6:40,47) are indicative of faith.

The title "Rabbi" is only used in the first half of this Gospel (chapters 1-12). Every time this word is used, an ensuing correction is made on the understanding of Jesus. In this occurrence, only a subtle correction is made, stemming from the double meaning of the Greek word menein, "to dwell" or "to remain." When the disciples ask of Jesus' dwelling place, Jesus gives the promise: "see" or "you will see" (Gk: opsesthe). Jesus' answer transcends the physical dwelling place, and refers to a much deeper promise. In verse 51, the same promise is repeated, wherein the Christological content is much more evident. Henceforth, subsequent Christological corrections associated with the usage of the title "Rabbi," become much more distinct and obvious. The other occurrences of "Rabbi" are in 1:49 – correction: Son of Man, 3:2 – correction: rebirth through the Spirit, 3:26 – correction: relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist is clarified, 4:31 – correction: food is doing the will of the father, 6:25 – correction: Jesus is the bread of life from heaven, 9:2 – correction: the miracle will show that Jesus is light, 11:8 – correction: the miracle will show that Jesus is life.

In verse 39, the "tenth hour" would mean the "tenth hour from sunrise" of the Roman calculation of time. This is the Jewish reckoning of time. Thus, this would be about four in the afternoon (10 hours counting from 6 am). Some more dynamic bible translations thus indicate "four in the afternoon," as opposed to the more literal "tenth hour."

The mention of the tenth hour indicates that little was left of the day, and they stayed with Jesus overnight. From 2:1 (see notes on 2:1), it can also be inferred that the current day is Friday (Friday evening marks the beginning of Sabbath), thus, inhibiting distant travels.

40

One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

The other disciple remains unnamed. Perhaps it is the beloved disciple, the author of this Gospel?

41

He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

This is now the fourth day, given that the previous day was Sabbath, thus inhibiting Andrew from looking for his brother. Note how the Christology has increased from "Teacher" or "Rabbi" in verse 38, to that of "Messiah."

42

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

In the Synoptics, the story of how and why Simon was conferred the name of Peter, is narrated. John telescopes Simon's renaming into this brief episode, as part of his literary style of presenting the whole truth about Jesus in each episode.

Simon is the original name. Cephas is the newly conferred Hebrew/Aramaic name, which means rock. Petros is Greek, which means rock. Peter is the English equivalent of Petros. Neither Petros in Greek nor Cephas in Aramaic represent real names. It is a nickname, just like the American "Rocky."

43

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

This is the fifth day. Jesus' words to Philip, "Follow me," echoes the synoptic call stories.¹⁶

44

Now Philip was from Beth-sa'ida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Andrew and Peter seemed to be living at Capernaum during this time.¹⁷ Beth-sa'ida may, most likely, have been their town of birth.

45

Philip found Nathan'a-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathan'a-el is a disciple that is only known to John. He is, perhaps, the same person as Bartholomew in the Synoptics.

46

Nathan'a-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth" sounds like a local proverb of the time. Such a statement echoes later attempts to reject Jesus on the grounds of his origin (John 7:52).

¹⁶ Mark 2:14

¹⁷ Mark 1:21,29

47

Jesus saw Nathan'a-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Jesus does a very interesting play of words here. Christ notes that Nathan'a-el is worthy of the name of Israel. By popular etymology, "Israel" connotes "a man who sees God." Sure enough, Nathan'a-el swiftly sees and acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God (verse 49).

Jacob was the first to be given the name Israel.¹⁸ Jacob, however, was a man of duplicity or guile, as evidenced by his dealings with Laban and Esau.¹⁹ According to John, no one has ever seen God. Only the Son knows and has seen God, as well as those who will see and acknowledge the Son's revelation of God. Thus, the Israel of the Old Testament has never really seen God. Rather, the "new Israel" is the one who truly sees/will truly see God.

48

Nathan'a-el said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Tradition has it that rabbis studied the law under the fig tree.²⁰ This may suggest that Nathan'a-el was a devout doctor of the law, a scribe or a rabbi. Furthermore, the interesting play of words is still evident. "Under the fig tree" is a symbolism for messianic peace.²¹ Thus, the time has come when the "Israel" of the New Testament is seen to be under messianic peace. As if insufficient, however, he is promised that he will "see greater things than these."

49

Nathan'a-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

50

Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."

51

And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Once again, an elevation of the disciples' Christology. From Messiah (verse 41), the perception of Jesus now elevates to Son of God and King. Here, Nathan'a-el's use of "rabbi" entails a correction by Jesus on His title. Jesus corrects Nathan'a-el's "Son of God" to "Son of Man."

In the Old Testament, the title "Son of God" is a common one. The Davidic king is referred to with this title.²² "Son of Man (Aramaic: bar('e)nāšā)," however, is a unique and unheard of title in Judaism (having its roots from Daniel 7:13). This title, thus, elevates the current level of Christology. "Son of Man," incidentally, almost exclusively occurs from the lips of Jesus, and almost never occurs outside the Gospels.

¹⁸ Genesis 32:29

¹⁹ Genesis 27:35-36

²⁰ Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes 5:11

²¹ Zechariah 3:10, Micah 4:4

²² 2 Samuel 7:14 Psalms 2:7,89:27

In John's narration, "Truly, truly" ("Verily, verily" or "Amen, amen" in some translations) occurs frequently (some twenty-five times) from the lips of Jesus. In the Synoptics, only a single "Truly" often occurs from Jesus' lips. The double "Truly" or "Amen" is characteristic of the Jesus in John.

As the Israel of the Old Testament saw the glory of God in a vision of a stairway, where God's messengers went up and down from the heavens,²³ the Israel of the New Testament (note that in Greek, the "you" in verse 51 is in plural form) will see God's glory through the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. The Israel of the New Testament is promised that he/they shall see greater things, in connection to Jesus' invitation of "come and you will see."

To the Israel of the New Testament, God's glory is initially revealed in its concrete form, at the Son's first miracle at Cana, in Galilee.

²³ Genesis 28:12-17

Chapter 2

The Wedding at Cana

¹ On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;

The literary and poetic beauty of God's word is so evident. The first glorious work of Christ during His ministry occurs "on the third day," just as the last glorious work of Christ during His public ministry occurs "on the third day" (his resurrection, which occurs "on the third day" after His atoning death).

This is the third day, two days after the call of Philip (the last reference of which is day five). It is also, perhaps, a Wednesday, because according to the Mishnah (Kethuboth 1), the wedding of a virgin should take place on such.

Consequently, from the beginning of the first witness to Christ and His baptism, this is now the seventh day. In the same way that Genesis narrates the creative days, after which the full glory of God's creative work becomes revealed on the seventh day, so does the new creation and the Son's glory become revealed on the seventh day, through the first ever recorded miracle of Christ.

Cana is a location that is unknown to the Old Testament. Of all the Gospel authors, only John knows about Cana. To date, its location is still disputed. One possible location is Khirbet Qana, some nine to twelve miles north of Nazareth. Another is Kefr Kenna, some three miles northeast of Nazareth.

Cana is the first place to behold Jesus' glory, and it will be the last. The post-resurrectional appearances of chapter 21 take place in Galilee, where Cana and Nathan'a-el are once again mentioned.

In the Johannine literary style of inclusion (John often mentions a detail at the end of a section, which matches a detail in the beginning of a section), it is interesting to note that the mother of Jesus (whom John never calls Mary) is only mentioned twice in this Gospel – at the opening of His glorious work, and at the closing of it, as He gave Himself up in the cross.

² Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.

The invitation of Jesus to the marriage symbolically represents an invitation of Jesus to our lives. As we are about to see, the invitation of Jesus to our life entails an ever fulfilling knowledge that His love and presence is with us, and we are never alone. His presence will grace every aspect of our life.

3

When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

In the culture then, running out of wine in a wedding banquet is of utmost humiliation. Here, the caring character of Mary is manifested. As a wonderful role model of love and concern for others, Mary plays the role of seeking God's help on others' behalf. In much the same way, the Christian must intercede and pray for others, without the need of being solicited for help. "...Keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

4

And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

Jesus addresses His mother as "woman," a polite designation during that time, culture, and language. However, it is rather strange for a son to speak thus to his mother.

Perhaps the title of woman can best be understood, if we continue to understand this Gospel in light of Genesis. The first week of Jesus' ministry shows numerous references to Genesis:

The prologue of this Gospel, as well as the book of Genesis, commences with the words "in the beginning" {Genesis 1:1}.

The prologue speaks of the notion of light and darkness, and how the light is to come into the darkness. Genesis gives the same reference {Genesis 1:2-5}.

During the baptism, the Spirit descends and remains on Jesus, just as the spirit of God swept over the primordial waters {Genesis 1:2}.

Seven days elapses from the time of the baptism to Cana, paralleling the seven creative days of Genesis {Genesis 2:2}.

Now, the title "woman" can easily be seen as a parallel of the "woman" in Genesis. The woman in Genesis led Adam to the first evil act in the Garden of Eden {Genesis 3:6}. The woman herein, however, will lead the New Adam (whom Jesus is identified as, in Romans 5:12-21) to His very first glorious act in Cana.

Furthermore, Genesis prophesizes that the offspring of the "woman" will crush the serpent {Genesis 3:15}. In calling His mother "woman," this prophecy is alluded to, and Jesus' triumph over Satan is emphasized.

The "hour" of Jesus refers to His death and resurrection. Thus, only when this approaches does Jesus actually say that the "hour has come."²⁴ Jesus' reply to His mother is somewhat ambiguous, for it does carry tones of refusal.

5

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Despite the ambiguous reply of her son, Mary's reaction is that of utmost faith and subservience to Him. "Do whatever He tells you" is a very powerful statement of faith and subservience. Jesus can never resist such wholesome trust and belief,²⁵ and for this, He does perform a miracle.

²⁴ John 12:23, John 17:1

²⁵ Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:21-22

⁶

Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

The enormous amounts of water were used for hand washing. The hand washing is not to wash out filth, but to cleanse themselves from times when they may have unknowingly touched anything that is ceremonially unclean. Consequently, the Jews considered themselves ritually unclean, if they did not wash their hands in a certain way prior to a meal.²⁶

The six stone jars carry an important symbolic meaning. In Jewish tradition, the number six is a number of imperfection – one less than seven, which is the perfect number.

⁷

Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

Note how these jars are either empty/barren or un-full.

⁸

He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.” So they took it.

⁹

When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom

The steward of the feast is usually selected by lot. Such person is often considered the head of the festivities, presiding over it, and ensuring that the celebration runs smoothly. There is no historical evidence of such a role, however, in Palestine. Furthermore, no Jewish literature offers any parallel to this role.

¹⁰

and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.”

The miracle of turning water into wine holds a very deep significance. In the olden times, the prophets had foretold of an abundance of wine during the messianic days.²⁷ The abundant wine at Cana, some one hundred twenty gallons of it, would signal that the messianic days are at hand. Attributing such abundant wine to Jesus would clearly signify his messianic role and nature.

Furthermore, in Scriptures, wine often represents wisdom and teaching.²⁸ By an abundance of wine at Cana, the abundance and richness of wisdom and true knowledge is symbolized. The “old wine” had been served. Now, the “new wine” – the “good wine” has arrived. Wisdom and true knowledge, at its finest, has become available. Such knowledge came to be through Jesus Christ.

Topping the symbolism is the transformation of the water used for purification, into wine. The water, used for Jewish religious rituals, has been replaced with wine or true knowledge. The old

²⁶ Mark 7:1-3

²⁷ Amos 9:13-14, Joel 4:18,

²⁸ Proverbs 9:4-5

interpretation of the law, along with rituals and such, is now replaced with something much better – and this new knowledge is brought about by Christ.

Further note how the jars associated with the Jewish rituals are barren or incompletely full. Jesus orders them filled to the brim with water, which is transformed to wine. This symbolizes the barrenness or incompleteness of Judaism, and its replacement by Christ with His full or complete knowledge of God. In the same light, we can comprehend Mary's remark: "They have no wine," as a poignant reflection of the barrenness of Jewish rituals, thus reflecting a barren or incomplete knowledge of God.

¹¹

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This calls to mind Jesus' promise to Nathan'a-el, that he shall see greater things. Sure enough, his first sign was not a mere manifestation of something slightly greater. Rather, His first sign manifested His glory. John will narrate a total of seven signs, which is, without accident, the perfect biblical number (also note the significance of the seven days from the time of the Baptist's witness to Jesus' first glorious work).

John never uses the word "miracle." Instead, he uses "signs," a term peculiar to the fourth Gospel.

¹²

After this he went down to Caper'na-um, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.

Jesus "went down" to Caper'na-um, because Caper'na-um is on the shore of Lake Galilee, some six hundred feet below sea level. Cana, on the other hand, is on the hills. None of the Gospels depicted an intensive ministry in Caper'na-um.

The invitation of Jesus to our lives entails that our life, henceforth, is never lived alone. Jesus ensures that the difficulties of our life never become insurmountable. The wedding couple in Cana were not even aware of the problem that began to brew in their wedding, as well as the miracle Jesus performed at that moment to deal with the issue at hand. In the same way, our daily lives are full of miracles, often unbeknownst to us, but always wrought upon by the love of Christ, who graciously bestows on us immeasurable miracles that we often take for granted, and often fail to appreciate and identify. As with the wedding couple in Cana, who invited Jesus to their wedding, so does our own invitation of Him to our lives allows Him to reveal His glory to us.

Cleansing of the Temple

¹³

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

There are three Passovers mentioned in this Gospel.²⁹ This would entail a narrated ministry of at least two years. The Synoptics, on the other hand, only mention one Passover, thus narrating only a year of Jesus' public life.

The verb "went up" is normally used to indicate the journey to the holy city, which was situated on a mountain.

¹⁴

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business.

In the temple (Greek: hieron) rather means the outer court of the temple or the court of the Gentiles. This is to be distinguished from the holiest of holies inside the temple, wherein only the priests can enter.

The animals, used as sin offerings, are a necessary element of Jewish worship.³⁰ In addition, every male Jew over nineteen years of age was required to make an annual contribution of half a Tyrian shekel coin for the temple upkeep.³¹ Thus, the money-changers are a necessity, in order to change currency that is otherwise religiously objectionable, into Tyrian currency (other currencies such as the Roman denarii and Attic drachmas were religiously questionable because they bore images of pagan gods or emperors). It is also said that the money-changers were agents of the temple priests, and that the latter made huge profits by heavy markups on the currency exchanges.

The narration of the temple cleansing is paralleled in the other Gospels, though with slight differences. For instance, John's narration reflects little similarity in the spoken words of Jesus, compared to the Synoptics. Only in John are the oxen and sheep vendors mentioned. Furthermore, John places the temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, whereas the Synoptics place it in the last week of Jesus' life (Matthew places this in the same day Jesus enters Jerusalem, Mark has it the following day). In the Synoptics, it was this incident that made the Jews want to kill Him.³² In John, it is the Lazarus incident which provoked the authorities to plot against His life.³³

Could this temple cleansing, perhaps, be a different instance than the one mentioned in the Synoptics? Or is this a mere chronological rearrangement by the evangelist(s) in order to emphasize a particular theological motive? These questions have divided biblical scholars.

²⁹ John 6:4, John 13:1

³⁰ Leviticus 5:5-8

³¹ Exodus 30:11-16

³² Mark 11:18

³³ John 11:45-53

15

And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

The Synoptics do not narrate the making of whip out of cords. The cords were, perhaps, readily available in the temple area, as it was used to tie and secure the various animals being sold there, or as bedding for the animals.

It is clear that the temple animals and the money-changers were an integral part of Jewish worship. The Jewish mode of worship necessitated the use of animals for sacrifice, for example. From this, as well as the preceding episode of the wedding in Cana, it is evident that Jesus is not merely attacking the temple, but rather, the Jewish mode of worship. In Cana, Jesus invalidates Jewish purification rites. Here, the Jewish framework of worshipping God loses its very meaning with the presence of Christ.

16

And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade."

It is only in John's account of the temple cleansing that Jesus speaks to the pigeon vendors personally. In the Synoptics, Jesus quotes scripture (Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11) to make His point. Here, the Word, Himself, directly spoke.

17

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me."

For John, "remembering" is a technical term that signifies how the disciples came to understand and realize how Jesus was the fulfillment of the scriptures, after His resurrection.

Psalm 69:10 is herein quoted. Note how the evangelist has changed the original present tense of the Psalm verse into the future tense. This probably calls to mind the bitter conflict and hostility that is to erupt between Jesus and the Jews.

18

The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?"

The request for a sign occurs throughout Jesus' ministry.³⁴ Here, the request for a sign is in order to justify His actions.

19

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

In the Synoptics, Jesus is misquoted as saying: "I can/will destroy the temple,"³⁵ which becomes the reason used for why He is put to death.

True to the Johannine style of highlighting the misunderstandings on the part of Jesus' opponents, Jesus' reply at that time was perplexing, yet expectingly intelligible for the audience of the time. The prophet Jeremiah had mentioned that any form of impurity would destroy the

³⁴ Mark 8:11-12, Matthew 12:38-39, Luke 11:29-30

³⁵ Matthew 26:61

value of the Temple in God's eyes.³⁶ Furthermore, in Zechariah, it was foretold that with the coming of the Messiah, an ideal temple will come wherein no form of commerce will be tolerated. With the destruction or degradation of the temple because of corruption, Jesus would raise up the new temple – an everlasting temple, in which all people would be welcome.³⁷

It is interesting to note that Jesus, in this Gospel, uses “raise up” (Greek: egeirein), as opposed to the Synoptics, which narrate the term “rebuild” (Greek: oikodomein). “Raise up” highlights the resurrection of Jesus, whom as would be seen by the disciples, would be raised up in three days.

²⁰

The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”

The Jews took Jesus' words literally. Herod had begun construction of the magnificent temple around 20-19 BC,³⁸ and the construction continued on till shortly before the Jewish revolt, which took place around 62 AD. The time these words were spoken was probably around the spring of 28 AD, some forty-six years after the commencement of the Herodian construction.

The misunderstanding of Jesus' words is very prevalent in the fourth Gospel. Jesus often speaks in metaphorical or figurative language, and his questioners only often take on His words on a literal or material level. This creates a misunderstanding on the questioner's part, and allows Jesus to elaborate on His thought more thoroughly.

²¹

But he spoke of the temple of his body.

Mark notes that the temple to be rebuilt is not made with hands.³⁹ Paul further writes that the temple of God is the church made up of believers.⁴⁰ This does not, in any way, conflict with John's interpretation, for the church is the body of Christ.

²²

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Note how the resurrection has allowed the disciples to view Jesus' words in the same light and level as that of scripture. Indeed, for scripture is God's word, and so is Jesus.

³⁶ Jeremiah 7:11-14

³⁷ Isaiah 56:7-8

³⁸ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 1, 21, 1 §401; *Antiquities*, 15, 11, 1, §380

³⁹ Mark 14:58

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:16

²³

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did;

²⁴

but Jesus did not trust himself to them,

We know nothing of these signs manifested at Jerusalem, for they were never recorded.

Jesus did not trust himself to them, for He knew the inadequacy of faith that is solely based on miracles. Such people recognize the miracles, but not the meaning behind it. A similar case of inadequate faith occurs in John 6:14-15, where the people react to His multiplication of loaves miracle by trying to make Him a political king.

²⁵

because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.

Jesus' knowledge of man, which transcends mere human and visible knowledge, is a true Johannine theme. He has demonstrated this thus far with Peter and Nathan'a-el,⁴¹ and He will demonstrate this again with the Samaritan woman,⁴² to His disciples,⁴³ and with Lazarus,⁴⁴ to name a few.

⁴¹ John 1:42,47

⁴² John 4:29

⁴³ John 6:61, John 13:11, John 21:19

⁴⁴ John 11:14

Chapter 3

Nicodemus

¹

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

Nicodemus is a character that is only mentioned in John. By being “a ruler,” he most certainly belonged to the Sanhedrin, which is the highest governing body of the Jewish people, composed of seventy-one people of whom are Sadducees (chief priests), Pharisees (scribes), and lay aristocratic elders.

²

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

In ancient Jewish literature, it is said that God showed his approval of a certain rabbi, by working miracles through him. To Nicodemus, Jesus must be such a teacher come from God, for God has shown miracles through Him.

Note how Nicodemus comes to Christ by night. To John, darkness and night is symbolic of evil, untruth, and ignorance.⁴⁵ Here, Nicodemus comes out of the darkness into the light⁴⁶. The symbolic import of the night is of great significance to the evangelist, that he consistently recalls this detail (see John 19:39).

On a natural level, this episode with Nicodemus may have also taken place at night, due to Nicodemus' fear of being seen associated with Jesus.

³

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

The Greek *anōthen* has a double meaning. It can mean “again” or “from above.” Nicodemus takes on the former meaning. However, in this verse, Jesus meant “from above.” This is evidenced by a parallel in John 3:31, as well as from two other Johannine usages of *anōthen*.⁴⁷ Interestingly, such a misunderstanding is only possible in Greek. Hebrew or Aramaic (the language spoken by Jesus) presents no words of similar meaning that could possibly cause this spatial and temporal misunderstanding.

Though the “kingdom of God” is a popular theme in the Synoptics, this phrase only occurs twice in this Gospel (the other is in verse 5).

⁴⁵ John 9:4, John 11:10

⁴⁶ John 3:19-21

⁴⁷ John 19:11, 23

5

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

From this verse, the Christian reader of today can draw upon themes of baptism and the Holy Spirit. To Nicodemus, however, Jesus' full teaching on the Spirit is not fully comprehensible, though it should have, at least, meant to him that the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit was at hand, preparing for man's entrance to God's kingdom.

Nicodemus should have partly understood Jesus. The pouring forth of God's spirit is a prominent theme in the Old Testament depiction of the messianic days. In Isaiah 32:15, it is described as the time when: "the Spirit is poured upon us from on high." On several occasions, the themes of both water and Spirit are joined together, as in Ezekiel 36:25-26: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you." Even in Nicodemus' own time, the notion of a spirit's redemptive role is not unheard of. The Essenes community at Qumran, from whom the Dead Sea Scrolls came from, records of this belief.⁴⁸

6

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

In this Gospel, "flesh" emphasizes mortality and weakness. This is in contrast with Pauline theology, which emphasizes the sinfulness of the flesh. The Spirit, on the other hand, is the extension of divine life and power to the human sphere.

7

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'

The you in "Do not marvel that I said to you" is singular, whereas the you in "You must be born anew" is plural. This makes sense, given that Nicodemus came as a representative of the Pharisees, by his use of the we pronoun in verse 2.

8

The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

Jesus employs a beautiful play of words on this verse – a play of words that cannot be reproduced in English. The Hebrew *rûah*, as well as the Greek *pneuma* can both mean "wind" or "spirit." The Greek *pneua*, can be rendered as "blows" or "breathes." The Greek *pwnh* literally means "voice," and can thus be used as "sound of the wind" or "voice of the Spirit." Consequently, this whole verse can equally mean: "The Spirit breathes where It wills, and you hear the voice of It, but you do not know whence It comes or whither It goes."

Nicodemus has difficulty in comprehending Jesus' words, so Jesus gives an example. Just as one believes in the wind without understanding its nature, so must we likewise do with the Spirit.

⁴⁸ 1QS (Qumran Manual of Disciple) 4 19-21

The interesting play of words and the dual meaning of certain passages is very characteristic of the fourth Gospel. Often, a dual meaning can be employed with certain Greek or Hebrew words, thus masking a deeper thought than what is superficially visible.

9

Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?"

This is the last time we hear of Nicodemus in this scene.

10

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?"

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he, Nicodemus, is supposed to be the teacher, not the pupil. When Nicodemus came to seek Jesus, he came representing "the Jews," saying "We know" (verse 2). From this statement, it is also evident that one's knowledge of the Old Testament should have enabled one to understand an aspect of Jesus' thought. Yet, Nicodemus failed to.

11

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony.

Jesus, here, speaks on behalf of all believers. The you in "I say to you" is singular, whereas the you in "you do not receive our testimony" is plural. The subject of the latter are the unbelieving Jews.

12

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

The preceding illustrations by Christ is of an earthly nature (using earthly analogies like birth and wind), and all such illustrations take place on earth. The succeeding illustrations in this scene, henceforth, will be more difficult to believe and comprehend, for they describe what is to follow after earth (heaven, or being lifted up).

13

No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.

This is the first of John's three Son-of-Man "being lifted up" sayings. Mark, on the other hand, has three Son-of-Man passion sayings.⁴⁹

This verse is a little difficult, because "ascended" is in the past tense. Jesus has not yet ascended during the time these words were spoken. Could this have been a change done by the evangelist?

Interestingly, it is only in John that Jesus portrays Himself as descending from heaven. In Ephesians 4:9, Paul writes of a descent and ascent of Jesus, but such refers to His descent into the lower regions after death. This verse stresses the heavenly origin of the Son of Man.

⁴⁹ Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33

14

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up,

15

that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

In both Matthew and the Septuagint version of Numbers 21:9 ff., Moses simply mounted the serpent on a pole. The Targums, on the other hand, indicate that Moses "placed the serpent on an elevated place."⁵⁰ Jesus may very well be citing the Targum, in the same way that He does in John 7:38.

The phrase "lifted up" has a twofold meaning – referring both to being lifted up on the cross, as well as to being lifted up to heaven. In the same way that lifting up the serpent delivered the Israelites from death, Jesus, lifted up in glory, becomes the ultimate savior of all.

"Eternal life," used here for the first time, is the prominent theme in this Gospel. By "eternal life," the quality of life rather than the duration is emphasized.

16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The love of God comprises all of creation. This is the only time in this Gospel, however, that God's love for all, just and unjust alike, is mentioned (compare to Matthew 5:45). In the other parts of this Gospel, God's love is directed towards His disciples. In the Johannine epistles, the same observation can be made: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). Note that in 1 John, God's love is oriented towards the believers ("we").

The verb *didonai*, referring to "gave," does not merely imply the giving through the incarnation, but also the giving of His Son's life through crucifixion. This is similar to the use of *paradidonai* in Romans 8:32 and Galatians 2:20.

The dialogue with Nicodemus now turns into a monologue. Nicodemus seems to slip off into the night, whence he came. In the fourth Gospel, we often find Jesus in a dialogue with a person or audience, after which, the hearers slowly fade away, and the speech turns to a monologue. The effect, then, is to free Jesus' words from a certain circumstance, making them eternally and universally valid.

⁵⁰ Neof. I; Ps Jon

¹⁷

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

In John, Jesus is sent to the world. In the Synoptics, Jesus is sent to Israel.⁵¹

The Greek for “condemn,” derived from the root in *krinein* and *krisis*, both mean “condemnation” and “judgment.” Jesus, in turn, came to this world not for condemnation, but for salvation.

¹⁸

He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Though Jesus did not come to judge, His coming constitutes judgment. This judgment is not only in the future, but is partly realized (the notion of realized eschatology). By refusing to believe, people impose condemnation upon themselves.

¹⁹

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰

For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

²¹

But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also present interesting parallels to the notion of a world divided into lightness and darkness.⁵²

Concluding this section, note that Jesus stresses the necessity of a spiritual rebirth. He has negated the notion of a natural birth into the Chosen People. Thus, another pillar of Judaism has been torn down.

⁵¹ Matthew 15:24, Luke 4:43

⁵² 1QS (Qumran Manual of Disciple) 3 18-21, 4 23-24

The Baptist's Last Witness

²²

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.

Jerusalem is in Judea. This verse is a bit confusing, given that Jesus is already in Jerusalem at this time. Certain biblical scholars, like Bultmann, believe that what is implied in this verse is that Jesus went to the country districts of Judea. This explanation makes sense.

In John 4:2, a clarification is made on Jesus' role in the baptisms. Jesus was present during the baptisms, but he did not, himself, baptize. We have no recorded instance anywhere in the New Testament of Jesus, himself, baptizing. Furthermore, the baptism in this scene should probably not be thought of in the same sense as a Christian baptism, but rather, a baptism like that of John the Baptist. The Christian baptism, based on New Testament thought, only received its efficacy from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

²³

John also was baptizing at Ae'non near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized.

The exact location of Ae'non, near Salim, is uncertain. Perhaps it is in the upper Jordan valley, or more likely, in Samaria near Shechem.

24

For John had not yet been put in prison.

The time reference is very interesting, because it puts the ministry in chapters 1 to 3 prior to John the Baptist's arrest. The Synoptics only know of Jesus' ministry after the Baptist's arrest.

25

Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying.

26

And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him."

27

John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven.

28

You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

29

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full.

30

He must increase, but I must decrease."

Jesus' popularity alarms the Baptist's followers, giving the latter a final chance to bear witness to Him. The Baptist does so, in terms of the Old Testament symbol of Israel as God's bride. Israel has been betrothed to God, and the time has come for Jesus to claim His bride – the new Israel. The Baptist, in turn, claims the role of the "friend of the groom" or the *shoshben* of the Jewish tradition (Paul also claims this role in 2 Corinthians 11:2). In Jewish weddings, the *shoshben* came with his friends to the bride's house and guarded it until the bridegroom came to take the bride home. Thus, there is a special trust between the *shoshben* and the groom, such that any impropriety is unthinkable (thus explaining the fury of Samson in Judges 14:20). Consequently, the only role of the Baptist is to prepare the bride for the groom. Hearing the bridegroom's voice allows the Baptist to rejoice, for he can now fade from the scene.

Verse 30 has had a significant influence, in terms of the tradition involving John the Baptist. Just as Jesus' birthday was fixed at December 25, the time of the winter solstice after which the days grow longer (the light has come into the world; he must increase), John the Baptist's birthday was set at June 24, the time of the summer solstice after which the days grow shorter (he was not the light; he must decrease).

31

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all.

32

He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony;

33

he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

34

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit;

35

the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand.

36

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

In verses 31-36, it is difficult to determine who the speaker is. Biblical scholars are divided on whether the speaker is John the Baptist, Jesus, or the evangelist. Incidentally, these verses resemble an earlier speech by Jesus to Nicodemus. Note the following correspondence:

- a) “from above” verses 3,7 = 31
- b) “the one who comes/came down from heaven” verse 13 = 31
- c) contrast bet. flesh/Spirit, earthly/heavenly and “from above/of earth” verses 6,12 = 31
- d) testifying to what has been seen verse 11 = 32
- e) failure to accept this testimony verse 11 = 32
- f) “the one [Son] whom God has sent” verse 17 = 34
- g) the theme of the Spirit verses 5-8 = 34
- i) “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” verses 15,16 = 36
- j) dualism between “whoever believes” and “whoever disbelieves” verse 18 = 36

This repetition, almost to a verse-by-verse correspondence, is characteristic of the fourth Gospel. Often, this repetition is a means by which the evangelist is able to express another sense of a word or thought with a dual-meaning.

Note the difficulty of verse 36: belief = has eternal life, disobedience = shall not see life. The counterpart of belief is not exactly disbelief, but rather, disobedience. Disobedience, herein, does not refer to a single act, but rather, a pattern of life. There is a connection between a person’s way of life, actions, and keeping the commandments; as well as one’s belief in Jesus. Evil deeds and disobedience results in one’s refusal to be in the light (see John 3:19-20).

Chapter 4

Jesus Leaves Judea

¹ Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John
² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),
³ he left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

These verses seem to clarify the fact that Jesus did not personally baptize. The fact that Jesus did not baptize made sense, for baptism with the Holy Spirit cannot yet be accomplished. The Spirit would not be given until Jesus returned to the Father. The baptism described herein is merely a continuation of the Baptist's work.⁵³

Jesus' reason for departure from Judea to Galilee is left unexplained. Did he leave to avoid confrontation with the Pharisees? Perhaps not, because there were Pharisees in Galilee also. For whatever reason, Jesus' departure from Judea seems to signal the end of His ministry of baptizing. Henceforth, His ministry will be of word and sign.

The Samaritan Woman

⁴ He had to pass through Samar'ia.

Though the main route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria (which normally took about three days),⁵⁴ this was not a geographical necessity. If Jesus was in the Jordan valley (3:22), he could have easily gone north through the valley, and up into Galilee through the Bethshan gap. Thus, the passing through Samaria implies a theological necessity, not a geographical necessity. In other parts of this Gospel, expressions of necessity often implied that God's will or plan necessitated the event in question (i.e., 3:14).

⁵ So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

Almost all manuscripts read Sy'char. However, the Syriac reads Shechem. Jerome, the fourth century biblical scholar, identified Sy'char with Shechem (now called Nablous). Sy'char is a problematic reading, because there are no traces of such a town in the pertinent area of Samaria. Shechem makes excellent sense, given that Jacob's well is only 250 feet from Shechem. References to Jacob and Sechem can be found in Genesis 33:18, 48:22. If Sy'char and Shechem are not identical, then Sy'char is most likely modern day Askar, about half a mile northeast from the well.

⁵³ John 7:39, Acts 1:5

⁵⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20, 6, 1; §118; *Life* 52 §269

6

Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Jacob's well is not mentioned in the Old Testament. The earliest mention of a well, described as about a hundred feet deep, is in Christian pilgrim sources dating back to the fourth century. The presently identified site as Jacob's well, located at the foot of Mount Gerizim, can be accepted with confidence.

7

There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

The sixth hour in verse 6 indicates noontime. This is rather unusual, for women involved themselves with such chores only during the early morning and evening. Perhaps this indicates that the Samaritan woman was a cast out (probably due to her impropriety).

Interestingly, the next time Jesus is driven to express His thirst will again be at noon. This time, the scene will be the crucifixion, where the life giving water Jesus speaks of in this scene will be fully realized.

8

For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

9

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

The conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans was bitter, deep, and historically conditioned. The Samaritans were descendants of an intermixed marriage between the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom (who weren't forced out during the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC), as well as foreign colonists brought in by the Assyrian conquerors (2 Kings 17:24 ff. gives an anti-Samaritan account of this). They were basically Mosaic in their beliefs, but with pagan admixtures. They only accept the first five books of the Old Testament, and reject the prophets, as well as the prophetic emphasis on the Jerusalem Temple. This rejection caused bitter hostility between them and the Jews. In 128 BC, the Jewish high priest burned the Samaritan temple on Gerizim. In 2 BC, the Samaritans helped the Syrian monarchs in their wars against the Jews. During Jesus' time, the Gospel of Luke even records an incident wherein Jesus and his disciples were refused hospitality by a Samaritan village.⁵⁵ In 52 AD, there was even a serious clash between the Jews and the Samaritans that required Roman intervention.⁵⁶

"Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" can also mean "Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans." The Jewish people considered the Samaritans to be ritually unclean. In fact, a Jewish regulation of around 65-66 AD warned that one could never count on the ritual purity of Samaritan women, since they were menstruants from their cradle! With this background in mind, we could very well imagine the amazement of the Samaritan woman who was asked by a Jew for a favor.

⁵⁵ Luke 9:51-55

⁵⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20, 6, 1-3; §118-36

10

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water?"

"Living water" and "flowing water" share the same Greek expression. This creates another perfect example of Johannine misunderstanding. Jesus, herein, speaks of "living water." The woman, on the other hand, thinks of "flowing water." Flowing water is a prized possession in Palestine, where during the long rainless months, one must depend on cisterns which store water from the previous winter's rains.

To the reader of the Gospel, Jesus' words have a profound meaning. In the Old Testament, precious water became a symbol for divine wisdom and teaching.⁵⁷ Jesus is consequently referring to His divine revelation as living water for humanity. Furthermore, Jesus is also referring to the Holy Spirit, who will also be given as living water to those who accept His divine revelation. This subsequent symbolic interpretation is clarified by Jesus in John 7:37-39.

12

Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"

In verses 11 and 12, by comparing Jesus to Jacob, and by pointing out the fact that Jesus has nothing to draw water with, the Samaritan woman was alluding to a miracle attributed to Jacob, which can only be found in some Palestinian Targums. Some versions of the Targum, which is an Aramaic version of the Old Testament, has the following in Genesis 28:10: "After our ancestor Jacob had lifted the stone from the mouth of the well, the well rose in its surface and overflowed, and was overflowing twenty years."⁵⁸ Jesus, not having anything to draw water with, is challenged by the woman. Is Jesus greater than Jacob, who merely made the water overflow, and did not need anything to draw water with?

13

Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,

14

but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Jesus, with His divine knowledge, fully understood the Jacob miracle which the woman alluded to. Jesus then responds with the verb *hallesthai*, or "welling up" or "leaping up." The water Jesus speaks of is greater than the water the woman comprehends, for this water "wells up" to eternal life.

15

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

The woman still misunderstands Jesus' words. Jesus, in turn, will give her a sign – His superhuman knowledge of her past.

⁵⁷ Isaiah 55:1-3, Psalms 36:9, Jeremiah 2:13

⁵⁸ Targum Neofiti Genesis 28:10

16

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

17

The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';

18

for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."

Jews were only allowed three marriages. If the same standard was applied among the Samaritans, then the woman would have been considered highly immoral.

In light of the proper background of the Samaritans, these verses also present a beautiful symbolism. The Assyrian conquerors brought in foreign colonists from five cities, who, in turn, brought their pagan cults with them.⁵⁹ (2 Kings 17:30-31 actually mentions seven gods, though Josephus implies a simplification to five gods⁶⁰.) Since the Hebrew word for "husband" (ba'al) was also used as a name for a pagan deity, verse 18 does an interesting play on words: "you have had five be'alim (the five gods previously worshipped), and the ba'al (Yahweh) you now have is not your ba'al (because the Yahwism of the Samaritans was impure – see verse 22)."

19

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

The Greek Kyrie can mean "Sir" or "Lord." Since its first use in verse 11, its use in the current verse has increased in respect.

The woman identifies Jesus as a prophet, due to His supernatural knowledge. Though the Samaritans did not accept the prophetic books of the Old Testament, the image of the prophet probably stems from Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (a passage which comes after Exodus 20:21b in the Samaritan Pentateuch). This prophet that was expected to come, was also to settle legal questions, hence the logic of the implicit question in verse 20.

20

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

In Deuteronomy 18:15-18 of the Samaritan Pentateuch, Joshua is given instructions to set up a shrine on Gerizim, which is the mountain the woman was referring to. In 4 BC, a temple was erected in Mt. Gerizim by the Samaritans to rival Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. The difference between the Jews and the Samaritans on the notion of where worship ought to take place, was one of the culprits of the bitter hostility between them (see notes on verse 9 above).

21

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

⁵⁹ 2 Kings 17:24 ff.

⁶⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 9, 14, 3; §288

This echoes Psalms 76:1, which states that “In Judah, God is known.” Jesus is, in turn, defending the Jewish tradition, as opposed to the heretical Samaritans. By the Samaritans’ rejection of much of the Old Testament, they have, in turn, also neglected much of the divine revelation.

“Salvation is from the Jews” may very well be referring to the Savior, who is from the Jewish nation. Jesus acknowledges this role in verse 26.

²³

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

²⁴

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus offers both nations a place in the new Israel, where the worship of the Father will no longer be confined to any locality.

“Spirit and truth” are a hendiadys. Both nouns are anarthrous, and there is one preposition. Thus, this phrase is really equivalent to “Spirit of truth.” Here, the dualistic concept between earthly and heavenly, between flesh and Spirit, is insinuated. Jesus replaces the temporal and earthly institutions (Gerizim and Jerusalem) with the heavenly (the Spirit given by Jesus that enables us to fully worship God). Note that the issue at hand is the worship of the Father in Spirit and truth. It is only with the gift of the Spirit that we become God’s children.⁶¹ This is the Spirit of Jesus and is the Spirit of truth⁶² (Jesus is the truth)⁶³.

It is important to note that “God is spirit” does not refer to God’s essence, as so often is misinterpreted (thus, the English translations carefully read “God is spirit” and not “God is a spirit.”). Rather, this refers to God’s relation to His people. We find three great equations in the Gospel of John and the first Epistle of John: “God is spirit,” “God is light,”⁶⁴ and “God is love.”⁶⁵ God gives us the Spirit,⁶⁶ God loves us, and because of this love, He God gave us His Son⁶⁷, our light⁶⁸.

²⁵

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things."

The Samaritans did not expect a Messiah, in the sense of an anointed king of the Davidic house. Instead, they expected a prophet-like-Moses – a Taheb. This belief was the fifth article in the Samaritan creed.

⁶¹ Romans 8:15-16

⁶² John 14:17, 15:26

⁶³ John 14:6

⁶⁴ 1 John 1:5

⁶⁵ 1 John 4:8

⁶⁶ John 14:16-17

⁶⁷ John 3:16

⁶⁸ John 1:4

26

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

It is interesting to note that Jesus never gives an unqualified acceptance of this title when it was offered to Him by the Jews. To the Samaritan, however, He accepts the title. The rejection of the title from the Jews is probably brought about by the fact that the Jewish people has a political or nationalistic insinuation to the title.

Jesus' words can also be translated as: "I am," an Old Testament self-designation of Yahweh⁶⁹.

27

Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

Rabbinic documents warned against speaking to women in public.⁷⁰ It is considered unbecoming of a religious man, doctor, or scholar, to be talking to a woman in public, even if it is one's wife.⁷¹ By talking to the woman, therefore, Jesus was, once again, expressing the unimportance of a religious or social restriction and custom.

28

So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people,

We should not seek a practical reason why the woman left her water jar. The detail described herein seems of symbolic import, for the woman now partly understands, and leaves behind her water jar, for she no longer sees any use for it. She no longer needs the jar for the type of living water she now possesses.

29

"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

30

They went out of the city and were coming to him.

The woman's question ("Can this be the Christ?") shows that her faith is still imperfect. "They" in verse 30 refer to other Samaritans.

31

Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

32

But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

33

So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?"

34

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.

Once again, we find the typical misunderstanding of Jesus' words. Jesus was speaking on a spiritual level, whereas the disciples were speaking on a material level. Jesus clarifies, in verse 34, that the food He speaks of is His mission. This naturally transitions to the harvest metaphor in the following verse.

⁶⁹ Isaiah 43:3

⁷⁰ The Babylonian Talmud, 'Erubin 53b

⁷¹ Bemidbar Rabba, sect 10. fol. 200. 2.

35

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest.

The Gezer calendar of the 10th century BC states an exact four months between sowing and harvest, and various rabbinic reckonings attest to the same fact. If this proverb completely stands (the statement is an actual observed fact that would thus indicate the time of the year), this would infer that this scene took place four months before harvest. Harvest time in the plain of Mahneh, east of Shechem, would run from mid-May for barley, and mid-June for wheat. This would date this scene at the well to around January or early February. Certain biblical scholars, like Bernard, contest to this theory, given that January and February are rainy months, and Jesus could have easily gotten water along the way, as opposed to waiting to come to the well.

Though the metaphor may be prompted by the sight of ripe grain fields near Shechem, the harvest mentioned herein refer to a symbolic harvest, as in Matthew 9:37. The harvests are the townspeople who are coming to Jesus.

36

He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

The sower and the reaper receiving their wages together is a sign of the new age. In Leviticus 26:5, the ideal reward is mentioned, which would be a time wherein harvesting and sowing all follow consecutively – in short, there would be an abundance of crops, such that the idle intervals between agricultural seasons will disappear. Amos also dreamt of a similar picture of the messianic times, wherein the plowman overtook the reaper.⁷² Herein, Jesus preaches that the harvest is ripe on the same day on which the seed has been sown, for Samaritans were already coming out from the village to see Him. Once again, this signals that the messianic time is at hand, and another messianic prophecy has been fulfilled.

37

For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'

38

I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

A similar verse in the Synoptics, to which verse 37 can be contrasted with, appears in Matthew 25:24: "I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow." These verses, in turn, cautions the disciples against taking credit for their missionary success. As disciples, we all merely reap the fruits of others' labor – which is primarily that of Jesus'.

The "others" in the second part of verse 38 is difficult. Who are the "others" that are being referred to here? It is most likely not Jesus, for "others" is plural. Can Jesus be referring to Himself and the Father? Another suggestion is that the "others" were the previous Old Testament figures, but this is rather limited, given that the subject of the reaper, who are the Samaritans, only accept the Pentateuch and reject the prophets. Other biblical scholars contend that the "others" are John the Baptist and his disciples, who preached in Samaria at Aenon, near

⁷² Amos 9:13

Salim. However, there is no previous allusion to the disciples of John the Baptist as having prepared the way for Jesus.

39

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."

40

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

41

And many more believed because of his word.

42

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

The Samaritans first believed on the basis of the woman's testimony. Then, they believed because of their own experience of Jesus' words. This envisages the mission of all Christian disciples – to share our testimony, so that others may experience Jesus' words, as well as His presence in their lives. In 17:20, we find the departing Jesus praying for "for those who believe in me through their word." In 20:29, He gives a blessing to "those who have not seen and yet believe."

Though many Samaritans believed in Jesus, such community of believers were probably merely confined to a small village. In the Acts of the Apostles, no hint is given that Jesus already had followers in Samaria before Philip the Hellenist came to evangelize them.⁷³

Jesus Enters Galilee

43

After the two days he departed to Galilee.

44

For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

45

So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast.

Verse 44 echoes similar sayings in the Synoptics.⁷⁴ Verse 45 presents a big difficulty, however, because it seems to contradict verse 44. Certain biblical scholars contend that the mention of Galilee in verse 45 refers to the general area, and not to Nazareth, which is the town of Jesus. This interpretation is difficult, given that Nazareth is in Galilee.

Perhaps a better explanation of verse 45 is that the people did not properly appreciate Jesus as he came to Galilee. The Galileans possessed unsatisfactory faith – a faith merely based on a crude dependence on signs and wonders. Thus, the welcome Jesus got in Galilee is just as shallow as the one that greeted Him in Jerusalem. As such, the welcome accorded to Him in Galilee is of "no real honor."

⁷³ Acts 8:4-25

⁷⁴ Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24, Matthew 13:57

Healing the Official's Son

⁴⁶

So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.

The Greek word used to designate the official was *basilikos*. It may be used on someone with royal blood, or someone who is a servant to the king. The latter is meant here. He would have served Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee whom is often referred to as a king in the Synoptics⁷⁵. Josephus has used *basilikos* to refer to Herod's troops⁷⁶, and the Synoptics speak of a Roman centurion. Thus, the subject in question may very well be a soldier. Since the time of Irenaeus, biblical scholars have suggested that this story is a third variant of the story of the centurion's boy, which already has two slightly different forms in Matthew and Luke.⁷⁷ These variants touch on various inconsequential details – details that could have easily been blurred by years that have lapsed since the time of the actual incident, to the time of the actual writing of the Gospels.

Given that the Synoptic centurion is a pagan⁷⁸ (though John never explicitly indicates that the official is pagan), it is interesting to note a certain progression of faith. We start off with Nicodemus, who is a Jew. Then, the next subject is the Samaritan woman, who is half-Jew and half-pagan. Now, we have a pagan.

⁴⁷

When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

⁴⁸

Jesus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

The "you" in verse 48 is plural. The man is seen as a representative of the Galileans.

⁴⁹

The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

⁵⁰

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way.

In verse 50, Jesus proclaims: "your son will live." Hebrew and Aramaic has no exact word for "recover." To "live," thus, can connote to "recover from illness" (as used in 2 Kings 8:9) or to "return to life from death" (as used in 1 Kings 17:23). Note the duality and interesting play on words by Jesus. Though "natural life" is conveyed in this story, the rich symbolic notion of "eternal life" is also implied. This "eternal life" is brought about by the man's belief.

⁷⁵ Mark 6:14,22; Matthew 14:9

⁷⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Life*, 72 §400

⁷⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, (189 AD), Bk II, 22:3, Prologue 7:783

⁷⁸ Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10

51

As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was living.

The path from Cana to Capernaum goes east across the Galilean hills, and then, descends to the Sea of Galilee. It is a twenty-mile journey that takes at least two days. The beginning of the descent (to the Sea of Galilee) would have then taken place on the second day.

52

So he asked them the hour when he began to mend, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

53

The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live"; and he himself believed, and all his household.

54

This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

It is worth noting that the evangelist reminds us twice of the first Cana miracle (at the beginning and at the end of the second Cana miracle – verse 46 and 54). Both miracles hold the same pattern: Jesus has just come back into Galilee, someone comes with a request, Jesus seems to refuse the request by the nature of His reply, the petitioner persists, Jesus grants the request, and a new set of people believes in Him. After both miracles, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and the Temple.

The theme of life starts with the story of Nicodemus. To him, Jesus spoke of a rebirth to a new life. The theme then develops with the Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus spoke of water that gives life. We now have the climax of Jesus restoring life. The restoration of life through the words of Jesus, spoken from a distance, exemplifies the power of His life-giving word.

Chapter 5

Cure on a Sabbath

¹

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

John never specifically mentions what feast this is. The three major feasts, which Jews were obliged to go to Jerusalem for, were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Some believe the feast referred to herein is Passover (if this was Passover, Jesus' recorded ministry would have been about three and a half years, if not, probably a year less). However, because John explicitly mentions Passover on other occasions (2:13,23 and 6:4), it seems strange that he would not record the name of the feast this time around.

An early tradition in the Greek Church identifies this feast as Pentecost or the feast of the spring harvest, which occurs fifty days after Passover⁷⁹. Eventually, however, Pentecost became the feast commemorating the covenant at Sinai some fifty days after the Passover in Egypt⁸⁰. Pentecost fits the current context well, due to references to Moses in the discourse (verses 46-47). If the proverb in 4:35 stands as an actual observation (see notes on 4:35), this would have meant that Jesus went to Galilee through Samaria around May, further implying a very short stay in Galilee.

²

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-za'tha, which has five porticoes.

There are numerous variants to the Hebrew (Aramaic, to be more precise – John loosely refers to Aramaic names as Hebrew) name of this pool: Bethza'tha, Bethsaida, and Bethesda. The last is the closest to the name recorded in the Qumran Copper Scroll (35-65 AD): “Bet ‘Eshdâ,” meaning “house of flowing.” Recent archaeological discoveries also shed some light on this pool. A large pool not far from the gate where the sheep were brought to the Temple was discovered (next to the Crusader Church of St. Anne). This structure had five colonnades (or porticoes) with two pools – a smaller one to the north and a larger one to the south. The pool was enclosed with four porches and a fifth one between the two pools.

³

In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed.

The fact that people are lying outside in the porticoes indicates that this did not take place during winter.

^{3b}

waiting for the stirring of the water;

⁴

for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.

⁷⁹ Leviticus 23:15-22

⁸⁰ Exodus 19:1

Verse 3b and 4 are missing from the best and earliest manuscripts. Furthermore, its Greek wording is unlike the rest of the Gospel of John.

⁵
One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

⁶
When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

In verse 6, Jesus' extraordinary knowledge of men is highlighted. Such supernatural knowledge is a strong Johannine theme, echoing 2:25.

Note Jesus' question: "Do you want to be healed?" Such a question seems senseless. The previous phrase just highlighted Jesus' extraordinary knowledge of men, thus making the question seem unnecessary. Furthermore, the man is at the pool in order to obtain healing (verse 7). Which human being wouldn't want to be healed from his/her infirmities, especially after thirty-eight years of being ill?

Jesus' question to the ill man is reminiscent of His question to the two blind men seeking His help: "What do you want me to do for you" (Matthew 20:32)? In both cases, the motivation for the question is certainly not to determine what was in the minds of the people. Rather, God wants us to interact with Him. In this scene, Jesus creates the wonderful opportunity for the ill man to communicate with Him and to seek His help.

⁷
The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me."

Verses 3b and 4 were, perhaps, a later scribal attempt to explain this verse.

⁸
Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk."

⁹
And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked. Now that day was the sabbath.

Note the immediate effect of Jesus' healing power: "At once the man was healed." What the waters of Judaism couldn't heal for years, Jesus healed in an instant. Some exegetes see the five porticoes as a symbolism for the Pentateuch, and how the water or life through the Pentateuch is insufficient in truly giving life. On the other hand, the real living water brought upon by Jesus has shown its efficacy. It is only through this living water that true life can be found.

Note how faith was not a requisite for this healing. This miracle had another purpose, namely, to clarify Jesus' work.

¹⁰
So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet."

In the Mishnaic tractate Sabbath 7:2, carrying things from one domain to another was the last of the 39 works forbidden. In 10:5 of the same tractate, carrying empty beds is implicitly forbidden.

11

But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk.'"

12

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your pallet, and walk'?"

The Jewish authorities had lost sight of the miraculous healing, and had just been fixated on the Sabbath violation.

13

Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

There are numerous instances recorded in the Synoptics, especially in the Gospel of Mark, wherein Jesus avoided drawing public attention to His miracles.⁸¹

14

Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you."

There are instances wherein Jesus does not accept the notion that a man's sickness or suffering was a sign that he had committed sin.⁸² On a more general scale, however, He does indicate a connection between sin and suffering. The Old Testament, on the other hand, drew a one-to-one correspondence between sin and suffering.⁸³

15

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

This man's actions can be contrasted with the believing response of the blind man in John 9. Therein, the blind man defends Jesus.

16

And this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath.

17

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working."

18

This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.

The whole discourse on the Sabbath is difficult to comprehend, without taking into account the complete theology of the time, the rules of the scribes regarding Sabbath, as well as various laws of testimony and Mosaic writings.

⁸¹ Mark 7:33, 8:23

⁸² John 9:3, Luke 13:1-5

⁸³ Ezekiel 18:20,26

The issue at hand stems from the commandment concerning Sabbath. “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11). “...Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15). The Jewish theologians realized, however, that God never really ceased to work on the Sabbath. Had God ceased work on Sabbath, the rabbis reasoned, then all of life and nature would cease to exist, because only God could give life⁸⁴ and it is only He who can deal with the fate of the dead in judgment. As Rabbi Johanan put it, God kept in His hand three keys that He entrusts to no agent: the key to the rain, the key of birth (Genesis 30:22), and the key of the resurrection of the dead (Ezekiel 37:13).⁸⁵ To the rabbis, it was obvious that God used these keys even on the Sabbath.

When Jesus said: “My Father is working still, and I am working,” He appropriated to Himself the Sabbath exemption and privilege, which is peculiar to God. By doing so, He made Himself equal to God, and no one was equal to God⁸⁶. In claiming the right to work even as His Father worked, Jesus was claiming a divine prerogative.

Incidentally, this is the first active hostility against Jesus in this Gospel.

Authority of the Son

19

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.

This proverb or parable takes its idea from apprenticeship in a trade. In a simple society like that of Palestine, a trade would be taught within a family. The son, would thus, have to imitate the father's work. Jesus was known as a carpenter's son (Matthew 13:55), and He himself grew up to be a carpenter (Mark 6:3).

Jesus states that there is nothing arrogant with what He said. He reiterates His dependence on the Father, and claims nothing on His own. At other instances, Jesus also states that none of what He says is his own,⁸⁷ and that the Son did not come of His own accord⁸⁸. Verses like these helped early Christian theologians in understanding that the Father and the Son possess one nature, one principle of operation.

20

For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel.

The following verses will elaborate on the “greater works” mentioned herein. Verse 21 states the first of these works: giving life. Verses 22-23 expounds on the second of these works: the power to judge. Note how all these works tie to the Sabbath theme, as elaborated above.

⁸⁴ 2 Kings 5:7

⁸⁵ The Babylonian Talmud, *Taanith* 2a

⁸⁶ Exodus 15:11, Isaiah 46:5, Psalm 89:8

⁸⁷ John 8:26, 12:49

⁸⁸ John 7:28, 8:42

21

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The life given to the royal official's son is but a prelude that demonstrates the life-giving power given to Jesus by the Father. The will to give life is a prerogative given to the Son, who has the power to decide whom to give life to. This sheds some light into the connection between the healing of the cripple at Bethesda and the order to stop sinning (verse 14). To those in the realm of death which is sin, the Son has the power to grant life. The only threat to the life that He grants is further sin (see also Hebrews 10:26).

22

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

23

that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

The Father has turned over all judgment to the Son. This judgment should be understood in the Old Testament sense of vindicating the good,⁸⁹ which is complementary to giving life.

24

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

25

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

The judgment of those who believe (by means of giving life) has its downside, for it also entails a condemnation of those who refuse the Son as sent by the Father. Verses 19-27 discusses realized eschatology: judgment, condemnation, and passing from death to life – all of which are part of that hour which is now here. The “dead” of verse 25 are those who are spiritually dead, who will live if they listen and believe.

26

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself,

27

and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.

28

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice

29

and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

30

"I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

In the Synoptic picture of the final judgment and the separation of the good from the evil, the “Son of Man” plays an important role.⁹⁰ The use of this title in verse 27 seems to echo its locus classicus, where in Daniel 7:13, the figure of “a son of man” appears in the context of final divine judgment. Verses 26-30 seem to be a variant of the speech of verses 19-25, with an emphasis, instead, on this future judgment and the life given on the last day or final judgment

⁸⁹ Deuteronomy 32:36, Psalm 43:1

⁹⁰ Mark 13:26; Matthew 13:41, 25:31; Luke 21:36

(parousia eschatology). That men will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds is common to John, Paul (Romans 2:6-8), and the Synoptics (Matthew 25:31-46). This is to be distinguished from salvation according to faith (Mark 16:16).

Whereas verses 24-25 deal with people that are living, verses 28-29 deal with people that are physically dead. In a way, both eschatological views are complementary, for the life of grace we receive on earth is the beginning of the life of beatific vision to be possessed in heaven.

Witnesses to Jesus

³¹

If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true;

Here, Jesus is referring to a principle of the law. In Deuteronomy 19:15, it is stated that a man cannot be convicted of a crime on a testimony of just one witness. The legal principle behind this is alluded to in John 8:17. Nevertheless, Jesus' use of this principle is slightly different from all other examples in the Old and New Testament. The current context does not deal with testimony that is necessary to convict a man, but rather, with testimony necessary to confirm someone's identity. This broader legal principle can be found in various rabbinic documents, like in the Mishnaic tractate Kethuboth 2:9, where it is stated that no man may bear witness on his own behalf.

This verse seems to contradict John 8:14: "Even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true." As we shall see, however, there is no real contradiction between the two statements.

³²

there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true.

"Another" does not refer to John the Baptist, but rather, to the Father. This is made clear in John 8:17-18, where the Father is explicitly mentioned as the other witness to Jesus. In four different ways, the Father gives testimony to the Son, as indicated in the following verse groupings: 33-34, 36, 3-38, 49-40.

³³

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

³⁴

Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved.

³⁵

He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

Ben Sira, a prominent teacher in Jerusalem, wrote the following of Elijah some 200 years before Christ: "Then Elijah arose, a prophet like fire, and his word burned like a torch" (The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach {Ecclesiasticus} 48:1). Furthermore, in speaking of the two lampstands, Revelation 11 clearly uses imagery drawn from Elijah's career. Thus, this is the Johannine version of Jesus' identification of the Baptist as Elijah, as explicitly specified in the Synoptics.⁹¹

⁹¹ Matthew 17:12-13

Josephus wrote of how men were highly elated at listening to John the Baptist.⁹² This would explain their “willingness to rejoice for a while in his light.” The “he was ...” in the earlier part of verse 35 would seem to presuppose the Baptist’s death.

³⁶

But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me.

Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus’ own works bear witness to Him.⁹³ Note how Jesus designates his miracles as “works,” and not “signs.” In 4:34, Jesus speaks of bringing the Father’s work (singular) to completion. The works (miracles) are part of that work which is the economy of salvation entrusted by the Father to the Son.

³⁷

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen;

³⁸

and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent.

Verse 37 is a difficult verse. In Deuteronomy 4:12, we seem to have a contradiction: “Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.”

Theologians and biblical scholars explain that the voices uttered in the Old Testament dispensation were those through angels or agents of God. Other biblical scholars pose a different interpretation of verse 37, stating that “voices heard” or “form seen” are just an analogy to specify the fact that the Jews never really heard or seen God.

³⁹

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me;

⁴⁰

yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

“You search the scriptures” can also be an imperative (Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and some of the early church fathers took it as such) – thus, it can be taken as a challenge to the Jews to go and “search” the scriptures in order to find life. Incidentally, “search” (Hebrew: *dāraš*) is a technical Hebrew verb used for Scripture study.

In Hebrew thought, the law was the source of life. A certain rabbinic literature once attested: “Great is the Law for it gives to those who practice it life in this world and the world to come.”⁹⁴ Paul argues against this in Galatians 3:21 and Romans 7:10. These verses have special meaning if the feast on which this was uttered was Pentecost, the feast of the Law.

⁹² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18, 5, 2; §118

⁹³ John 3:2

⁹⁴ *Pirke Aboth* 6:7

What Jesus implies herein, is that the commendable task of studying Scripture is fruitless, if we lack the knowledge of God that can only come through Him. This deliberate refusal to accept Him entails a refusal to accept God's word, from which eternal life comes from. That Jesus used the Scriptures to challenge the authorities is clear in the Synoptics.⁹⁵

41

I do not receive glory from men.

Jesus states His distrust in human praise and self-glory. This same theme is restated in a slightly different manner in verses 7:18, 8:50, and 12:43. The Greek word, *doxa*, can mean both "praise" from men and "glory" from God. There is an interesting play on this word in verse 44.

If Jesus is angry with the Jews for not receiving Him, it is because He sees this as a rejection of God, and not because He is interested in their praise.

42

But I know that you have not the love of God within you.

"Love of God" can either mean "God's love for you" or "your love for God." The former meaning is the one found in the rest of the Gospel. It fits the analogy of verse 38. On the other hand, a case can also be made for the latter meaning on the analogy of 3:19. Perhaps this was intentionally ambiguous to cover both meanings.

The love of God was the essence of the law.⁹⁶ When Jesus tells the Jews that they do not possess it, He is leading up to the theme that they have betrayed Moses.

43

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

This is a general reference and a prediction of false messiahs who are to come in the name of Jesus. The Synoptic traditions echo a similar thought.⁹⁷

44

How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Though initially spoken to the Jews, this same verse speaks to us today. As humans, we always seek praise from others. Praise is a means of attaining self-assurance. The challenge Jesus presents, however, always shakes this human confidence. Only after this self-assurance is shaken is He ready to make an act of faith that is expressive of His dependence on God.

45

Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope.

46

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

47

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

⁹⁵ Mark 12:10-12, 35-37

⁹⁶ Luke 10:26-28

⁹⁷ Mark 13:6, 22

Once again, the theme of Pentecost speaks out loud in these verses.

In Jewish tradition, Moses was pictured as an intercessor for the people, who pleads before God day and night.⁹⁸ Moses, the people's advocate, is suddenly turned to their accuser.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses wrote a song which would serve as a witness against the Israelites if they violated the law or covenant.⁹⁹ In fact, the whole Mosaic Book of the Law was to serve as a witness against such Israelites.¹⁰⁰ Now, the prophet-like-Moses stands before them, and when they do not heed Him as Moses commanded, they stand accused before Moses himself.¹⁰¹ The whole Mosaic Book of the Law now serves as a witness against them.

Moses testifies to Jesus.¹⁰² Jesus' statement that Moses wrote of Him may be a reference to a specific passage such as Deuteronomy 18:18, or it may be a more general reference to Jesus' fulfillment of the whole Law. Consequently, it makes no sense for the Israelites to place their hope in Moses and his writings, because they do not really believe Moses when they reject Jesus.

⁹⁸ *Assumption of Moses* 11:17, 12:6, "the good advocate"; *Exodus Rabbah* 18:3 on Exodus 12:29

⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 31:19-22

¹⁰⁰ Deuteronomy 31:26

¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 18:15

¹⁰² John 1:45

Chapter 6

Multiplication of the Loaves

¹

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiber'i-as.

After an unidentified amount of time, the evangelist picks up the story in Galilee the following spring, near the second Passover. How Jesus got back to Galilee is not explained.

Mark and Matthew speak of the “the Sea of Galilee.” Luke, on the other hand, speaks of “the Lake of Gennesaret”,¹⁰³ (from the Hebrew name Chinnereth). Throughout the New Testament, only John uses the name “Tiber'i-as.” In the 20s, Herod built a town on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, and named it Tiber'i-as, after the emperor. Most likely, it was only after Jesus' time that the name “Sea of Tiber'i-as” became popular. Tiber'i-as can be found in some 1st-century Jewish literature.

Luke identifies this location that Jesus went to as Bethsaida, on the northeast shore. In Mark's account, however, it is only after the multiplication that the disciples cross the lake to Bethsaida.

²

And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased.

There is only one sign performed on the sick, that was recorded as having taken place in Galilee.¹⁰⁴

³

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples.

This mountain in Galilee, always referred to with the definitive article and often occurring in the Synoptics, is associated with important theological events. The Sermon on the Mount¹⁰⁵, call of the twelve¹⁰⁶, and the post-resurrection appearances¹⁰⁷ all took place on “the mountain” in Galilee. Tradition identifies the location of these events in the northwest shore of the lake and a hill called “the Mount of the Beatitudes.”

Jesus, like the rabbis, usually taught sitting down.¹⁰⁸ John's narration does not mention teaching, in contrast to Mark's account of this event.

⁴

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

This is the second Passover mentioned in this Gospel.

¹⁰³ Luke 5:1

¹⁰⁴ John 4:46-54

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 5:1

¹⁰⁶ Mark 3:13

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 28:16

¹⁰⁸ Mark 4:1, Mark 9:35, Matthew 5:1, Luke 4:20

5

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"

The multitude were, most likely, not Passover pilgrims, given that the lake was not on the pilgrimage route from Galilee to Jerusalem. Furthermore, pilgrims traveled with food of their own.

According to Luke, this scene takes place in Bethsaida. Thus, the question to Philip makes sense, given that Philip is from there.¹⁰⁹

6

This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

This verse is a clarification by the evangelist. In this Gospel, Jesus is never portrayed as ignorant of anything.

7

Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

In Matthew 20:2, a denarius is a day's wage.

8

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

9

"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

The mention of a lad (or "servant," Greek: *paidarion*) and barley loaves are details that are reminiscent of Elisha's miracle.¹¹⁰ Wheat bread was more common, and barley loaves were cheaper and served for the poor. Luke 11:5 seems to indicate that three loaves suffice as a meal for one person.

10

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

"Sit down" literally meant "lie down" or "recline." The fact that there was much grass would indicate springtime, and therefore, Passover.

Five thousand excludes women and children, as explicitly clarified in Matthew 14:21.

11

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

In the Synoptics, the disciples are involved in the distribution.

12

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost."

¹⁰⁹ John 1:44

¹¹⁰ 2 Kings 4:42-44

13

So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.

Numerous biblical scholars like Léon-Dufour, for instance, clarify that “left over” is not the same as “the remnant” of Old Testament thought. The Greek root *periss* never translates the Hebrew root שׁר, which is used for “remnant.” Rather, what is referred herein is “surplus.”

John pays little attention to the fish, as opposed to Mark. The bread will be the subject of the coming discourse.

14

When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

15

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

16

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,

17

got into a boat, and started across the sea to Caper'na-um. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

18

The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing.

19

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened,

20

but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

21

Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

22

On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.

23

However, boats from Tiber'i-as came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.

24

So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Caper'na-um, seeking Jesus.

25

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

26

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

27

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal."

28

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

29

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

30

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?"

31

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."

34 They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out.

38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me;

39 and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day.

40 For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

43 Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves.

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

46 Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.

47 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

48 I am the bread of life.

49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you;

54 he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

57

As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.

58

This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."

59

This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Caper'na-um.

60

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

61

But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"

62

Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?

63

It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

64

But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him.

65

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

66

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.

67

Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

68

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life;

69

and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

70

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

71

He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him.