

**The Gospel of John**  
**Messiah's Signs & Men's Responses**  
**John Hepp, Jr. | johnhepp@kingdominbible.com**

*This writing is more detailed than a survey but less complete than a commentary. In it the name John often refers to the fourth Gospel rather than the apostle who wrote it. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV). In these quotations I have (1) usually changed Jesus' title Christ to its equivalent Messiah, (2) capitalized pronouns referring to deity, (3) sometimes added bolding. KJV means King James Version of the Bible. NASB means New American Standard Bible. References to Leon Morris are to his excellent commentary, The Gospel According to John. As always, the student should read the Bible book repeatedly and actively.*

**Introduction to John's Gospel**

**Its Characteristics.** John was apparently written much later than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those three are called “Synoptic Gospels” because in general they share the same approach to Jesus’ life and ministry. John repeats very little from the others but—apparently on purpose—complements them in many aspects. It tells much of Jesus’ ministry in Judea, which started earlier than His ministry in Galilee. John does not repeat the Lord’s parables, many of which give information about the future kingdom and its coming. John selects only a few of Jesus’ miracles, which it calls “signs.” It records many of His discourses—often in connection with His signs—which are not found in the Synoptics. It shows that there are present aspects of judgment and eternal life, which seem to be only future in the Synoptics. It gives great emphasis to Jesus’ deity, which can be concluded from the Synoptics and Acts but is not obvious there.

John has become the favorite Gospel in Western Christianity. Some use only John when preaching the good news. This is in spite of the many messages summarized in the Book of Acts, which clearly favor the approach of the Synoptics. That—not John’s approach—is how Christianity first grew. The student should determine if the current preference is justified.

This fourth Gospel is often called “The Gospel of Belief.” Not because John uses the Greek noun for belief or faith, *pistis*. It never does. But it uses the verb *pisteuo* (believe) 98 times. Believing is the proper response to God and His revelation. John looks at believing from many angles, including the kind of “believing” which does not save.

**Its Author & Purpose.** The author never calls himself by name but is “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23). By a process of elimination we know he is the apostle John. His book leaves no doubt about the purpose of his writing. Read his statement that follows, noticing especially what I have bolded. After the statement are some technical comments that should prove helpful.

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

“**Miraculous signs**” represents one word, *signs*, in Greek. “**Christ**” (= *Messiah*) is the title of the promised King, who will rule the world (Matt. 2:2, 4; Luke 23:2). It is the English form—not a translation—of the Greek word *Cristos*, which literally means “Anointed.” *Cristos* is common not only in the Greek New Testament but also in the Greek version of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it translates the Hebrew title *Mashiac*, which also means “Anointed.” As a title *Mashiac/Cristos* could and did refer to any king of Israel. For example, David so called his predecessor Saul (see 1 Sam. 26:9, 11, 16). Each king was anointed with oil as a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit. But a number of prophecies (such as, Ps. 2:2, 6-9) looked forward to a future great *Mashiac/Cristos*, whose anointing with the Spirit is described in Isaiah 11:1-2. A synonymous title for Him is *Messiah*, which represents the Aramaic form of *Mashiac* (John 1:41). The Great Confession in each of the Gospels is that Jesus is this *Christ/Cristos/Mashiac/Messiah/Anointed King*.

To this title is sometimes added, as in John 20:31, another title: *Son of God*. For example, the Great Confession in Matthew (16:16) adds it, but the parallel passages (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20) do not. *Son of God* is often equivalent to *Cristos*; it was used for purely human kings like Solomon (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Ps. 89:26-27). But it can also, as in Jesus’ case, imply deity.

### Synopsis of John’s Gospel

Think of this Gospel as a drama with a prologue, two long acts, and an epilogue. The majestic prologue (1:1-18) sets the stage, presenting the main characters and describing their roles. Act I of the drama is the rest of chapter 1 through chapter 12. Act II covers chapters 13-20. The epilogue is chapter 21. Consider the two acts of the drama:

**Act I** (John chapters 1-12). Here we see selected evidence that Jesus is Messiah, the divinely predicted King to rule over the divinely predicted kingdom. This evidence consists mostly of seven signs (miracles), some with related discourses. These signs all reflect Old Testament prophecies that Jesus shows He can fulfill. In spite of this evidence, Act I shows that His own people, in general, “did not receive Him” (1:11).

**Act II** (John chapters 13-20). This part has no more signs until the resurrection. In chapters 13-17 Jesus ministers to “all who received Him...who believed in His name” (1:12). Knowing “that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father” (13:1), He prepares these believers for His absence. He “cleanses” them through His word (15:3) and prays for them (ch. 17). In chapters 18-20 unbelief and belief both come to maturity. Unbelief crucifies Him, ignorantly abetting His triumph over the world (16:33) and His return to the Father (12:24). They shame Him, without

believing it, as “King of the Jews” (19:19-22). But when He overcomes death, even the most skeptical of His disciples confesses that this King is both “Lord” and “God” (20:28).

## Comments on Each Section of John's Gospel

### The Prologue, 1:1-18

Here we meet **the main characters** of the drama:

- The Word who was with God and became flesh (as Jesus, Messiah)
- God the Father
- John (the Baptizer)
- Those who rejected the Word
- Those who received Him

Here we also anticipate **the main themes** of the drama:

- The Word's relation to the Father (1:1-2) and to the world created through Him (1:3-5). The life resident in Him is light for the world, which the darkness cannot overcome.<sup>1</sup>
- John the Baptizer's great mission as “witness to testify concerning that light” (1:6-8). John did not have in himself the life that “was the light of men,” but pointed to that true light.
- The Word's “coming into the world” and becoming “flesh,” which produces a division in mankind. Some reject the revelation (the light), but those who accept it get “the right to become children of God” (1:9-14). This is something quite new in the world, no less than a new creation.
- Believers, in accordance with John's ever-ringing witness, now following the greatest Person of all time. In Him they receive one grace after another; in Him they see the Father (1:15-18).

### Scene 1: Jesus' First Witnesses, 1:19-51

This scene takes place during four days at Bethany in the Jordan River valley. It shows how Jesus' public ministry begins, starting with John's witness about Him.<sup>2</sup> Since belief in the true light leads to becoming God's children, we can call this period “the beginning of the new creation.” Indeed, the account in John chapters 1 and 2 reminds us of the old creation in Genesis 1: Each begins with the light; each is presented in orderly days. On these days in John 1 we hear the very words (some in Aramaic) of the first witnesses to Jesus—and their descriptive titles for Him. Hearing John's witness, some of John's disciples leave him to become Jesus' first disciples.

---

<sup>1</sup> NIV has “the darkness has not **understood** it.” That is a possible translation. However, the translation “has not **overcome** it” better reflects the struggle between darkness and light in this Gospel. In 12:35 NIV translates the same subject and the same verb as “the darkness **overtakes**.”

<sup>2</sup> This scene takes place about forty days after Jesus was baptized. “At once” after that occasion “the Spirit sent Him out into the desert, and He was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan” (Mark 1:12-13). By day 2 of this scene in John, however, He has returned triumphant from that temptation. On day 2 John points Him out; on day 4 He leaves for Galilee.

- **Day 1** (1:19-28). John denies that he is Messiah, Elijah, or “the Prophet.” In words from Isaiah 40 he claims to prepare the way for the Lord and the One far greater than himself.
- **Day 2** (1:29-34). John points out Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29) and the Son of God (1:34).<sup>3</sup> John knows this because earlier, when he baptized Jesus, he saw God’s Spirit come upon and remain upon Jesus. That was Jesus’ anointing, making Him the Anointed One (the *Cristos*). As such, He will baptize in (or with) the Spirit (1:33). All four Gospels and Acts concur in calling this Messiah’s great work. By it men would be reborn as members of Messiah and co-heirs with Him (1 Cor. 12:12-13). He began to baptize in the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 11:15-17).
- **Day 3** (1:35-42). Two of John’s disciples leave John and follow Jesus. One of them finds his brother Simon and gives witness that Jesus is “Messiah” (Aramaic for *Christ*, the Anointed King; see Introduction). Jesus predicts that Simon’s name will be changed to “Cephas” (Aramaic for *Peter* = “man of rock”).<sup>4</sup>
- **Day 4** (1:43-51). Deciding to leave for Galilee, Jesus calls Philip, who invites Nathanael. Philip gives witness that Jesus is “the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote” (that is, Messiah, 1:45). When Jesus shows that he knows Nathanael miraculously, this one calls Him “the Son of God...the King of Israel” (1:49), probably used as equivalent titles. Jesus says they will see Him, “the Son of Man,” as the ladder to heaven.  
NOTE: *Son of Man* was Jesus’ favorite title for Himself. It was ambiguous in meaning and not widely used among the Jews as a title for the Messiah. Its source was Daniel 7:13-14, where “one like a son of man...was given authority [over] all peoples, nations and men of every language [in] an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Thus, *Son of Man* reflected both His humanity and His royal authority.

### Scene 2: Sign 1, Jesus Makes Wine at a Feast, 2:1-11

This scene shifts from the Jordan River in Judea to the region of Galilee, where Jesus had been reared. Jesus and His five or six disciples probably took three or more days to travel the 65-70 miles and reach Cana, past Nazareth. There they were invited to a wedding feast, in which His mother apparently had some authority. Since this feast began “on the third day” after Day 4 above, it began on **Day 6** or **Day 7** of what I have called “the beginning of the new creation.”

Wedding feasts lasted for days (see Gen. 29:22, 27). Like other feasts, they pictured the future kingdom of God, in which God promises to feed His people royally. See such promises in Isaiah

<sup>3</sup> There is good textual evidence that John’s title for Jesus in 1:34 was not “the Son of God” but “the Elect of God.” The latter (like the former) was another title for Messiah (Isa. 42:1; 43:10).

<sup>4</sup> This prediction about Simon was fulfilled at Matthew 16:17-18.

25:6-9 and Revelation 19:7, 9 (cf. Amos 9:13). See Jesus' use of this figure for the future kingdom in Matthew 8:11; 22:1-14; and Luke 14:15-24.

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. (Isa. 25:6)

Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 8:11)

Wine is one of God's blessings: "wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart" (Psalm 104:15). Like all other good things, of course, wine has its risks; there are many warnings. Yet, God required the use of "wine or other fermented drink" (Deut. 14:26) in order to "rejoice" at certain feasts. In fact, it was considered criminal to run out of wine (and joy!) at a wedding. It was a practical policy, of course, to bring out "the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests were drunk" (John 2:10, literally).<sup>5</sup>

At Cana Jesus made a great abundance of wine, around 150 gallons! Wine of the finest quality. Not only did He thereby honor marriage and increase joy. He also demonstrated that He can fulfill the prophecies of abundance in the coming kingdom. It is probably significant that He used filled "jars...for ceremonial washing" (2:6) to do so. Such washing was required through Moses. But "through Jesus Messiah" jars will be full of "grace and truth" (1:17). This miracle "revealed His glory [as Messiah], and His disciples put their faith in Him" (2:11).

### **Scene 3: Jesus Cleanses His Father's House, 2:12-25**

After a brief move to Capernaum, this scene shifts to Jerusalem, especially the temple. It was time for the Passover, when Jews and others came from all the earth to worship. Once again the background of Jesus' action was God's promise for the future kingdom: "On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite [= merchant] in the house of the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 14:21). By chasing out all merchants and their merchandise, He showed the zeal of the godly Man referred to in Psalm 69:9. The end of that psalm (vv. 34-36) has another brief portrait of the future kingdom.

When the Jews asked Him to prove His authority to so act, He promised the greatest sign of all, His resurrection. However, He did so in cryptic language: "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days" (2:19). His enemies misunderstood—and used His language against Him (Matt. 26:61). After the resurrection His disciples understood—and believed.

Believing has stages. Disciples who witnessed about Him in chapter 1, then saw His glory and believed in Cana, would still need to believe after Jesus rose. Contrast the many who believed because they saw miraculous signs in Jerusalem but were not worthy to be trusted (2:23-25).

---

<sup>5</sup> The same word means "drunk" in Eph. 5:18; Luke 12:45; 1 Thess. 5:7; Rev. 17:2.

**Scene 4: Jesus Teaches the Teacher, 3:1-21**

In this interview with Nicodemus, Jesus' main subject was man's need to be born from above in order to enter the coming kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus was still in Jerusalem. The leader who came to see Him was a sample of the many people just mentioned, who had inadequate belief based on Jesus' signs. At this point Nicodemus believes that Jesus is "a teacher who has come from God" (3:2). Yet, Jesus soon tells him, "You people do not accept our testimony....you do not believe" (3:11, 12).

We are told that Joseph of Arimathea was "waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51). Evidently Nicodemus had that same hope (John 3:3, 5). What kind of kingdom were they expecting? Like other Jews, they got their basic definition from God's prophets. Many prophets described a future kingdom that will include political and material as well as spiritual elements. For example, see Isaiah 2:1-4, repeated in Micah 4:1-4. That prophecy pictures a kingdom on earth, ruled from Jerusalem, with all nations living in peace and observing God's laws. Jesus never contradicted that prophetic picture of the kingdom. Yet, as here in John 3, He did emphasize the spiritual requirements to enter it. (See "Special Note: Did Jesus Redefine the Kingdom Nicodemus Was Waiting for?")

"You are Israel's teacher...and do you not understand these things?" (3:10). Why should Nicodemus have known about the birth from above? Because in the Old Testament Scriptures God repeatedly promised it as a future blessing in connection with the coming kingdom. For example, consider Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which told what God would do after He dispersed Israel "among the nations" (v. 1). He would "restore your fortunes...gather you again...bring you to the land... make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers" (vv. 3-5; see also v. 9). On what basis could God admit them into the restored kingdom? The rebirth from above: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (v. 6).

Ezekiel 36:28-30 and 33-38 gives a similar description of the future kingdom. Israel's land will "become like the garden of Eden" (v. 35). The LORD "will make [Israel's] people as numerous as sheep" (v. 37). Other nations "will know that I the LORD have rebuilt" (v. 36). Notice again the basis for admitting Israel to that predicted kingdom: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean...and put My Spirit in you" and "give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezek. 36:25-27).<sup>7</sup> Thus, Ezekiel 36 describes the kingdom Nicodemus was waiting for—

---

<sup>6</sup> Here "see the kingdom of God" (3:3) is equivalent to "enter" it (3:5). "See" can imply being present when something future happens, as in Abraham's desire to "see the day" of the future Messiah (John 8:56). It is often equivalent to "experience," as in Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35, 36, 37 (see decay) and Hebrews 11:5 (see death).

<sup>7</sup> This transformation of God's people is called "a new covenant" in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The gift of the Spirit to "all" rather than a few is also emphasized in Joel 2:28. Of course, this gift—and the resulting new birth—could not take place until Jesus was glorified.

and mentions the same elements Jesus talked about: the water, the Spirit, and the new life. Nicodemus should not have expected the kingdom without the rebirth by the Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

In John 3:13-15 or 16 Jesus continued to speak to Nicodemus. Here He showed him what a person must do to be born from above—believe in God’s “one and only Son.”<sup>9</sup> His being “lifted up” (v. 14) refers both to His death and His ascension (12:32-33). Verse 15 uses “eternal life” for the first time in John, although 1:4 implies the same thing.

It is not clear whether Jesus spoke John 3:17-21 to Nicodemus, or on a later occasion—or if it is a commentary by the writer. Those verses show another result of the Son’s coming: He was not sent to judge men, but by their response they judge themselves. They either come to the light He has brought or hate and avoid it. “Whoever lives by [literally, does] the truth comes into the light....” (3:21). This is one of many thoughts in John’s Gospel that he repeats in his first epistle. There he says that by walking in the light a person shows that he lives by the truth (1 John 1:6-7; compare 2 John 1, 2, 4; and 3 John 1, 4).

### Scene 5: John Continues to Witness, 3:22-36

John’s witness goes at least through verse 30. The rest may come from the writer. This section, especially 3:27-36, anticipates much that Jesus said later.

- 3:24 This verse gives an example of the fact that John is complementary to the Synoptics.  
 3:28 Messiah is bridegroom = He is the promised King.  
 3:36 The Greek verb (*apeitheo*) in “whoever **rejects** the Son” normally means “disobeys.” That is always its meaning outside of the Bible, and perhaps in the Bible (as in 1 Peter 2:8 and 4:17). If it means “disobeys” in John 3:36, it could refer either to the quality of unbelief or its result: (a) In quality unbelief itself is disobedience. That is so because belief is required. (b) As its result unbelief produces disobedience. All unbelievers regularly disobey God. Notice that God does not overlook such an attitude but retains a lasting antipathy (wrath) that will punish it.

### Scene 6: Jesus Wins Samaritans, 4:1-42

What a contrast between the persons Jesus talked to in John 3 and John 4! In chapter 3 it was a respected and learned man, a Jewish leader. In chapter 4 it was an immoral, unlearned, and unnamed Samaritan woman. Both were hindered by faulty religion. Both needed birth from above. But only she (at that time) humbled herself to receive it.

---

<sup>8</sup> Since the kingdom is still future, the expression “born into the kingdom” is misleading. It is not used in the Bible. God is indeed preparing citizens and heirs for that future kingdom (Matt. 25:34; Acts 14:22; James 2:5). But at present they are “brought ...into the kingdom of the Son” only in the same sense as they are “rescued...from the dominion of darkness” (Col. 1:13). So far, that action is juridical, not yet factual.

<sup>9</sup> “One and only” (used in 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18) is Greek *monogenes*. It is sometimes translated “only begotten” because the *genes* part is similar to the Greek word *gennao*, beget or give birth. But the two words are probably not related (*gennao* has double *n*; *genes* does not). *Monogenes* is used elsewhere about uniqueness (Heb. 11:17), not about being begotten.

**Special Note: Did Jesus Redefine the Kingdom Nicodemus Was Waiting for?**

We are told that Joseph of Arimathea was “waiting for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51). Evidently Nicodemus had that same hope (John 3:3, 5). What kind of kingdom were they expecting? Like other Jews, they got their basic definition from God’s prophets. Many prophets described a future kingdom that will include political and material as well as spiritual elements. For example, Isaiah 2:1-4, essentially repeated in Micah 4:1-4, pictures a kingdom on earth, ruled from Jerusalem, with all nations living in peace and observing God’s laws. Israel will be restored, reborn, and rich (Deut. 30, Ezek. 36).

Jesus never contradicted that prophetic picture of the kingdom. Yet, in John 3 and elsewhere, He did emphasize the spiritual requirements to enter it. The whole Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) outlines such entrance requirements without redefining the kingdom. See especially the description of the repentant people in Matthew 5:3-10 (“theirs is the kingdom”), also 5:20 and 7:21. Several of Jesus’ prophecies described the same kind of future kingdom as the earlier prophets. For examples, see Matthew 19:28; 25:31-32; and Luke 19:11-27. If the Lord tried to redefine the kingdom—even to His closest followers—He utterly failed to do so. Even “after His suffering... He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). At that time “He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Finally, with open and understanding minds, what did they understand about the kingdom? That some day He would still “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6).

Nevertheless, many interpreters nowadays deny that the kingdom will include such material and political elements. They argue that the kingdom began at the Lord’s first advent, as a purely “spiritual” kingdom—and quote a few verses as proof. For example, (1) “The kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28); (2) “The kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21, NASB); (3) “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36); (4) “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Such verses, however, can be interpreted to harmonize with the earlier prophecies rather than to contradict them. The first two, (1) and (2), for example, need not redefine the kingdom but simply mean that in one sense Messiah embodies it. When He is on earth, the kingdom is there; when He is not there, neither is the kingdom. Similarly, (3) “not of this world” refers not to the kingdom’s character but to its place of origin. It is “not **from** this world,” as implied also in the Jewish expression “the kingdom of [from] heaven.” (4) Romans 14:17 has a typical absolute-for-relative statement. Instead of speaking absolutely (“the kingdom is not...”), we would speak relatively (“the kingdom is not primarily...”). In other words, the coming kingdom will have eating and drinking (see Matt. 8:11) but is much more than that.

It is evident that no kingdom like the predicted one began at Messiah’s first advent. But His signs show that He can produce it; and He promised to come again to do so.

- 4:1-3 In order to complete His work, Jesus left Judea. He wanted to avoid too early a show-down with Pharisees.
- 4:4 “He had to go through Samaria,” although strict Jews often walked extra miles to avoid Samaria. Jesus “had to” do things (as also seen in 3:14; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9) for reasons not cultural or personal but always related to His mission.
- 4:6 The sixth hour was probably noon (the woman came alone); compare 19:14.
- 4:7-28 This dialogue can be structured by the woman’s progress toward faith. Her attitude kept changing as she saw in Jesus a Jewish man, then a prophet, then Messiah.
- 4:14 The “spring of water” inside one is probably the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus gave after He was glorified (7:38-39).
- 4:22 Salvation is from the Jews as conduit, not as their exclusive right or control.
- 4:23,24 “Worship the Father in...truth” probably means—above all—through Jesus.
- 4:26 It was unusual for Jesus to admit that He was Messiah—but not risky in Samaria. The Samaritans did not immediately try to “make Him king by force,” as the Jews later wanted to do (6:15).
- 4:29 “Could this be the Messiah?” Her question expected a negative answer; she doubted that her fellow Samaritans would accept her testimony. (A little testimony can go a long way!)
- 4:34 Jesus’ food was to do—and finish—God’s will and work. This anticipates Jesus’ words in 5:17-30. “Finish” is what He did at the cross (19:30).
- 4:35 “Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” This probably refers to the villagers coming toward them (v. 30), dressed in white.
- 4:42 “The Savior of the world”—Samaria is an example of those “from every tribe and language and people and nation” who will “serve our God and...reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

### Scene 7: Sign 2, Jesus Heals the Official’s Son, 4:43-54

Back in Cana, Jesus now showed His power to act at a distance, just by speaking. Such power will be quite handy in the coming kingdom. The Ruler, since He has a body, will not be physically present in every place. Yet, “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Isa. 65:24). This promise is one aspect of the impressive picture of “new heavens and a new earth” (that is, the kingdom) in Isaiah 65:17-25.

4:46-47 Cana was 20-25 miles from Capernaum.

### Scene 8: Sign 3, Jesus Heals on the Sabbath, 5:1-18

At the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, Jesus provoked the conflict that eventually led to His death. There on the Sabbath day He chose to (a) heal one man out of many and (b) require the man to carry his mat. These actions angered the Jews because they were done on the Sabbath.<sup>10</sup>

Why the Sabbath? Not because of a sudden crisis, since the man “had been an invalid for thirty-eight years” (v. 5). Nor because the man had faith, since “the man who was healed had no idea who it was” that healed him (v. 13). The simplest answer is in verse 17, that the Son was cooperating with the Father in work the Father chose to do on that day. “My Father,” Jesus said, “is

<sup>10</sup> The weekly Sabbath was always the seventh day, not the first. It was Saturday, not Sunday.

always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” But again, why did the Father choose that day for this miracle? Because of what the Sabbath symbolized.

The old covenant (the Mosaic law) gave great importance to the Sabbath. Each Sabbath looked backward and forward. Backward, it celebrated God’s completion of the first creation in six days (Exod. 20:8-11). Forward, it spoke of His invitation to join in His future rest in a new creation (Ps. 95:7-11, as interpreted in Hebrews 3:7 to 4:11). That hope for the future is summed up in the word *sabbatismos* (“Sabbath-rest”) in Hebrews 4:9. It is the great goal of God’s present work, the new creation, which He and the Son will complete. What better day to work on the new creation than the day that symbolizes it?! What better day to make a person whole?!

5:3b-4 This is an explanation of what the “disabled people” (v. 3) at Bethesda thought (v. 7). This explanation is not found at all in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts—and is marked as “spurious in more than twenty” others.<sup>11</sup>

5:8, 10, 11 “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” The Jews were right.<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 17:21 is specific: “This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem” (also in verses 22 and 24). Therefore, when John 5:18 says that Jesus “was breaking the Sabbath,” it probably states it as a fact, not just the Jews’ opinion. But how could the Son do otherwise? He had to join His Father at work on something far greater than the law. In John 7:21-24 He returned to this subject. There He said that if circumcision was more important than the Sabbath, how much more important was “healing the whole man”?

5:16 “Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath.” This story is only a sample.

### Scene 9: The Son Speaks of His Relationship to the Father, 5:19-47

We have considered verses 16-18 in the previous scene, to which they give a conclusion. But they also introduce the present scene, which deals with (a) the Son’s perfect harmony with the Father (vv. 19-30) and (b) the Father’s testimony to the Son (vv. 31-47).

Verses 19 and 30 bracket the first part of His speech. Each verse says that the Son cannot act independently from the Father. (Cf. 4:34, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”) Because of the Father’s love for the Son, He grants Him the related powers of giving life and judging (vv. 20-22, 26-29). The Son will judge as a member of the human race (“because He is the Son of Man,” v. 27; cf. Acts 17:31). In fact, He will call all men out of their graves to receive either life or judgment (vv. 28-29) according to their deeds.<sup>13</sup> From this we can imply two resurrections, which fact is elaborated in Revelation 20.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (United Bible Societies, 1994), 179. In fact, verse 4 is not even found in the early versions in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic.

<sup>12</sup> But notice that they were more concerned about the violation of the Sabbath than its fulfillment (v. 12).

<sup>13</sup> Judgment will be according to whether they “have done good” or “have done evil” (v. 29). This does not mean that they earn eternal life but that their deeds prove or disprove their faith.

Verse 24 shows that there is a present aspect to judgment and eternal life. In one sense, believers will not be judged (the Greek for NIV “condemned” is the same word as “judge” in vv. 22, 27, and 30). They already have life, having “crossed over from death to life.”<sup>14</sup>

In verses 31-47 the Son spoke about His witnesses (who testified about Him). Since He did not accept man’s witness, He must discount that of John the Baptist, though accurate. What witnesses did He accept? Superficially, there might seem to be four: (1) His own works (v. 36), (2) the Father (v. 37), (3) the Scriptures (v. 39), and (4) Moses (vv. 45-47). However the last three seem to be equivalent (8:18 mentions only two witnesses). The Scriptures—including Moses—are the Father’s word (v. 38).

5:31 “My testimony is not valid.” Jesus said this from the perspective of the Jews. But actually, of course, His testimony is valid, as stated in 8:13-14.

Notice three reasons why, in spite of the witnesses, they would not believe (v. 40): (1) They did not really love God (v. 42). (2) They received glory from one another instead of from God (v. 44). (3) They didn’t believe Moses’ writings (v. 47). Those writings, in which God Himself witnessed, were quite sufficient (see Luke 16:29-31).

### Scene 10: Sign 4, Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand, 6:1-13

All four Gospels record this miraculous sign: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-13. Because their purposes are different, they approach the story differently. Many sermons are based on this story; it can teach us many lessons. Among the lessons, though not the most important, are (1) Jesus can meet our needs, (2) He can multiply our resources, and (3) He requires that “nothing be wasted” (John 6:12).

- **The Occasion.** All four Gospels locate this sign during Jesus’ first “withdrawal” from Galilee<sup>15</sup> On this occasion He “crossed to the far [that is, the northeast] shore of the Sea of Galilee” (6:1). But “a great crowd of people followed Him” (6:2); He was never so popular in Galilee before or after this. John also informs us (6:4) that it was nearly time for another Passover Feast.<sup>16</sup> Two of John’s other additions to this account are particularly important: (1) He explains why Jesus, after this miracle, quickly separated Himself (and His disciples) from the crowds. (2) He tells us what Jesus later said in Capernaum about this miracle and its meaning.

<sup>14</sup> The same verse (1 John 3:14) tells how we know that we are secure: “because we love our brothers.” Nevertheless, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah,” where the evidence will be presented and we will be rewarded (2 Cor. 5:10).

<sup>15</sup> In Matthew and Mark this is the first of four such withdrawals. In each withdrawal Jesus (1) stayed out of the territory of Herod Antipas, who had beheaded John, and (2) went to the mountains. This first withdrawal, says Matthew, was right after John’s disciples came to tell Jesus of John’s death and burial. Mark and Luke show that its announced purpose was to rest after the apostles’ preaching tour.

<sup>16</sup> Only John gives us clear evidence of more than one year for Jesus’ ministry. He mentions a first Passover in 2:23, possibly (though not likely) another one at 5:1, this one (6:4), and the final one (12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39). Passover was celebrated in April, just after the rainy season. For the feeding of the 5000 all but Luke refer to the abundant grass.

- **The Sign Itself.** John shows us that Jesus had this miracle planned even before most of the crowd arrived. “When Jesus...saw a great crowd coming...He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’ He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do” (6:5-6). Philip’s answer was that “two hundred denarii” (6:7, Greek) was not enough money to buy each one a little. That was the equivalent of wages for two hundred days’ work. The other Gospels merge this early discussion into one initiated by “the Twelve” (Luke 9:12) late in the day.<sup>17</sup>

Only John gives certain details: It was **Andrew** who told Jesus about **a lad** with five **barley** loaves and two fishes. But all four Gospels say that Jesus (1) had the people sit down, (2) gave thanks for the meal of loaves and fishes, (3) gave the food for all to eat, and (4) had His disciples gather up the broken pieces that were left over (twelve baskets). All but John say that He served the meal through the disciples.

- **The Meaning of the Sign.** Since each sign shows something about Messiah, what does this one show? There seem to be three levels of teaching, with only John emphasizing the deepest level. (1) On the first level, Jesus can provide for our material needs.<sup>18</sup> (2) On a deeper level, He can multiply our scanty resources to meet the needs of others. This is an emphasis in those Gospels that record the disciples’ participation in distributing the loaves and fishes. (3) On the deepest level (the one dealt with in John), Jesus can provide the promised kingdom feast. Psalm 22:26 predicts that in that kingdom “the poor will eat and be satisfied,” as they did here. But this miracle goes beyond the one at Cana. The wine of that first sign symbolizes kingdom joy; the bread of this fourth sign symbolizes life itself.<sup>19</sup> Not physical life alone, which the people would have settled for—but eternal life, as He says in His discourse in Capernaum. Both levels of life are implied in the picture of the “one shepherd” in the promised kingdom, caring for the flock, Ezekiel 34:23-31 and John 10.

### Scene 11: Sign 5, Jesus Walks on the Water, 6:14-24

The fifth sign, walking on the water, was private, just for Jesus’ closest disciples. Like His other miraculous signs, it taught like a parable in its details and its totality. Its truth still encourages us centuries later.

---

<sup>17</sup> Mark says, “many...ran on foot from all the towns and got there [to the solitary place] ahead of them.” Matthew and Luke say that He healed their sick; Mark and Luke, that He taught them. In all but John, the subject of food for the crowds came up only late in the day. The disciples suggested that the crowds be sent away to buy food—but Jesus told the disciples to feed them.

<sup>18</sup> We can infer this simplest meaning from Matthew 16:5-12, an incident in which “the disciples forgot to take bread.” When Jesus warned them “against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” they thought that He was concerned about bread (vv. 5-7). But He was not. He reminded them of “the five loaves for the five thousand” and “how many basketfuls you gathered.” That provision should have erased such worries (vv. 8-12). This does not mean that material things like food are unimportant; on the contrary, “your heavenly father knows that you need them” (Matt. 5:32) and will provide.

<sup>19</sup> Bread was not—and is not—considered optional in Bible lands. It was the most essential food. Jewish portrayals of the future kingdom feast (as in Enoch 62:14) often if not always included bread.

All the Gospels but Luke tell us that by dark after feeding the 5000, Jesus had gone into the mountain alone. He had separated Himself from the people He had fed. John explains the reason: Jesus knew that the people “intended to come and make Him king by force” (6:15). Does this mean, as we often hear nowadays, that He refused to be a “political” Messiah? Our answer should not contradict Scripture. Would Jesus refuse to rule in the way His Father had promised Him? For example, in Psalm 2 God told Him, “Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter” (Ps. 2:8-9). Will the day never come when He will ask for and be given that inheritance? Of course, it will; that is what the Book of Revelation means. But Jesus would not rule until He first died for and acquired citizens to inherit with Him.<sup>20</sup> He first came as the Lamb but will some day come as the Lion.

In John 6 Jesus’ disciples had just had a foretaste of His future glory. But they still understood nothing about His sufferings, in which they would participate (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12). Elated over the miracle, they set off for Capernaum in a boat without Him. But soon they found themselves bucking a “strong wind” and “rough waters” and had to struggle for hours in their rowing (John 6:18-19a). No doubt they felt forsaken. When Jesus suddenly appeared “approaching the boat, walking on the water...they were terrified” (6:19b). But they took Him “into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading” (6:21). This miracle showed them—and us as well—that in hard times the Lord may seem to be absent but never forsakes us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6).

### Scene 12: Jesus Claims to Be the Bread of Life, 6:25-71

Unaware that Jesus had walked on the water, some of the 5000 came and found Him in Capernaum. “In the synagogue in Capernaum” (6:59), Jesus discoursed on the deepest level of meaning for the fifth sign. Before the discourse, there was some introductory discussion (vv. 25-34). The discourse itself had three parts (vv. 35-42, 43-52, 53-60), each part closed by a response. Then followed a sequel (vv. 61-71). The Twelve must have been greatly disappointed that after this discourse, “many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him” (v. 66). Yet, their own faith in Him as Messiah (“the Holy One of God,” v. 69) reached a new level.

**Introduction** (vv. 25-34) Some people from the 5000 found Jesus and requested another sign from Him. These people were interested in material food, not in the meaning of the signs (6:26-27).<sup>21</sup> Jesus told them that they should work—by believing in Him—for “food that endures to eternal life” (6:27-29). They requested He do a sign that would force them to believe (6:30-31).<sup>22</sup> He then seemed to promise such a sign. “It is My Father,” He said,

<sup>20</sup> It was quite a temptation for Him to seek easier shortcuts to His throne (as in Matt. 4:5-10). But He was determined to endure the suffering in order to “see His offspring” and “justify many” who could share in His glory (Isa. 52:13 to 53:12). That is the point of the “new song” in Revelation 5:9-10, just before He rules.

<sup>21</sup> “Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread” (J. P. Lange, as quoted by Godet). There have always been those “who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Tim. 6:5).

<sup>22</sup> Jesus’ feeding them in a desert place had reminded them of the manna given in the time of Moses: “Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.” It was commonly thought that in the coming kingdom Israel would be fed manna again. Furthermore, God had promised another prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-19), which explains why they called Jesus “the prophet who is to come” (6:14). But they were not yet convinced. Jesus had fed them only

“who gives you the true bread from heaven” (6:32). Next He identified that bread in terms which, ambiguous in Greek, could still refer to food for their stomachs: “The bread of God is **that which** comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world” (6:33, NASB). So far, Jesus had not stated clearly that God’s bread is a Person; so they wanted that bread (6:34).

**Part I** (6:35-42) Now Jesus revealed that He is the Bread from heaven, who gives eternal life to everyone who comes to Him believing. All who come are the Father’s gift to the Son. He will receive them all and lose none, will even “raise them up at the last day.”<sup>23</sup>

*Response:* The Jews grumbled because Jesus, whose parents they knew, claimed to have come from heaven.

**Part II** (6:43-52) Jesus said that only those whom the Father draws—all those “taught by God”—can come to Jesus. Those who come eat the Bread of Life (= believe). Furthermore, they—unlike the forefathers in the desert—will never die. “This bread,” said Jesus, “is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

*Response:* The Jews argued, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

**Part III** (6:53-60) Jesus insisted that the only way to have eternal life is to eat His flesh and drink His blood.<sup>24</sup> The person who does so, He said, “remains in Me, and I in him.” And he lives “because of Me” “just as...I live because of the Father.”<sup>25</sup>

*Response:* “Many of His disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”

It is still disputed how Jesus was to give His “flesh...for the life of the world” (v. 51) and how He expects us to “eat [His] flesh and drink [His] blood” (v. 54). For example, the Roman Catholic Church claims to offer Him and eat of Him literally and physically. They do this at each Eucharist, which corresponds to what Protestants usually call “the Lord’s Supper.” For Catholics the Eucharist is one of seven sacraments established by Christ and controlled by the church. At the Eucharist, they believe, the officiating priest transforms the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood.<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus’ words “this is My body” and “this is My blood (Matt. 26:26, 28) become a material fact.

---

once—not for forty years. And the bread He had used was just earthly barley, not “manna...the grain of heaven... the bread of angels” (Ps. 78:24-25)!

<sup>23</sup> We call this “the Doctrine of Eternal Security.” It includes bodily resurrection.

<sup>24</sup> Drinking blood was a shocking thought for a Jew—or the early church (Lev. 17:10-14; Acts 15:20, 29).

<sup>25</sup> “Because of” may mean both (1) with Him as source (5:26) and (2) to please Him (4:34). (Leon Morris)

<sup>26</sup> Roman Catholic teachers note that John does not record the institution of the Lord’s Supper, conclude that he refers to it in chapter 6. Also, in connection with feeding the 5000, only John uses the Greek verb *eucharisteo* (give thanks, 6:11 and 23), from which comes *Eucharist*. However, that verb was **not** associated with the Lord’s Supper in the biblical accounts (including 1 Cor. 10 and 11) nor in most early church writings. Neither was the word *flesh* (*body* was used instead). Nor was John 6 usually interpreted as meaning the Lord’s Supper. For example, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius all interpret John 6 “spiritually” but not as referring to the Eucharist. Furthermore, Jesus said that eating His flesh and drinking His blood are **absolutely essential** to getting eternal life, which not even Catholicism (and certainly not the Bible) claims for the Eucharist.

Most Protestants explain Jesus' words differently, that they mean "This bread/wine **picture** My body/blood." It is a figure of speech like "I am the vine" or "I am the door." So is "eat and drink." Does such eating and drinking achieve eternal life (vv. 51, 53-54, 57)? Yes, but so do actions such as, "receiving" Him and "believing in" Him (vv. 35, 40, 47; and many other verses in John). Since these actions bring the same results as "eating" and "drinking," they are equivalent actions.

**Sequel** (6:61-71) This discourse prompted many to leave Jesus. However, the Twelve—most of whom had been drawn by the Father—confessed Him. Later they would understand it all.

Note especially two of Jesus' statements in the sequel. These favor our explanation of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. (1) "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before!" (vv. 61b-62). This may mean that if eating His flesh seemed strange when He was present, how much more when He would be absent. The simplest conclusion would be that eating His flesh is not literal. (2) "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit [or Spirit] and they are life" (v. 63). Here "flesh" and "Spirit" are again contrasted as they were earlier. In 1:12 and 3:6 they were sources for the two kinds of birth. In 6:63 we can conclude that spiritual perception and spiritual eating are contrasted to fleshly.

Why would Jesus use a figure of speech so easy to misunderstand? Why did He begin the figure by saying, "My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51)? Partly because His benefit to us really is inseparable from His giving His flesh in death. If He had not done so—and if we had not participated (eaten), we could never obtain eternal life.

### Scene 13: Opinions about Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles, 7:1-52

John 7:1 to 10:21 all took place in connection with a single feast late in Jesus' ministry. It was the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), which was celebrated, and still is, in October after all the harvests. Apparently considered the greatest feast of the year, Tabernacles symbolized the future kingdom God had promised.<sup>27</sup> It was obligatory for "all the men" (Exod. 23:14-17).<sup>28</sup> For Jesus, this occasion was about six months after He had fed the 5000 and only six months before His final Passover. By this time the opposition to Him had hardened on the part of the leaders in Jerusalem. Now "no one would say anything publicly about Him for fear of the Jews" (v. 13).

Chapter 7 is truly saddening. Most of it shows Jesus' own people (1:11) "judging by mere appearance [rather than] a right judgment" (7:24). It is instructive to hear their various specious

<sup>27</sup> Note its prominence in Zechariah 14:16-19, part of a description of that kingdom. We cited that same chapter in connection with Jesus' cleansing of the temple in John 2: "On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite [i.e., trader] in the house of the LORD Almighty" (v. 21). The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), a few days before Tabernacles, symbolizes the amazing spiritual cleansing of Israel just before the kingdom begins (Zech. 12:10; 13:1).

<sup>28</sup> NIV quotes Jesus: "I am not **yet** going up to this feast" (v. 8). Some very good Greek manuscripts do not have the word "yet." If He didn't say "yet," Jesus might have meant that He was (1) not going as a pilgrim, to celebrate the feast itself or (2) not going for the purpose His brothers suggested. When He did go, it was "not publicly, but in secret" (v. 10), just the opposite of what His brothers had recommended (v. 4).

arguments against Jesus. (Of course, such arguments rarely give the real reasons for unbelief.) As usual, John does not comment on their errors; he expects the reader to recognize them and correct them. In some cases, the fallacy of one group contradicted the fallacy of another group (contrast vv. 27 and 42). As always, most of these mistaken people were content to go on in their ignorance. Consider some of their arguments—mostly against Him.

- Jesus' brothers questioned His judgment. (1) They assumed that He was counting on the wrong set of disciples. They considered the disciples in Galilee unimportant compared to those in Judea (v. 3). (2) They believed that Jesus did not know when to “go public” (v. 4).
- The general public either liked Jesus (“a good man”) or distrusted Him (“He deceives the people,” v. 12).
- When He asked why they were trying to kill Him, some considered Him demon-possessed for asking (v. 20).<sup>29</sup> Demon possession would imply that He was unclean, confused, and dangerous. On this occasion His critics were pilgrims from other places, not from Jerusalem.
- The anger of the Jews had erupted when He had healed the man on the Sabbath (7:21-24, referring to chapter 5). Jesus urged them to “make a right judgment” (v. 24). If they did, they would recognize that “healing the whole man” (v. 23), like circumcision (vv. 22-23), was more important than the Sabbath.
- People from Jerusalem realized that the authorities did indeed want to kill Jesus (v. 25). These people said that Jesus could not be Messiah because “we know where this man is from...no one will know where [Messiah] is from” (v. 27).<sup>30</sup> Jesus' initial response to them could be translated as a statement or a question (v. 28a). Either way, it is ironical—because they really did not know. In “He who sent Me is true” (v. 28b), “true” may mean “real”; the people in Jerusalem actually thought that no one had sent Jesus (8:19, 55).
- Some rightly asked, “When the Messiah comes, will He do more miraculous signs than this man?” (v. 31). Accordingly, after He promised to give the Spirit, some confessed Him to be Messiah (v. 41) or the Prophet (v. 40).
- Some could not see how the Messiah could come from Galilee when the Scripture specified David's family and Bethlehem (vv. 41b-42; contrast v. 27).
- The chief priests and Pharisees argued to the temple guards that no “rulers or...Pharisees believed in Him” (v. 48). The same leaders blurted out their contempt for the average person (v. 49).
- Nicodemus pleaded that Jesus should be heard before He was condemned (vv. 50-51). The other leaders responded that no prophet comes out of Galilee. (But at least Jonah did.)

It seems that Jesus' maxim in 7:17 shows how all the wrong views could be corrected: “If anyone **chooses to do God's will**, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own.” What does “chooses to do God's will” mean? Augustine says it means the same as “believes.” While it includes belief (cf. Heb. 11:6), it also implies willingness to obey

---

<sup>29</sup> When He said, “Not one of you keeps the law,” He probably referred to all Jews. That same fact is highlighted in Romans 2:25-29.

<sup>30</sup> IV Ezra 13 pictured Messiah arising from the sea.

God, as seen by reading Matthew 7:21 in context.<sup>31</sup> That verse from the Sermon on the Mount has some of the same thoughts and words: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who **does the will of My Father** who is in heaven.”

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast,” Jesus made a startling public announcement (7:37-39). What He said was related to one of the main themes of the feast: God’s promise of water and the Holy Spirit. Tabernacles looked both backward and forward. Backward, it remembered God’s provisions, including water, for the nation of Israel in the desert (Ps. 78:16; 105:41) and during the past year. Forward, it anticipated His blessing—especially the rains—for the agricultural year just beginning and His promised blessings—both physical and spiritual (as in Isaiah 35:6-7; 55:1)—for the future kingdom. In connection with these themes, there was a “water ceremony” on each of the first seven days.<sup>32</sup> Early each day a priestly procession brought water in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam to the temple. After pouring this water beside the giant altar, the high priest led in prayer. He prayed in thanksgiving for the harvests finished and in petition for rain and for the promised Holy Spirit. On the seventh or eighth day, Jesus stood up among the thousands of worshipers and promised to give the satisfying water of the Holy Spirit. He described the gift in terms of the lifegiving water from the rock in the desert. He began to fulfill this promise on the Day of Pentecost after His ascension to heaven.

#### Scene 14: Jesus and the Adulterous Woman, 7:53—8:11

This incident took place early in the morning “in the temple courts” (8:2). “This story, though probably authentic, is omitted in many manuscripts and may not have been originally a part of this Gospel.”<sup>33</sup> If it was original, it is possible that some removed it from their manuscripts because it seems to show leniency toward sin. We will comment on four matters.

- First, consider the purpose of “the scribes and Pharisees” who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus. They were not seeking justice. If they had been, they would have gone to a court to determine such matters as (1) whether the woman had been warned before she sinned, (2) whether there were two eyewitnesses of her sin. They would also have taken the guilty man. Instead, they were “testing [Jesus], in order that they might have grounds for accusing Him” (v. 6). They presented Jesus with a dilemma. If He condemned the woman, He might incur the wrath of the Romans. But if He pardoned her, He might lose some upright disciples. The scribes and Pharisees didn’t want justice; they wanted to force Jesus to sit as Judge. For this His time had not come. Therefore, He said, “I pass judgment on no one” (v. 15).

<sup>31</sup> The verb translated “do” in John 7:17 and Matt. 7:21 is translated “put into practice” in Matt. 7:24 and 26.

<sup>32</sup> Leviticus 23 says that this feast “lasts for seven days” (v. 34) but has an “eighth day” and “sacred assembly” added (v. 36). Josephus and the Talmud considered the eighth day to be part of the feast. Edersheim says it was not. Apparently the water ceremony was performed once on each day one to six, then seven times on day seven, but not at all on day eight.

<sup>33</sup> *The Ryrie Study Bible* (p. 1615). In Greek manuscripts it is not found in the oldest ones plus about one hundred others. It is also missing from some of the ancient versions and from the early (fourth century) lectionaries. No Greek Father comments on it before the twelfth century. Yet, Jerome (about A.D. 420) said he found it “in many manuscripts, both Greek and Latin.” Augustine (about A.D. 430) said that some of no faith had removed it from their manuscripts. Some manuscripts have it at a different location.

- Second, consider Jesus' puzzling response. He began to write (or draw) on the ground—and continued to do so until the accusers had all left. In spite of many suggestions as to what He wrote,<sup>34</sup> we cannot be sure. John says neither what nor why—only that before He had finished writing, the accusers had all gone. Apparently, they were all guilty, possibly of adultery.
- Third, consider Jesus' requirement, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). This cannot mean that only perfect people can administer justice or capital punishment. If it did, there could be no human justice. God's covenants with Noah and Israel,<sup>35</sup> for example, would have been unenforceable. We conclude that Jesus' requirement on this occasion refers to those who would substitute their own authority for that established by God. Jesus' rule invalidates lynching (execution without a trial).
- Fourth, consider what Jesus said to the woman. Although He did not authorize others to lynch this woman, neither did He pardon her. There is not even a suggestion that she was repentant.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, what did He mean by saying "Neither do I condemn you...Go now and leave your life of sin" (v. 11)? That He did not speak as her Judge but as her potential Savior.

### Scene 15: Jesus Claims to be the Light of the World, 8:12-59

This scene occurred soon after the Feast of Tabernacles. The crowds of pilgrims had gone home—and would not return until the time of Passover (11:55; 12:12). All of chapter 8 took place in the temple (vv. 20, 59). At least part of it (vv. 12-20) took place "in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put." This was in the innermost court to which women had access, called "the Court of Women." John's record in chapters 8-11 deals mainly with Jesus' response to His adversaries, whom John often calls "the Jews."

In chapters 6 and 7 you have seen Jesus claim to fulfill two symbols from the Exodus: (1) in chapter 6 the manna, and (2) in chapter 7 the water from the rock. Starting in chapter 8 is the third such symbol: (3) the light from the pillar of fire. All three are symbols of God's care for the nation of Israel when Moses led them through the desert—and also of His care in the future kingdom predicted through the prophets. As you saw earlier, Israel celebrated the symbol of the water in the Feast of Tabernacles. They celebrated the symbol of the light then, also.

A major feature of the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of giant lamps in the women's court in the temple....The light illuminated the temple area and the people gathered to sing praises and dance. The light reminded the Jewish people of how God

---

<sup>34</sup> Apparently, what He wrote is not crucial. Among the suggestions: (1) The words He spoke, "If any one of you is without sin...." (2) The Ten Commandments (showing that He is the Lawgiver, writing with His own finger as God did at Mount Sinai). (3) Information about the accusers to show that He knew their sin.

<sup>35</sup> Both covenants required the death penalty. For examples, see Gen. 9:1-20, Lev. 20:1-18, 27.

<sup>36</sup> It is true that she called Jesus "Lord" (v. 11). But here the translation could have been a respectful "Sir."

was with them in their wanderings in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud which turned to fire at night (Num. 9:15-23).<sup>37</sup>

As we continue in chapter 8, some of the divisions and thoughts come from Leon Morris.

**The Son's Claim** (8:12). In John 8:12 Jesus claimed to be the ultimate light for the whole world, not just the Jewish world. (This also meant, of course, that He is Messiah.) Light is one of the grandest themes in Scripture, starting with the first day of creation (Gen. 1:3-5). It was a key word in many prophecies of the future kingdom (for example, Isa. 9:2; 42:6-7; 49:6; 51:4; 60:1-3) and in initial fulfillments (Luke 1:78-79; 2:30-32; Acts 9:17-18; 26:18). The same claim had been stated in John's Prologue (1:9) and would be reiterated in 9:5 and 12:46. He is the "Light of life," which may mean light that gives life, or is life, or springs from life, or illuminates life—or a combination of these things. This light, however, is available only to those who follow Him. Not a single follower will walk in the darkness.<sup>38</sup>

**The Father's Witness** (8:13-20). In the rest of chapter 8 after the claim, (1) Jesus showed that this light really comes from the Father, (2) His light revealed that some who posed as followers were imposters. He revealed their deepest motives. Although they were extremely religious Jews—the "cream" of mankind—they proved to be enemies of God's Son and tried to kill Him.

8:15-16 In these two verses Jesus seemed to contradict Himself. In verse 15 He said, "I pass judgment [Greek verb *krino*] on no one." But in verse 16 He said, "If I do judge [*krino*], My decisions [*krisis*, noun form of *krino*] are right." The contradiction dissolves if we consider two meanings for "judge" and two comings for Messiah. (1) When judging means to enforce God's law and punish its violation, that was no purpose of His first coming but will be for His second coming. Regarding His first coming, He later said, "I did not come to judge the world, but to save it" (12:47; see 3:17). But regarding His second coming, He said He will do "all judgment" (5:22, 27) in connection with raising the dead (5:28-30). (2) When judging means to exalt truth and reject lies (see 8:26), Messiah has done that. His words and deeds—especially His death—have already judged the world in that sense (see 12:31). When His light shines, men judge themselves by their response to it (3:18-21).

8:18 In the nature of things, there can be no adequate witness of divine things outside of divinity (compare 1 Cor. 2:11).

**Dying in Sins** (8:21-24). In their present condition the Jews would die in their sins. They would be unable to go where the Son would go (back to the Father),<sup>39</sup> because their origin and attitude was only earthly. The remedy for their condition was to believe that Jesus was "I am" (v. 24; see v. 58). This seems to include His being the light, Messiah, and deity.

<sup>37</sup> Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition*, p. 303.

<sup>38</sup> This impossibility for believers to walk in darkness is a key thought to understand John's first epistle. Only those who walk in the light truly participate ("have fellowship") with God in eternal life (1 John 1:6-7).

<sup>39</sup> "You will look for Me" (v. 21), He said. This may mean, "You will look for Messiah," which religious Jews still do.

**The Father and the Son** (8:25-30). This section strongly affirms the unity of the Son with the Father, from whom His message comes.

8:25 When they asked Jesus “Who are you?” His answer included an unusual Greek term (*ten arken*) that no one seems to explain satisfactorily. The term normally means “at first” or “at the beginning.” NIV paraphrases with “all along.”<sup>40</sup>

8:28 “To lift up” is used here, as in 3:14 and 12:32-34, with reference to the cross. Only John uses the Greek verb to mean the cross; elsewhere it means “to exalt.” By his use John shows that the cross is the Son’s greatest glory.

**Slaves of Sin** (8:31-47). This section is quite important in regard to faith. It shows up believers who didn’t believe. Among those who believed in Jesus in verse 30,<sup>41</sup> some were still not His disciples and ended the chapter trying to kill Him. Rather than being free, they were slaves to sin and to the devil.<sup>42</sup> Jesus gave the key to really being His disciples, coming to know the truth, and being set free.<sup>43</sup> That key is to “hold to [*meinete en*, continue in] My teaching” (v. 31). This does not mean that such “continuing” merits discipleship but that it constitutes it. Momentary faith is not saving faith.

Notice that the Jews claimed both a physical relationship to Abraham (v. 33) and a moral one (v. 39). Their murderous attitude—“based upon hostility to God” (Dods)—disproved the latter (v. 40). Twice accused of having a different father (vv. 38, 41), they claimed God as Father (v. 41).<sup>44</sup> In verse 43 Jesus traced their failure to spiritual comprehension rather than mental ability: “The Jews took no notice of what Jesus said because they had no notion of what He stood for.”<sup>45</sup> What, then, really was their motive? “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire” (v. 44).<sup>46</sup> By hating the light that Jesus brought, they showed that they were liars and murderers like their spiritual father, the devil. By lying in Eden he, in effect, had murdered the whole human race.

**The Glory the Father Gives the Son** (8:48-59). This section, like 5:19-30, again (1) emphasizes the Father’s concern to glorify His obedient Son and (2) promises victory over death for believers. But while the Son’s previous claims might—or might not—mean deity (see 5:18), He now removed all doubt by calling Himself “I am” (8:58).

<sup>40</sup> Here are some other translations of the Greek term *ten arken* used in 8:25. (1) “from the beginning.” But the Greek for this is usually *ap arkes* (v. 44); also *arken* is not used elsewhere for this subject matter. (2) “altogether” or “exactly,” by the Greek Fathers. (3) “to begin with” or “at all.” This meaning disagrees with the context, v. 26.

<sup>41</sup> The Greek in 8:30 is a form often used for saving faith (*pisteuein eis* + accusative). But this form also seems to express defective faith, in 2:23f and 12:42.

<sup>42</sup> Romans 6 shows that all people are slaves either to sin (vv. 6, 16, 17, 20) or to God, obedience, and righteousness (vv. 16, 18, 19, 22).

<sup>43</sup> “Truth” is here bound to the Person and work of Jesus. It does not mean human wisdom, which does not itself free anyone from sin (v. 34). Human wisdom tends to enslave men to a proud self-sufficiency such as the Jews showed (v. 33).

<sup>44</sup> “We are not illegitimate children” probably alluded to the Old Testament comparison of idolatry to fornication.

<sup>45</sup> Leon Morris, p. 463.

<sup>46</sup> Notice that this is the opposite attitude from 7:17. The description of the devil in 8:44 is unique—and important for understanding 1 John.

- 8:51 “If anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.” This describes the same person as “whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and...has crossed over from death to life” (5:24). “Keeps” implies both obedience and continuing (see 8:31). “Never see death” refers to the most important, spiritual, aspects of death.
- 8:56 “Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day.” Abraham’s joy stemmed from God’s covenant with him (Gen. 12:1-3) and the birth of his son Isaac (“laughter”), through whom it would be fulfilled (Gen. 17:17). He knew some of the outline of God’s plan, but few of its details. “He saw [My day] and was glad” seems to mean that Abraham was conscious when Jesus came.
- 8:58 “Before Abraham was born [Greek, came to be], I am.” “I am” is the divine title for Yahweh (the LORD) from the Greek version of Exodus 3:14.<sup>47</sup> It is elsewhere used for God in Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4; etc.

### Scene 16: Sign 6, Jesus Gives Sight to the Blind Man, 9:1-41

In chapter 8 Jesus had claimed to be the light of the world (8:12). In chapter 9 He proved that claim with a sign. In chapter 10—with no change in setting—He would describe Himself with a different figure, that of the Good Shepherd.<sup>48</sup> Although John does not separate chapters 9 and 10, we will do so simply to mark the change of figure.

In 8:13-59 the light from Messiah Jesus had revealed the real motives of some religious men. In chapter 9 that light came into one man’s life, to transform him both physically and spiritually. The physical is important, but the spiritual is more important. Notice that there was no Old Testament story like this. “Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind” (8:32). Yet there were divine promises there (such as, Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7) of a kingdom in which all will be able to see. Messiah (John 8:22) can fulfill such promises.

**The Sign Itself** (9:1-12). In these verses Jesus, doing God’s work, gave sight to a man born blind. Through the man’s testimony the sign was made known.

- 9:1-3 The disciples, assuming that such a defect is punishment for sin, asked about its cause. Jesus denied their assumption and answered about its purpose, which was to display God’s works in the man.
- 9:4-5 Jesus restated the current theme (that He is the light), which He would now illustrate. As in every man’s case, Jesus had His day in which He must finish His work. His work was God’s work.
- 9:6-7 Jesus spit, made mud, anointed the man’s eyes, and sent him to wash at the pool of Siloam (“sent”). This assured that when healed, the man was separated from Jesus and could freely interact with the Pharisees.
- 9:8-12 The man gave his first witness of how Jesus had healed him.

<sup>47</sup> The Greek phrase (*ego eimi*), in answer to a question, can mean “I am the man” (9:9). But in 8:58 it simply refers to existence. “It is the style of deity, and it points to the eternity of God according to the strictest understanding of the continuous nature of the present *eimi*. He continually IS.... ‘These are the words of the most impudent blasphemer that ever spoke, or the words of God incarnate’ (Morgan).” (Leon Morris, p. 473)

<sup>48</sup> “I tell you the truth” (10:1) never begins a section elsewhere. And 10:3-5 is perfectly illustrated in chapter 9.

**The Pharisees Deal with the Healed Man** (9:13-34). First, they interrogated him and his parents; finally, “they threw him out” (9:34). Meanwhile, the man’s faith in Jesus grew.

9:13-17 This first interrogation of the man gives the main issues in what follows. For the Pharisees Jesus must be a sinner for not keeping the Sabbath.<sup>49</sup> For the restored man, Jesus must be a prophet.

9:18-23 The Jews interrogated the man’s parents, who feared to witness.

9:24-34 Again interrogated by the Jews, the man refused to call Jesus a sinner<sup>50</sup> and recognized that He must be from God. Accusing the man of being born in sin, the Jews “threw him out” (v. 34). This probably banned him from various societal activities and worship.<sup>51</sup>

**Jesus Leads the Healed Man to Full Faith** (9:35-41). Since the healed man truly heard the voice of his Shepherd (10:4, 27), He followed Him. At this point the blind had come to see fully, but those who thought they saw remained blind.

9:35-38 Jesus found the man and led him to full faith in Himself, “the Son of Man.”<sup>52</sup> The man “worshiped Him” (v. 38), probably by bowing to the ground before Jesus. Worship is proper before God (4:24; 12:20).<sup>53</sup>

9:39-41 Jesus commented that His ministry made blind ones to see and seeing ones to become blind. If the Pharisees had acknowledged their blindness, they would have seen and not kept their guilt (literally, would not have sin).<sup>54</sup>

### Scene 17: Jesus Claims to be the Good Shepherd, 10:1-21

Although we are treating this as a separate scene and discourse, it is not. The setting remains exactly the same as for scene 16 (see my comments there). Notice two indications that the subject matter has not changed: (1) The first words in 10:1 are “I tell you the truth.” According to the record, Jesus often said this for emphasis in the middle of a conversation (for example, 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 10:7) but never at its beginning. (2) What Jesus said in 10:3-5—that the sheep follow their shepherd but not a stranger—had been perfectly illustrated in chapter 9.

Jesus here claimed to be “the shepherd of His sheep” (10:2) and “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14). In Christian experience this fact has been a great consolation and source of strength. But in Jew-

<sup>49</sup> According to Pharisaic interpretation of the law, Jesus had broken at least three laws when He healed the blind man on the Sabbath: (1) By making mud, He had done the equivalent of kneading dough; (2) He had anointed with a non-usual substance; (3) He had healed when life was not in danger. (Leon Morris, p. 480, footnote 17)

<sup>50</sup> They told him to “give glory to God” (v. 24). The NIV note calls this “a solemn charge to tell the truth (see Joshua 7:19).” Or it might be a call to praise God—rather than a man—for making him well. In verses 24 and 29 by saying “we know,” they implied that he should accept their conclusions without evidence.

<sup>51</sup> Leon Morris says the meaning of the punishment is unclear since we lack information from New Testament times. In later history, he says, it could involve either a thirty-day exclusion or a permanent exclusion. Then it would “cut a man off from all normal dealings with the Jewish community, but not from worship” (Morris, p. 488, footnote 35). But the Greek expression includes a word for “away from synagogue,” which would include worship.

<sup>52</sup> There is much stronger Greek textual support for “Son of Man” than for “Son of God” (KJV). Both terms are used for Messiah. See my note at Scene 1 Day 4.

<sup>53</sup> This is the only time John uses the verb *worship* in regard to Jesus.

<sup>54</sup> One result both of Jesus’ words and works is that men “have sin” (15:22, 24; cf. 19:11). They find forgiveness only by confessing that sin (1 John 1:8-9).

ish ears the claim must have been startling. For them the “Shepherd of Israel” was God Himself (Ps. 80:1; see also Ps. 23:1 and Isa. 40:10-11). The title referred not only to His concern and care but also to His authority and sovereignty.<sup>55</sup> Human rulers—and the future Messiah—were also called “shepherds.”<sup>56</sup> For examples, see Isaiah 56:9-12 and especially Ezekiel 34.

10:3 “The watchman opens the gate for Him.” If the watchman in Jesus’ figure should be identified, he is probably John the Baptist, who presented Jesus to Israel.

“The sheep listen to his voice.” If flocks of sheep are mixed (say, in a cave) for the night, each flock will go to its own shepherd when he calls the next morning.

“He calls his own sheep by name.” He has a name for each one.

10:7, 9 “I am the gate.” It is possible that in this paragraph He refers to shepherds who double as “gates.” George Adam Smith reports on an Arab shepherd who did so. Each night he slept across the one opening in the enclosure. No sheep could go out, and no wolf could come in, without crossing his body.

10:8 “All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers.” In Greek the main verb is *are* rather than *were*. Jesus probably referred to other supposed leaders, like the Pharisees, in His own day, not to Old Testament leaders. “Thieves” steal but “robbers” also use violence.

10:9 “come in and go out, and find pasture.” This indicates nothing more than “free and secure movement” (Leon Morris, p. 508).

10:11 “The hired hand” is not necessarily bad, just hired—is used of fishermen in Mark 1:20.

10:16 “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.” These are Gentile believers.

10:17-18 Our Shepherd had to lay down His life—and take it again—in order for us to live. No one forced Him to do this; He did it in obedience to His Father.

### Scene 18: Jesus Claims that He and His Father are One, 10:22-42

Some consider this the Lord’s last public discourse. See our notes on chapter 12, where “Jesus left and hid Himself from them” (12:36). In 10:22-39 Jesus was in Jerusalem during the “Feast of Dedication.” The Greek word for “dedication” (*ta enkainia*) was the translation for Hebrew *Hanukkah*, still the name for the festival. That Greek noun, with related verbs, had been used for the consecration of four altars for animal sacrifices across the centuries: (1) the tabernacle altar (Num. 7:10-11), (2) the altar in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:63), (3) the original altar in the second temple (Ezra 6:16), and (4) the replacement altar in the second temple. The fourth occasion was the origin of the festival itself. It celebrates the rededication of the second temple in 164 B.C., after the amazing Maccabean victories over the Syrians in 165-164 B.C.<sup>57</sup> This celebration, also called “Feast of Lights,” lasts eight days, beginning 25 Chislev.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> In Revelation 2:27 “He will rule them with an iron scepter” (cf. Rev. 12:5), “rule” is the same verb as “shepherd.” The background for this expression is Micah 5:2, quoted in Matthew 2:6 about the “ruler who will be the shepherd of [God’s] people Israel.”

<sup>56</sup> So also are Christian leaders (elders). The title *shepherds* is used for them only once (Eph. 4:11), but the concept permeates the key passages of Acts 20:28-35 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

<sup>57</sup> The Jewish website “<http://chanukah.chabad.org/>” surveys the story and gives instructions for the feast.

<sup>58</sup> Like all Hebrew months, Chislev was lunar, beginning with the new moon and lasting the lunar cycle of 29-30 days. Chislev bridged our (Gregorian) months of November and December.

Jesus spoke this discourse in “Solomon’s Colonnade” (10:23), along the eastern edge of the outer temple courts. This was “a covered walkway formed by rows of columns supporting a roof and open on the inner side facing the center of the temple complex.”<sup>59</sup>

The Jews demanded a clear statement from Jesus as to whether He was the Messiah (10:24). As usual, He appealed to His works, done in the “Father’s name,” as witness (10:25). The Jews could not believe and follow Him because they were not His sheep. If they had been, they would have been eternally secure in His hand and His Father’s hand (10:28-29).<sup>60</sup>

This led to the claim “I and the Father are one” (10:30). By “one” (Greek neuter, not masculine) He seems to refer to unity of purpose, as in 17:21.<sup>61</sup> Did the Jews object to His claim of oneness? Not so much as to His continued claim to Sonship. He proceeded to show them that even men are called “gods” in Scripture.<sup>62</sup> With much more reason, “the one whom the Father set apart as His very own and sent into the world” deserves to be called “God’s Son.”

### Scene 19: Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead, 11:1-44

Jesus had made mighty claims and done marvelous signs, all related to the kingdom promised through the prophets. Many works He had done on the Sabbath, the day that prefigured the coming kingdom. Each sign had combined material meanings with spiritual meanings:

- He had transformed water into wine.
- He had healed with a word and at a distance.
- He had made a man whole after years of infirmity.
- He had provided bread from heaven.
- He had walked on the water.
- He had replaced a man’s deep darkness with light.

But one thing was lacking. Could He give eternal life, both physical life and spiritual life? He had often promised that He could do so, but had given no proof. What kind of Messiah would He be if He won every other battle but the battle with death? Not the Messiah we need.

In John 11 Messiah completes the evidence, then the Jewish Sanhedrin gives its verdict.

The story is simple enough. Two sisters, Mary and Martha from Bethany near Jerusalem, send Jesus an anguished plea that their brother Lazarus is dying. Jesus answers that the sickness is not for death but for God’s glory. Then He deliberately waits so that He arrives four days after

---

<sup>59</sup> NET (New English Translation) Bible, printed version of the New Testament, p. 320. The whole NET Bible is available at “<http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>.” It includes copious textual and interpretive notes.

<sup>60</sup> Notice that security depends on His grip, not ours.

<sup>61</sup> In chapter 17 He prays “that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us. . . .” He is hardly requesting divinity for us—but a unity of purpose.

<sup>62</sup> In Psalm 82:1, 6 God seemed to call human judges “gods” (as in Exod. 21:6 and 22:8). He did so because “the word of God” was their responsibility. Notice that Jesus argued from a single word (“gods”) repeated in the psalm. He assumed that the words of Scripture, not just its concepts, were inspired.

Lazarus's death and burial.<sup>63</sup> When Martha goes out to welcome Him, He tells her that Lazarus will rise because He is the resurrection and the life. Martha confesses that He indeed is Messiah. When Mary goes out to Him, along with Jews from Jerusalem who are "comforting" her, Jesus becomes upset. He also weeps. Then in spite of Martha's protest, He has the stone removed from the burial cave. He thanks His Father publicly, calls Lazarus out, then instructs the people to free him.

- 11:2 This is the Mary who would soon pour perfume on the Lord "for the day of [His] burial" (12:7). Only John tells us who did this. Mary seemed less practical and self-controlled than her sister but with greater spiritual insight.<sup>64</sup>
- 11:4 Jesus' response was not just for the Twelve but also for the messengers to take back to the sisters (see v. 40).
- 11:11 "fallen asleep." This figure of speech emphasizes the fact that dying is not final to Jesus or to believers (see 1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 15). Those fallen asleep will wake up.
- 11:24 Jesus had also promised to raise believers "at the last day" (6:39, 40, etc.). But resurrection power does not inhere in a day but in Him.
- 11:25-26 These are excellent memory verses. In verse 25 "live" and "die" are both physical (looking to the resurrection). But in verse 26 "never die" is spiritual.
- 11:33 "**was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.**" These two Greek verbs do not indicate sorrow but anger and agitation, probably for the Jews' hidden attitude. The first verb (*embrimaomai*, also in v. 38) is often used "as an expression of anger and displeasure."<sup>65</sup> The other verb (*tarasso*) is used "of mental and spiritual agitation and confusion."<sup>66</sup>
- 11:35 "Jesus wept." The Jews thought Jesus wept because He shared the sisters' sorrow at the loss of Lazarus. This seems doubtful, because Jesus knew that Lazarus was about to rise. Perhaps He was overwhelmed (as in the Garden of Gethsemani) at the battle He was engaged in with death. Perhaps He was touched by the sorrow death has brought to all humans—and by the unbelief expressed by the Jews in verses 36-37.
- 11:43 It has often been remarked that if Jesus had not specified Lazarus, all the dead would have come out!

### Scene 20: The Sanhedrin Decides that Jesus Must Die, 11:45-57

How sad that, for personal gain, some of the Jews who came to comfort Mary, should hurry away to betray the real Comforter! This section tells the response of the highest Jewish council, the Sanhedrin,<sup>67</sup> to all the evidence for Jesus presented in chapters 1-11. Unaware that his own

<sup>63</sup> By the fourth day corruption had begun—and Jews believed that even the soul had finally left the scene. These facts, plus the stone at the tomb and the grave clothes, left no room to doubt that Lazarus was dead.

<sup>64</sup> See also Luke 10:38-42.

<sup>65</sup> William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 254. It is translated "they rebuked harshly" in Mark 14:5, "with a strong warning" in Mark 1:43.

<sup>66</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon...*, p. 812. *Tarasso* is translated "were thrown into turmoil" in Acts 17:8, "stirring up" in Acts 17:13, "throwing into confusion" in Galatians 1:7 and 5:10.

<sup>67</sup> The Sanhedrin had 71 members: the high priest, 24 heads of priestly orders (chief priests), 24 elders, and 22 scribes. Caiaphas was high priest for several years, 18-36, including "that [important] year."

words had a double meaning, the high priest pronounced the verdict as God's prophet: "It is better...that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Unwilling to precipitate the end, Jesus "withdrew to a region near the desert" until time for the Passover festival. Verses 54-57 could be considered part of the next scene, for which they help to set the stage. They tell us nothing about Jesus' activities but only about the people who went to Jerusalem to purify themselves for the festival.

### Scene 21: Mary Anoints Jesus for Burial, 12:1-11

Matthew and Mark, with interesting differences, also tell about this anointing by Mary. Luke 7:37-50 has a story similar in the following details:

- Jesus was reclining at a meal to which He was invited.<sup>68</sup>
- A woman anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair.
- This action occasioned criticism, to which Jesus responded.

However, these are not two versions of the same story. Study the following differences.

<b>Differences in the Anointings of Luke 7 and John 12</b>		
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Luke 7:37-50</b>	<b>John 12:1-11</b>
Where and when it took place	Galilee, before Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem	Bethany near Jerusalem, just before the final Passover, after Jesus raised Lazarus, who was at the meal
The kind of woman who did the anointing	A "sinner" (name not given) known for "many sins" and not invited to the meal	Mary, quite respectable, who had many "Jews" as friends (11:19)
Other details about what she did	She kept on kissing His feet and wetting them with her tears.	She used "pure nard, an expensive perfume."
Her reason for anointing Jesus	To show love because her many sins had been forgiven	To prepare His body for the day of His burial
The point of the criticism	That if Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman was touching Him.	That the perfume could have been sold (instead of poured out) and the money used to feed the poor
The point of Jesus' response to the criticism	That the one forgiven a lot loves a lot	It was right to do this, since Jesus would leave them.

In that year "six days before the Passover" (12:1) was the Sabbath, which began on our Friday evening. Mary's action was unusual for the following reasons: (1) when she did it (before His death), (2) the great value of her gift (a year's wages for a day laborer), (3) her absolute devotion (she let down her hair in public, which respectable women did not do, and wiped His feet).

<sup>68</sup> In fact, each was in the house of someone named "Simon" (Luke 7:40, 43; Mark 14:3).

What Judas said in criticism (12:4-6) spread to the rest of the Twelve (Matt. 26:8-9). In effect, his argument was that such valuable perfume was wasted on Jesus. But in fact, Judas wanted the opportunity to benefit (by theft) from such a gift.<sup>69</sup>

Notice the importance of Lazarus in this scene and the next (12:1, 2, 9, 10, 17). Apparently, it was only the “chief priests” who decided that Lazarus must die again (12:10). In contrast to the Pharisees, the ruling priests (at least the Sadducees) did not believe in the after life nor in the resurrection (see Acts 23:6-8).

### Scene 22: Jesus Enters Jerusalem as King, 12:12-19

On Sunday before His final Passover, Jesus unmistakably presented Himself to His nation as Messiah. This occasion, often called “the Triumphal Entry,” is recorded in all four Gospels.

Messiah’s nation was well-represented; vast numbers came to Jerusalem for Passover.<sup>70</sup> “The great crowd that had come for the feast,” probably from Galilee, “went out to meet Him....” Waving palm branches (the emblem of victory, Rev. 7:9), they shouted words from the climax of the “Egyptian Hallel,” Psalms 113-118.<sup>71</sup> These words were well-known to every son of Jacob, but now got a new twist: “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, **Blessed is the King of Israel!**” (12:13). In other words, this coming one was the King. Jesus implied the same thing by riding into Jerusalem on the donkey. By doing so, He deliberately fulfilled Zechariah 9:9: “See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.”

Some think that Jesus rode a donkey to show His refusal to be the “military Messiah” the people expected (12:13). Instead, say these interpreters, He would be a Messiah “of gentleness, humility, and peace [and] establish His kingdom through suffering, humiliation, and death”?<sup>72</sup> Such a comment, though partly true, favors a misleading view of Scripture, Messiah, and His kingdom. It makes one part of a prophecy deny the rest of it. In this case Zechariah 9:9 and 10 are two parts of the same prophecy. The comment accepts, as it should, that the first part (v. 9) was literally fulfilled. But the comment also implies that the first part fully defines Messiah and His kingdom. If it does, then Messiah as God’s agent will never literally fulfill the other part (v. 10): “take away the chariots...and the war horses...and the battle bow will be broken....And He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the

<sup>69</sup> Matthew tells this story at a later stage in Passion week (see Matt. 26:1-2). Where he puts the story implies that Jesus’ response to Mary’s action helped Judas decide to betray Him (Matt. 26:14-16). If so, it is inaccurate to translate in verse 4, as NASB does, that Judas was already “**intending to** betray Him.” It simply means “was going to,” as translated in 6:71.

<sup>70</sup> For one Passover, the Jewish historian Josephus estimated 2,700,000 in attendance.

<sup>71</sup> Edersheim says that the Egyptian Hallel was chanted on eighteen feast days—all public—and one feast night (Passover) every year. On public occasions the priests chanted every line of the six psalms, and the people responded. Their response varied: (1) to nearly every line they said “Hallelujah”; (2) to the first line of each psalm and to 118:25a, 25b, 26a, they repeated the line. “Hosanna” stands for “Do save, we beseech Thee” in 25a. “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” is 26a. (Psalm 129:8 shows that “in the name of the Lord” goes with “Blessed” rather than “comes.”)

<sup>72</sup> These two quotations are from Sunday School commentaries.

ends of the earth.” It is evident that verse 10 foresees the use of force on unwilling nations in order to establish a worldwide kingdom of peace. Many other prophecies (such as, Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4; Zech. 14:12-16) agree. Why should we doubt that Messiah will use force?<sup>73</sup>

Thus, there is clearly a gap—the whole present age—between Zechariah 9:9 and 9:10. God did not reveal this gap to Zechariah. Like other prophets, he did not understand the relation between “the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10-12). But now we do. Now, in our own time of suffering, 1 Peter exhorts us to look at both of His comings. We look back to His example in suffering (1 Peter 2:21) but forward to “when His glory is revealed” (4:13; cf. 5:1, 4).<sup>74</sup> We recognize Messiah’s meekness when He came to die but never lose sight of His “power and coming” to reign.

### Scene 23: Jesus Announces that the Time for His Death Has Come, 12:20-36

The scene is still Jerusalem during Passion Week. “Some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast” wanted to talk to Jesus. No doubt Jesus felt elated that non-Jews were beginning to seek Him. What glory they represented for Him—that wider world with “other sheep that are not of this [Jewish] sheep pen” (10:16). But in order to produce “many seeds” (literally, “much fruit”), the kernel of wheat must first die (12:24). The hour to do so had finally come. What a divine paradox that the Son’s death could “glorify” both Him (12:23) and the Father (12:28)!<sup>75</sup>

Death to produce life has been called “the law of the seed.” Does this law apply to His servants as well as the Master? Of course, it does; Jesus announced it in terms that apply to us all (12:24-26). In repentance and baptism we begin by dying.<sup>76</sup> When we truly follow Him, that is where He leads us (12:26).

12:28-30 The Father’s answer from heaven was unique in the Gospels. It was not for Jesus’ sake but for the rest, though some thought it was thunder, others, an angel.

12:31 In what sense was Jesus’ death and resurrection a “judgment on this world” and on its “prince”? It not only revealed the Father’s verdict (and inflicted it on the Son) but rescued its slaves to a new life. In effect, it cut the roots of the devil’s power, guaranteeing that the tree will eventually fall.

<sup>73</sup> The Book of Revelation repeatedly alludes to the final war against Messiah, leading to His kingdom. For examples, see 11:18; 14:18-20; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11-21. Some refuse to accept this at face value. But why?

<sup>74</sup> When Peter later knew that he was near death, he reminded us of the future “eternal kingdom” (2 Peter 1:11). He was one who got to “see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). That happened, as a preview, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9), “when we were with Him on the sacred mountain” (2 Peter 1:18). So Peter can assure us that “we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Messiah, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

<sup>75</sup> Notice how many results verses 25-32 attribute to His death. It would glorify Him and His Father (12:23, 28), “produce many seeds” (12:24), keep His life “for eternal life” (12:25), judge this world (12:31), drive out “the prince of this world” (12:31), “draw all men” to Messiah (12:32).

<sup>76</sup> “The man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (12:25). Mark 8:34-37 describes repentance in equivalent terms.

12:32-33 “Lifted up” refers both to His death and His resurrection and ascension. This is the third figure for His death in this passage. The first figure was the death of the kernel of wheat. Next was His “hour.”

12:35-36 Five times (in Greek) He calls Himself “light” in these verses—and again in verse 46. This is one of the grandest themes in the book, first announced in the Prologue.

### Scene 24: God Explains Jewish Unbelief, 12:37-50

The greatest tragedy in history is the official and widespread Jewish rejection of Messiah. With all their advantages (Rom. 9:1-5), how could God’s people miss the grand Fulfiller?<sup>77</sup> John 12:37-50 helps explain that unbelief and gives a summary of the message they rejected. In John’s dramatic presentation, this passage is like a voice speaking from behind the curtain.

The first part of this section (12:37-43) shows that through the prophets God had predicted Israel’s unbelief. To prove this, John 12:38 quotes Isaiah 53:1. Written centuries earlier, this verse was part of the last and greatest of the “Servant Songs” looking forward to Messiah’s coming. In common with many other prophecies, however, this verse spoke of future events as though they had already taken place. Its point of view was that Messiah had already come—and had been rejected and sacrificed. The people of Israel were speaking: “our message ” refers to the report they had heard about Messiah when He came. Very few had believed that report.

Next, John 12:40 quotes Isaiah 6:10 to show that God Himself had hardened Israel. As Alva McClain points out, Isaiah 6:9-10 was “quoted only upon the occasion of certain great adverse crises in the history of Israel.”<sup>78</sup> The passage reveals that God responded to Israel’s rebellion by darkening their understanding. If they would not believe, now they could not believe. Not that the message was unbelievable. “Many even among the leaders” saw that it was right but were afraid to confess it, “for they loved praise from men more than praise from God” (12:42-43).

The second part of this section (John 12:44-50) summarizes that message. It repeats the themes that Messiah had often proclaimed: (1) that He was sent by the Father (2) as the light of the world, (3) speaking God’s final word, (4) which can bring eternal life.

1. He was the One sent by the Father (12:44-45).
2. He had come as light so that believers would no longer walk in the darkness (12:46).
3. Judgment was not His purpose but will be based on the word He has spoken (12:47-48).
4. This message from the Father brings eternal life (12:49-50).

**Introduction to Act II.** John 12 has concluded Messiah’s public ministry, Act I of this drama. “His own did not receive Him”; they saw His signs but rejected Him. So now begins Act II,

<sup>77</sup> Roman 9-11 deals with this great tragedy from the perspective of preaching a universal gospel.

<sup>78</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 422. Those four crises were (1) in Isaiah’s day, when Israel’s rebellion was leading to captivity and the end of the Old Testament kingdom (Isa. 6:9-10); (2) in Messiah’s ministry after Israel’s attitude had made it clear that they would reject Him (Matt. 13:13-15); (3) again in Messiah’s ministry, after He had officially offered Himself in the Triumphal Entry and they prepared to kill Him (John 12:37-41); (4) after Messiah had risen from the dead and been preached from Jerusalem to Rome but the nation had still rejected Him (Acts 28:25-27).

chapters 13-20. First (chs. 13-17) He turns to those “who received Him...who believed in His name.” After that (chs. 18-20) He will let both unbelief and belief come to maturity.

The relative usage of key terms points to the change of themes. Words like *life*, *light*, and *darkness* were key terms in chapters 1-12; but words like *love* will be key in chapters 13-17.<sup>79</sup>

Usage of Key Groups of Terms in John 1-12 and 13-17		
Group of Terms	Times Used in John 1-12	Times Used in John 13-17
Terms for <i>life</i>	50	6
Terms for <i>light</i> and <i>darkness</i>	32	None
Terms for <i>love</i>	6	31

### Scene 25a: The Lord Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet, 13:1-17

In this first scene of Act II, the “Teacher and Lord” acted in a most disturbing way. He stripped Himself like a slave and performed a slave’s service (13:4-5).

Verse 1 is a preface to the rest of the book. It explains why Jesus did what He did—all the way to the end. The preface is dated “just before the Passover Feast.”<sup>80</sup> “The evening meal...being served” in verse 2 was the first and most important meal of that feast. The Synoptic Gospels give us other details about that particular meal.<sup>81</sup> It was finished by the time of John 14:31, when the Lord said, “Come now; let us leave.” It may be that chapters 15-17 took place after they left the banquet room.<sup>82</sup> However, since we lack definite proof that the scene changes, we will number its parts as 25a, 25b, 25c, and so forth.

More important than the physical setting is what Jesus had in mind during the meal:

- “That the time [literally “hour”] had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father” (13:1; compare 12:23, 27). This also meant, of course, that He would leave His beloved disciples.
- That “the devil had already prompted Judas...to betray Jesus” (13:2, 10, 18-19, 21).
- “That the Father had put all things under His power” (13:3a).
- “That He had come from God and was returning to God” (13:3b).

With these things in mind, Jesus got up during the evening meal and stripped like a slave to do a slave’s task (13:4-5). He explained the meaning and purpose of His action in two stages. It was more than a lesson in humility.

<sup>79</sup> The data in the chart is taken from Leon Morris, page 613. He takes it from C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953).

<sup>80</sup> This is the third Passover mentioned by name in John. See 2:23 and 6:4. Technically, Passover was completed the first night after eating the lamb sacrificed that afternoon. However, Unleavened Bread continued for a week—and was often called Passover.

<sup>81</sup> These include the inauguration of the Lord’s Supper, as we noted at John 6.

<sup>82</sup> However, see 18:1.

1. He began to explain when Peter strongly objected (13:6-8a). He washes the feet, He said, of everyone who has "part with" Him (13:8b-11). He distinguished this washing from conversion, which He called a "bath" that makes one's "whole body...clean" (13:10). "A person who has had [that] bath needs only," because of contamination along the path, "to wash his feet" (13:10). In other words, Jesus' action did not symbolize the complete bath of conversion but the partial washing(s) that follow that bath. This is the same process of purification we read about in 1 John 1:7, for everyone who walks in the light.<sup>83</sup>
2. After washing the feet of all who reclined at the table, Jesus resumed His place of honor (13:12). Then He ordained that each of them (us) should follow His example and wash one another's feet (13:13-17).<sup>84</sup> This means that we must do our part to help other believers get purified.<sup>85</sup> In other words; we help accomplish 1 John 1:7 for each other. The apostle Paul said the same thing using different figures: "If someone is caught in a sin...restore him gently....Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Messiah" (Gal. 6:1-2).<sup>86</sup>

### Scene 25b: The Lord Announces and Sends Out the Betrayer, 13:18-30

Still at the Passover meal, the Lord again alluded, as in John 6:70, to the enemy in their midst (13:18). Then He clearly declared that one of them would betray Him (13:21). By doing so, He assured that later they would realize that Jesus Himself was not a helpless pawn but in full control. Peter asked "the disciple whom Jesus loved, [who] was reclining next to Him," to find out who Jesus meant (13:23-24). This referred to John, who could simply turn his head and quietly ask Jesus the question. "Dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas" (13:26).<sup>87</sup> So John knew who the tempter would be. However, when Judas departed quickly at Jesus' command, neither John nor any of the others knew why (13:27-30). "It was night" (13:30) had a moral meaning as well as physical (see 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36).

### Scene 25c: The Lord Gives the New Command and Announces Peter's Fall, 13:31-38

The betrayer's departure was like turning on a switch to run machinery. The final "hour" had begun. Its outcome was so sure that Jesus spoke of it as already accomplished. The three times He said "is glorified" in verses 31 and 32 are all in past tense (aorist indicative) in Greek. Now He began to prepare His followers for His absence, a procedure continuing through chapter 17. His first steps were (1) to announce that absence (13:33) and (2) to give them the new command (13:34-35). It was the announcement of His absence that interested Peter and made him pledge allegiance even if he had to die. Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny Him three times that very night shut Peter's mouth for the rest of scene 25.

<sup>83</sup> "If we walk in the light...the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

<sup>84</sup> "You should wash one another's feet...You should do as I have done for you" (13:14-15). Some understand this to establish footwashing as a church ordinance.

<sup>85</sup> The following conclusion, though common, seems inadequate: "The point of Jesus' saying is rather that [disciples] should have a readiness to perform the lowliest service" (Leon Morris, p. 621). Certainly lowliness is required to do this service properly. But it is not just any service. It is the service the Lord had made specific when He distinguished "washing" from "bathing."

<sup>86</sup> It is obvious that this footwashing is something we cannot do (even symbolically) to Messiah. He has no sin. But if we could, it would be far easier than to do it to those who need it.

<sup>87</sup> Probably giving him the morsel was a special sign of friendship. Apparently Judas was in the highest place of honor after Jesus, next to Jesus' back (so says Edersheim).

**Scene 25d: The Lord Announces that His Departure Will Not End His Care, 14:1-14**

14:1-3 By trusting in God and the Son, they could calm their fears about the future. His absence would be temporary, enabling Him to “prepare a place for” them in “My Father’s house.” After that, He would rejoin them forever. “My Father’s house” already had “many rooms” (literally “dwelling places,” which “mansions” meant when KJV was translated). What is that house? He had earlier called the temple by that name” (2:16-17). Here in 14:2 He clearly referred to heaven. However, we must remember that the heavenly city will eventually descend to earth (Rev. 21:2-3, 9-10, 24, 26). The following words from the Jewish Targum on 1 Chronicles 17:9 refer to that future earthly scene.

And I will make (or, prepare) *for my people a prepared place*, and they shall  *dwell in their places*, and they shall *not tremble more*. (Leon Morris, p. 638.

Morris italicizes words that reflect John 14:1-3.)

14:4-6 As Jesus had often said, He was going back to the Father. And the way to the Father was Himself.<sup>88</sup>

14:7-11 When Jesus promised they would “from now on” know and see the Father, Philip eagerly welcomed the promise. (It is the greatest hope of every godly soul.) Jesus reminded them that they saw the Father (“His work”) in the Son.

14:12-14 A vital connection with (faith in) the Son connects a person to all the Son’s power. The person so connected can, by asking “in His name” (vv. 13-14) do the same works Jesus did—and “even greater” works (v. 12). Interpreters often focus on the “greater” works and identify them as the winning of many to Messiah starting in the Acts period. Perhaps the promise includes that, but why would Jesus call them “greater” if they were just more numerous? Furthermore, note the following: (1) This promise is not for just a few, such as, apostles and preachers, but for every individual believer—“anyone who has faith in Me.” (2) It includes doing the same miraculous signs that Jesus did: “will do what I have been doing.” If we interpret these two facts at face value, they have not happened yet. Believers have not yet done the Lord’s miracles. The reason is that they are “miracles of the coming age” (Heb. 6:5, literal). They will not be repeated abundantly until the coming age, when the Lord returns to rule (Matt. 12:32; 13:39-43; 19:28-29). At that time all believers will help Him “restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).

A parallel promise is that all prayers “in My name” get answered (v. 13). This does not refer to words we tack to the end of a prayer but to requests in line with the Son’s character and purposes, and for His glory. The reverse is also true. If something is contrary to His character or purpose, we cannot by our words or emotions force Him to do it.

---

<sup>88</sup> Leon Morris (p. 641) reminds us that “we should not overlook the faith involved both in the utterance and in the acceptance of those words, spoken as they were on the eve of the crucifixion. ‘I am the Way’, said One who would shortly hang impotent on a cross. ‘I am the Truth’, when the lies of evil men were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph. ‘I am the Life’, when within a few hours His corpse would be placed in a tomb.”

**Scene 25e: The Lord Promises His Continued Presence through the Spirit, 14:15-26**

The disciples felt that the Lord's departure would leave them like orphans (14:18). On the contrary, He would continue with them in the person of "another Counselor...the Spirit of truth." Starting here, the Lord several times described the person and imminent ministry of the Spirit (14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15). In fact, He identified the Spirit's coming as His own "coming" and His Father's coming.<sup>89</sup> They would come to those who love the Son and obey His teaching (14:15-18, 21, 23-24), that is, to all true believers.<sup>90</sup> If this meaning is correct, then the disciples at this point do not represent only the converted but all **professing** believers. We will discuss that probability again in chapter 15.

"Another Counselor" in 14:16 implies what 1 John 2:1 states, that Jesus is such a Counselor. The title in Greek is *Parakletos*, sometimes written in English as "Paraclete." It means a helper in legal affairs.

"Comforter" is the traditional translation. But its modern associations render this word unsuited to conveying the meaning of the Greek term. The thought is rather that of the advocacy of one's cause than of comforting in our sense of the term. "Advocate"...is a more satisfactory rendering, but the word really means a friend, especially a legal friend. (Leon Morris, p. 649)

It is likely that "I will come to you" in 14:18 includes this gift of the Holy Spirit. The disciples would again "see" Jesus (14:19) not only when He appeared bodily after rising but also in the Spirit. This does not deny the Spirit's separate existence. Though the Greek word (*pneuma*) is neuter and can use neuter pronouns (14:17), His personhood is often emphasized by masculine pronouns (15:26; 16:7, 8, 13, 14).

**Scene 25f: The Lord's Farewell Truly Brings Peace, 14:27-31<sup>91</sup>**

"Peace" was a farewell greeting then as it is today (*shalom*). But in Jesus' case, it represents reality, not just wishful thinking. Notice too that if they had loved Jesus (more than themselves), they would have been glad for Him to go back to the Father. The Father was greater than Him in respect to the Incarnation (that is, since the Son was now a man), not in essence.

"The prince of this world...has no hold on Me" (14:30) shows that Jesus had no obligation to the devil. If He submitted, it was out of love and obedience to His Father (14:31).

"Come now; let us leave" (14:31) at least indicates a break in the discourse. It is not clear whether they left immediately or not.

<sup>89</sup> "You will see Me" and "on that day" in verses 19 and 20 seem to refer—at least in part—to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. He appeared only to His disciples.

<sup>90</sup> A different interpretation is that the revelation of Father and Son in 14:21 is a special one for obedient believers, not for all of them. That interpretation insists that "love" and "obedience" are not true of all believers. But they are: "If God were your Father, you would love Me" (8:42; cf. 5:42). And "this is love for God: to obey His commands" (1 John 5:3).

<sup>91</sup> It is hard to decide if this section begins at verse 27 or at verse 25.

**Scene 25g: The Lord Pictures Himself and Believers as Vine and Branches, 15:1-17**

This figure of the vine was often used by the prophets to picture the nation of Israel. In fact, the Greek words for “true vine” in 15:1 had been used in the Greek version of Jeremiah 2:21. But Israel had turned into “a corrupt, wild vine” (Jer. 2:21) and had yielded only “bad grapes” (Isaiah 5:1-7; see also Psalm 80:8-16 and Ezekiel 15:1-8). Finally, however, God’s real true vine was in this world, a vine that would produce good fruit for Him.

What is this fruit? Anything that honors God (“to My Father’s glory,” 15:8). Some of the things that the New Testament elsewhere calls “fruit” are worship (Heb. 13:15), character (Gal. 5:22-23), good deeds (James 3:17; Romans 15:28), and possibly converts (Rom. 1:13).

This vine produces its fruit through its branches (15:2, 5, 8). These are people chosen to be branches<sup>92</sup> by Messiah: “I chose you...to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (15:16). In fact, it is by bearing fruit (or much fruit) that we show we are His disciples (15:8).<sup>93</sup> These branches cannot bear fruit on their own but only by remaining in the vine (15:5). Also, the gardener, Messiah’s Father, tends them. Precisely because they do bear fruit, He prunes them so that they will bear more (15:2).<sup>94</sup>

In some cases, however, a branch “bears no fruit.” Such a branch “He cuts off” (15:2a).<sup>95</sup> Apparently this represents the same person who “does not remain in [Messiah, the vine]” and who “is thrown away and withers” (15:6a). Such branches/persons “are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (15:6b). Who are these people? The fact that they were in the true vine before they were cut off seems to imply that they were believers. Yet the fact that they were fruitless shows that they were not believers. They showed no evidence of the vine’s life; they belonged to it only in appearance (like Judas). Therefore, they were not pruned, like the fruitful branches, but cut off and burned. It is the Father who cuts them off (15:2a); presumably it is He who **throws** them **away** (15:6). This can never happen to a true believer: Using the same Greek verb (bolded), the Son promised, “whoever comes to Me I will never **drive away**” (John 6:37). No believer can “come into judgment” like this (John 5:24, Greek; compare 3:18; 5:29). Much less can he be “burned” (15:6). As a divine punishment on people, burning in the New Testament is always eternal (e. g., Matt. 3:10; 13:30, 40-42; 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7-8).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> The New Testament frequently refers to the fact that all Christians are chosen. For examples, see Rom. 8:33; Eph. 1:4ff; Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 2:4.

<sup>93</sup> “Thus the two actions are really one and the same: bearing fruit and being Jesus’ disciple are not two different actions, but a single action. The first is the outward sign or proof of the second...” (NET Bible, p. 344)

<sup>94</sup> “Prunes” is the Greek word *kathairei*, which literally means “cleans.” The result is that they are “clean” (*katharoi*, 15:3, the same word as in 13:10 but not referring to the original “bath” as it did there). God uses many means in pruning (see Hebrews 12:4-11). Here in 15:2-3 it is “the word I have spoken to you.”

<sup>95</sup> This is, in effect, the meaning of the same Greek verb (*airo*) in John 11:39, 48; 16:22; 17:15. The verb can also mean “lift up,” as in 8:59 and 5:8-12. Based on that meaning, some say the fruitless branch is lifted off the ground in order to bear fruit. But vinekeepers do not lift up branches for that purpose; neither does John suggest it.

<sup>96</sup> This also fits the picture of burning in Old Testament passages about the vine, such as, Ps. 80:16 and Ezek. 15:1-8; 19:12. Yet, convinced that all “branches” must be believers, some interpret their being burned as temporal punishment. They often cite 1 Cor. 3:10-15 as teaching that some believers will have no fruit for God. On the contrary, it is “each man’s **work...what he has built**” that may be burned up, not all his fruit and not himself.

One's interpretation of John 15:1-17 should fit the meaning of the word translated "remain" nine times in verses 1-10.<sup>97</sup> That key word is the common Greek verb *meno*, which KJV often translates as "abide." Primarily based on this passage and KJV, some interpreters elaborate a Doctrine of Abiding. By "abiding" they refer to a special action, which *meno* does not do. It simply means "stay, remain, continue" in an existing place, condition, or action. Not a new action but one already stated or implied. That is what *meno* means whether it is used literally or non-literally. Most books only use it literally. But John's writings also—and often—use it non-literally, as in John 15. In its earlier non-literal use in John, it affirms remaining in a saving relationship to Messiah. For example, compare two statements Jesus made side-by-side:

- Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has eternal life.** (6:54)
- Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **remains in Me and I in him.** (6:56)

From these statements<sup>98</sup> we can conclude that every true believer remains in Him. Thus they all fulfill the first condition, as stated in John 15:7, for getting answers to prayer. They also fulfill the second condition; for according to John 5:38; 17:14; and 1 John 1:10; 2:14; His words remain in every believer. Therefore, each is told, "ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." This wide-open offer is similar to the one near the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7-11). Apparently the only limitation to the offer is suggested by the purpose of our request, which should be to bear fruit and glorify the Father (John 15:8).

"If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love" (15:10). Do all believers obey Him? Yes, for "we know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands" (1 John 2:3-5). Of course, our obedience is not perfect. We always have room to grow in love, the command that sums up all His commands: "Love each other as I have loved you" (15:12, 17; 13:34). Showing love like His will not restrict our life nor embitter it, but will make it joyful (15:11; see also 16:20-24; 17:13; 1 John 1:4). What is joy? A grateful and expectant spirit before God's goodness. Joy probably includes what I have bolded in the following quotation: "The Christian life is not some shallow, insipid following of a traditional pattern. It is a life characterized by **'unexhausted (and inexhaustible) power for fresh creation'**" (Leon Morris, p. 674)

By thus revealing His purposes, the Lord treats us not as slaves but as friends (15:13-15).<sup>99</sup> These friends are all for whom He "[laid] down His life" (15:13), that is, all true believers.

### Scene 25h: The Lord Warns that the World Will Hate Believers, 15:18—16:4

What an unpleasant surprise that good people are hated! It is not because of their slips, which the world often pardons in its own children. Rather, it is because their goodness condemns the world—as it did in their Master's case. "If they persecuted Me [which they did], they will perse-

<sup>97</sup> In 15:16 it is the verb "last." See my "*Meno and the Doctrine of Abiding.*"

<sup>98</sup> See other clear examples that *meno* indicates a saving relationship, in 8:31, 35a; and 1 John 2:19.

<sup>99</sup> "I no longer call you servants [Greek, slaves]" (15:13). We should not draw false conclusions from this. For only a moment later (15:20) the Lord does call the same followers "slaves." All believers are "slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6:18) and "slaves to God" (Rom. 6:22). How, then, should we understand the Lord's disclaimer? As an absolute statement in place of this relative one: "I no longer call you **only** slaves, but friends as well."

cute you also. If they obeyed My teaching [which they did not], they will obey yours also” (15:20).<sup>100</sup>

In fact, Jesus’ words (15:22) and Jesus’ works (15:24) made the world “guilty of sin.”<sup>101</sup> This probably means that He revealed their true condition (15:22b-23, 24b). Doing so, however, led them to add the sin of rejecting Him.

Believers cannot escape the world’s hatred because they remain in the world as witnesses guided by the Spirit (15:26-27). Yet, their persecutors think that even killing them is a service to God. Quite often, as in what was done to Jesus, persecution hatches out of perverse theology. “Pilcher aptly reminds us that ‘A sermon was preached at the burning of Archbishop Cranmer, and the horrors of the Inquisition were carried out with a perfectly good conscience.’” (Leon Morris, p. 693)

### Scene 25i: The Lord Tells What the Spirit Will Teach, 16:5-15

This section has two unique parts: (1) 16:5-11 is the only New Testament passage that outlines the Holy Spirit’s work for the world. (2) Only 16:12-15 anticipates that through the Holy Spirit Jesus would reveal what became the New Testament.

Jesus again stated that He was returning to the One who sent Him. Yet the disciples were not sufficiently concerned about His ministry to ask where He was going. Indeed, Peter had asked that earlier (13:36); but his real interest had been the consequences for them, not for Jesus. Jesus wanted them to know that closing His earthly life would not close His earthly story. That story would continue through the Helper, whom Jesus would send only after His ascension (see 7:39 and the record, in Acts 2:32-33, of the fulfillment).

In John 16:8-11 Jesus outlined what the coming Spirit would teach the world. He would “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (16:8). Presumably, He would do this through those He indwells, the disciples left in the world as witnesses (15:27; Acts 1:8). This seems to be the general intent of 16:8-11. But its details have been interpreted in many ways, hinging on which meaning is taken for each of three Greek words.

- The first word is the one translated “convict” in verse 8 (*elenksei*). Does it refer to convincing someone or to exposing him, that is, showing the case against him? Probably the former, which meaning I assumed when I just now said that the “Spirit would teach the world.” Two examples of this conviction are Acts 2:37 (“they were cut to the heart”) and 24:25 (“As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid...”).

<sup>100</sup> Various epistles use these same arguments preparing the saints for persecution. For example, 1 Peter 2:18-25 tells believing slaves to “suffer for doing good” rather than “for doing wrong.” “It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God” but not commendable to endure “a beating for doing wrong.” Peter proceeds to cite Messiah’s example of such suffering.

<sup>101</sup> The Greek says simply “have sin.” In 9:41 the same expression refers to guilt the Pharisees added by refusing to accept the light. Unbelievers, who “deceive [themselves] and the truth is not in [them],” deny their guilt (1 John 1:8). Believers, in contrast, confess it and find forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

- The second word is the one three times translated “because” in verses 9-11 (*hoti*). That translation means it introduces a reason. But the word could instead be translated “namely” and introduce an apposition (an equivalent). Could that be its meaning here—in one or more cases? In other words, does *hoti* tell **why** the Spirit convicts (“because”) or **what** He convicts about (“namely”)? Many interpreters take the first case here as appositional: “in regard to sin, **namely**, that they do not believe on Me.” However, it seems more likely that all three verses give reasons, as they are translated in the NIV.<sup>102</sup>
- The third word is the one translated “righteousness” in verses 8 and 10 (*dikaiousune*, used only here in John). Is this word used here for character acceptable to God or for vindication (proof that someone is right)? I assume the former—and that the standard of righteousness is the now absent Messiah (“He will testify about Me,” 15:26).

John 16:12-13 promises the befuddled and forgetful apostles that the Spirit would clear their minds. This work by the Spirit made possible the powerful preaching in Acts—and the inspiration of all the New Testament books. “What is yet to come” probably includes the final events revealed in many of those books, especially Revelation.<sup>103</sup>

John 16:14-15 again emphasizes that the Spirit’s main objective is to glorify Messiah (thereby glorifying the Father). His only source of information is Messiah, whose source is the Father.

### Scene 25j: The Lord Clears up Difficulties, 16:16-33

In John 16:16-33 the Lord assured His disciples of future joy, answered prayer, and peace in the midst of trouble. First (16:16-22) He emphasized the fact that their sorrow at His absence would be short. In fact, when they saw Him again (16:16, 19) and He saw them (16:22), the sorrow itself would turn to lasting joy<sup>104</sup>. This is true because the suffering of the cross—like the anguish of childbirth—is what produces new life.

Next (16:23-27) He assured the disciples that they have the privilege of asking the Father for anything directly—and receiving it from Him. As He said before (15:16), they must ask in Messiah’s name. But the Father Himself loves them<sup>105</sup> enough to respond quite apart from Messiah’s intercession. He needs no persuading to be gracious. Nevertheless, their acceptance is based on their relationship to Messiah.

- 16:23 This verse has two Greek verbs each translated “ask” but often used differently.
- 23a: “In that day you will no longer **ask** Me anything” (using the verb *erotao*)
- 23b: “whatever you **ask** in My name” (using the verb *aiteo*)

<sup>102</sup> It would not be surprising if in the first case John meant to give both a reason and an equivalent/apposition.

<sup>103</sup> “I will show you what must take place after this” (Rev. 4:1). Morris, however (p. 701), believes that John 16:13 refers not to eschatology but to “the whole Christian way.”

<sup>104</sup> For the meaning of *joy* see near the end of my comments on 15:1-17.

<sup>105</sup> Here God’s love is stated with the Greek verb *phileo*, which many interpreters wrongly consider inferior to *agapao*. Often these two verbs for love, and their related nouns, seem equivalent. Therefore, it is sufficient that only the *phil* stem provides forms to combine with other words (e. g., *philadelphia*, brotherly love; *philarguria*, love of money). However, *phileo* often seems to imply attraction because of mutual kinship and interests (as here in John 16:27). *Agapao* does not require mutuality. Yet, *agape* is not limited to God and believers; even tax collectors have it for those who love them, Matt. 5:46.

The verb in 23b (*aiteo*) means to make requests. Therefore, 23b means that the Father will grant requests made in the Son's name. The verb in 23a (*erotao*) can likewise mean to request, as it does in 17:9, 15, and 20. If it means that here, 23a may imply that prayer should no longer be directed to the Son. However, this verb can also mean to ask questions, as it does in 16:30. If that is its meaning here, 23a says that questions will be unnecessary because of the Spirit's teaching.<sup>106</sup>

16:25 The Lord had "been speaking figuratively" but would later "speak plainly." He probably did not refer to figures of speech as much as to incompleteness and ambiguity.<sup>107</sup> They were not yet capable of handling all the truth—as they would be after His resurrection.

Finally (16:28-33), the Lord predicted the disciples' fall but assured them of His love and their ultimate share in His triumph. No doubt these words later became a great encouragement and consolation. Overcome with shame because of deserting Him, the disciples remembered that He had foreseen their failure, yet pledged His faithfulness! Their faith would mature. Though they "believed" Him in chapter 16, they would understand and believe much better after His resurrection.

### Scene 25k: The Lord Prays for His Own, 17:1-26

Although the Messiah Jesus often prayed to His Father, we have few records of His actual words.<sup>108</sup> John 17 is by far the longest such record. Sometimes it is called "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer." That title is somewhat misleading because, as Hebrews makes plain, He was not yet a priest. He did not become one until He completed His sufferings (Heb. 5:8-10): "He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He...was designated by God to be high priest...."<sup>109</sup> From that time on, He "always lives to intercede for" us (Heb. 7:25). As He intercedes, we can assume that His concerns are no different from those voiced in John 17.

His main concern, as always, was the new creation. For it a climax was at hand. As I noted earlier,<sup>110</sup> Son and Father had been working for centuries in preparation for that new creation. Some of that preparation was in prophetic revelations now available in our Bibles. The phrases

<sup>106</sup> One objection to this interpretation is that it requires "I tell you the truth" to present a new thought (see my comments on 10:1).

<sup>107</sup> "Figuratively" translates "*en paroimiais*." The Greek noun is translated "proverbs" in 2 Peter 2:22. But in John (10:6; 16:25, 29) it refers to language that requires interpretation, as it does in *Jesus Sirach* 47:17.

<sup>108</sup> Matthew 26:39-44, with parallels, includes some of those words. Matthew 11:25-26 is unique in the Synoptics—and reveals similar theology to that in John.

<sup>109</sup> This quotation is from the conclusion to Hebrews 5:5-10, which shows how Jesus fulfilled the two requirements for becoming a priest. The theme of Jesus' priesthood is developed in Hebrews 4:14 to 10:18.

<sup>110</sup> See my comments on scenes 1-2 (John 1:19—2:11) and especially scene 8 (John 5:1-18). I called the days of John 1-2 "the beginning of the new creation." However, that statement must be modified because the new creation cannot really begin without the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, it is more accurate to call those earlier days—as well as all the miraculous signs—an anticipation.

in John 17 relate to and summarize many of those other biblical thoughts.<sup>111</sup> Thus, this prayer is exceedingly rich; my few comments will be poor.

Consider the background for the new creation. That background began with the original material creation also made by the Son in the Father's will (Col. 1:16). One purpose of that first creation was to manifest God's glory (Ps. 19:1). To "rule over every living creature"—in harmony with his Maker—the Son had made "man in His own image" (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8). He had "formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:6). Yet sin and death had entered the story—and incapacitated men for ruling. To achieve God's purposes, a new beginning became necessary. Father and Son began preparing for a new creation. That work is the main theme of the Bible. To be the channel of God's grace, God chose Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). He multiplied Abraham's physical descendants into a nation, Israel, and constituted them as His own kingdom. He gave them the Sabbath as a repeated symbol of the future new creation. He had their prophets describe that future as the rule of David restored and perfected. He promised Israel a new covenant to transform them.

When the time was ripe, the Father sent His Son into David's family (Matt. 1:16, 20-21; Luke 1:26-33) with the words and works of reconciliation. In John 17 the Son rejoiced after "completing the work" (17:4). Around Him in the Upper Room He saw the raw materials of that new creation. These men would become its foundation and—with Him—its heirs. Once more, in a sense, He had formed men "from the dust of the ground." Once more (after His resurrection), He would breathe God's Spirit into what He had formed.<sup>112</sup> Now He described them and prayed for them.

One way to approach John 17 is through its key Greek words. Some of those are the words for *give* (17 times), *world* (16 times), *glorify/glory* (5 + 3 times), *Father* (6 times + many pronouns), and *name* (4 times). For example, consider the following uses of *give*:

#### A. What the Father has given or will give to the Son

The Son speaks to the Father of "everything You have given Me" (17:7). Because of these gifts He can say, "All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine" (17:10). These gifts include:

- Authority over all people (literally "over all flesh," 17:2)
- Certain people (17:2, 6a, 6b, 9, 24; see also 18:9)
- Work to do (17:4, "completing the work You gave Me to do")
- Words to speak (17:8)
- The Father's name (17:11, 12)<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Marcus Rainsford wrote 506 pages showing such relationships: *The Lord's Prayer for Believers* (8<sup>th</sup> ed., London: Chas. J. Thynne, no date, but the 4<sup>th</sup> ed. was 1895).

<sup>112</sup> This breath of life would be previewed in John 20:22 and fulfilled in Acts 2.

<sup>113</sup> In 17:11 the KJV and the New KJV read, "keep through Your name **those whom** You have given Me." Similarly, they indicate in verse 12 that what the Father has given is the **people**. But that translation is doubtful, especially verse 11, where it is supported only by the *Textus Receptus*. The New KJV footnote for verse 11 acknowledges that "NU-Text and M-Text read *keep them through Your name which You have given Me*" (italics are theirs). The KJV and New KJV are both based on the *Textus Receptus* (Received Text), which itself was based on a

- glory (17:22, 24)

B. What the Son gives to those the Father gives Him

- Eternal life (17:2). This is equivalent to knowing the Father and Jesus Messiah (17:3; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6 and Phil. 3:10).
- The words the Father gave Him (17:8, 14). They had accepted these words.
- The glory the Father gave Him (17:22). He gave this in order that they might be one as the Father and Son are one.

The whole prayer can be outlined according to those for whom the Son made requests:

A. For **Himself** (17:1, 5) the Son requested the Father to glorify Him.

The basis for this request was that He had brought glory to the Father by completing His assigned work on earth (17:4).<sup>114</sup>

What did this request mean? Ultimately, to restore to Him—this time as a Man—the heavenly glory He had before creation. But it probably included the glory of the cross itself, as implied in the similar words of 13:31.<sup>115</sup> How could the shameful cross be glory? Because by His death the Son overthrew Satan, paid the wages of sin, took away the sting of death, and became our high priest. Death and resurrection was His double door back to heaven. From heaven He began to baptize men in the Spirit, constituting the church over which He is head. In short, His request for glory was not selfish. Such glory would enable Him to glorify the Father by giving eternal life to those the Father had chosen (17:1b-2).<sup>116</sup> This request has been fulfilled: “God...has glorified His servant Jesus” (Acts 3:13).

---

small group of the late manuscripts available in the beginning of the seventeenth century. *Textus Receptus* often—though not in John 17:11—agrees with what the New KJV calls the “M-Text.” That is the “majority” text, based on the great majority of Greek manuscripts. However, no M-Text manuscript is older than the fifth century, and nearly all are much later. The “NU-Text” is the one adopted by the United Bible Societies. It is a “critical” text based on all the evidence, including older and apparently better manuscripts discovered since the KJV was created. To repeat, the New KJV footnote admits that its *Textus Receptus* reading in John 17:11 disagrees with both the M-Text and NU-Text. In those texts we read that it is God’s name that is given. (The manuscript evidence in verse 12 is not so lopsided.)

<sup>114</sup> This was His work as a Man. Previously, of course, He had worked with His Father both in creation and in all the preparation for His incarnation. In a sense, as Rainsford points out (*The Lord’s Prayer for Believers*), He was from the beginning the tree of life, the ark of safety, the bow of promise, the Passover lamb, every altar and every sacrifice, the tabernacle, and much more.

<sup>115</sup> “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him” (13:31) seems to refer to the cross. The next verse (13:32) concludes that “if God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself.” That is, since the cross glorifies God, He will also make the Son rise from the dead and ascend to heaven. Each One glorifies the Other. Apply this to 12:27-28, where the Son asked the Father to glorify His own name (rather than save Him from death). In effect, even this was a request to glorify the Son.

<sup>116</sup> Notice by this sentence how I understand the connection between verses 2 and 3. The purpose clause in verse 2b (“that He might give eternal life...”) explains the one in verse 1b (“that Your Son may glorify You”). In Greek each of the two purpose clauses begins with *hina*, and they are separated with a “just as” (*kathos*) clause. See the same structure and function in the first three clauses of verse 21.

B. For **those the Father had already given Him**, He made three requests.

These requests were necessary because the Son was leaving the world but the others were staying (17:11a). He asked the Father to

1. Protect them by the power of His own name (17:11b) so that they might be one (17:11c). Thus they would experience the full measure of Messiah's joy (17:13). Messiah had so protected them during His stay on earth (17:12).
2. Protect them from the evil one (17:15).<sup>117</sup> This was the world ruler—a world that hated them because they had received the Father's word from the Son (17:14, 16).
3. Sanctify them in the truth, that is, in the Father's word (17:17, 19). This meant to separate and dedicate them as they went into the world, sent by the Son (17:18). The Son had separated and dedicated Himself to achieve this goal (17:19).

The basis for these requests was that they were the “raw material” of the new creation. They belonged to the Father, who had chosen them, and to the Son, to whom the Father gave them (17:9-10). “They were Yours; You gave them to Me” (17:6). In verses 6-8 the Son mentions two evidences of who they were.

1. They had obeyed the Father's word (17:6). This is the same as Jesus' description on a different occasion of those who are blessed. “A woman...called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave You birth.’” Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:27-28). Likewise, in John 14 He had promised the Holy Spirit to those who “obey what I command” (John 14:15-16). Also, “if anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (14:23). These disciples had obeyed Him in response to His revealing the Father's “name” to them (17:6, 26, literally). God's name stands for His character and reputation, God Himself as revealed.<sup>118</sup>
2. They now knew the Son's relationship to the Father (17:7-8). This is another way of saying that they believed “that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (20:31).

It may seem strange, in view of the disciples' coming failure, that the Lord spoke so highly of them. He did so because “there is no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?” (Rom. 8:33-34a). Remember that not the Son but the Father originally chose these people—even before they heard or believed.<sup>119</sup> The Son “will lose none of all that [the Father] has given [Him]” (John 6:39; cf. 40, 44).

---

<sup>117</sup> “not that You take them out of the world but that you **protect** them **from** the evil one” (17:15). The same bolded verb and preposition (in Greek) are used in the Lord's promise in Revelation 3:10: “I will also **keep** you **from** the hour of trial.” Since the request in John is to keep believers from permanent harm, not to snatch them away, the same words in Revelation probably do not refer to the rapture.

<sup>118</sup> In a sense God's name is identical to His glory, revealed in His creation (Ps. 19:1-6) and in His word (Ps. 19:7-11). His name was central in His redemption of Israel (Exod. 3:13-20; 6:2-3; 33:5-7) and is fully manifested in Messiah (John 17:6). Jesus taught us to constantly pray for the Father's name to be honored (Matt. 6:9).

<sup>119</sup> It is a perversion to think that God angrily or anxiously waits to see whom His Son will present to Him as having believed the gospel. The Son chooses (John 15:16) only those whom the Father chose first. “It was no part of the work of Christ to make us God's people, and it was no part of the work of Christ to secure God's love for us” (Rainsford, *The Lord's Prayer for Believers*, p. 100). Our own task is to speak the message by which the Father will draw those He has chosen.

C. Finally, for **all believers** He made two requests.

These people include those gained during His ministry and others who would believe through their word (17:20).

1. That they all be one, like the Father and the Son. The stated purpose was that the world might believe that the Father (a) sent the Son and (b) loved believers (17:21, 23). This request was not for one organization of believers, which has never convinced the world in the places where that has been achieved. Instead, it was for a unity of spirit and purpose—of mutual love, as already stated in John 13:35. Such unity is based on sharing in the divine life: “be in us” (17:21).
2. That they be with Him (17:24a), to behold His glory (17:24b). That is the glory the Father gave the Son because He loved Him before creation (17:24c). That love of the Father for the Son is what the Son made known to them and put in them (17:25-26).<sup>120</sup>

The basis for these requests was the fact that the Son had already given them His glory (17:22-23a). As I stated before, they were the raw material of the new creation.

### Scene 26: The Lord Is Arrested, 18:1-11

We are studying “Act II” of this Gospel, chapters 13-20. We have just looked at its first scene, a long one (chs. 13-17). In it the Lord has instructed and prayed for those “who received Him... who believed in His name.” In these next scenes (chs. 18-20) He will finish His own work on earth by dying and rising again. Though treated shamefully, He will be in complete control. Through these events both unbelief and belief will come to maturity.

Scene 26 takes place in an olive grove across the Kidron Valley just outside the walled city of Jerusalem. This grove the Synoptic Gospels identify as Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. They also tell us that the Lord fervently prayed there (see Luke 22:39-46). John, however, does not mention that prayer. He has already told us Jesus’ prayer concerns—in 12:23-28 and chapter 17. In scene 26 John’s interests are the betrayer, the participation of Roman soldiers in the arrest, Peter’s brave but misguided response, and—above all—Jesus’ majestic control.

Judas guided a “detachment of soldiers” there along with Jewish “officials from the chief priests and Pharisees.” The Roman soldiers<sup>121</sup> were probably some of those that kept order from the Roman “Antonia” next to the temple complex. The “officials” were probably temple police.

Notice that Jesus took the initiative. The large group coming to get Him with torches and lanterns (18:3) must have been seen and heard long before they arrived. It was early April, Passover season. The moon was full; the air was still, clear, and cold.. But instead of fleeing, Jesus “went out” to them (18:4) and identified Himself. His repeated “I am” (18:5, 6, literally; NIV supplies “He”) probably had a double meaning: Jesus the Nazarene and God (see 8:58).

<sup>120</sup> Note the mention of love in verses 23, 24, and 26.

<sup>121</sup> Literally, “the cohort,” which on paper numbered 600 but here was probably just a detachment of them.

Peter gave no thought for his own safety; he could hardly compete with a single Roman soldier. But he was determined not to forsake his Lord and tried to spare Him from “drinking the cup” that Jesus knew He must drink.

### Scene 27: The Lord Is Questioned by the High Priest, 18:12-24

This scene highlights Peter’s first denial (18:15-18), when Jesus was questioned by the high priest (18:19-23).<sup>122</sup> Determined not to be a coward, Peter followed Jesus into great danger. John got him into “the high priest’s courtyard” because John “was known to the high priest” (18:15, 16). That meant more than mere acquaintance. It may be that James and John, Jesus’ cousins, were of the priestly tribe of Levi (through Aaron).<sup>123</sup>

It is interesting that though “the high priest...questioned Jesus” (18:19), we are told none of his questions. We only know that Jesus’ reprimanded him for illegal procedure—for trying to get incriminating evidence from the accused rather than from witnesses.<sup>124</sup> For this reprimand an officer slapped Jesus in the face (see Isa. 50:6). Apparently this “high priest” was “Annas...the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year” (18:13). Years before, Annas had been high priest and had been deposed. So successively had five sons of Annas before Caiaphas. Annas was apparently “the power behind the throne.”<sup>125</sup>

### Scene 28: The Lord Is Sentenced by Pilate, 18:25 to 19:16

This scene begins with Peter’s second and third denials (18:25-27). It is hard to harmonize the accounts because each Gospel selects from a babble of voices. From Peter’s failure we should learn to trust ourselves less, and that it does little good to screw up our courage when our thinking is crooked.

“To avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover” (18:28). “Passover,” as elsewhere in John, probably referred to the entire

<sup>122</sup> There were three stages to the religious trial (Annas, Caiaphas with the Council at night, the Council after dawn). After that were three stages to the civil trial (Pilate, King Herod, Pilate again). Apparently John records only stage 1 of the religious trial but stages 1 and 3 (combined) of the civil. I will not comment on what John omits.

<sup>123</sup> Their mother was Salome, sister of Jesus’ mother Mary (cf. 19:25 with Matt. 27:56). Since Mary and Salome had a “relative Elizabeth” (Luke 1:36, NASB) “from the daughters of Aaron” (Luke 1:5, NASB), they were probably from the same tribe. Some argue that Mary was of the tribe of Judah. The only evidence they give is the genealogy in Luke 3, which differs at many points from Joseph’s genealogy in Matthew 1. However, (1) the two genealogies are not wholly distinct; they briefly merge **after David** at the names of Zerubbabel and Shealtiel. (2) Mary’s name is not even mentioned in the Luke genealogy. (3) Luke twice says that Joseph—but never Mary—is descended from David (Luke 1:27 and 2:4). J. Gresham Machen, in his classic *The Virgin Birth*, shows how both can be genealogies of Joseph made from different perspectives. Also, both Matthew and Luke clearly believe that Jesus had royal rights through Joseph.

<sup>124</sup> It was also illegal to hold at night any trial involving a death sentence.

<sup>125</sup> Edersheim disagrees (in his book about *The Messiah*) that this first interview was with Annas. Instead, he says that the “high priest” in verses 19-23 is Caiaphas, called the “high priest that year” (in 18:13, also 11:49 and 51). To Edersheim, verse 24 is retrospective rather than chronological. Otherwise, he says, (1) John 18 would have nothing about the trial before Caiaphas and (2) Peter’s denial would be at the wrong house. However, the title translated “high priest” is repeatedly used in this context for other priests: e. g., 18:35, 19:6, 15. Regarding argument (1), the trial and verdict had already been completed in John (11:47-53). Regarding argument (2), the two houses may have shared the same courtyard.

seven-day feast.<sup>126</sup> They had eaten the main Passover meal on the previous night. The uncleanness they feared—and that could last for seven days—would result from touching a dead body or someone who had touched it (Num. 19:16, 22). How sad that the moral defilement of killing Jesus didn't bother them!

They did not bring Jesus to Pilate to get justice. If that were all they wanted, they could have lynched Him as they later did Stephen (Acts 7). In fact, Pilate offered to let them kill Jesus without passing sentence himself (18:31). They refused. They wanted Him crucified (18:31-32), which they thought would quite discredit Him. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (quoted by Gal. 3:13) says that “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.”

Only John gives us certain details of Pilate's interrogation and Jesus' responses (18:33-38 and 19:8-11). The issue, repeatedly mentioned, was Jesus' claim to be “king of the Jews” (18:33; cf. Luke 23:2). The final argument by the Jews was “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar” (19:12). In his masterful commentary, Alva McClain says

There are some interpreters who argue that this charge was a *total* misrepresentation of the true nature of the Messianic Kingdom, and that our Lord's answer to Pilate proves that His Kingdom was wholly a “spiritual” matter, having no political or material implications whatsoever. It is passing strange that men have not seen the utter folly of trying to erect an adequate definition of our Lord's Kingdom based in large part on a brief conversation between Him and a cynical Roman governor who knew nothing about the Kingdom of God, and cared less.<sup>127</sup>

What follows are Pilate's three “questions” and Jesus' three responses. For the meanings of the responses, I have quoted from, or summarized, McClain on pages 380-382. (The footnotes are mine.)

**Question 1:** Are you the king of the Jews? (18:33)

**Response:** Jesus' response intended “to clarify the exact meaning of Pilate's inquiry so that it could be answered intelligibly. If the source of the charge was Pilate, then it would be entirely *political* and nothing more. In that case the Lord's answer would be, No, I am not a king in that narrow sense of the term.” However, if Pilate asked from the Jewish standpoint, Jesus would not deny His Messianic rights.

**Question 2:** “Am I a Jew?...It was Your people and Your chief priests who handed You over to Me. What is it You have done?” (18:35)

<sup>126</sup> Technically, after the first day it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

<sup>127</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1959) 380. His discussion of this interrogation continues through page 382.

**Response:** “The way is cleared for our Lord’s reply to the original question. The first part of his reply is wholly negative: ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (vs. 36).<sup>128</sup> The preposition is *ek*, indicating source or originating cause.<sup>129</sup> His kingdom does not originate in the present cosmos or world system.” If it did, His servants would fight. “This was something that Pilate could understand: a ‘king’ with no military support, and who actually had to be protected from physical violence on the part of his own subjects, could give no possible concern to the politically realistic Pilate.”

**Question 3** (NIV interprets it as an ironic exclamation): “You are a king, then!” (18:37)

**Response:** “You are right in saying I am a king.” Jesus underlines this as being “truth.”

To this, Pilate has no answer, except to drop his cynical “What is truth” (vs. 38) as he left the hall of judgment, tragically unaware that he had been in the presence of the King, who is the God of all truth.

Now to deduce from this brief exchange between Pilate and Jesus the sweeping proposition that the Messianic Kingdom is exclusively a kingdom of love and truth, which will never employ force in dealing with sinful men upon earth, is certainly theological conjecture at its worst. The Old Testament prophets had agreed that Messiah would rule over the nations “with a rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9), and this was confirmed by the King Himself in the days of His flesh (Luke 19:14, 27); but the force used will be that of divine omnipotence, not the force of human armies.

Three times during this trial Pilate stated, “I find no basis for a charge against Him” (18:38; 19:4, 6). If he considered Jesus innocent, why then did he have Him flogged? Flogging was a painful ordeal in which the Roman soldiers would take no pity<sup>130</sup> and which many did not even survive. But Pilate thought that the result would satisfy the Jews’ anger<sup>131</sup> and make them willing to release Jesus (19:1). He was quite mistaken.

Near the end of this section we are reminded that “it was the day of Preparation of Passover Week” (19:14). That meant it was Friday. It was preparation not for the Passover proper but for the Sabbath of that week. As I stated before, the Passover proper was past. Every family’s lamb

<sup>128</sup> “My kingdom **is**...” does not refer to a present kingdom. It is common to speak of important future things as though they were present. For example, in context the following present tenses definitely refer to the future: “God’s judgment...**is** [will be] based on truth” (Rom. 2:2), “they **are** [will be] children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36).

<sup>129</sup> This preposition + noun (*ek tou kosmou*) can also refer to character, as it does twice in 17:14. However, in 18:36a it makes better sense, with McClain, to take it as source. NIV has recognized that in 36b: “But now My kingdom is **from** another place.” Notice also the word “now,” which NASB translates “as it is.”

<sup>130</sup> This flogging was inflicted with “a leather whip that had pieces of bone or metal imbedded in its thongs. It was used by the Romans only on murderers and traitors” (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1499). Not only the body but the head and face were left ripped and bloody. The crown of thorns and blows to the face instead of kisses of homage, showed the soldiers’ scorn for the Jews’ “king.”

<sup>131</sup> The Jews were not the worst of mankind but, in some ways, its best. Certainly, they were the most favored (Rom. 9:1-5). However, it is misleading to cover up their guilt in killing the Lord of glory. (Some modern versions avoid repeating “Jews” in verses like 19:7 and 12.) Indeed, all men are guilty and took part in that crime. But, as Jesus pointed out, some have a “greater sin” (19:11)—those who had the greatest light. See 1 Thess. 2:14-16.

had been sacrificed the previous afternoon (Thursday) and eaten the previous evening (the beginning of Jewish Friday).

### Scene 29: The King of the Jews is Crucified & Buried, 19:17-42

John's account of Jesus' crucifixion and death emphasizes (a) the notice fastened to His cross and (b) the fulfillment of Scriptures. Pilate's notice was in the three languages most spoken in that region: "Aramaic, Latin and Greek" (19:20). The chief priests objected because the sign identified Jesus as "THE KING OF THE JEWS" (19:19). Pilate refused to change it. "Many of the Jews read this sign" and were forever reminded of Whom they had rejected.

John records four events that fulfilled Scripture while Jesus hung on the cross. What John says about one of those events fits all four: They "happened, so that the scripture would be fulfilled" (19:36). Before He died, (1) soldiers gambled for His clothes (19:24) and (2) Jesus expressed His thirst (19:28-30). After He died, (3) none of His bones were broken (19:31-33, 36) but (4) a soldier pierced His side (19:31-34, 37).

In addition, only John includes these two features: (1) Jesus entrusted His mother<sup>132</sup> to His cousin John (19:26-27). (2) Just before He "gave up His spirit," He said, "It is finished" (19:30).<sup>133</sup>

John 19:38-42 records Jesus' hasty but honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea, helped by Nicodemus. In doing this, each of them risked his own future. By asking Pilate for Jesus' body to bury, Joseph revealed that he was a secret disciple (19:38).<sup>134</sup> Nicodemus brought so many fine spices as would be suitable for burying royalty (19:39-40).

**Introduction to John 20.** Through chapter 19 John's story about Jesus has been beautiful and impressive. But if there were no chapter 20, the story would leave us confused, depressed, and hopeless. Without the resurrection Christianity—if it existed—would be only another religion, another set of theories. Instead, Jesus' defeat of death makes His story the power of God.<sup>135</sup> His resurrection brings us good news.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Messiah from the dead.... (1 Peter 1:3)

<sup>132</sup> As in 2:4 Jesus again called her "woman," the same address He used with the Samaritan (4:21). NIV softens the expression when used of Mary by adding the word "dear."

<sup>133</sup> "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit" (Matt. 27:50). Apparently, His loud cry was "It is finished"! "To finish or complete" has been a key thought in John.

<sup>134</sup> In fact, the "new tomb" was Joseph's own (Matt. 27:60). As a rich man (Matt. 27:57) he fulfilled Isaiah 53:9, that the Servant would be "with the rich in His death."

<sup>135</sup> "It took both His death and His resurrection to fulfill the prophecy which He [Jesus] enacted when He was baptized..." (John Franklin Carter, *A Layman's Harmony of the Gospels* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961], p. 341). Carter also points out "the irony of the situation...that the only Person who has ever come forth in victory over death is One whose tomb was guarded to keep His body in it" (p. 336).

The early church gave highest priority to this fact. Even before Pentecost the apostles led in choosing a replacement for Judas, to “become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:22; see 4:2). There are “many convincing proofs” of that resurrection (Acts 1:3). Each Gospel gives only part of the evidence. Now we will look at what John has selected, two scenes in the main body of the book and one scene in the epilogue. (Study the table that follows.) The two scenes in the main body are (1) at the empty tomb (20:1-18) and (2) in a locked house (20:19-29).

<b>John’s Selected Evidence of Jesus’ Resurrection</b>				
<b>In the Main Body of the Gospel</b>				<b>In the Epilogue</b>
<b>At the Empty Tomb on the First Sunday (20:1-18)</b>		<b>In a Locked House on the First &amp; Second Sundays (20:19-29)</b>		<b>By the Sea of Tiberias (21:1-23)</b>
(1) 20:1-10	(2) 20:11-18	(3) 20:19-23	(4) 20:24-29	21:1-23
Mary Magdalene finds the tomb empty.	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.	Jesus appears to the disciples without Thomas.	Jesus appears to the disciples with Thomas.	Jesus appears to seven disciples.
She informs Peter & John, who enter the tomb and see the graveclothes.	She informs Jesus’ “brothers” (disciples).	He commissions them and symbolically imparts the Spirit.	He shows Himself alive to Thomas, who confesses Him.	He has them make a miraculous catch of fish—and reinstates Peter.

**Scene 30: The King Has Risen & Departed from the Tomb, 20:1-18**

This scene has two parts (1 and 2 in the chart); so does the next (3 and 4 in the chart). All four parts took place “on the first day of the week [that is, Sunday].” Parts 1-3 were all on the first Sunday; part 4, on the next Sunday. By appearing on successive Sundays, the Lord set the stage for Christian worship on that day.

It is evident that God, from the beginning, had chosen for Jesus to rise on Sunday. That was the reason He had ordained, centuries earlier, a special ceremony for that day. Each year on Sunday (“the day after the Sabbath,” Lev. 23:11) of “Passover” week,<sup>136</sup> Israel was to offer the “firstfruits.” “Bring to the priest,” God had told them, “a sheaf of the first grain you harvest” (Lev. 23:10). The priest was to offer these firstfruits to God, thus consecrating the entire grain harvest, which could then begin.<sup>137</sup> This ceremony, like most of Israel’s feasts, was related to agriculture. But, like all the feasts, it also pictured eternal things. Firstfruits gave promise of the future resurrection. Thus, it was fitting that Israel was offering firstfruits on the very morning Jesus

<sup>136</sup> More specifically, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began with the Passover meal (Lev. 23:6).

<sup>137</sup> The first grain was barley. After the barley harvest followed the wheat harvest, both of which were complete by the time of Pentecost, fifty days later.

rose. He fulfilled the ceremony, “raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).<sup>138</sup>

A. His tomb is empty, 20:1-10.

It was a woman who first announced to other disciples the Lord’s resurrection and first saw Him. Though Jewish courts did not value a woman’s testimony, God did. He gave that honor to Mary Magdalene.<sup>139</sup>

Remember that John’s evidence was selected out of much coming and going. When John wrote, it was already well-known that several women bought spices then went early the next morning to anoint Jesus.<sup>140</sup> Mary probably included other women when she said, “we don’t know where they have put Him” (20:2). Apparently, she arrived first (“while it was still dark,” 20:1) and left even as others were arriving. Finding the tomb open and empty, she ran to report to Peter and John, who themselves ran to the tomb. Though John got there first, he did not go in until after Peter.<sup>141</sup> Like Peter, “he saw the strips of linen lying there” (20:6) and the head cloth “folded up by itself, separate from the linen” (20:7). He realized that no grave robbers would have taken the linen off the body nor carefully placed the head cloth where it was. Jesus had risen!

B. He appears to Mary Magdalene, 20:11-18.

Not until he resumes Mary’s story does John first mention angels at the tomb.<sup>142</sup> In this grand event the number and location of angels kept varying.

---

<sup>138</sup> This still leaves the question of the relation between Sabbath and Sunday. See my commentary on John 5:1-18, where I pointed out the predictive aspect of the old covenant Sabbath. It spoke of God’s invitation to join in His future rest in a new creation, as summed up in the word *sabbatismos* (“Sabbath-rest”) in Hebrews 4:9. That future Sabbath, the new creation, is the great goal toward which He and the Son (and we also) still work. That explains why their favorite day to work on it was the Sabbath. However, when certain elements of that day have been attained, a new day, Sunday, can symbolize that fact.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Magdalene was from Magdala, on the NW shore of the Lake of Galilee. Mark reports that the Lord “had driven seven demons” out of her and also that the disciples did not believe her testimony (Mark 16:9-11, 14). There is no Scriptural evidence that she was ever a prostitute, as some believe.

<sup>140</sup> The Gospel accounts are sometimes hard to harmonize. For example, was Mary Magdalene alone—as it seems in John—or not? The Matthew account (28:1, 5-10) says that another Mary went to the tomb with her. There they both saw the angel, who told them that Jesus was risen, which fact they should tell the disciples. As they “hurried away...suddenly Jesus met them” with the same message. Luke 24:1-10 reports an even larger number of women (at least five) but no appearance by Jesus. Such discrepancies do not argue against the resurrection but for it! They are a mark of honest testimonies. Many commentaries suggest ways to reconcile them. For one example, Carter suggests that Matthew 28:1 and 2 merge two separate visits to the tomb by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary: (1) The first visit—for a quick look—(v. 1) took place in the evening when the Sabbath turned to Sunday. (The verb translated “at dawn” in Matthew 28:1 can mean “was about to begin,” as it is translated in Luke 23:54.) (2) The second visit—to anoint Jesus—(v. 2) took place the next morning. (John Franklin Carter, *A Layman’s Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 342)

<sup>141</sup> John was apparently the youngest of the apostles; he outlived the rest of them. He and Peter may have stayed in different homes in Jerusalem (20:2 says literally, “to Simon Peter and to the other disciple”). However, “the two were running together” to the tomb (20:4, NASB). John got there first because he ran faster.

<sup>142</sup> Matthew tells us that an angel had rolled back the stone, making the guards shake and become like dead men (Matt. 28:2-4). Then (as also in Mark) the angel had instructed the women that Jesus had risen and that the disciples should go see Him in Galilee.

It is puzzling that Mary did not recognize Jesus until He called her by name. Her tears possibly obstructed her vision, but also Jesus appearance had probably changed (see 20:20, 27; 21:4, 7, 12). Later He had to prove to the assembled disciples that He was not a ghost (Luke 24:37-43). He admonished Mary not to hold on to Him (John 20:17) because it was vain to try to keep Him on earth. He had to return to the Father. That would not be a quick trip. It would last until time for His second coming, for which we are still waiting. “Go...to My brothers and tell them [this],” Jesus said (20:17). He probably did not mean physical brothers but spiritual, as in 21:23.<sup>143</sup> Accordingly, she “went to the disciples” (20:18).

### Scene 31: The Lord Appears to His Disciples in a House, 20:19-31

A. He appears to them without Thomas on the first Sunday, 20:19-23.

In the Gospels we have the records of the following appearances by the Lord on that Sunday:

- to Mary (John 20:14-17; Mark 16:9)
- to “the women” (Matt. 28:8-10)
- to the two walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13)
- to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34)
- to “the disciples” in the locked house (John 20:19-23). This included both “the Eleven and those with them” (Luke 24:33). Mark 16:14-18 and Luke 24:36-49 combine this appearance with another appearance some weeks later.

Notice the Lord’s repeated greeting in John 20:19 and 21 (“Peace be with you!”). That greeting implied all of God’s blessing and prosperity, which He could now begin to grant. The purpose of this appearance was (1) to convince them He had risen (20:19-20) and (2) to commission them (20:21-23). He sent them out with the Spirit’s presence (here imparted symbolically) and authority. He indicated what that authority means.

The Lord’s breathing on them (20:22) recalled both creation and prophecy.<sup>144</sup> It was He who had breathed life into the first creation (Genesis 2:7). It would be He who would infuse life into the new creation (Ezekiel 37:9, 14). Thus, His action in the locked room was itself a prediction, which He would fulfill on Pentecost. On that later day the “sound like the blowing of a violent wind...from heaven” (Acts 2:2) was Messiah’s breath imparting the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, 33).

This gift of the Spirit would bring power to “forgive sins” and “not forgive them” (John 20:23). Believers exercise this power when they tell others the gospel. That was clearly the way—and the only way—people were forgiven as recorded in the book of Acts. Those who believe are forgiven; those who do not believe are not forgiven.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Hebrews 2:11-12, quoting from Psalm 22:22, makes a point of His calling us “brothers.” However, “His [physical] brothers” also became disciples by the time of the ascension (Acts 1:14). Jesus made a special appearance to His brother James (1 Cor. 15:7).

<sup>144</sup> This Greek verb for breathing is used only here in the New Testament, clearly calling to mind its use in Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:9.

<sup>145</sup> The Roman Catholic Church teaches that “the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to their Apostles and their lawful successors [that is, the priests] for reconciling the faithful [that is, Christians] who have

B. He Appears on the Next Sunday, 20:24-29.

The apostles were far from self-deluded and expecting Jesus to rise. They stubbornly refused to believe the other eyewitnesses.<sup>146</sup> On this second Sunday Jesus convinced even the most stubborn of them. But though Thomas's attitude was wrong, his final confession was right: Jesus is both Lord and God! This is both the conclusion and the high point of Act II of the book.

C. John states the purpose of this Gospel, 20:30-31.

I will repeat John's statement with clarifications as I gave them in the introduction.

Jesus did many other **miraculous signs** in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God**, and that by believing you **may have life** in His name.

“**Miraculous signs**” represents one word, *signs*, in Greek. “**Christ**” (= *Messiah*) is the title of the promised King, who will rule the world (Matt. 2:2, 4; Luke 23:2). It is the English form—not a translation—of the Greek word *Cristos*, which literally means “Anointed.” *Cristos* is common not only in the Greek New Testament but also in the Greek version of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it translates the Hebrew title *Mashiac*, which also means “Anointed.” As a title *Mashiac/Cristos* could and did refer to any king of Israel. For example, David so called his predecessor Saul (see 1 Sam. 26:9, 11, 16). Each king was anointed with oil as a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. But a number of prophecies (such as, Ps. 2:2, 6-9) looked forward to a future great *Mashiac/Cristos*, whose anointing with the Spirit is described in Isaiah 11:1-2. A synonymous title for Him is *Messiah*, which represents the Aramaic form of *Mashiac* (John 1:41). The Great Confession in each of the Gospels is that Jesus is this *Christ/Cristos/Mashiac/Messiah/Anointed King*.

To this title is sometimes added, as in John 20:31, another title: *Son of God*. For example, the Great Confession in Matthew (16:16) adds it, but the parallel passages (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20) do not. *Son of God* is often equivalent to *Cristos*; it was used for purely human kings like Solomon (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Ps. 89:26-27). But it can also, as in Jesus' case, imply deity.

---

fallen after baptism...” (Council of Trent). The same council goes on to say that Christians should confess all mortal sins to priests in order that they may “pronounce the sentence of remission or retention of sins.”

There is no Scriptural evidence, however, (a) of a special New Testament priesthood with such power, (b) that the sins referred to in John 20 are those committed after baptism, or (c) that the means of forgiving is to “pronounce the sentence.” Instead, all the evidence in Acts and the Epistles shows that forgiveness was brought by the message about Christ. “You” forgive because “you” preach the Word. Look up Acts 10:42-43. Notice what Peter said to Cornelius and his company about the forgiveness of sins: that whoever believes in Jesus (the “Judge”) will receive such forgiveness.

<sup>146</sup> Jesus “rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mark 16:14).

### The Epilogue, 21:1-25

This incident, of course, adds to the evidence for Jesus' resurrection. But it has an additional purpose: to emphasize the restoration of Peter. Peter was destined to give spiritual leadership to the early church—an enormous honor and task. But he had fallen from his position. His restoration was a common theme in the Gospels.<sup>147</sup>

The story itself is easy to follow. Seven of the disciples were at the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee). Led by Peter, they spent all night fishing without results. Next morning by obeying a “stranger” on shore, they netted 153 large fish, too many to haul into the boat.<sup>148</sup> John realized and told them that the man on shore was Jesus. So Peter “wrapped his outer garment around him...and jumped into the water” (21:7) to wade or swim to shore. There he found that Jesus had made “a fire of burning coals” (21:9), like the fire when Peter had denied Jesus (18:18).<sup>149</sup> Jesus gave them fish and bread for breakfast, which probably reminded them of feeding the 5000.

After breakfast Jesus asked, “Simon Son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” (21:15). He probably meant “Do you love me more than the other disciples do?” Peter had said earlier, “Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will” (Matt. 26:33).<sup>150</sup> But now he didn't dare compare his love to that of others. Nevertheless, he answered, “You know that I love You” (21:15). Jesus' response was, “Feed My lambs” (21:15). Twice more Jesus asked about Peter's love, with similar answers and responses. Study all three questions and answers in the chart that follows, noting the Greek words used for love.

In His first two questions about Peter's love, the Lord used a form of the verb *agapao*. Peter, however, answered with *phileo*. The Lord switched to *phileo* on His third question, which verb Peter still used to answer.<sup>151</sup> As I previously affirmed,<sup>152</sup> *phileo* is not inferior to *agapao* and is often equivalent. It is used of the Father's love for the Son (5:20), and for believers (16:27), also of the Son's love for John (20:22). Sometimes, however, *phileo* seems to imply attraction because of mutual kinship and interests. *Agapao* does not require mutuality. That difference may be the point of their usage in 21:15-17.

<sup>147</sup> Luke 22:31-34 predicted both his fall and his restoration. He was sent a special message (Mark 16:7, “But go, tell His disciples and Peter”). Also, the Lord appeared privately to him (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

<sup>148</sup> This had to remind them of a similar incident three years before, Luke 5:4-11.

<sup>149</sup> The Greek word refers to charcoal, not available just anywhere.

<sup>150</sup> It has been suggested that he meant “Do you love me more than you love the tools of your fishing trade?”

That is possible grammatically but not likely.

<sup>151</sup> “Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’” What hurt was not the fact that Jesus switched verbs but that He asked basically the same question “the third time.” This clearly pointed back to his three denials.

<sup>152</sup> See my footnote for 16:23-27.

<b>Jesus Restores Simon to Spiritual Leadership, John 21:15-17</b>			
	<b>Jesus' Question</b>	<b>Simon's Answer</b>	<b>Jesus' Charge</b>
1	Simon Son of John, do you truly love ( <i>agapas</i> ) me more than these?	Yes, Lord, You know that I love ( <i>phileo</i> ) You.	Feed My lambs.
2	Simon son of John, do you truly love ( <i>agapas</i> ) me?	Yes, Lord, You know that I love ( <i>phileo</i> ) You.	Take care of My sheep.
3	Simon son of John, do you love ( <i>phileis</i> ) me?	Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love [ <i>phileis</i> ] Me?"  Lord, You know all things; You know that I love ( <i>phileo</i> ) You.	Feed My sheep.

It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of the Lord's charge to Simon Peter. That charge is the main duty of every Christian leader. Years later, Peter made it the keynote of his instructions "to the elders among you...as a fellow elder:...Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..." (1 Peter 5:1-4). The apostle Paul echoed the same charge to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28). Elders who give their "attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4) will not have time to micromanage everything else in the church.

Do John 21:15-17 and Matthew 16:16-19<sup>153</sup> make Peter the first pope? The Roman Catholic Church says that they do: "The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the 'rock' of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.... This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope."<sup>154</sup>

We cannot deny that Peter had a special position as first confessor of Messiah and leader of the early church. By restoring him, Jesus pointed the church in the right direction. But that is far from proving that Peter had authority over all other leaders or that he passed such authority to someone else. Neither claim can be justified from the New Testament. What a bitter irony that Jesus' call for faithful service is used to justify a heretical system! Romanism gives much of Jesus' glory to Mary. Instead of trusting Jesus' finished work on the cross, it trusts the priests' constant Eucharists. It puts the church and its sacraments in place of faith in Messiah and His Word. It has historically brought ignorance of the Scriptures, political maneuvers, and persecution of true believers.

<sup>153</sup> "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon....And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church....I will give you the keys of the kingdom....' Clearly this bestowed honor and authority on Peter. Though he represented all the apostles, he was first, both as confessor and leader.

<sup>154</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [New York City: Doubleday, 1995] 254. See also p. 234.

Faithful leaders, in contrast, pass on the teachings of apostles like Peter and John. They build “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Messiah Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). Such building results in “a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).