

CHAPTER TWO—JESUS CHRIST AS THE REVELATION OF TRUTH

The previous chapter was concerned with those introductory matters relevant for understanding John's unique view of truth, which is centered in Jesus Christ. This has two aspects: Jesus as the revelation of truth, and Jesus as the revealer of truth. The focus of the present chapter is on the first aspect, and it can only be comprehended by taking into account the images that the Evangelist connects with truth. In the author's judgment, although John 14:6 also contains two images (way and life), it seems that the meaning of the various images used throughout the Gospel to explain the content of Jesus' person and work finds its summary in Jesus' self-declaration to be the truth.

1. TRUE LIGHT

It is appropriate to begin with the theme of light because it is the first idea connected with truth in the Gospel. But it is also appropriate for two other reasons. One is that the content of Jesus' person and work, which is the message from the Father, of whom Christ bears witness, by its very nature will create a division between those who receive it and those who do not, just as light marks the boundary between itself and darkness. The second reason is the ability of the term "light" to speak to a diverse group of readers and potential readers. It is indeed significant that in attempting to communicate to Greeks the salvific revelation that came in Jesus Christ, John uses the image of light. This is a universal idea, and thus it is not surprising to find it in the various traditions that have been suggested as the background to John's thought, in both the Greek and Hebrew categories.

If the origin of John's Gospel is Ephesus, which is not unreasonable, some of John's intended readers may very well have had knowledge of other religious expressions in which light was important. In Homer, for example, *phōs* is used for a number of concepts, such as light, brightness, sunlight, torch, fire, and eyesight. Figuratively, it can mean the light of life (a

reference to life itself). This led to thoughts of salvation and to the one who brings it.¹ Later, in Plato's famous illustration of the cave, light is the knowable realm, which can only be experienced through education, as the soul makes its upward journey. The destination of the soul is the form of the good, which produces light for the visible realm. In the intelligible realm, to which the soul is to aspire, the form of the good provides truth and understanding.² Later in the *Republic*, Plato provides more detail of the relationship between education and light. In the discussion of the education of the philosopher-kings, after one has mastered the various prescribed disciplines, the conclusion is that one

must be led to the goal and compelled to lift up the radiant light of their souls to what itself provides light for everything. And once they've seen the good itself, they must each in turn put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order, using it as their model. Each of them will spend most of his time with philosophy, but, when his turn comes, he must labor in politics and rule for the city's sake, not as if he were doing something fine, but rather something that has to be done. Then, having educated others like himself to take his place as guardians of the city, he will depart for the Isles of the Blessed, and dwell there. And, if the Pythia agrees, the city will publicly establish memorials and sacrifices to him as a daimon, but if not, then as a happy and divine human being.³

Not only was light associated with the wisdom that came through knowledge of philosophy, but it was also referred to as "life," as opposed to "death." This is implied in Plato's discussion of the philosopher-kings, but is seen more clearly in a translation of a portion of a comedy now lost that conveys the sense of salvation one felt in embracing philosophy: "Believe me, O men, my whole life until now has been death rather than life. All was shadow: The beautiful, the holy, the good was evil; such was the earlier darkness of my understanding...But now, since I have come here, I have come back to life...I walk, I talk. I understand. The sun, so great and magnificent, O men, I have discovered anew; I now see you, the sky, the acropolis and the

¹H. -C. Hahn, and C. Brown, "Light (*phōs*)," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: The Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 490-495.

²Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, 514a-518d, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992, revised edition), 186-190.

³*Ibid.*, Book VII, 540a-540c, 211-212.

theater in the clear light of today.”⁴

Philo picks up on this connection of light with wisdom and darkness with folly and the role of reason as it relates to God. He argues that to become wise, one must use reason to contemplate “incorporeal things discernible only by the intellect, the light of which is continually shining and never extinguished.”⁵ The way to understand “incorporeal things” is not through Greek philosophy, but through the Law. Thus, the object of that study is not some abstract form of the good, but Yahweh, who Philo describes as “the first light, ‘For the Lord is my light and my Saviour,’ is the language of the Psalms; and not only the light, but he is also the archetypal pattern of every other light, or rather he is more ancient and more sublime than even the archetypal model, though he is spoken of as the model; for the real model was his own most perfect word, the light, and he himself is like to no created thing.”⁶

But “light” is not confined strictly to the Greek usage; in using this idea, Philo did not venture into strange territory. It is found in late Judaism, with its association with the Law. Perhaps borrowing from Psalm 119:105, Odes of Solomon 10:1 reads: “The Lord has directed my mouth by his Word, and has opened my heart by his Light.”⁷ Nor is dualism found only in gnosticism. In the Testament of Levi 19:1 the choice is unambiguous: “And now, my children, you have heard everything. Choose for yourselves light or darkness, the Law of the Lord or the works of Beliar.”⁸

As the present study will make clear, although the above examples show the popularity of the theme of light, and thus stress its universal appeal for the Evangelist, they are not to be taken as providing the background for John’s use. Rather, crucial for the Evangelist’s use of “light” is its

⁴Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 37.

⁵Philo, “The Special Laws, I,” LII, (288), *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 561.

⁶*Ibid.*, “On Dreams,” Book I, (75), 372.

⁷James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, two vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983, 1985), 2: 743-744.

⁸*Ibid.*, 1: 795.

presence in the Old Testament, and the rich variations found there. It can be used to express who God is on the basis of what he is like (Ex. 34:29; Psa. 104:2); what God will be for his people in the age to come (Isa. 60:19-20); or the work of revelation carried on by the Servant of the LORD (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Moreover, the Old Testament as well shows a duality that exists between light and darkness, understood as righteousness and wickedness (Prov. 4:18-19; 13:9). It is for this reason that darkness is frequently used to indicate God's judgment (Job 18:5-6, 18; 38:15; Jer. 13:16; 25:10; Lam. 3:1-3, 6; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-15). Given the obvious contrast of light and darkness as righteousness and wickedness, although these terms are not used, they are nevertheless valid for signifying the choice between life and death in Deuteronomy 30:11-20.

The dualism of John is not the spiritual versus the material of gnosticism. Like the Old Testament, it is concerned with correct thinking, which will necessarily manifest itself in correct conduct. Though one must disagree with Bultmann's conviction that the Gospel is dependent upon gnosticism's cosmological dualism, it is true that one observes in John a "dualism of decision." It demands a response which has bearing not only in this life, but also in the life to come.⁹

The idea of light is found numerous times in the Fourth Gospel, with reference to the salvation that came in Jesus Christ. The aim is to look at three passages—John 1:1-13; 3:17-21; and 8:12—which together show the importance that this word has for John as he seeks to testify to the revelation of this salvation.

⁹Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, two vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955), II: 21. The reasons for disagreement with Bultmann's Gnostic dualism concern the lateness of its date, as well as significant discoveries such as Qumran, which show the Gospels to be much more Jewish in nature than had been claimed by the history-of-religions school. This in part accounts for the comparatively small role this school plays in current discussions on New Testament theology. In addition to Bultmann, R. Reitzenstein and W. Bauer had also seen Gnostic influence. More recently, similar convictions have been expressed by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester (*Trajectories through Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], 232-268), as well as by W. Kümmel (*Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975, revised edition], 217-228).

1.1 THE PROLOGUE

Any discussion of a dominant theme in John must include the introductory section of the Gospel. Carson is correct to describe the prologue as a foyer which introduces the reader to many of the major terms found throughout the book.¹⁰ Moreover, these terms point to the overarching idea of the preexistent Word becoming incarnate in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the greatest of truths, for in this event is seen the glory of God in the resulting salvation of sinners and the establishment and growth of the church.

The word “light” is found six times in the prologue, and it is the first occurrence (v. 4) that is the most difficult because of the textual variant and the subsequent understanding of v. 5. Though at the beginning of the prologue the Evangelist discusses the matter of origins, and the role of the eternal Logos in creation, he does not spend much time on it, strongly suggesting that he is not very concerned about countering any primitive gnosticism’s dualistic cosmology. He moves quickly from creation to redemption precisely because the focus of the incarnation of the Word is the salvation of those who are lost in darkness. It is the same God who stands behind creation and redemption.

Nevertheless, the question arises as to the point at which John has ceased talking about creation, and has moved toward redemption. How one understands “light” in v. 4 (which is connected to the structure of v. 3) depends on the decision made regarding the variant. The fourth edition published by the United Bible Society does the following: (v. 3) *panta di autou egeneto, kai chōris autou egeneto oude en. ho gegonen* (v. 4) *en autō zōē ēn, kai hē zōē ēn to phōs tōn anthrōpōn*. This option from the various possibilities has widespread support, including a papyrus from the early third century, and by virtue of the punctuation puts *ho gegonen* with v. 4, thus producing something like: “What appeared (happened) in him was life, and the life was the light of men.” This seems to be a reference to the incarnation.

¹⁰D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 111.

There is also support, though not as strong, for placing the punctuation after *ho gegonen*, thus putting the verb in v. 3. A possible translation would then be: “All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made.” Continuing with v. 4, one could then have: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” This appears to further describe creation, and consequently sees *ho gegonen* as pointing back to the *panta* at the beginning of v. 3. As is expected, the commentators are divided.¹¹

A common reason for rejecting the putting of *ho gegonen* with v. 4 is the difficult understanding that is supposedly produced. Furthermore, as has been seen in Morris, the idea that all things have life in the Logos is not Johannine. But this is assuming that *ho gegonen* must be translated as “what has been made,” or some other wording that brings to mind the theme of

¹¹Bultmann believes that the poetry of the verse is destroyed if *ho gegonen* is put with v. 3. But he nevertheless takes the verse as continuing the theme of creation: “...the vitality of the whole creation has its origin in the Logos; he is the power which creates life” (*The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971], 39). Brown agrees with this placement of *ho gegonen*, but maintains that v. 4 is not talking about the creation of all things. Instead, it is the special creation of eternal life which came to be by the creative Word of God (*The Gospel According to John*, two vols. [Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966, 1970], I-XII: 26-27). De la Potterie, who likewise sees a salvific focus in v. 4, also thinks it should be pushed back to v. 3. The *panta* is not to be understood as referring to creation, but to “ ‘tout’ ce qu’a réalisé le Verbe, dans l’ordre de la révélation et du salut” (*La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, two vols. [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977], I: 163). This emphasis on revelation is observed rather powerfully in Barth: “Always in this Gospel the term *zōē* (with or without the addition of *aiōnios*) has soteriological-eschatological significance...*Zōē* in John’s Gospel is not the life that is already in us or the world by creation; it is the new and supernatural life which comes in redemption and has first to be imparted to us in some way. Is it really permissible to assume that precisely here we have an exception and that what is meant is the natural life that is lent by God to all creatures as such? Is it not more likely that precisely at this point where it occurs for the first time it has to be used in the pregnant sense that it bears in the rest of the Gospel” (*Witness to the Word*, ed. Walther Furst, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986], 39)?

Bruce (*The Gospel and Epistles of John* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983], 32-33), Morris (*The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, revised edition], 72-73), and Schnackenburg (*The Gospel According to John*, three vols., trans. David Smith and G. A. Kon [New York: The Seabury Press, 1980, 1982], 1: 239-240) argue that *ho gegonen* belongs in v. 3. Bruce points out that John commonly begins his sentences with “in.” Morris grants that the earliest manuscripts with punctuation tend to put *ho gegonen* with v. 4, and notes that the Church fathers generally began to attach it to v. 3 after the former was used to support heretical ideas. But given that the earliest manuscripts did not have punctuation, both translations are possible. He believes that if *ho gegonen* is placed in v. 4, it “gives us an exceedingly complicated expression.” He concludes: “That the Word is the source of life is a typically Johannine idea. That everything that has been made is life is not, even if we add, ‘in him.’”

creation. Ed. L. Miller¹² observes that elsewhere in the Gospel this form of *ginomai* is translated as “has happened” and “has come.” In John 6:25 it is even found in the simple question: “When did you get here?”¹³ Miller maintains that it is this direction in which *ho gegonen* should be taken.¹⁴ He then sees the following progression for the first five verses of the prologue: vv. 1-2 deal with the relationship of the Logos to God (preexistent state); v. 3 addresses the relationship of the Logos to the world (time of creation); v. 4 concerns the relationship of the Logos to humanity (incarnation); and v. 5 pertains to the relationship of the Logos to evil (activity in the present).¹⁵

Brown argues that “if vss. 4-5 refer to the coming of Jesus, then the clearer reference to his coming in 9 and 10 seems tautological.”¹⁶ However, that does not necessarily follow. It is true that vv. 9-10 are a clearer reference, but it is also a fuller reference. It gives more detail than vv. 4-5. Moreover, if Brown is correct in asserting a similarity between the beginning of the prologue and the beginning of Genesis,¹⁷ it gives further support for the incarnational understanding. There is clearly enough evidence to show that Genesis 2, rather than being a second creation account, is actually a fuller version of Genesis 1. In the same way, Miller may be correct in his four-step progression for vv. 1-5, for vv. 6-18 may very well give the fuller detail missing from the outline of the first five verses.

Barth’s point is well-taken: given the fact that *zōē* in John overwhelmingly (if not exclusively) refers to salvation, it is unlikely that its first usage should refer to creation. Very good argument would need to be made to treat *zōē* as something other than eternal life. Perhaps such an argument is that John begins his Gospel with a brief discussion of origins. He does not begin with salvation. And since every living thing does receive physical life from the Logos,

¹²Ed. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3/4* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

¹³*Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹⁴See also Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 52.

¹⁵Miller, *op. cit.*, 90-97.

¹⁶Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 26.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, I-XII: 26.

that may be what John is intending to communicate. Again, the fact that the original manuscript would not have included punctuation, and furthermore that a major papyrus (number 66) does not contain punctuation, suggests that one should not be too insistent one way or the other. That v. 3 should contain *ho gegonen*, causing v. 4 to be seen as referring to creation is firmly established through most of the major English translations (for example, KJV, NKJV, NASV, and NIV). However, evidence for the other translation is solid and deserves serious consideration. But John does move seamlessly from creation to redemption, and it seems reasonable to suggest that perhaps John is being intentionally ambiguous in order to allow for both understandings.

This whole discussion of the location of *ho gegonen* has obvious bearing on how one views v. 4b: “and the life was the light of men.”¹⁸ There are two concluding arguments for the incarnational approach that should be made. The first is the difficulty that seems to attend the interpretation if one sees this as a reference to creation and thus to a general revelation issuing from it. As was indicated, the Evangelist does move very smoothly from creation to redemption, making it theoretically possible for v. 4a to point to creation and v. 4b to describe the revelation present in the incarnation of the Word. But practically this is unlikely given that “life” appears in both halves of the verse, and it is doubtful that two different meanings would be intended within this same verse.

¹⁸Calvin suggests that the “light of men” is understanding: “He speaks here, in my opinion, of that part of life in which men excel other animals; and informs us that the life which was bestowed on men was not of an ordinary description, but was united to the light of understanding. He separates man from the rank of other creatures; because we perceive more readily the power of God by feeling it in us than by beholding it at a distance” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, XXII vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993, reprint], XVII: 32). This, however, does not seem to adequately explain the richness of either the term “light” or “life.”

Bruce agrees that the phrase is true in terms of the reason that is given to us. But here it refers to the “spiritual illumination that dispels the darkness of sin and unbelief” (*op. cit.*, 33). If true, then v. 4a should probably be understood more in terms of the incarnation.

Carson’s approach is helpful. The phrase could point to humanity’s being created in the image of God (which would continue the theme of creation). Also possible is a reference to general revelation, or “even of more specific revelation bound up with the coming of the Son.” Carson concludes that “John is more interested in the source of the light (the life of the Word) and its purpose (for the human race) than in the mode or purpose of its dispersal” (*op. cit.*, 119).

The second argument is the probable origin for this combination of “life” and “light.” Psalm 36 describes by way of contrast the sinfulness characteristic of humanity and the good and righteous ways of God. Apart from the grace of God the expressions of wickedness found in vv. 1-4 are true of every single person. But for those to whom this grace has come there is the thankful acknowledgment that, based upon who God is (vv. 5-7a), his children enjoy his powerful protection (v. 7b), as well as the fact that all good things come from him (v. 8). Those who experience these blessings can confidently confess: “For with Thee is the fountain of life; In Thy light we see light” (v. 9). This confession can only be made by those to whom God has revealed himself. There are blessings that are enjoyed by all, whether or not they acknowledge God as their source. Those blessings are certainly involved here, but it goes much deeper. Those who credit God with what theologians call “common grace” do so because they know God salvifically. So the terms “life” and “light” do not refer merely to the revelation of earthly and therefore temporal blessings. They extend to the eternal life that is theirs because of the LORD. And the fulfillment of this covenant promise of redemption is manifested in the incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ the God-man (John 1:14-17).

If there is any idea of creation present in v. 4, part of the meaning of v. 5 is rooted in Genesis 1. But given John’s characteristic contrasting of light and darkness in the spiritual realm, the focus is more on that aspect than on physical light and darkness. The important observation here is the use of the present tense for *phainō*, and the relationship between it and the past tense *katelaben*. Schnackenburg suggests that the present tense applies to the Evangelist’s own time, while the aorist points back to the time of the incarnation.¹⁹ Haenchen’s answer is unsatisfying: the combination refers to “the fruitless activity of the Logos in the generations prior to the incarnation of the Logos.”²⁰ The difficulty of the present tense in the first half seems to lead

¹⁹Schnackenburg does not see how this verse fits in with the structure, as he understands it. He therefore thinks that v. 5 is a digression of the original hymn, the flow of which can be seen if one moves from v. 4 to v. 9 (since he also rejects vv. 6-8) (*op. cit.*, 1: 245).

²⁰Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, two vols., trans. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1: 115.

Morris to conclude: “Discussions of whether John has in mind the preincarnate Christ or the incarnate Christ seem quite beside the point. He is not dealing here with the incarnation, but with the fact that it is of the very essence of light that it shines.”²¹

More of the discussion has focused on the meaning of the second half due to the translation of *katelaben*. There are two primary translations of *katalambanō*. The first is “to seize,” “to attain,” or “to make one’s own.” Related ideas are “to seize with hostile intent,” “to overtake,” and “to come upon.” Finally, it can mean, “to catch” or “to detect.” The second is a cognitive category: “to grasp,” “to find,” and “to understand.” One can see how either definition could apply. People were unable to understand the message Jesus came to bring; so they rejected him (for a time, even his own brothers). And in some cases this lack of understanding led to very hostile attempts to seize the light. It may very well be the case that the Evangelist intends both ideas to be seen, for as Carson says: “This verse is a masterpiece of planned ambiguity.”²² Boice acknowledges that both translations are correct, but maintains that there is a better way, which takes into account the metaphor of light. He sees *katalambanō* as “to quench,” “to extinguish,” or “to eclipse.”²³ Those opposed to Jesus sought nothing less than to extinguish him and therefore his message. In his crucifixion what they thought had been accomplished was actually bringing to completion the very message they were trying so hard to silence.

Bultmann’s existential approach leads him to focus on the need for all people to understand the message of the light. Thus, he takes *katalambanō* to mean “to understand,” or “to grasp.”²⁴

²¹Morris, *op. cit.*, 75. Barrett is nearly identical: “No particular manifestation of divine light is meant; it is as much an eternal property of the Light to shine in the darkness as it is of the life to be the light of men, and of the Word to have life in himself. The light cannot cease to do this without ceasing to be light” (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978, revised edition], 158).

²²Carson, *op. cit.*, 119. Barrett takes this position as well (*op. cit.*, 158).

²³James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, five vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-1979), 1: 54.

²⁴Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 48, note 1. He does make clear that it is not mere understanding that is needed, but what he calls the “comprehension of faith.” B. F. Westcott, however, argues that it should be rendered “to overcome” because “to understand” does not fit either the image or the context (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980, reprint], 10).

But Bultmann excluded, most commentators see a historical reference in the past tense of *katalambanō*. The leading idea is the fall of Genesis 3.²⁵ Godet's view changed from the first to second editions of his commentary. Initially, he held that v. 4 was describing the period of time subsequent to creation, and v. 5 as pointing to the fall. But for the second edition, Godet thought that v. 4 signifies the entire time from creation to the coming of the Logos, and v. 5 indicates the rejection that Jesus experienced by those to whom he came.²⁶ Morris suggests that Calvary is a strong possibility. "There the light and the darkness came into bitter and decisive conflict and the darkness could not prevail." But Morris does conclude that John probably has in mind more than one meaning.²⁷

Among those commentators who hold to some kind of redactionary influence, the standard approach is to view vv. 6-8 (and sometimes even v. 9) as an insertion into the prologue. Bultmann contends that at this point the Evangelist leaves his source and inserts his own material on John the Baptist. The disconnection between these verses and the rest of the prologue exists because of the need to counter those who consider John the Baptist to be the coming light.²⁸ John 1:8 certainly seems to be doing some work of clarification between John the Baptist and Jesus (*cf.* John 3:25-31). But this in no way proves Bultmann's contention that competition exists between the disciples of Jesus and the Baptist because Jesus broke away from the Baptist

²⁵Westcott says: "An acquaintance with the history of the Fall is evidently presupposed" (*op. cit.*, 9). Brown maintains that v. 5 refers to creation and the attempted overcoming of the light by the darkness points to the fall. The light, however, continues to shine because of the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 (*op. cit.*, I-XII: 27). Borgen also believes the fall is in view in his article, "Logos Was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 127.

²⁶Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1978, reprint), 251-252.

²⁷Morris, *op. cit.*, 76-77. If meant to be taken in different ways, it at least seems valid to point to Calvary as the pivotal occurrence of the long battle between light and darkness. It was not the first clash, nor would it be the last. But it was the fulfillment of God's redemptive promise in Genesis 3:15. All who belong to the light point to that event as the basis for the defeat of darkness. If that is true for v. 5b, v. 5a may, though not exclusively, be a reference to the incarnation. E. Achtemeier's emphasis on v. 5 as showing Jesus' sovereignty over evil is particularly important, especially if Jesus' life and ministry is in view in the incarnation and crucifixion ("Jesus Christ, the Light of the World: The Biblical Understanding of Light and Darkness," *Interpretation* 17 [1963]: 447).

²⁸Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 49.

group.

Brown assumes that the next section should be the coming of that Word to defeat the darkness. Therefore, the section on John the Baptist must be an insertion by an editor, with v. 9 serving as the editor's transition from v. 8 to the resuming of the Evangelist's account in v. 10.²⁹ But there is good evidence to maintain the integrity of the prologue's unity, rather than to resort to the weaving of editorial comment. If it is true that vv. 1-5 serve as a kind of outline to the prologue (admittedly leaning on the validity of the incarnational interpretation of v. 4), then with v. 6 beginning to provide the detail of the outline, it is entirely reasonable to expect John to talk about the Baptist, whose divine responsibility was to introduce the coming of the incarnate Word. But even if this structure is incorrect, it is still logical to mention the special role of the Baptist before the coming of the light. To assume that after v. 5 the Evangelist should begin discussing the arrival of the Word misses the biblical significance attached to John the Baptist and his unique commissioning. Jesus himself explicitly states that John the Baptist is the one Malachi wrote of when he foretold of God's messenger who would prepare the way. John the Baptist is a prophet. But as Jesus says, "he is more than a prophet." And he even declares: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:7-11).

With v. 9 comes the first appearance of one of the words in the *alētheia* word group, the adjective *alēthinon*. It is important to say at the beginning that in describing the incarnate Word as the "true light," John is not implying that John the Baptist (or anyone else who witnesses to Jesus Christ) is a false light, but he is not the revealed fulfillment of God's covenant promise. These other lights are reliable, for they faithfully bear witness to him who is the "true light."³⁰

²⁹Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 27.

³⁰This is the idea that Barth seems to be picking up on when he makes his distinction between "direct" and "indirect" lights. While the direct light of the incarnate Word does not come until v. 14, one should still see some presence of it in vv. 9-13. But Barth believes it is significant that the description of the incarnation comes after this section, rather than at the beginning. This causes Barth to conclude: "John the Baptist undoubtedly is not the only one at issue. He represents all those who can and must be mentioned with reference to the *phōs erchomenon eis ton kosmon* in this derived and secondary sense" (*op. cit.*, 57).

There were others who purported to be things they were not. In Acts 5 Gamaliel refers to two such individuals who attracted people for a time, but whose movements crumbled after their deaths (vv. 36-37). As Barclay rightly says, “Before Jesus came there were other lights which men followed. Some were flickers of the truth; some were faint glimpses of reality; some were will o’ the wisps which men followed and which led them out into the dark and left them there.”³¹

Borgen sees a connection based on the rabbinic understanding of the Law as light, and the ideas of primordial light and darkness³²: “At the lawgiving, Moses brought the primordial light down from heaven, and according to John i 9 primordial light makes its appearance at the coming of Jesus. As the lawgiving of Moses was for all men, so in John i 9 the light shines for every man when it comes.”³³ There is certainly similarity, but one wonders if the ideas presented are close enough so as to be influential for John’s thought.

There is some discussion about the proper understanding of *ho phōtizei panta anthrōpon*. The idea is expressed in the Testament of Levi 14:4: “For what will all the nations do if you become darkened with impiety? You will bring down a curse on our nation, because you want to destroy the light of the Law which was granted to you for the enlightenment of every man, teaching commandments which are opposed to God’s just ordinances.”³⁴ It would certainly be easy

It is true, of course, that the significance of John the Baptist, as well as others who pointed to Jesus as the only way, truth, and life, must not be minimized, especially given John’s concern for the idea of witness. But Barth does not appear to give enough emphasis to the incarnate Word in vv. 9-13 in saying that the reference to him is only “implicit.” It is true that the incarnation itself is not explicit until v. 14. But that does not preclude the Evangelist from having as his central focus in vv. 9-13 the reality and significance of the Word’s coming. One must disagree with Barth when he reasons: “No, the reference is not to the light which appeared in the humanity of Jesus, although not first or only in his humanity, but to the primary light of the revelation of life from which all other light derives (with the Baptist, and the category that he represents, in view)” (*ibid.*, 62).

³¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, revised edition, two vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), I: 54.

³²In Genesis *Rabbah* XII:6, the idea is presented as a sequence: primordial light, followed by primordial darkness; then the presence of light again when Messiah comes (*Midrash Rabbah*, ten vols., ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. H. Freedman [New York: The Soncino Press, 1983], I: 91-93).

³³Borgen, *op. cit.*, 124-125.

³⁴Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, 1: 793.

enough for John to use this idea, substituting Jesus for the Law as the enlightening light. It may be an attempt to show the relevancy of the Christian message for all Jews. But it is also a concept that fits very well with John's conviction that the message of salvation is for all, whether Jew or Greek. Westcott seems to argue that *ho phōtizei panta anthrōpon* is teaching the common New Testament doctrine of general revelation.³⁵ Morris echoes this, reiterating that it is "sufficient at least for them to be blameworthy when they take the wrong way instead of the right way."³⁶ Barrett and Carson persuasively argue that the clause is not dealing with general revelation, but with judgment.³⁷ This view, as Carson points out, fits with what is going to be said in vv. 10-13. One would expect that when the incarnate Word appeared, people would overwhelmingly embrace his message. But far from that, there was widespread rejection, even hatred, of him and the words of life he came to bring. Usually John's reference to the "world" is one of opposition to Jesus. That is the emphasis here as well. He came to the world, and the world did not know him. Not only that, the world actively pursued him in order to take his life. The world should have recognized its Creator and received him. Instead, it chose to remain in darkness.³⁸

³⁵Westcott, *op. cit.*, 13-14.

³⁶Morris, *op. cit.*, 84.

³⁷Barrett, *op. cit.*, 161; Carson, *op. cit.*, 123-124. Carson believes that here *phōtizei* signifies the bringing to light or revealing, rather than of illuminating inwardly. Instead of giving all some level of understanding, it serves, as Carson says, a "discriminating function": "It shines on every man and divides the race: those who hate the light respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and hereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21)."

³⁸Based on the similar wording in v. 17, de la Potterie sees *egeneto* (v. 10), not as the creation of the world by the Word, but as "un événement important dans la réalisation historique du dessein de Dieu" (*op. cit.*, I: 165). The fact that a clause is similar, however, does not mean that therefore the interpretation is to be identical, particularly given the flexibility of *ginomai*. Simon Martin, in discussing John's use of "world," is correct in stressing the significance of the creature rebelling against the Creator ("Exegesis 12: True Light in the World," *Foundations* 27 [1991]: 4).

1.2 LIGHT AND JUDGMENT

Truth in the Gospel of John is never merely intellectual; that is, it is never just a body of facts that though good can be treated indifferently. It demands a response from the hearer that is nothing short of life-changing. For an individual to do anything less with it is to spurn the divine giver and the grace that he offers. This is every bit as true for the Greek who is utterly steeped in pagan religion and philosophy, as well as for the Jew who is trusting in the Law's letter rather than in its fulfillment. Any degree of pluralism present among the Evangelist's readers is erased by the exclusive authority of him who is the true light.

The discriminating aspect of light observed in v. 10 of the prologue (and in the broader context of vv. 9-13) is given its fullest treatment in 3:17-21. God did not send the Son into the world to execute judgment, but to bring salvation (v. 17). Yet a natural consequence of his coming is judgment upon those who do not receive him. The reason for the shining of the light is to reveal to people the reality of their sin, and thus drive them to saving faith and repentance. Those who spurn that salvation are self-condemned in that they have no one to blame but themselves. There is a divine completion in eternal condemnation. But that is a response to the rejection of Jesus. This is why there is no contradiction between v. 17 ("For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world") and 9:39 ("For judgment I came into this world"). The purpose of the Son's coming was redemption. But in the communicating of that redemption it was (and is) inevitable that some will persist in sinful unbelief, and so bring judgment on themselves.³⁹

Regarding the coming of the light in v. 19, Lindars suggests that the Evangelist intends it to

³⁹Dodd's explanation should not be missed: "The purpose and intention of the coming of Christ are in no sense negative or destructive, but wholly positive and creative; but by an inevitable reaction the manifestation of the light brings into view the ultimate distinction between truth and falsehood, between good and evil. Hence, it is *krisis*, discrimination. Men by their response to the manifestation of the light declare themselves, and pronounce their own judgment" (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 210). The idea of a present judgment as determined by one's reaction to the light is crucial to John's explanation of the light. But one must resist Haenchen's assertion that like v. 18, v. 19 "reveals the secret of Johannine eschatology: the final judgment is not one coming at some time in the future, something yet outstanding, but takes place in whether one believes the proclamation or not" (*op. cit.*, 1: 205).

mean that Jesus is the “principle of moral goodness,” which existed from creation. Prior to the incarnation, the light was an “internal light from the strictly moral point of view.”⁴⁰ Surely John means more than this. He is not talking about mere morality, even that which can only come by virtue of the incarnation. Jesus did come, as he tells John the Baptist in Matthew 3:15, to “fulfill all righteousness.” The significance of Jesus’ perfect active obedience must never be minimized. And from this it is true that the coming of the light brings about a change in conduct. There is certainly a moral aspect to the proper reception of this light. But his coming involves a dramatic confrontation with the devil and all those who have been blinded by him, including the religious leaders. Moreover, the victory that he came to bring could only be accomplished by his being handed over to the forces of evil for crucifixion.

The decision that all must make is clear: darkness or light.⁴¹ But while it is true that in the physical realm people generally prefer light over darkness, that is not the case in the spiritual realm. And it continues to be so today: “The verdict of the evangelist in v. 19 is not meant to be purely historical; the judgment takes place wherever men prefer darkness to light and do not believe in the Son of God.”⁴² Though the true light has come to reveal to lost sinners the way back to God, they have chosen to willingly and lovingly remain in darkness.

John says that “men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.” How one translates *gar* determines the relationship between the evil deeds and the loving of darkness over light. Godet asks: “What is, indeed, the ground of this guilty preference? It is that *their works are evil*.”⁴³ This takes *gar* in its usual sense indicating cause or reason. Thus, the reason

⁴⁰Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 160.

⁴¹Hans Conzelmann, “*Phōs, ktl.*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IX, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 353. Conzelmann adopts Bultmann’s language of “decision dualism”: “Revelation brings to light what man really is. This is the crisis.” This is different from gnosticism, which stressed a deterministic outlook based on one’s elect status. Bultmann’s explanation is helpful: “He does indeed reach his decision on the basis of his past, but in such a way that this decision at the same time gives the past its real meaning, that in unbelief man sets the seal on the worldliness and sinfulness of his character, or that in faith he destroys its worldliness and sinfulness” (*The Gospel of John*, 159).

⁴²Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 1: 404.

⁴³Godet, *op. cit.*, 398.

that people love the darkness instead of the light is because their deeds are evil. But theologically, the deeds are not the cause of one's loving either light or darkness, but the result. It is the state of the heart that will produce either good or bad works. As Jesus says, "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). The fruit that comes forth does not determine the particular tree. Rather, what the tree is will determine the fruit. That is why Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again from above. Only then could the righteous deeds follow. Thus, what kind of deeds one does bears witness to the heart. It seems better therefore to take *gar* in the sense of expressing continuation or connection, even the idea of confirmation. The way by which one is able to determine whether another belongs to the light or to the darkness is the deeds that are done. The outward actions betray the inward commitment and affection.

With v. 20 comes the reason why darkness is loved, rather than light. Notice that it is not a mere preference for the darkness, but an intense hatred of the light because of the exposure of evil deeds that is inevitable. When the light shines upon sinners, it causes them to flee to the darkness because they refuse to see sin for what it really is. That would demand the radical changes of self-denial and discipleship. "It is only the evil-doer who does not wish to see himself and who does not wish anyone else to see him. Such a man will inevitably hate Jesus Christ, for Christ will show him what he is and that is the last thing that he wants to see. It is the concealing darkness that he loves and not the revealing light."⁴⁴ In very moving and memorable language, the first rite of the Holy Eucharist in the Book of Common Prayer contains a prayer in which God is identified as the one "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." Those who belong to the light do not fear such an unveiling, for the work of Christ has brought to them redemption, not judgment. Those who do not belong to the light, even though they run from it, will nevertheless not be able to hide from it, nor outdistance it. It will come upon them and reveal all the shameless deeds of darkness.

⁴⁴Barclay, *op. cit.*, I: 140.

Interestingly, the two words used for “evil” in vv. 19 and 20 are different. Verse 19 contains the usual adjective, *ponēros*, but in v. 20 the less common *phaulos* is employed. Although there is overlap, a difference in emphasis is detected. While *ponēros* refers to what is wicked or evil, *phaulos* denotes what is worthless. The change could be a deliberate one, by which the Evangelist is seeking to show that Jesus’ teaching has universal application. It would be readily acknowledged by Jewish readers that Gentile “sinners” remain under the judgment of God; they are outside the covenant and do not keep the Law. But it is also those whose deeds are “worthless” who face judgment. This verse follows Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader. This sad state of humanity in vv. 19-20 is true even of Israel’s teachers if the works they do are used in the attempt to keep oneself in right standing before God. Those who trusted in good deeds and hated the salvation Jesus brought were not wicked in an ethical or moral sense. But in rejecting the light, all their efforts to please God were worthless, like a “filthy garment” (Isa. 64:6). And eventually, this rejection of truth did lead to outward wickedness (such as conspiring to murder an innocent man and perverting justice). The only other occurrence of *phaulos* in the Fourth Gospel is 5:29. Whereas in 3:20 Jesus’ prior discussion with Nicodemus is in view, here, however, Jesus is speaking directly to his Jewish antagonists. Confrontation between Jesus and the Jews is beginning, and Jesus makes the statement about the resurrections of life and judgment in response to those who objected to Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath. The Jews would assume that in “defending” the Sabbath, which was obviously a good deed, they would share in the blessed life to come. Honoring the Sabbath is good, but if it is a legalistic tool to keep God’s favor, the letter might be maintained, but the spirit is missed. If one wants to participate in the life to come, one must honor the Son by believing his word, and in so doing honor the Father who sent him (v. 23).

In 3:20, John shows why it is that people do not respond properly to the light. It elaborates on the connection between light and judgment in v. 19. But v. 21 serves as a contrast by describing the state of those who receive the light and in so doing live in a manner that demonstrates the delight in having one’s works come into view.

The first half of the verse is difficult because the order appears to be reversed. Theologically, it is understood that one must first come to the light before being able to act according to the truth (“practicing the truth”). But that is not the order the Evangelist uses.⁴⁵ De la Potterie maintains that “to come to the light” signifies “to believe,” which means that “to practice the truth” cannot be talking about Christian conduct.⁴⁶ Instead, “to practice the truth” conveys the need to receive the truth, which de la Potterie links with John 6:45 in defining it as “se mettre à l’école du Père et apprendre (de lui) la vérité.”⁴⁷

A better way may be to see more of a correlation with v. 20, which will maintain the understanding of Christian conduct. Those who do evil do so because they hate the light. Consequently, they do not come to it. In v. 21, those who practice the truth implicitly love the light and, consequently, come to it. For one to practice the truth is to order one’s thoughts and actions in a manner that is consistent with the revelation that has been received and believed (John’s “coming to the light”). These deeds are the necessary result of saving faith, and can therefore only come about because of God. The verse is not an affirmation of salvation by works; but the works will show whether or not one really has come to the light.

1.3 THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus’ well-known declaration in John 8:12 is important for two reasons. The first is for the whole issue of backgrounds, which will be treated shortly. The second is that it is of universal application. Jesus is not the light only for those of Jewish descent who thus already have some knowledge of the ways of God, or of those who, although they were outside the covenant, have now embraced Judaism. He is the light for the whole world, and therefore the invitation to come

⁴⁵Tasker takes the phrase as “the man of integrity,” who is “inevitably drawn to him, for he has nothing to fear in the exposure of his actions and motives to the divine light” (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960], 69). Calvin has a similar understanding in talking about sincerity (*op. cit.*, XVII: 129). It appears, however, that the Evangelist means more than integrity or sincerity.

⁴⁶de la Potterie, *op. cit.*, I: 488.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, I: 503. “...to be put in the school of the Father and to learn (from him) the truth.”

to him is extended to all regardless of race, nationality, or anything else.

It is necessary to briefly consider the story sequence in John 7 and 8. This is significant for two reasons. The first is the location of the story of the woman taken in adultery, and the fact that many, if not most, of the commentators believe that it was not found at this particular place in the Gospel.⁴⁸ The second is the connection that John is intending to make with Jesus' reference to himself as light and the source of water, and the Feast of Tabernacles, with its Old Testament significance.

Even with omitting John 7:53-8:11 (which is most likely correct in view of the textual argument), it is still a difficult task to determine the setting (whether during or after the feast) and audience (whether the crowd and the Jewish leaders, or only the Jewish leaders) of 8:12. Morris suggests that the crowd, though mentioned eight times in chapter 7, is not mentioned at all in chapter 8: "Throughout this section of the Gospel Jesus is confronted by his adversaries, not by the people at large. All this appears to mean that the feast was over and the crowd had gone home. Perhaps it was not long over, and the significance of the ceremonies had not yet faded from people's minds."⁴⁹

But it seems that if Jesus proclaimed himself to be the light of the world after the feast had ended, some of the force of the statement is diminished, even if it is shortly after. In addition, this would mean that of the two great images portrayed—water and light—one was conveyed to the crowd, and the other to his opponents. It is better to see Jesus as presenting both ideas of himself before the crowd, on the last day of the feast. Finally, John 8:12-59 does not seem to only involve Jesus' adversaries because v. 30 says that during this exchange with his opponents, "many came to believe in him" (even though their belief is shown to be false in the dialogue that

⁴⁸J. Ramsey Michaels, for example, argues that John 7:53-8:11 does not belong before 8:12 on the grounds that it breaks the flow from John 7 (the reference to the source of water) to John 8 (the reference to the light), in relationship to the feast (*John* [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984], 146). Boice acknowledges the strong evidence against inclusion, as John wrote it. And while he does not argue that it was in the original, he does point out that the placement is consistent with earlier chapters, in which a story is used to introduce the teaching that follows (*op. cit.*, 2: 308).

⁴⁹Morris, *op. cit.*, 386.

follows). This certainly does not preclude his rivals from coming, but the fact is that “many” of those against him did not repent and believe. Many of the crowd did, whom the Pharisees called “accursed” in 7:49. This leads to the suggestion that the reason why the crowd is nearly invisible in this section—as compared to chapter 7—is that here the focus is on those opposed to Jesus (the “Pharisees” and the “Jews”—the broader term to include those who are not religious leaders). There is antagonism as Jesus speaks in chapter 7 (vv. 20 and 30). But by far, the attention is on those who are receptive, or at least inquisitive and willing to listen.

Besides maintaining John’s pattern of a story followed by related teaching, another reason why Boice considers it acceptable to put 7:53-8:11 before 8:12 is that “without it the change of thought between the fifty-second verse of chapter seven and the twelfth verse of chapter eight is abrupt and unnatural. We do not know where Jesus is in John 8:12, nor to whom he is speaking.”⁵⁰ It is true that if one assumes an immediate progression from 7:52 to 8:12, it does seem abrupt and unnatural. The Pharisees, chief priests, and officers seem to be talking away from the immediate vicinity of Jesus and the multitude.⁵¹ Then, in 8:12, the Pharisees are talking with Jesus. A short amount of time must be allowed for the Pharisees to get from where they are in 7:52 to where Jesus is in 8:12. But the “again” indicates that Jesus is talking to the crowd,⁵² and seems to be used to indicate the needed elapse of time. If this is correct, it does not appear abrupt. It also does not necessarily follow that without the change between 7:52 and 8:12 one does not know Jesus’ location and audience. From 7:14-52, Jesus is teaching the multitude in the temple. At first the Pharisees are there, but then go off to order the officers to arrest Jesus (v. 32). The Pharisees are waiting for the officers to return, and are displeased when Jesus is not with them (vv. 45-47). As Jesus continues to teach in the temple, the Pharisees have their discussion (vv. 45-52). While Jesus is still teaching the crowd, the Pharisees end their discussion

⁵⁰Boice, *op. cit.*, 2: 308.

⁵¹Apparently, at first the Pharisees are among the people, or at least close enough to hear them (7:32). Upon hearing them entertain thoughts that Jesus is the Christ, the Pharisees depart and send the officers to arrest Jesus. While the officers are supposed to be arresting Jesus, the Pharisees are waiting in private to receive him. (They certainly were not going to do it in or near the crowd.)

⁵²George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, revised edition), 127.

and go back to Jesus (8:12).⁵³

In spite of this setting, not all commentators have seen Old Testament connections. Bultmann sees Jesus' great statement as being "based on Gnostic usage which presupposes a metaphysical dualism of light and darkness, wherein light is both the life-force of the divine world and the revelation whose coming into the world brings about the division of light and darkness."⁵⁴ It has already been shown, however, that Bultmann departs from a strict Gnostic dualism in discussing the decision that must be made concerning the light. The determinism is absent. The importance of revelation is just as strongly seen (in fact, more so) in the Feast of Tabernacles and the provision of God in the wilderness. In addition is the well-known observation that the later date of gnosticism's influence makes it impossible to confidently claim Johannine dependence. Much more plausible is that any Gnostic similarity is due to its borrowing of biblical material or ideas.

Regarding those who see a Semitic setting, Brown draws attention to the feast and two redemptive events in the story of the Exodus: water from the rock and the pillar of fire.⁵⁵ As for the observed dualism, Brown believes that in the Old Testament, light and darkness are not opposed as concepts of good and evil as they are in the Gospel. He suggests that the Dead Sea Scrolls are influential for this dualism.⁵⁶ Glasson, likewise, sees the feast and the Exodus provisions, as well as the fact that Old Testament images that came to be applied to the Law are applied to Jesus in the Gospel. Particularly is this true of water, bread, and light, which Glasson

⁵³Dodd presents a similar scheme. It is helpful to notice in his treatment that there is no difficulty in suggesting this sequence with the fact that the feast moves into its last day in John 7:37 (*op. cit.*, 345-348).

⁵⁴Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 342. Conzelmann's position is similar: "The description of the deity or the Revealer as the light of the world cannot be derived from the Old Testament or the Greek tradition" (*op. cit.*, 351). With the same confidence, Hans H. Malmede asserts: "Nun ist offenkundig, dass der Gebrauch des Worts phos bei Joh der gleiche ist wie im CH [*Corpus Hermeticum*] und in der Gnosis überhaupt" (*Die Lichtsymbolik im Neuen Testament* [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986], 104).

⁵⁵Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 343-344.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, I-XII: 340. D. Moody Smith also notes the Qumranian phrase, "the light of life" (*John* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999], 181). Even if it is granted that this idea regarding the difference between the Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel is correct, it must be allowed that John is capable of taking the Old Testament dualism of light and darkness and modifying it for his purpose.

calls the “three gifts” of Jewish tradition.⁵⁷

If Glasson is correct about the “three gifts,” two of which are mentioned within a short period of time in connection with the feast, it serves as a powerful argument for Jews, particularly in view of John 1:17. But even if Glasson is incorrect, the force is not diminished in that Jesus’ declarations as the source of water and the light of the world are firmly rooted in the Old Testament. Morris adds an important aspect of the feast that makes Jesus’ comments all the more significant. For the first seven days water was brought to the temple from the pool of Siloam. But this did not occur on the last day, the eighth, on which Jesus cried out for all to come to him and drink. Likewise, while the large candelabra were also lit during the feast (scholars differ on the number of nights), on the eighth day they were not. Jesus’ statement that

⁵⁷T. Francis Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 62-63. He notes that Nehemiah 9:12, 15 speaks of this combination, as well as Psalm 105:39-41. Jewish tradition connects Moses with the bread, Aaron with the cloud of glory, and Miriam with the well (Tractate *Vayassa*, ch. VI [Ex. 16:28-36], *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, three vols., trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976], 2: 128). According to Jewish tradition, the well is identified as a rock that moved with the Israelites (*Sukkah* 3:11-13, *The Tosefta*, six vols., trans. Jacob Neusner [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977-1986], II: 220-221).

Severino Pancaro distinguishes between contrasts and comparisons that are explicitly made by John and those that may be made. He believes that an explicit comparison is made between Jesus and the Torah as “life.” But it is not certain for the themes of bread, water, and light. However, of these three, there is a good case that such a connection is made for “bread” and “water.” Regarding the “very slight” probability for “light,” Pancaro holds: “The uncertainty stems from the fact that, whereas the ‘living water’ and the ‘bread of life’ in the Fourth Gospel have counterparts (v.g., the (water of the) well of Jacob and the manna) in which one may find a symbolic reference to the Law, ‘light’ has no such counterpart. It is therefore hazardous to infer that Jn is contrasting Jesus and the Torah when he speaks of him as the ‘light.’” Consequently, he rejects the notions that “water” and “light” should be seen in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, or that these two themes join with “bread” to indicate Glasson’s “three gifts.” “There is no evidence that the pillar (cloud) of fire was ever taken as a symbol for the Law.” The only possible connection between Jesus, the Torah, and light is indirect, as “life” is attached to “light” in John 8:12 (*The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975], 452, 485-486). As for Pancaro’s rejection based on the lack of evidence for a connection between the Law and the pillar of fire, it is nevertheless true that a strong relationship exists between the Law and light. Even if the relationship between the Law and the pillar of fire is only an implied or indirect one, that is certainly enough to link “light” (and “water”) with the Feast of Tabernacles. Pancaro’s argument is not strong enough to counter the connection that John (and therefore Jesus) makes between these two themes and the feast. M. E. Boismard, though not addressing John 8, stresses the importance of light as found in the messianic age, in which light is not merely the means by which the path to life is travelled; it is life itself (*St. John’s Prologue*, trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans [Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957], 119-122). This is important, especially given the fact that light is one of the predicates of the “I am” statements.

he is the light of the world would contrast that lack of brilliant light.⁵⁸ Thus, the Feast of Tabernacles provided two powerful illustrations to help teach the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the fullest revelation of God to his people (*cf.* Zech. 14:6-8).

2. INCARNATION OF THE WORD

Of the various elements in the Fourth Gospel that point to a Greek concern, perhaps the most obvious one is John's use of the term *logos*. It is therefore not surprising that extensive debates over its meaning have gone on for quite some time. As the following discussion will demonstrate, the concept of "word," whether the Greek *logos* or the Hebrew *dabar*, was a common but powerful idea. That this is true for the Greek mind is particularly significant for this study, for it shows the deliberate purpose of the Evangelist to speak to as many people as possible using a term that is rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. But having made this connection, John takes it where it has not been before in the fulfilled Christological sense of the New Testament revelation. This focus on Jesus Christ is to be embraced by both Jews and Greeks.

Nowhere is the Evangelist's concern for Greek evangelism seen more clearly than in his use of *logos* as a name for Jesus Christ. Used in this way, it occurs only four times in the Gospel, and all of them in the prologue. This certainly does not indicate that in John's mind Jesus ceased to be the Word when he began his public ministry. Rather, the exclusive usage must be seen in the vital theological point that John is intending to convey: Jesus of Nazareth is none other than the preexistent One who has become incarnate in order to fully make known and perfectly accomplish the salvation of God. "So in saying that John's theology is incarnational we are saying that it is revelational, which is another way of saying that the glory of God is central to Johannine thought."⁵⁹ Indeed, for this salvation to be realized—the requirements for which only

⁵⁸Morris, *op. cit.*, 374, 388.

⁵⁹W. Robert Cook, "The 'Glory' Motif in the Johannine Corpus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984): 297.

God himself was capable of fulfilling—Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God and second person of the Trinity, had to be made like those for whom he came to save (Heb. 2:17-18). Thus, the significance of the necessity of the incarnation cannot be stressed enough. It is at the heart of biblical Christianity. “It is the Son or Word of God that was made flesh. But he was made flesh in the entire fullness of deity, which is also that of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Here we make contact at once with the mystery of revelation, which is the real object of Christology, namely, the source and root of all the various problems and solutions which are to engage us from now on.”⁶⁰

2.1 BACKGROUNDS

As is well-known, the term “word” was found in numerous religions and philosophies in the ancient world, even apart from the reference to literal speech. This has prompted commentators to evaluate these various usages so as to attempt to determine the likely background of John’s own use. It has been assumed that if the correct background can be established, what John may or may not have meant in the prologue can be determined.

2.1.1 GREEK TRADITIONS

The beginning of a fuller understanding of *logos* is seen in Heraclitus (sixth century B. C.). He viewed life as being in a constant state of change. This would result in utter chaos were it not for the orderly principle that was found in everything, which was called the *logos*. Moreover, because of this ubiquitous presence, it meant there was a unifying relationship between people and the world, each other, God, and later, between this world and the world above. This connecting principle was taken by Stoicism to be the cosmic law of reason, so that in popular religion the *logos* was equated with Zeus. It is the reason for everything’s existence, which later

⁶⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 133.

led to the stressing of the creative power of the *logos*.⁶¹

Bultmann argues that John owes much to the Gnostic redeemer myth. Here, the *logos* descends to the lower world in human form, where he assumed a human body in order to disguise himself from the demonic forces, as well as to not alarm the very people he came to redeem. He further points out that in Christian gnosticism, this disguised redeemer is Jesus. But rather than claim, as Dodd does, that gnosticism borrowed the concept from Christianity, Bultmann concludes that “it [the idea of the incarnation] is itself originally Gnostic, and was taken over at a very early stage by Christianity, and made fruitful for Christology.”⁶² As was mentioned earlier, gnosticism’s dating is late (especially so for Bultmann’s Mandaean gnosticism) and evidence for Gnostic thought going back beyond the New Testament era or even to it is weak at best. In spite of the current general consensus against not only Gnostic influence particularly, but the history-of-religions approach in general, Görg recently advanced the notion that, in addition to the Old Testament and Jewish theology, one needs to also look at the incarnational theology of the ancient Egyptian Ptah religion. Assuming gnosticism’s validity, since later Egyptian theology, with its Hellenistic elements, influenced the Johannine perspective, one must look to earlier Egyptian understanding of incarnation.⁶³

Although the background to John’s Logos theology lies elsewhere, the use of the term is obviously evidence of a concern on John’s part to proclaim that the message of Jesus Christ is for all. Undoubtedly, the early use in Heraclitus, as it passed through the sophists, and then made its way through Stoicism, found some degree of reception, in whatever form it took, in a sophisticated city like Ephesus. The ways in which the Evangelist uses the term, particularly in the prologue as a proper name for the preexistent Christ, would naturally serve as an immediate

⁶¹H. Kleinknecht, A. Debrunner, O. Procksch, *et al*, “*Legō, logos, rhēma, ktl*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967): 81-85.

⁶²Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 25-26.

⁶³Manfred Görg, “Fleischwerdung des Logos: Auslegungs- und religionsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu Joh 1, 14a,” in *Von Jesus zum Christus: Christologische Studien. Festgabe für Paul Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Hoppe and Ulrich Busse (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 480-482.

bridge between the message he was bringing and the people whom he was seeking to reach.

2.1.2 HEBREW TRADITIONS

A number of possible backgrounds for the Johannine Logos have been defended: the Old Testament (usually focusing on the prophetic “word of the LORD” or a similar construction); the Wisdom tradition (literature comprising both the Old Testament and the Apocrypha); the rabbinic identification of Torah with the “Word”; and the application of the Hebrew *memra* in the Targums. As for the speculative Judaism of Philo, since he combines Jewish and Hellenistic ideas in his use of *logos*, he will be treated in the next section.

Frequent attention has been given to the wisdom literature and the similarities with the Logos of the prologue. Not only is the idea of wisdom personified, but it is also spoken of as being established from everlasting (Prov. 8:23). As existing before creation, Wisdom is said to have been active in creation (Prov. 8:30; Wisd. 9:1-2). There is a sense in which Wisdom dwells with people (Sir. 1:10; 24:8). These and other similarities cause Culpepper to conclude: “Jewish speculations regarding the nature of Wisdom seem, therefore, to have had a formative influence on John’s Christology.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Dunn points to several New Testament passages displaying a high Christology and maintains: “But *all these passages have been influenced to a significant degree by Wisdom terminology*; all express what can properly be called *Wisdom christology* in one form or another. That is to say, the language of these passages is the language used of the figure of Wisdom in the Wisdom literature of the OT and particularly inter-testamental literature.”⁶⁵ Even Dodd, who in the weight that he gives to the Hermetic literature sees a much stronger Greek presence, agrees that Wisdom plays an important role in the prologue. While there are common features with the word of God of the Old Testament, “it is on the other side a concept clearly similar to that of Wisdom, that is to say, the hypostatized thought of God

⁶⁴R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 93.

⁶⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 164.

projected in creation, and remaining as an immanent power within the world and in man.”⁶⁶

Evans sees a number of backgrounds as contributing to the prologue. He refers to the wisdom literature (including Sirach and Wisdom, which he considers to be part of the Old Testament), as well as to Philo. But he also mentions the targumic *memra* as having some characteristics that bear some resemblance to the prologue. He is not at all arguing that rabbinic thought regarded *memra* as a hypostasis. But he does observe that in the writings *memra* sometimes takes on an independent aspect in which it is like God, has feeling, and acts as an intermediary.⁶⁷

In regard to the Old Testament, it is a common observation that in Genesis 1:3, Psalm 33:6, and throughout the Prophets, the use of “word” as it is related to God is not merely uttered speech. Rather, it carries with it the ability to actually perform the will of God. When God issues a command the deed is done. It is not only the expression of desired intent. It is equated with the accomplishing of that intent. In the case of the Prophets, it is a common feature that the word of the LORD “came” to a particular prophet. Harris does not believe there to be a strong connection between John’s use of *logos* in the prologue and these Old Testament citations because, as she says, “It [the use of “word” in the Prophets] does not appear without a genitive—‘the word of the Lord’ (or ‘his,’ ‘thy,’ or ‘my’ word)—and it falls a good deal short of the personification of a pre-existent being with God, who can become incarnate.”⁶⁸ Her observations of these Old Testament occurrences are correct. But the fact that this is true does not necessarily mean she is correct to conclude that it is “doubtful whether this usage stands immediately behind John’s use of the Logos.”⁶⁹ As has been seen before, the Evangelist is

⁶⁶Dodd, *op. cit.*, 275.

⁶⁷Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 144-145; 127-128. But Elizabeth Harris has observed, as have others, that *memra* is used as a substitute for God, in order to avoid using the divine name. She does not deny that *memra* at times takes on an independent quality, but it is a less personified form than that which appears in both early Judaism and the prologue. Its use as a periphrasis seems to carry more weight for Harris than any degree of personification (*Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 197).

⁶⁸Harris, *op. cit.*, 197.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 197.

perfectly capable of taking an Old Testament idea and in showing how it is fulfilled in Jesus expands it well beyond the Old Testament usage and common Jewish understanding. Referring to Isaiah 55:10-11, Dodd's comment is significant: "If it be said that these are mere poetical embroidery of language, it must nevertheless be admitted that the readiness to use such language points to an habitual tendency of thought to attribute to the spoken word an existence and activity of its own; and in fact such a tendency is deeply impressed upon the Hebrew language."⁷⁰

2.1.3 PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Interestingly, one might expect that John's use of *logos* would be rooted firmly in the Greek world, given the importance that this word had in Greek religions and philosophical expressions. That this is not the case is certainly strengthened by the value that Dodd assigns to the Wisdom tradition. Although John is using the term masterfully to speak to his readers, one must look elsewhere for the contributor or contributors to his thought. As has been shown, the Wisdom tradition, relying heavily on the Apocryphal books of Wisdom and Sirach, is considered a prime source for John's Logos Christology. But lest one conclude that Greek thinking completely surrenders to a Hebrew tradition for the use of *logos* in the prologue, a blend of both Hebrew and Greek ideas is observed in Philo, thus making Hellenistic Judaism a major factor in the minds of significant commentators. Bertold Klappert, in the influential *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, summarizes the opinions of many when he writes that Philo's combined ideas of wisdom, the *logos* as a mediator, the use of Old Testament teaching on creation, as well as Stoic and Platonic language "provide the strongest contacts with the Johannine Logos-concept."⁷¹

Two points must be discussed here: Philo's reference to the "second deity" and his exegesis on the "man" of Genesis 1:27. In the second section of his "Questions and Answers on

⁷⁰Dodd, *op. cit.*, 264.

⁷¹Bertold Klappert, G. Fries, and C. Brown, "Word (*logos*)," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: The Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 1116.

Genesis,” Philo goes on to say, “...for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe, but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear it the type of the divine Word; since in his first Word God is superior to the most rational possible nature.”⁷² If this were all that existed on this idea, one might be tempted to surmise that Philo was influenced too much by Hellenism and abandoned his Jewish monotheism. But elsewhere he clearly affirms that there is only one true God.⁷³

Given the difficulty that characterizes some of Philo’s writings because of his reliance upon philosophy, he must be intending that his reference to the “second deity” be taken in some way other than the literal one. Philo’s equating the “first Word” with God indicates that what he calls the “second deity” corresponds to a “second Word,” who is also God. Thus, Dunn appears to explain the initial difficulty: “But in the end of the day *the Logos seems to be nothing more for Philo than God himself in his approach to man, God himself insofar as he may be known by man.*”⁷⁴

As for Philo’s exegesis of Genesis 1:27, in “On the Confusion of Tongues,” (XXVIII [146]), he equates the *logos* with the man who is made in God’s image. The *logos* reflects God’s image on two levels. First, the *logos* was an accurate image of the true God. Second, the *logos* was also the model or archetypal idea upon which the universe is ordered.⁷⁵ Evans goes as far as suggesting that this formula “may very well be the most important link between Genesis and the wisdom literature and incarnational theologies found in John and Paul.”⁷⁶

⁷²Philo, “Questions and Answers on Genesis,” II, (62), *op. cit.*, 834.

⁷³*Ibid.*, “On Dreams,” Book 1, XXXIX, (229), 385.

⁷⁴Dunn, *op. cit.*, 228.

⁷⁵Thomas Tobin, “The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 257.

⁷⁶Evans, *op. cit.*, 112. Tobin argues: “The identification of the *logos* with the heavenly man of Gen 1:27 provides the middle term, if you will, between the *logos* and Jesus of Nazareth: *logos*—heavenly man—particular man (Jesus of Nazareth)” (*op. cit.*, 267). Dodd also argues for a similar importance, believing that when one takes the Philonic *logos* into account with the Old Testament “word of the LORD,” the incarnation becomes “more intelligible” (*op. cit.*, 279). Tobin believes that the similarity between John and Philo indicates that both “were part of the larger tradition of Hellenistic Jewish biblical interpretation

Before moving on to a consideration that has received far too little attention, it is necessary to conclude the discussion on the Hebrew and Philonic traditions. It is true that greater or lesser degrees of affinity can be detected between John's prologue and the various suggestions presented. But it must not be forgotten or minimized that in all these the foundational Christian ideas—that there is one God who exists in three persons, and that the second person took on human flesh—are utterly foreign to the Hebrew mind. There is a certain personification—whether in Philo, the Wisdom tradition, or the targumic *memra*. But, as Boice notes, this is far different from the personalization that takes place in John's prologue.⁷⁷ Unlike anywhere else, the Evangelist is concerned to show that the word *logos* actually becomes capitalized. It is not merely another name for God. It is more than the prophetic “word of the LORD,” although the importance of the Old Testament is seen when one notices the similar significance that is placed on the relationship between the message and the source of it, and the corresponding need for witness to be born to it.⁷⁸ In addition, as the exegesis of John 1:14 will demonstrate, Old Testament symbolism and its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth is never far from the Evangelist's mind. With such strong reliance, which in the prologue culminates with v. 17, the burden of proof that John is indebted to the Apocrypha, Philo, or the *memra* of the Targums is surely on the advocates of those backgrounds. It is entirely reasonable, however, to suppose that John was familiar with each of these, and as he wrote of the Word's incarnation he knew that his approach would speak to a wide group of people, possessing a considerable diversity of beliefs and

and speculation. Both were making use of similar structures of thought and were expressing those structures through the use of similar vocabulary, even though the results were very different” (*op. cit.*, 268). This, however, is problematic, for the similarity of thought structure and vocabulary is not as great as Tobin maintains when one notes basic differences. For one thing, Philo is much more philosophical than John. John is clearly not interested in combining Hellenistic philosophy with the Christian Gospel, as Philo is with the Old Testament. Secondly, Philo is quite allegorical, while John, even if one wishes to argue that he engages in some allegorizing in Old Testament interpretation (so, Dodd), is not.

⁷⁷James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), 160.

⁷⁸This is not to suggest that the prophets and Jesus, as the bringers of the message, are equal. While both messages come from God, obviously in the Christian Gospel the difference is that the messenger is one with God. But in both the Prophets and the Fourth Gospel, great significance is attached to the necessity of one proclaiming, by bearing witness, the message (or word) that God desires to give.

commitments.

2.1.4 THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

Dunn expressed the trend well when he wrote: “Inquiry into the identification of Jesus as the Logos in John 1 has tended to concentrate too much on the Jewish and Hellenistic background and to give too little prominence to the earlier Christian talk of the word of God.”⁷⁹ There is a richness in the union between Jesus and the message he is revealing. John deals with this idea in a way that the Synoptic Gospels do not. And yet, it is not a concept that John created. In Matthew 4 Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. To the first temptation, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus responded, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (v. 4). Then, near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock” (Matt. 7:24). Jesus is not contradicting what he said earlier while in the wilderness. To hear and obey Jesus’ words is the same as hearing and obeying the words of God. And because this is true, the people who listened recognized that Jesus’ teaching was characterized by authority, something that the biblical scholars of their day did not have (vv. 28-29).

In John 8:31-32 the focus is on Jesus’ words: “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” In John 14:6 the emphasis is on Jesus’ person: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” One cannot separate the Word from the words which he speaks. This explains the profound and various ways the Evangelist uses *logos*. It can, of course, refer to Jesus himself (1:1, 14), as well as to audible speech (4:39). It is also used in a theological sense

⁷⁹Dunn, *op. cit.*, 230. Ed. L. Miller appears to be willing to go even further when he says of those commentators who have called attention to the Fourth Gospel itself: “But they stop short of the possibility it is here *primarily, essentially, and exclusively* that we encounter the origin of the Logos concept, any other associations attaching themselves only along the way and in a more or less accidental manner” (“The Johannine Origins of the Johannine Logos,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 [1993]: 450).

that is more forceful than a statement that is merely true or even compelling. This theological sense is comprehensive. It is related to salvation (2:22), active in healing (4:50), and decisive in judgment (12:48). It is also the message of salvation carried by the apostolic witness (17:20). Finally, it is the total content of Jesus' message (5:24; 6:68; 8:31, 37, 43).⁸⁰ The overall significance of the rich use of *logos* could not be stated any better when Boice writes:

...the Johannine use of the *logos* terminology is in perfect harmony with and even amplifies what has earlier been described as an organic revelation involving, at the same time and in the closest possible unity and inter-dependence, a personal, a verbal, an active, and a scriptural communication. All of these terms are concerned with revelation. And their organic unity is found where alone it could be found—in Jesus Christ who has been active as the Logos in all revelation in the past and who in His incarnate form unites a verbal and an active witness in Himself. Jesus is the self-communication of God. Where Jesus speaks God speaks. Where Jesus acts God acts.⁸¹

2.2 THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD

If there is any confusion or misunderstanding among the Evangelist's readers concerning the identity of the one who has come, he states it as clearly as possible in v. 14. The Word is not some abstract principle responsible for the existence and ordering of the universe. Nor is the Word mere content, even redemptive content originating from God himself. Rather, the Word was with God in the beginning (which is another way of saying that the Word always was), and therefore is God. It is this very same Word who became incarnate in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. As Charles Wesley expressed it:

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

This statement is at the heart of Christian theology, for it is the activity that separates Christianity from all other religions or religious movements. Every other religion teaches that

⁸⁰For a similar treatment, see Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 66-67.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 72.

the way by which an individual attains to the divine, regardless of the terminology used, is to somehow work one's way there. It may be through ascetic meditation, mystical self-awareness, refraining from a list of prohibitions, practicing a list of virtues, or hoping that one's good works will outweigh—either by quantity or quality—the bad ones. But only Christianity maintains that it is not about what an individual can either practice or avoid. It is impossible to commend oneself to God and so ascend to him. In fact, as Paul says in Romans 3, no one, of one's own desire, is even remotely interested in trying to seek the true God (vv. 10-11). But what it is about is that God has come down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, that all who trust in his redemptive accomplishments might be made increasingly like him. And that divine descent occurred in the incarnation.

2.3 THE ENFLESHING OF THE WORD

Not a little attention has been given to the translating of *egeneto* as “became.” It has been expressed that this is not a correct rendering because it at least implies that in the incarnation the nature of the eternal Word was changed.⁸² Schnackenburg sees a change as occurring, but a change that affects the Word's position rather than his nature. He describes this change as one in the “mode of being.” This would make one nervous except that in elaborating on the application he seems to understand “mode of being” as not pointing to ontology.⁸³

The author agrees with Cranfield that “became” is not inappropriate, that it does not assume

⁸²J. C. O'Neill therefore argues that *egeneto* should be translated as “was born” or even “was made” (“The Word Did Not ‘Become’ Flesh,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 [1991]: 127). Barrett agrees concerning the rendering, “became.” He says that “was born” would be appropriate, except that this idea is expressed in the preceding verse by *gennēthēnai*, and a “change of verb would be harsh” (*op. cit.*, 165). C. E. B. Cranfield, however, accepts “became” because in his judgment it does not diminish the nature of the Word (“John 1¹⁴: ‘became,’” *Expository Times* 93 [1981]: 215). Notice that O'Neill, who rejects “became,” accepts “was made,” and Cranfield, who accepts “became,” also accepts “was made.”

⁸³“...hitherto he was in glory with his Father (cf. 17:5, 24), now he takes on the lowliness of human, earthly existence; formerly he was “with God” (1:1b), now he pitches his tent among men, and in human form, in the full reality of the *sarx*, to attain once more the glory of his heavenly mode of being after his return to the Father (17:5)” (*op. cit.*, 1: 267).

an unbiblical change in the nature of the Word. But a change does occur, and Schnackenburg is correct to emphasize the positional aspect. This appears to be what Paul is teaching in Philippians 2. And yet the proliferation of suggestions as to the proper meaning of the *kenōsis* strongly cautions against probing too deeply into those areas that God has left intentionally veiled. In describing the hypostatic union, the drafters of the Chalcedonian creed wrote that Jesus is “perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably...” It is important to notice that the framers are not explaining how the Word became flesh. Instead, they are using specific language to counter various heretics who were teaching false doctrine stemming from their refusal to leave the mystery intact. The Church fathers are merely trying to retain this mystery by constructing statements that if violated, show oneself to be outside the circle of orthodoxy. Thus, the reality of the incarnation of the Word is one that is contemplated best when it is contemplated, not by rigorous scientific analysis, but by faith, that one might bow before the inscrutable God.

It appears that in using the word *sarx* John wishes to convey the human reality of the Word’s coming. It is not some kind of metaphor or figurative language to describe God’s immanence or governance of the world. Nor is it some kind of docetic appearance. It is real flesh that could be seen, touched, and, as the crucifixion demonstrated, wounded and killed. Though the word “spirit,” whether referring to the spiritual versus what is earthly, sinful, or temporary, or to the Holy Spirit, is missing in the prologue, the Gospel nevertheless has dualistic elements throughout. This has led Morris to suggest that in v. 14, *sarx* is used to counter the primitive docetism which will flourish in subsequent decades.⁸⁴ This is certainly possible, even though it would be more subtle than I John, where several passages seem to indicate the theology of those who did not remain with I John’s readers. Regardless if Morris is correct, the earlier remarks on the use of *sarx* are given particular force when Calvin comments: “The word *Flesh* expresses the

⁸⁴Morris, *op. cit.*, 90-91.

meaning of the Evangelist more forcibly than if he had said that *he was made man*. He intended to show to what a mean and despicable condition the Son of God, on our account, descended from the height of his heavenly glory.”⁸⁵

Perhaps the most original interpretation of the meaning of *sarx* discovered, for which the author could find no other confirmation, rests on the remainder of v. 14. Attention is drawn to the Old Testament allusion to the tabernacle or temple, which points to the “common early Christian tradition which identified the new temple with the community.” The verse, then, is not dealing with the incarnation at all, but with the coming of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶ Some other considerations within the verse lead him to offer that *pneuma*, not *sarx*, should be used. He speculates that the presence of *sarx* represents a “slight adjustment of a source text,” and for the purposes of investigation acts as if a lacuna exists where *sarx* is located, in order to see if *pneuma* fits the context. He admits that such a lacuna does not exist, but since *pneuma* is possible, in his judgment, he believes this is strong evidence that redaction has occurred. He assumes that Gnostic or docetic elements are in existence at the time, and the redactor intentionally put *sarx* in place of *pneuma* to counter the heresy.⁸⁷ This seems an arbitrary judgment, based on two unproven assumptions. First, the strong dualism throughout the Gospel suggests some kind of anti-Gnostic or anti-docetic offensive, even though it does not have the polemical feel of the first Epistle. But there does not appear to be such *sarx/pneuma* dualism in the prologue, at least as far as the vocabulary is concerned. Second, based on the first, one cannot hypothesize a “slight adjustment” simply because of an interpretive presupposition which seems to be supported by the fact that another term may also fit the context. It is true that the Evangelist has pointed to the incarnation in vv. 10 and 11. But there is nothing redundant about a more explicit statement a few verses later. It certainly does not warrant the change that Meagher is offering. The incarnational meaning stands, and consequently so does the word *sarx*.

⁸⁵Calvin, *op. cit.*, XVII: 45.

⁸⁶John C. Meagher, “John 14 and the New Temple,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 60.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 61-66.

2.4 HE DWELT AMONG US

Implied in the idea that the Word became incarnate is the fact that he came to live among his creation, that is, among fallen people. Most commentators see some allusion to God's dwelling with his people during the Sinai-event, whether a reference to the tabernacle or tent of meeting, both of which were structures which served a temporary purpose until the completion of the temple. That this perceived allusion is justified is evidenced by the strong presence of the covenant in vv. 14-17, and the fact that Jesus, who is the mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 8:6), is declared to be superior to Moses.

It is significant, not only with reference to the covenant, but more specifically with the theological application of the idea of the temple to Jesus. In the Old Testament, the temple signified the dwelling of God among his people. It referred to much more than the physical building, for it is spoken of eschatologically in Ezekiel 43:7a: "And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.'" The temple was central in the covenant community of Israel. What went on in the temple was at the heart of Judaism, and in terms of atonement, the sacrifices. But when Jesus came, because he is the propitiation and atoning sacrifice for sinners, he referred to his salvific activity in terms of the temple: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Understandably, this was not grasped until after his resurrection. But because of this, it is now only in Jesus Christ where one may experience communion with God. God meets with his people only through him. In the eschatological Jerusalem, John writes that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple (Rev. 21:22). Raymond Collins rightly emphasizes the concept of revelation: "Jesus is himself the locus of divine revelation, the tent of meeting—the tent of testimony. He is, in a word, the true Tabernacle, the real Temple."⁸⁸

There is disagreement among commentators over the precise reference. On the basis of

⁸⁸Raymond F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Louvain: Peeters Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 205.

similarities observed between Exodus 33:7-34:35 and John 1:14-18, it has been said that the reference to the Word's dwelling among people points to the tent of meeting rather than the tabernacle. The reasoning is based on the fact that in the LXX the "tent of meeting" is translated as *skēnē martyrion*.⁸⁹ But it is curious why Exodus 25:8 is cited, which although talking about the tabernacle, calls it a "sanctuary" (Heb., *miq' dash*; Gk., *hagiasma*). The very next verse contains the word "tabernacle," which the LXX translates *skēnē*. Thus, in using the verb *skēnoō*, John is not necessarily rejecting the tabernacle in favor of the tent of meeting.⁹⁰

However, other observations argue for the tabernacle. The tent of meeting of Exodus 33 appears to function as a provisional location for revelation, not only for worship, but for advice in various matters. Moreover, it was put outside the camp—unlike the tabernacle, which remained among the people. Exodus 35 seems to indicate that all the articles for worship, for which construction God gave specific instructions, were used in the tabernacle, not the tent of meeting.⁹¹ The tabernacle was central to Israel's worship, while the tent of meeting does not have such significance. Granted it was a place where God met with Moses, which the people could see and worship from their tents. But it does not have the religious importance that the tabernacle clearly had. Unlike the tabernacle, God was not among his people in the tent of meeting. Since it was between the cherubim on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant where God was understood to symbolically dwell, it is much more appropriate to see John 1:14 as referring to the tabernacle. Because of the Ark, the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt and was to

⁸⁹Henry Mowvley, "John 1¹⁴⁻¹⁸ in the Light of Exodus 33⁷-34³⁵," *Expository Times* 95 (1983-1984): 136.

⁹⁰While Carson mentions the tabernacle, of the choice between that and the tent of meeting, he maintains that "the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst his people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh" (*op. cit.*, 127). For forthcoming reasons, the author believes it points to the tabernacle. But the apparent significance of Exodus 33-34 for this part of the prologue warns one not to cling to one idea too firmly. Either way, as Carson says, the meaning in the context of John 1 is clear.

⁹¹There is an extensive discussion concerning the relationship between the tabernacle and the tent of meeting. In Exodus 35:21, which speaks of the plans for the tabernacle's construction, as well as several other texts, "tent of meeting" is clearly a synonym for "tabernacle." But that is not the case for the tent of meeting in Exodus 33, since the tabernacle is not built until Exodus 36. This means that the articles for Israel's worship (chapters 37-39) were not associated with this tent set outside the camp.

be worshipped. It was at the Ark where atonement was ultimately found in the Old Testament dispensation. As the blood was sprinkled upon the mercy seat, God, who dwelt between the cherubim above it, would look down and see the blood, rather than the Law which Israel had broken. This, of course, found its perfect fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the one in whom alone that mercy can be found.

With this symbolism in mind, which takes on added meaning in the comparison made between Moses and Jesus in v. 17, it seems that more is intended than *skēnē* merely designating a “temporary residence among men.”⁹² Barth sees the dwelling of the Word as one of both fulfillment and promise. It is the fulfillment of God’s dwelling among his covenant people in the Old Testament. But Jesus’ coming is a promise that points to the eschatological dwelling of God.⁹³ From this perspective, even Jesus’ coming is temporary. But it is the basis for his second advent, which will usher in the eternal dwelling and reign of God (Rev. 21:3).

2.5 HIS GLORY BEHELD

That the Word became incarnate does not mean that no traces of his divinity were seen. Throughout the Gospel Jesus’ glory is presented in his words and deeds, and this concept of the revealed glory of God is found in the Old Testament. Exodus 33:11 says that when Moses entered the tent of meeting to converse with God, there was a face to face encounter because God appeared in the theophanic form of the pillar of cloud. Then, when God announces that he will go before Moses and the people, Moses asks to see the unveiled glory of God (v. 18). Moses is denied this request for the sake of his own life, although he is permitted to look upon a portion of it. But in Jesus of Nazareth the fullness of God’s self-revelation is seen (Col. 2:9). Jesus said to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The fullest expression of who God is, seen in all his ways, is in Jesus.

⁹²Barrett, *op. cit.*, 165-166. He is correct in his observation that *shakan* is not regularly represented by *skēnoō*. But this is not strong enough evidence to counter the LXX use of *skēnē* to render *mishkan*, combined with the overall Old Testament allusion found in John 1:14-18.

⁹³Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 94.

There is less discussion about the Old Testament allusion than about the specific event of Jesus' ministry in which his glory was seen. One suggestion, although the event is not recorded in John's Gospel, is the transfiguration.⁹⁴ Most certainly this is not what the Evangelist is alluding to. Not only is it absent from the Fourth Gospel, but John includes other events which together give his readers a glimpse of what it was like to have been with Jesus. In John 2, after his first miracle at Cana, the text explicitly says, "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him" (v. 11). In John 11 Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and the result is like that of the miracle in Cana: "Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him" (v. 45). Conversion resulting from Jesus' miracles (which were signs proving his identity and mission) was not the only way Jesus' glory was seen. In that mysterious encounter with those seeking to arrest him in Gethsemane, when Jesus identifies himself his captors fall to the ground (John 18:6). Jesus is not aggressive or threatening in any way. There is some kind of holy majesty that overpowers his rivals. Also, his glory was beheld by those to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared.⁹⁵

Bultmann dismisses any idea that the phrase refers to historical eyewitnesses, since unbelieving Jews were also eyewitnesses, but nevertheless rejected Jesus. Rather, what is stressed is the importance of faith, passed down by those eyewitnesses who believed and the tradition that formed from them.⁹⁶ But the reason for this dismissal is weak. There are two interpretations possible, both of which allow for historical eyewitnesses. First, while not denying

⁹⁴T. W. Manson states: "In John the light that flashed out in one dazzling blaze of glory on the Mount of Transfiguration is diffused through the whole narrative. Everything that the Evangelist has to say is made to reflect the glory" (*On Paul and John: Some Selected Theological Themes*, ed. Matthew Black [London: SCM Press, 1963], 151). It is difficult to see how this event has such importance when it is not found in John. From the Synoptic Gospels it is learned that the transfiguration did not occur at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. So it is also difficult to see how it is "diffused through the whole narrative," unless Manson means that as the Evangelist reflected on his time with Jesus, this event impacts the composition of the Gospel. It appears that the event is far more significant for Manson than for the Evangelist.

⁹⁵Ben Witherington believes it is these appearances to which John refers (*John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995], 55).

⁹⁶Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 69-70.

that the Word dwelt among and was beheld by all, that is, both believers and unbelievers alike, in the use of “us” and “we” John is focusing on those who have believed. Second, the Evangelist may be saying that the Word appeared and revealed his glory regardless if one believes. All have seen it and are therefore responsible to respond in faith. Either way, the necessity of faith is maintained without existentially removing it out of its historical context.

Ernst Käsemann, a student of Bultmann, puts the idea of glory as it is presented in John’s Gospel against the Synoptic Gospels to see how they compare in describing Jesus’ ministry. For Käsemann, in the Synoptic Gospels the basic pattern observed is that Jesus’ glory is really seen in the resurrection, which is preceded by the shame of the crucifixion. But when one looks at the Fourth Gospel, glory is such a dominant theme throughout that

the incorporation and position of the passion narrative of necessity becomes problematical. Apart from a few remarks that point ahead to it, the passion comes into view in John only at the very end. One is tempted to regard it as being a mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work. His solution was to press the features of Christ’s victory upon the passion story. At any rate he does not describe the journey of Jesus as a process which leads from lowliness to glory.⁹⁷

This, however, fails to grasp two applications of glory which are specifically emphasized in John’s Gospel. The first is that John is the only Evangelist who provides a sense of the majesty, glory, and power of the preexistent Word, and the astounding lowliness and humility that accompanied his becoming flesh for the sake of undeserving sinners. That John displays more of this glory throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry does not take away from the humility of the prologue. The Johannine discussion of the preexistent origin of Jesus of Nazareth is unique, as compared to the Synoptic Gospels, and it is rightly emphasized. But to minimize the lowliness and humility also present is to miss half of what John intends to communicate, which leads to a misunderstanding of the whole prologue. Both aspects are necessary for redemption, and are therefore necessary in God’s self-revelation.

⁹⁷Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 7.

The second observation is that in the Fourth Gospel, largely because of the Olivet discourse, the passion is shown as a sovereign decree of God, which is the path to Jesus' obtaining of the glory like that of his preexistence (17:1-5).⁹⁸ To be sure, it is real humility and suffering. That John sets this in the wider scope of the plan of God does not diminish the reality. But from the Word's humble beginnings as a baby in Bethlehem, to the glorious ascension of the risen Christ, every moment of Jesus' ministry was accomplishing his Father's work of redemption.

John further indicates the relationship between the Word and God with *monogenēs*. Disagreement arises over whether it should be translated "only begotten" (NASV, KJV, NKJV) or something like "one and only" (NIV, NRSV). Barrett acknowledges that the word itself means "only of its kind," but feels that here, in relation to the Father, it should be "only begotten."⁹⁹ In spite of the objection of Barrett and others, "one and only" is to be preferred. "Only begotten" was used by Jerome in the struggle against the Arian heresy. The subsequent influence of the Vulgate on the King James Version solidified it as the standard English translation. But it is not what John meant. Brown rightly says, "*Monogenēs* describes a quality of Jesus, his uniqueness, not what is called in Trinitarian theology his 'procession.'"¹⁰⁰

Christian Grappe picks up on the similarity between Isaac and Jesus as "beloved sons." (The LXX for Genesis 22:12 as well as Matthew 3:17 use *agapētos*.) Grappe, who sees significant intertestamental influence, argues that, among other contributors, the *Prayer of Joseph* is important for the prologue.¹⁰¹ Grappe also notes the similarities with Genesis 1 and Exodus 33-34. Then he discusses Sirach 24, the rabbinic *shekinah* and targumic *memra*, the Qumranian

⁹⁸John's Gospel is the only one that recounts Jesus' remark to Pilate, after the latter rebuked him for not answering his questions: "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (19:11a). This is true in a general way of all leaders. But Pilate, who would otherwise be virtually unknown in history, is known far better than some emperors because of the part he played in the condemnation of Jesus. But it was God's desire to do this, because suffering is the path to glory (Matt. 16:21-23).

⁹⁹Barrett, *op. cit.*, 166. This is also the position of John Dahms ("The Johannine Use of *Monogenēs* Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 29 [1983]: 222-232).

¹⁰⁰Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 13.

¹⁰¹Christian Grappe, "Jean 1, 14 (-18) dans son Contexte et à la Lumière de la Littérature Intertestamentaire," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 80 (2000): 159-160.

“grace and truth,” and Wisdom 7. It seems that Grappe is more interested in showing similarities from various traditions than in trying to pinpoint the origin of John’s thought. Obviously exempting the Old Testament references, all of the others were influenced by the Old Testament.

2.6 THE OFFENSE OF THE INCARNATION

Paul writes in the first letter to the Corinthians that the message of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1:23). The Jews were looking for signs that would identify their messiah. Jesus’ condemnation and crucifixion solidified in the minds of unbelieving Jews that Jesus was not God’s anointed one. To them, Jesus was a blasphemer, and his death was what he deserved. He was a violator both of the Mosaic Law and the laws of the state. The messiah would never be punished as a criminal, and given the Roman occupation of the Jews’ covenant inheritance, the focus was certainly on that aspect of the messiah as reigning sovereign, rather than as suffering servant. For Greeks the cross was foolishness because of its humiliation and brutal form of punishment. Salvation could never be obtained through such an act. Furthermore, the gods were assumed to maintain their distance from the world of mortals. And when such involvement did take place, the god or goddess would never be subjected to such ridicule. Salvation did not come from the death of God, but from wisdom obtained through intellectual pursuits, particularly philosophy.

In speaking to Jews, deliverance was spiritual, not physical or political. In speaking to Greeks, salvation came by redemption, not intellectual accomplishment. Suffering and death followed by resurrection was the means by which people were brought near to God. The path to glory was the path of the cross. All this applies to the incarnation, for this was necessary in order for atonement to be made. For Jewish readers, the doctrine of the incarnation was a clear violation of the central tenet of Judaism (Deut. 6:4). God is one, and it is blasphemy and therefore worthy of death to claim oneness with God, as Jesus did (John 8:58; 10:30). For Greek readers, the *logos* was a principle, not a person. Even though some held that the *logos* was present in everything, it was an abstract force or presence that kept things from spinning out of

control. That this *logos* was the only true God who became man was ludicrous. As now, Christianity was not a popular religion. It did not attract many influential people. It was embraced by the poor, the powerless, and the uneducated. But the world, whether seeking after signs of their own choosing or secular wisdom, became fools because they failed to see that the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Word was the very revelation of God, and as such was the supreme demonstration of the grace and truth of God in Christ.

3. GRACE AND TRUTH REALIZED

Having written of the reality of the Word become flesh in v. 14, the Evangelist concludes the prologue by emphasizing the uniqueness of this Word, who is identified as Jesus Christ in v. 17. In v. 15 it is seen that Jesus is superior to John the Baptist, who although born before declares that Jesus “has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.” Then, in vv. 16-17 Jesus is shown to be superior to Moses, with v. 18 continuing that theme, as well as concluding this powerful introduction to John’s account. In showing Jesus’ superiority to Moses, this third section will also show the superiority of the grace and truth that Jesus brought.

3.1 MOSES AND JESUS

At first, v. 17 (reinforced by other passages in the Fourth Gospel) appears to set the Law against grace. Moses brought the Law, but Jesus Christ brought grace and truth. This naturally brings to mind Pauline teaching in Romans and Galatians.¹⁰² However, two points must be understood. The first is that Paul is by no means antinomian. Even in Romans, in which the Gospel of grace alone through faith alone is clearly taught, he calls the Law “holy,” “righteous,” and “good” (7:12). Any appeal to Paul must include this aspect of his view of the Law. The

¹⁰²Merrill C. Tenney writes: “The contrast between law and grace as methods of God’s dealing with men is expressed here as plainly as in the Pauline writings (see Rom 5:20-21; Eph 2:8). The law represented God’s standard of righteousness; grace exhibited his attitude to human beings who found that they could not keep the law” (*The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981], 33). Udo Schnelle also makes a strict distinction between the Law, associated with Moses, and grace and truth, associated with Jesus (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes* [Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998], 43).

second is that one must pay careful attention to context before deciding how a particular term is to be understood. If the Gospel was written in Ephesus, since Paul spent two years there (Acts 19:10) and later wrote a letter to them, it is certainly reasonable to conclude that the Evangelist could communicate similar ideas and be understood by his readers. At this particular point in the prologue it seems that the concern is more to show how Jesus and the message that he brings exceeds and, in fact, fulfills, the revelation given through Moses. Jesus Christ is the end of the Law (Rom. 10:4), but that in no way means that the Law was not characterized by grace and truth.

The proper contrast must be seen in the verbs, which point to the two people mentioned. The Law “was given” (*edothē*) through Moses; grace and truth “were realized” (*egeneto*) through Jesus Christ. The contrast is thus between the one who is merely the mediator and the one who is the source.¹⁰³ And it is precisely this contrast that is found numerous times throughout the Fourth Gospel, whether directly or by allusion. But as will be demonstrated in regard to some of the specific references to Moses, the purpose of the contrast is not to show that the Mosaic economy is contrary to the character and ways of God. Rather, part of its divine purpose was to point to the promised Messiah as the fulfillment of the Law (and the Old Testament generally) so that people would recognize him when he came. This evangelistic function of the Law can be seen particularly in the Gospel of Matthew with all its references to fulfilled messianic prophecy.

All this indicates that the real difference between Moses and Jesus in John 1:17 is not one of antithesis, but of synthesis.¹⁰⁴ To be sure, there are aspects of the Mosaic Law that are no longer

¹⁰³J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, two vols., (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), I: 30. Edwyn Hoskyns echoes this idea: “The law was a gift separable from the agent by whom it was given. Grace and truth, however, came not only *by* but *in* Jesus Christ, who is the truth embodied (xiv. 6)” (*The Fourth Gospel*, two vols., ed. Francis Noel Davey [London: Faber and Faber, 1940], I: 150).

¹⁰⁴The antithesis in John (and also in Paul) is made more evident when people treat the Law as the end, rather than seeing it as pointing to Jesus and his salvific work. The term “synthetic” seems to originate with J. Jeremias (“*Mōusēs*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967], 873). Lindars acknowledges his debt to Jeremias and explains the parallelism this way: “*just as the law was given through Moses, so grace and truth (which the law prefigures) came into being (egeneto) through Jesus Christ*” (*op. cit.*, 97-98). Bruce explains that the grace and truth present in the Old

in force now that Jesus has come (e.g., ritual laws). But these have not been forgotten or arbitrarily cast aside. They have been perfected. The event upon which they leaned for their whole significance has occurred.¹⁰⁵ It is unnecessary (and, in fact, sinful) to concern oneself with shadows when the reality has come.

This synthetic understanding of John 1:17 has bearing on other passages in John that look like Moses is being treated negatively. The second half of John 5 records Jesus' response to those who were seeking to kill him because he had healed on the Sabbath, and in that context had also claimed that God was his Father (v. 18). Jesus' opponents claim that they are right with God because they regard themselves as God's covenant people and fervently hold to the Scriptures. But Jesus rebukes them for thinking they possess eternal life by them when at the same time they reject him, of whom the Scriptures testify (vv. 39-40). Furthermore, Moses, the great servant of God whom the Jews esteemed so highly, actually accuses them before God precisely because they look to the Law that Moses brought rather than the Law's fulfillment. Jesus said to them, "For if you believed Moses, you would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me" (v. 46).

During two other controversies Jesus refers to the Scriptures as "your Law" (8:17 and 10:34). Both contexts show that Jesus is not distancing himself from it, and thereby setting himself against Moses. Rather, he is proving that statements he made to which others objected should be believed because of the Old Testament. By Jesus' appeal to the Scriptures he is demonstrating

Testament "was disclosed in concentrated fulness in the incarnate Word" (*op. cit.*, 43). Gerald L. Borchert speaks of stages of grace, with the grace of Jesus Christ as the final stage (*John 1-11* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996], 123). Finally, Andreas Obermann speaks of the contrast as a progression, as opposed to a replacement (*Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannesevangelium* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996], 53-54). The variety of explanation reflects the effort spent on trying to properly handle the relationship between the old covenant and the new, and to deal with the whole issue of continuity and discontinuity, since it is the same God who has established both covenants.

Günter Reim mentions an important parallel when he notes that Jesus also brings a law. But this new commandment is the law of love for one another, the basis for which is Jesus' love (John 13:34). And love for Jesus is demonstrated by obeying his word (John 14:15, 23-24) (*Studien zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund des Johannesevangeliums* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], 141-142).

¹⁰⁵Westcott deals with this temporary nature of the Law when he says, "It was 'given' for a special purpose. On the other hand, the Gospel 'came' (*egeneto*), as if, according to the orderly and due course of the divine plan, this was the natural issue of all that had gone before" (*op. cit.*, 27).

that what he is teaching is not inconsistent with what is written in it. Moreover, he says that it cannot be broken (10:35). It is an abiding authority. All this accentuates the enthusiasm that Philip expressed to Nathanael: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (1:45).¹⁰⁶

It must also be added that one’s interpretation of John 1:17 also affects *charin anti charitos* in v. 16. The *hoti* at the beginning of v. 17 connects the two verses. If one takes an antithetical approach to v. 17, then the *anti* must mean something other than “instead of,” which is the primary definition.¹⁰⁷ But if one sees v. 17 as synthetic, the *anti* in v. 16 is best translated as “instead of,”¹⁰⁸ or better, “replaces,”¹⁰⁹ and what the Evangelist intends to communicate is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to his people.

3.2 GRACE AND TRUTH IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

In v. 17 a number of translations render *egeneto* as “came,” which is a common meaning. However, this may contribute to the idea that grace and truth were absent in the Law and appeared only in Jesus Christ. But as was pointed out earlier, this approach is incorrect because God is both gracious and true in his very character, which necessitates that his dealings with Israel be marked by grace and truth. The NASV’s rendering of *egeneto* as “realized” supports this, for it points to the fullest and most complete revelation of that grace and truth in the coming of Jesus.

¹⁰⁶Whitacre rightly says, “The revelation of God in Jesus is not contradictory to Judaism, but rather the very thing for which Judaism had been preparing. So when the Jewish opponents reject Jesus later in the story they do so despite their Judaism, not because of it” (*op. cit.*, 61).

¹⁰⁷Barrett suggests: “The meaning of this phrase seems to be that Christian life is based at all points upon grace; as it proceeds one grace is exchanged only for another” (*op. cit.*, 168). Bultmann acknowledges the usual translation of “instead of,” but concludes: “Yet neither for the source nor for the Evangelist (v. 17), can the meaning be that the *charis* given by the Revealer takes the place of an earlier OT grace. It can only mean the *charis* of the Revealer, whose inexhaustibility is unfolded in its ever changing variety” (*The Gospel of John*, 78, note 2). For an excellent discussion of *anti*, see Carson, *op. cit.*, 131-134.

¹⁰⁸See Ruth B. Edwards, “*Charin anti Charitos* (John 1.16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 3-15.

¹⁰⁹Carson, *op. cit.*, 132.

The background of v. 17 is most likely Exodus 34:6, where the LORD passes before Moses and proclaims his name, identified by his attributes: “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.” After the sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32, in chapter 33 the LORD tells Moses that he will no longer go before Israel to guide them into Canaan. Moses acts as mediator and pleads for God to go. God answers his request and Moses then asks to see the glory of God. Moses is denied this, but he is permitted to see a portion of this glory (what is referred to as God’s back), described as all the LORD’s goodness, grasped by the list of attributes in Exodus 34:6-7.

God is true in all his ways and because he is faithful and unchanging in his very nature he cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). He promised that the land would be given to Abraham’s descendants, which was clearly a gracious promise. It was therefore not based on any merit in Abraham, nor on any merit in his descendants. In the wilderness Israel had tested the LORD time and again, but this widespread idolatry was the height of their rebellion up to this time. God’s response shows the constancy of his grace and truth. In addition to going before Israel and appearing before Moses, he also gives Moses two new tablets and makes a covenant to do miracles before them which have been seen by none before (Ex. 34:10).

As important a figure as Moses was in redemptive history, his mediation, as well as the priestly and prophetic mediation that followed, was never anything more than a temporary mediation until that divinely appointed time when Jesus came, who is the only mediator between God and sinners (I Tim. 2:5).¹¹⁰ Moses brought the Law, which was given in order that Israel might obey the righteous decrees of God and receive his blessing. But once it is broken (which is inevitable because of original sin), fellowship with God is broken, which is why the sacrificial system was central to Old Testament worship. The Law never had any saving power in itself. Its effectiveness was only found in the promise of God to send one who would keep it faultlessly

¹¹⁰ “All that Moses could do was to mediate the law-code to Israel. What God does is to reveal himself through the Word, partially on Sinai, fully in Jesus Christ” (Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Grace and Truth: A Study in the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [London: SPCK, 1975], 7).

for all those whom God had chosen to redeem. As John Murray explains:

Law can do nothing to justify the person who in any particular has violated its sanctity and come under its curse. Law, as law, has no expiatory provision; it exercises no forgiving grace; and it has no power of enablement to the fulfilment of its own demand. It knows no clemency for the remission of guilt; it provides no righteousness to meet our iniquity; it exerts no constraining power to reclaim our waywardness; it knows no mercy to melt our hearts in penitence and new obedience.¹¹¹

The Law cannot accomplish any of these objectives on its own because its efficacy does not rest in itself, but in the work of Jesus to which it points. Calvin's three uses of the Law aids in recognizing the divine value of it, which proves its graciousness and truth even while it directs people to the one who is the fullest expression of God's grace and truth because he is himself God. The first use, which has already been stressed, is that of directing sinners to Christ, as seen in the many ways that Christ has fulfilled it. The second function of the Law is the revealing of punishment that awaits the disobedient, which is intended to curb sin. Calvin's third use is the reality that in the Law the character and will of God is revealed, for in the Decalogue is communicated how people are to behave in regard to both God and one another.¹¹²

It has been demonstrated how John 1:16 and 17 are connected. It now remains to see how v. 17 and v. 18 are related. The first part of v. 18 can only be understood in light of v. 17a, because without it one has difficulty in determining to whom John is referring. This means that the setting is still Exodus 33-34. Moses saw the LORD in a theophanic form (33:9), as well as some aspect of his character (34:22-23). But as great as this was, compared to the revelation of God among his people in the incarnation, what Moses saw was of such a limited nature that John can say that no one has seen God at any time (1:18a). But this limitation must be understood by the context of v. 18b. The focus of the verse is not on what is seen, but on what is revealed. When God passed before Moses, the event was planned with great care lest Moses see God directly and

¹¹¹John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 185.

¹¹²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, two vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1: 348-366, particularly pp. 357-361.

perish. Moses is shielded by God himself to keep this from happening. But during Jesus' public ministry no such care was needed. Those who saw Jesus directly did not perish. Nevertheless, Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And when the Evangelist says that it is the only God at the Father's side who has explained him, he means that to live during as well as after the coming of Jesus is more significant than to have seen what Moses saw and heard what Moses heard. To be sure, these were gracious and true things. But the revelation that Jesus is and has brought is the completion of the divine appearance and content given at Sinai. To really know God, one must not look to the revelation at Sinai, but to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Ibuki suggests that in the constructions of v. 17a-17b and v. 18a-18b, there is a correspondence between the two verses: v. 18a corresponds to v. 17a, and v. 18b to v. 17b.¹¹³ If this is true, it only strengthens the relationship between the verses. But even if this is not what the Evangelist intends, vv. 16 and 18 certainly show the legitimacy of v. 17a as belonging in the prologue, contrary to Harris' conception that if it were omitted, there would be no obvious loss.¹¹⁴ Thus, John 1:17 would signal to the Evangelist's Jewish readers that in Jesus Christ a new day has dawned. It is the day of grace, not in the sense that grace was absent in the Mosaic economy, but in the sense that in Jesus is the perfection of the Law. Though God was gloriously revealed to Moses and all Israel at Sinai, the fullest revelation is in Jesus. Moreover, the message that Jesus brought was not directed toward Jews alone, but to all who will believe. God's covenant people are no longer defined by whether they are a part of the nation of Israel. All who receive Jesus' words are members of the new Israel, not according to natural birth,

¹¹³Yu Ibuki, *Die Wahrheit im Johannesevangelium* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1972), 205.

¹¹⁴Harris, *op. cit.*, 63, 77. On p. 63 she writes: "For within the testimony of John in vv. 15-18 the sequence of thought would be clearer if v. 17a were omitted and we would then read 'he was before me'; 'of his fulness have we received and grace for grace'; 'grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' It is difficult to see what contribution v. 17a makes to this." Then, on p. 77 she returns to this idea with even stronger language: "As I have observed above, the juxtaposing in 1.17 of Moses and 'the law' with Jesus Christ and 'grace and truth' is so odd and awkward that 1.17a could be removed without obvious loss." This fails to appreciate vv. 15-18 as showing what Morris calls "the Word's surpassing excellence" (*op. cit.*, 95) over John the Baptist and Moses.

followed by circumcision, but according to the spiritual rebirth that is done in both Jews and Gentiles by the will and power of God alone.

4. "I AM" STATEMENTS

When the Christology of John's Gospel is addressed, perhaps the first topic under discussion is the prologue. But the high claims made there continue throughout the Gospel, particularly in the "I am" statements. In fact, it could even be said that these statements expand upon or describe what one encounters in the prologue. Moreover, they do this in a powerful way. The breadth and depth of usage helps teach the fullness of the divine revelation in Jesus, appreciated all the more in the setting of Old Testament fulfillment. In addition, that they were spoken by Jesus himself is important for the whole issue of Jesus' own understanding of who he was. This particular question will be discussed in chapter three, when the various witnesses to truth are considered. For the present, Stauffer's comment serves as an appropriate starting point for looking at Jesus' famous sayings: "Perhaps the mysterious phrase harbors within itself the most authentic, the most audacious, and the most profound affirmation by Jesus of who he was."¹¹⁵ Thus, a study of the "I am" sayings is indispensable for properly grasping the Johannine conception of truth, focused in Jesus Christ. As the discussion will make clear, both the *egō eimi* used absolutely and in conjunction with a predicate prove the equality that exists between Jesus and the Father, as well as how Jesus is the fullest revelation of God to humanity. To understand this and to act accordingly by responding in faith is to possess the truth of God and enter into the true covenant relationship with him. The purpose of this section, then, is to show the oneness that exists, seen in the absolute use, as well as to provide the theological foundation for the specific predicates that will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Given the importance of this phrase for John's purpose, it must be seen whether a similar use of *egō eimi* should be seen in the Synoptic Gospels, or whether the phrase indicates simple

¹¹⁵Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 174.

identity. There are three passages in Mark (and their respective parallels) that have been the subject of such analysis.¹¹⁶ Although Stauffer acknowledges that the Synoptic occurrences are ambiguous, he maintains that they do refer to the divine self-revelation.¹¹⁷ The argument he makes is not without merit, but compared to the Fourth Gospel the ambiguity that Stauffer admits precludes the confidence that marks his discussion. It may very well be that the synoptists are intending a subtle reference to divinity, to be seen only by those who have faith, or the humble interest to inquire further into Jesus' teaching. But it is also true that each occurrence of *egō eimi* could be taken as a simple identifier, thus, as a form in which a predicate could be implied even though it is not used. With John, on the other hand, the phrase is used unequivocally to make divine claims about Jesus. And because of this explicit use in John 8:58, other less obvious ones contain a richer meaning than at first appears. This is true not only for the absolute "I am" of vv. 24 and 28, but also for those with predicates found throughout.

4.1 BACKGROUND TO THE "I AM" STATEMENTS

It is necessary to engage in a fairly detailed study of backgrounds because of the Evangelist's purpose for his use of the "I am" construction. Hellenistic influence has been proposed, and although it is the author's contention that it is the Old Testament that is responsible for and governs John's use, the very fact that there is a connection between John's predicative use and Hellenistic form argues for an evangelistic emphasis, while at the same time remaining faithful to biblical fulfillment.

Earlier in the twentieth century there existed much more interest in viewing the "I am" construction from a Hellenistic direction.¹¹⁸ The focus was generally on the similarity of the

¹¹⁶See Mark 6:50 (Matt. 14:27); Mark 13:6 (Matt. 24:5; Luke 21:8); and Mark 14:62 (Matt. 26:64; Luke 22:70). In Stauffer's discussion he does not include Matthew 24:5 as a parallel to Mark 13:6. Matthew does not have *egō eimi* as an absolute, but includes the predicate, *christos*. However, it should be mentioned that the context will decide when a predicate is understood. In Matthew 24 the context is that of a warning against false Christs who will deceive many people.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁸In addition to Bultmann, one also finds this in E. Schweizer (*Egō Eimi: Die religionsgeschichtliche herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur*

predicative form, not so much on the actual predicates themselves. Later, although the discovery at Qumran in 1947 and subsequent archaeological findings put an end to the dominance of this approach, George MacRae continued to push for Hellenistic connections. He argued that in the predicative “I am” sayings Jesus showed his transcendence over these religious symbols, which for him indicated not only that the Evangelist was influenced by a syncretistic background, but that his use was deliberate in his interpretation of Jesus’ words.¹¹⁹

In spite of these past efforts, the current consensus is solidly in the direction of Judaism, and in the Old Testament specifically, even by commentators who tend to see more influence from Qumran, wisdom literature, or rabbinic writings. An important component is the relationship between the absolute and predicate sayings. Hellenistic literature is filled with the latter but does not contain the former. Given the connection between the two types of statements, as well as the Old Testament parallels for both the absolute and predicate uses, it is undoubtedly the Old Testament to which one must turn to understand the meaning of these sayings.

Most of the discussion has centered on two passages in the context of John 8: Isaiah 41-43 and Exodus 3:14.¹²⁰ In attempting to understand the Johannine “I am” statements, commentators have generally preferred Isaiah over Exodus. One reason is form: in the LXX, it is the Hebrew *ʾani hu* that the Greek *egō eimi* represents. In Exodus the terms are different. Rather than *ʾani hu*, the Hebrew is *ʾeh yeh ʾasher ʾeh yeh*, with the corresponding Greek, *egō eimi ho ōn*. The second reason is content: the context of the Isaiah section, with the twin ideas of judgment and

Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939]), and A. Deissmann (*Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, reprint], 136-142).

¹¹⁹George W. MacRae, “The Ego-Proclamation in Gnostic Sources,” in *The Trial of Jesus*, ed. Ernst Bammel (London: SCM Press, 1970), 133-134.

¹²⁰David Mark Ball sees Isaianic influence in other “I am” sayings outside John 8. In Jesus’ disclosure to the Samaritan woman in John 4:26, Ball points to Isaiah 52:6, where a nearly identical phrase is found. In John 6:20 the disciples see a figure on the water and are afraid. Jesus identifies himself and tells them not to be afraid. Though lacking the *egō eimi*, the ideas in Isaiah 43:1-2 are close. Lastly, a similar construction is observed between John 13:19 and Isaiah 43:10 (“*I Am*” in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 177-199).

salvation, fits well with John 8.¹²¹

However, it is not necessarily the case that a choice must be made between Isaiah and Exodus. Brown has shown that lexically a connection between the two should be seen,¹²² and Coetzee has also provided evidence for similarity between John 8 and Exodus 3:13-17.¹²³ The strong identifying language of God, who will bring judgment upon the unrighteous and salvation to his people, surely brings to mind the self-identification made to Moses at Horeb. Furthermore, the name is not merely given so that God may be addressed correctly. Rather, his name communicates who he is in his character and thus in how he will act toward those upon whom he has set his affection, beginning with his revelatory promise to Abraham. Thus, it should be stressed that Exodus 3 stands behind the relevant passages in Isaiah, which do appear to be similar to passages in John 8, at least.

From this emphasis on Isaiah, commentators have sought to dig deeper into Judaism for other support for Isaianic influence on John. Stauffer observes that by A. D. 20, Isaiah 40-45 was prominent in Jewish religious life. The *'ani hu* was a popular term to refer to God, which through the Hallel psalms was “firmly established in the rituals of the two principal pilgrimage feasts, Tabernacles and the Passover...It is therefore virtually certain that even then the priests paraded around the altar repeating the sacred formula ‘Ani we hu’ (=Ani hu). Such was the significance, in theology and liturgy, of the theophanic formula ‘Ani hu’ in the days of Jesus.”¹²⁴ This discussion of Isaiah’s influence on John 8 adds another significance to John 8:12, even if Stauffer’s conclusion is incorrect. In addition to a reference to the pillar of fire, in linking the verse with Isaiah, specifically 42:6, Jesus’ claim is also that he is the Servant who will be a light to the nations. As a light to the people, Jesus shows that God’s covenant extends beyond the

¹²¹For a detailed chart showing numerous similarities between John 8-9 and Isaiah 42-43, see J. C. Coetzee, “Jesus’ Revelation in the Ego Eimi Sayings in Jn 8 and 9,” in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament*, ed. J. H. Petzer and P. J. Hartin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 171-174.

¹²²Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 536.

¹²³Coetzee, *op. cit.*, 174-176.

¹²⁴Stauffer, *op. cit.*, 183. If this is true, it would add more support to Ball’s connection that Isaiah lies behind Jesus’ statements in John 6:20 and 13:19, since both occur around Passover (even if sections outside Isaiah 40-45 are used).

ethnic boundaries of Judaism to whoever will come.¹²⁵

Along similar lines, though more specific, David Daube refers to the foundational meeting of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, during which T. W. Manson argued that *egō eimi* is used to indicate the presence of the Messiah. Daube believes that the origin of the term is to be seen in the rabbinic Passover Haggadah. The context is of course Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and the focus of *`ani hu* is that God himself was responsible for this deliverance. The emphasis is therefore on the fact that God has appeared powerfully among his people, which is what happened in the coming of Jesus.¹²⁶ Two comments are in order. The first is that given the uncertainty in dating the origin of the later written rabbinic material, it is unwise to give too much weight to the Passover Haggadah. The second point is that even if an early origin could be proved, the variety of uses (audience, context, time of year) guards against trying to pin down the precise source for the Evangelist's use. Both John and rabbinic tradition had the same authority, namely, the Old Testament Scriptures. It is therefore much better to see both as working from this common source.

Schnackenburg generally sees both the absolute and predicate "I am" sayings as coming from the Old Testament. But he is also aware of the frequency with which Hellenistic religion used the "I am" predicatively. Given some of the vocabulary in John, Schnackenburg believes the structure of the predicate statements to be Hellenistic.¹²⁷ The structure is Hellenistic, but whether the Evangelist (and Jesus) borrowed it is another matter. The basis for Jesus' absolute self-designation is unquestionably the Old Testament. But the predicates themselves are also rooted in the Old Testament, even though some of them had meaning outside it. Thus, since one is dealing with Jesus' own statements, rather than the explanatory work of an author, Jesus' religious context must be allowed to speak above all other religious and philosophical affinities. And for him to combine the self-identifying absolute with an Old Testament image in order to

¹²⁵Ball, *op. cit.*, 218.

¹²⁶David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Arno Press, 1973, reprint), 325-328.

¹²⁷Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 2: 86.

more fully reveal his person and work—even though such a construction may be less common compared to Hellenistic usage—is entirely reasonable. Consequently, the Evangelist’s decision to include these sayings comes from Jewish commitments, not Hellenistic ones.

But it is not accidental that this structure is so common in Hellenism. John has already shown his desire to use vocabulary that speaks to both Jews and Greeks. The richness and force of these statements would be strongly felt by Jewish readers, particularly those possessing Hellenistic backgrounds. At the same time, the statements would reach out to those who had embraced Hellenistic thinking. In the predicate sayings, the Fourth Gospel would present a form that was recognizable to Greek minds. But coupled with the absolute uses of *egō eimi*, they would take Greek hearers beyond to explain to them the true identity of the one who declared himself to be the “I am,” and the importance of that understanding for true freedom (John 8:31-32).

4.2 CLASSIFICATION OF THE “I AM” STATEMENTS

Throughout this study the assumption has been that the “I am” sayings can be divided into two categories: those in an absolute form and those accompanied by a predicate. But this approach is not universally accepted, thus justifying a more careful look at what else has been said in terms of classifying the “I am” statements. The element that has generated the most discussion is the implied predicate and where that fits in relation to the other two categories. Bultmann divided the occurrences into four groups: presentation formula (Who are you?); qualificatory formula (What are you?); identification formula (identifying oneself with another person or object); and recognition formula (containing a predicate).¹²⁸ Brown acknowledges the absolute use and the predicate use. But he also proposes occasions where there may be an implied predicate.¹²⁹ For example, in John 8:24 and 28 the Greek text contains no predicate. Does the context indicate the absolute meaning of v. 58, or is there an implied predicate, such as

¹²⁸Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 225-226, note 3.

¹²⁹Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 533-534.

“he” (NASV)? Billy Simmons, who like Philip Harner also sees nine absolute uses, admits that classification is difficult due to this question of an implied predicate, where *egō eimi* is used in the absolute sense.¹³⁰ At this point, particularly for Bultmann’s division, Ball is correct to warn against allowing the formal parallels, whether with or without a predicate, to determine the meaning of a given occurrence. The context in which the statement is made must determine the meaning.¹³¹

In considering the possibility of an implied predicate, it must be remembered that the Evangelist engages in irony (4:12) and the use of double meaning (13:1), and one must make sure that an implied predicate does not negate these. A difference must be made between predicates that are intended by the author and those assumed by the contemporary exegete that knowingly or unknowingly soften the meaning of the statement. In John 4:26 Jesus identifies himself as, “*Egō eimi, ho lalōn soi.*” Major translations have not seen in this an example of the absolute “I am,” and so have inserted the implied predicate, “he.” (The better translations inform the English reader of this decision by either placing the predicate in brackets or italicizing it.) But commentators have nevertheless seen in Jesus’ statement a subtle reference to identity with God. As has been seen, although in Jesus’ wording Ball sees a connection with Isaiah 52:6, in the Greek, *egō eimi* is the way to indicate simple identification. The context and direction of the dialogue suggests that “Messiah” is intended to be the implied predicate. The woman was talking about the Messiah and Jesus tells her that he is the one of whom she is speaking. This is not to suggest that a double meaning is not intended. But the point is that Jesus is the Messiah whom the Samaritan woman was awaiting. To be sure, God’s promised Messiah was more than what people were generally anticipating; and for those reading this account knowing all about Jesus, they may very well have seen a subtle reference to deity. But it does not appear from the story that this deeper meaning is intended to be communicated at the time of the conversation.¹³²

¹³⁰Billy E. Simmons, “A Christology of the ‘I Am’ Sayings in the Gospel of John,” *The Theological Educator* 38 (1988): 94-95.

¹³¹Ball, *op. cit.*, 257.

¹³²The same allusion to deity has been seen by Ball for John 6:20. Jesus’ mastery over creation is said to

The same construction is found in John 13:19. Whereas in 4:26 there was a predicate to which the statement could be attached, here there appears to be no such predicate. It could be an implied reference to “Messiah.” But the statement is immediately followed by a claim of equality with God: those who receive Jesus’ witness receive Jesus, and those who receive Jesus receive God. What the Father does, Jesus does (5:19); what the Father speaks, Jesus speaks (12:49-50). Also, Jesus tells the disciples that they are correct to call him “Teacher” and “Lord.” But in his divinity, which will be more clearly understood after the resurrection (20:28), he is Teacher and Lord *par excellence*.¹³³

In terms of dealing with the presence or absence of an implied predicate, the most difficult passage, in the author’s judgment, is the opening section of John 18, which records Jesus’ arrest in the garden. Major commentators see Jesus’ identification as an absolute use of *egō eimi*, and a common argument is the reaction of his opponents when they hear it.¹³⁴ F. F. Bruce prefers to take Jesus’ statement as an intended double meaning by the Evangelist. Thus, while it is a simple identification (since the authorities want to know which one is Jesus), it is also much more.¹³⁵ Carson offers a convincing argument for an intended implied predicate, which in the context is, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He does not outrightly dismiss the divine reference, but shows that Jesus’ opponents’ response does not have to indicate such a reference. For one thing, the reaction to his statement is not that of John 8:58-59 or 10:30-31. Secondly, at the Feast of Tabernacles, recorded in John 7, those sent to seize Jesus and bring him to the chief priests and Pharisees return empty-handed because of their astonishment over Jesus’ words (vv. 45-46). Even if none of these same officers are present at the garden, it is difficult to believe that word did not get around concerning Jesus. His presence and authoritative teaching communicated

refer to Isaiah 43:1-2 (*op. cit.*, 182-183). Again, the context suggests that Jesus’ *egō eimi* is meant to be taken as a simple identification, given the alarm of the disciples over this shadowy figure on the water.

¹³³Philip Harner maintains that this passage is central in John’s understanding of Jesus because of the necessity for faith to be able to comprehend Jesus’ meaning, which will occur after the resurrection and ascension (*The ‘I Am’ of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Use and Thought* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970], 38).

¹³⁴See, for example, Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 3: 224.

¹³⁵Bruce, *op. cit.*, 341.

much about who he was, and elicited various responses, such as joy, amazement, and extreme hatred. Carson says it is not at all unlikely that some of the officers are present. “If they have been awed by Jesus before, if they have been dumbfounded by his teaching, his authority, his directness in the full light of day in the precincts of the temple where they most feel at home, it is not hard to believe that they are staggered by his open self-disclosure on a sloping mountainside in the middle of the night—the more so if some of them hear the overtones of God’s self-disclosure in the prophecy of Isaiah.”¹³⁶ It certainly seems that some kind of heightened revelation of who Jesus is occurs, even beyond what may have already been known by those sent to arrest him. But it does not seem to be based on Jesus’ words as an understood reference to the divine name.

The Evangelist is writing after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, and in recording Jesus’ words may intend that a double meaning be detected by the thoughtful reader. But in terms of the arrest itself, it does not seem that Jesus was making a veiled identification with God. However, how Jesus responded to his own imminent death, particularly under the watchful and scheming eyes of his opponents throughout these events prior to his crucifixion, clearly proves that this was no mere man, but the divine Son of God who had become flesh.

The Gospel of John is concerned to show who Jesus is, which is proved, whether or not one acknowledges it, by observing the work he came to do. Because of this relationship, one must not separate the absolute and predicate sayings. Ball proposes that the predicate “I am” statements deal with Jesus’ role or function, while the absolute uses point to Jesus’ identity or person. But these obviously belong together, for as Ball states: “It is only because of who Jesus is that he is able to fulfill the role which he has.”¹³⁷ This means that in the predicates Jesus is also communicating some knowledge of his person, even though the particular image refers to an aspect of his role. “In his classic study, Zimmermann explains it this way: “Er gibt das Lebensbrot, indem er sich selbst gibt (6, 35); er bringt nicht nur das Licht, sondern er ist es (8,

¹³⁶Carson, *op. cit.*, 578-579.

¹³⁷Ball, *op. cit.*, 175.

12); er vermag dem Lazarus die Auferstehung zu gewähren, weil er die Auferstehung ist (11, 25); er zeigt nicht nur den Weg zur Vater, er ist der Weg (14, 6).”¹³⁸

4.3 JOHN 8

After Jesus’ declaration in John 8:12, the subject is that of the validity of Jesus’ witness (vv. 13-18). Since this validity is in part dependent upon the Father’s testimony, an exchange occurs over the location of Jesus’ Father, with the conclusion that his opponents know neither him nor his Father (vv. 19-20). This leads into the topic of judgment, which is connected to the knowledge of who Jesus is (vv. 21-24). From here the subject naturally moves to Jesus’ identity, which again brings up his relationship to the Father (vv. 24-30). From v. 31 to the end, Jesus directs his comments to “those Jews who had believed him.” Their response to Jesus’ teaching indicates, however, that they are not true believers (see John 6:65-66). These Jews claim their status based on their relationship to Abraham. The rest of the chapter proves that because of their reaction to Jesus’ teaching they are not the children of God, but of the devil. And as for their supposed relationship to Abraham, if they really were his descendants, they would receive Jesus’ message.¹³⁹

In v. 24, Jesus says that if those listening to him do not believe that “I am” (*egō eimi*), they will die in their sins. Judging from the verses preceding, and up to v. 28, where the next *egō eimi* occurs, there does not seem to be an implied predicate. This best explains the follow-up question

¹³⁸Heinrich Zimmermann, “Das absolute Ego Eimi als die neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 4 (1960): 272. “He gives the living bread, in that he gives himself (6, 35); he not only brings the light, but he is it (8, 12); he is able to grant resurrection to Lazarus, because he is the resurrection (11, 25); he not only shows the way to the Father, he is the way (14, 6).” Furthermore, because of this, Braumann is correct when he says, “In the judgment of the present writer, the ‘I am’ sayings are not to be regarded as parabolic pictures designed to illustrate the significance of Jesus, so that one could grasp the intended reality on the basis of the picture. It is rather the reverse. It is Jesus himself who determines the meaning of the picture” (G. Braumann, and H. -G. Link, “I Am (*egō eimi*),” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown [Exeter: The Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976], 281).

¹³⁹In asserting that John’s Gospel is anti-Jewish, Maurice Casey misses the point that the problem is not with the Jews’ ethnicity, but with their theology in failing to see that the Old Testament points to Christ (*Is John’s Gospel True?* [London and New York: Routledge, 1996], 223-229).

in v. 25: “Who are You?” To supply the predicate “he” still retains the mystery that prompts the Jews’ question, but it weakens the statements, which reach their crescendo in v. 58. Barrett’s view is puzzling: he argues that the continuous present of *eimi* is appropriate here (as well as in v. 58) because it reinforces the assertion that Jesus belongs to the eternal, heavenly world.” But shortly after he says, “*Egō eimi* does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms.”¹⁴⁰ It seems inconsistent to talk about Jesus as belonging to the eternal and heavenly world, yet deny his identity with God.

A better understanding is to see in Jesus’ comments an equating, through fulfillment, of his works with God’s works—and therefore his person with God’s person—in the prophecy of Isaiah. Standing behind this identification in Isaiah is the divine name of Exodus 3:14. Isaiah 41 begins like a courtroom drama, with God calling creation to account. Concluding the first section, the LORD says:

Who has performed and accomplished it,
Calling forth the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, am the first, and the last. I am He (v. 4).

This theme of judgment is also seen in John 8, even with the presence of *egō eimi*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *’ani hu*. Early in his discussion with the Jews, Jesus declares: “I said therefore to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (translation mine). Jesus proceeds through the chapter to show why his opponents are condemned, and what they must embrace to be acquitted.

In Isaiah 42:6, although the phrase is different (*egō kyrios ho theos*), the similarity to the *egō eimi* is obvious. The Servant of the LORD will bring justice (vv. 1-4), but will also bring salvation to his people (vv. 6-7).

The idea of witness, so important in John 8, is strongly seen again in Isaiah 43, particularly vv. 10-11:

“You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD,
And My servant whom I have chosen,

¹⁴⁰Barrett, *op. cit.*, 342.

In order that you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I am He.
I, even I, am the LORD;
And there is no savior besides Me.

With this, v. 25 also fits well with John 8:24:

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions
for My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins.

Further detail is then given in John 8:28 concerning the means by which transgressions will be wiped out.

Jesus has left his opponents quite puzzled with his statement in v. 24. From their perspective, v. 28 is not much better, although the content of the needed belief is more detailed. They will know that “I am” when they lift up the Son of Man. The first point that needs to be made is that the name “Son of Man” could be the implied predicate of *egō eimi*. But Brown is correct to reject this idea because “it does not fit John’s thought that the ultimate insight into the exalted Jesus would be that he is the Son of Man.”¹⁴¹ Rather, it seems at least possible that the term is used close to *egō eimi* so that, even though Jesus intends his use of “I am” as a subtle reference to the clear absolute use coming in v. 58, “Son of Man” is the answer that for now Jesus is content to give to the question, “Who are You?” “Son of Man” was far from being an empty term that Jesus used here for no other reason than to answer the question concerning his identity. This is a favorite term of self-identification for Jesus, used more by the synoptists, because of its mystery. There were various thoughts going around as to the identity of this figure, rooted in Daniel 7:13. This allowed Jesus to use the term freely and fill it with his own meaning, something which was impossible with the term “messiah” due to the political aspirations that had become attached to it. Jesus therefore made very high claims with this name, and of the few times it is used in the Fourth Gospel, here it gets attached, via v. 28, to the divine name in v. 58.

The second point is in regard to the idea of being lifted up (*hypsōō*). The verb has two meanings. The first is the literal lifting up, which is used in John 3:14 to describe Moses’ lifting

¹⁴¹Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 348.

up of the serpent, recorded in Numbers 21:9, as well as Jesus' lifting up. The second is the figurative sense of elevation in honor, status, or authority. Most likely, Jesus intends his usage to include both concepts. It was not strictly in his crucifixion that his identity would be understood by some. Rather, it was his crucifixion followed by his resurrection and ascension that became the center of apostolic preaching in the subsequent decades (Acts 2:22-36). In these events, the glory that Jesus shared with the Father in his preexistent state was restored (John 17:5; Rom. 1:4).¹⁴²

As the dialogue continues and Jesus' judgment becomes more pointed, as well as personal, in the discussion of covenant membership through Abraham, the Jews protest Jesus' accusation that they are acting inconsistently with Abraham: "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God" (v. 41). This is most likely an allusion to their interpretation of Jesus' birth; at any rate, Jesus does not stoop to their level. He continues by proving that if they really did belong to God they would respond properly to his words, for he came from God. Because they do not properly respond, they show themselves to actually be children of the devil. Verse 48 is a second attack on Jesus: they consider him to be a Samaritan and demon-possessed. If Jesus is going to deny them their divine covenant blessings in Abraham (which they assumed they possessed because of their birth), Jesus must be a Samaritan nationally, and spiritually in league with the devil. Rather than justifying himself, he instead talks about his desire to glorify his Father.¹⁴³

The subject again shifts to Abraham with Jesus' statement: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (v. 51). This is proof to the Jews that Jesus is

¹⁴²Jerome Neyrey links vv. 24 and 28, and 58, to John 5:26, which he sees as having a unique aspect of eschatological power. Based on the meaning of John 1:1-4 and 10:17-18 (both of which concern the idea of life), he concludes: "Thus, 5:26 says two things: (1) Jesus is an eternal figure in the past, who already 'is' in the beginning and (2) Jesus is an imperishable figure in the future, who can lay down his life, take it back, and be alive forever" (*An Ideology of Revolt* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], 52-53).

¹⁴³The Jews have deeply insulted Jesus (and more than that, blasphemed him). In not seeking his own glory, Jesus rejected a fundamental value of first-century Mediterranean culture. For a fuller treatment of honor and shame, see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, revised edition), 28-55.

demon-possessed. Abraham himself, as well as the prophets, died. Another example of Johannine irony is observed in their question: “Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be” (v. 53)? Jesus is moving beyond the vague allusions in vv. 24 and 28, for they again inquire as to his identity. He says that his Father, who glorifies him, is the very one whom the Jews make out to be their God. Then, in v. 56, Jesus informs them: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.” The Jews do not pick up with Jesus’ statement in v. 54 concerning the identity of his Father as God, but ask how, considering his age, Jesus has seen Abraham (v. 57). Apparently, Jesus’ remark about his Father in v. 54 did not greatly impact them because in their question in v. 57 they shift the attention from Jesus to Abraham. The next verse will decisively put the emphasis where it properly belongs.

There are various opinions on the meaning of Jesus’ reference to Abraham’s rejoicing.¹⁴⁴ It seems best to take it as a reference to the sacrifice of Isaac. Even before they arrived at the place God appointed, Abraham knew that both he and his son would return to the servants (Gen. 22:5). And when Isaac asked about the location of the sacrifice, Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (v. 8). After the angel of the LORD prevented Abraham from killing Isaac by providing a ram, Abraham named the place exactly what he knew the LORD would do.

Finally, Jesus pulls together all the things he had been saying, rendering it impossible to misunderstand him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.” It would have been astounding enough to say, “Before Abraham was born, I was.” In using the present tense, Jesus is explicitly identifying himself with the LORD God of Israel. But in spite of this clear ascription to deity, not all commentators have taken it (and therefore, vv. 24 and 28) this way. J. A. T. Robinson grants that Jesus is asserting preexistence, but nevertheless concludes: “That Jesus is arrogating to himself the divine name is nowhere stated or implied in this Gospel.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴For the various suggestions, see Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 359-360; and Carson, *op. cit.*, 356-357.

¹⁴⁵John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer-Stone Books,

He goes on to explain: “It is the ‘I’ of the mystics, who make the most astonishing claims to be one with God, without of course claiming to *be* God...” Robinson concludes his explanation: “He knew himself in the depth of his spirit as one with the eternal ground of his being.”¹⁴⁶

These various attempts, however, do not account for the fierce reaction of the Jews against Jesus, which will be seen again in 10:31, after Jesus’ equally blatant association: “I and the Father are one.” Schnackenburg’s comment that 8:58 is an “indirect reference” to Exodus 3:14 is weak.¹⁴⁷ It is a direct reference, and there was no doubt in the Jews’ minds what Jesus was claiming. For them, their accusation that Jesus was possessed by a demon was absolutely proved by this vicious blasphemy against the God of Israel. Moreover, as children of the covenant of Abraham it was their duty to God to carry out the proper judgment of such a heinous crime (see Lev. 24:10-16). This clear reference to the divine name pulls together the entire narrative, for it explains what Jesus meant in vv. 24 and 28, thus serving as the only conclusion to be drawn from all that Jesus had spoken concerning himself and the unique relationship that he alone had with the Father.

5. TRUE PROPHET

Of the four Gospels, John is the only one to include the crowd’s confession that Jesus is truly the Prophet (6:14; 7:40), indicating that there was some level of expectation among them for one to come who would exceed other prophets (whether true or false) who had already come.

Because of the Old Testament background of Deuteronomy 18, it is necessary to treat this

1987, reprint), 386. This is similar to Lindars: “But the point of verse 58 is not to assert that Jesus is the abiding expression of God, but that he exists from before creation” (*Essays on John*, ed. C. M. Tuckett [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992], 127, note 18). This is why in his commentary on John 8:59, Lindars wonders: “Exactly how his words constitute blasphemy is not yet made clear” (*The Gospel of John*, 337).

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 387. Though not following Robinson’s philosophical approach, John Painter is also unwilling to commit: “Though this is not the pronouncement of the divine name the implication of a claim to be older than Abraham does move in the direction of a divine claim and this is understood also” (*The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991], 258).

¹⁴⁷Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 2: 224.

confession separately. However, the background for the broader contexts in which those statements were made must not be forgotten. The context for the occurrence in 7:40—the Feast of Tabernacles and the significance of Jesus’ fulfillment in his provision of living water—has already been discussed. The context for the occurrence in 6:14—the Israelites’ receiving of the manna in the wilderness and Jesus’ fulfillment as the true bread—will be discussed in the next section. Both of Jesus’ provisions—living water and true bread—refer to God’s covenantal dealings in the wilderness, which resulted in the crowd’s confession, showing that in their thinking these statements and actions of Jesus were consistent with what the Prophet would say and do.

The Evangelist’s inclusion of these two confessions most likely has something to do with his intended audience. Assuming the traditional provenance of Ephesus, for which there is sufficient support, there would have been considerable concern for Hellenistic Jews. Obviously the reference to Jesus as “the Prophet” would have been understood by Jewish readers. But the prophetic figure characterized by the communicating of oracles (such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi) would be familiar to Greeks and to those who converted to Judaism out of Greek thought. This is not to suggest that there are similarities between Jesus and his prophetic function and Greek prophets and their oracles. Rather, the concepts of “prophet” and “prophecy” would not be foreign to Greeks even though there were fundamental differences between the Greek and Hebrew understandings.

Like other themes connected with truth in the Fourth Gospel, this too is rooted in Jewish thought. In addition to Deuteronomy 18, however, other Semitic expressions also made use of the idea of prophet. Moses figures heavily in these expressions, thus offering proof that it is ultimately to the Old Testament to which one must turn in order to grasp the Evangelist’s intention.

5.1 DEUTERONOMY 18: A PROPHET LIKE MOSES

The various Semitic traditions, to greater or lesser degrees, point to Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Although not all made connections with the Messiah, the belief that the Prophet and Messiah were the same person is possibly seen in John 6:15, where the people, upon confessing Jesus as the Prophet, intended to forcefully crown him king. But it has also been put forth that it is possible to take the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 as looking ahead to the prophetic institution. It is not a question of one or the other, but, rather, one of primary reference.¹⁴⁸

Two arguments have emerged in favor of the prophetic institution. The first is the observation that *navi'* is without the definite article. Regarding the basic difference between definite and indefinite, Waltke and O'Connor explain: "The basic opposition of the categories *definite: indefinite* is similar: in Hebrew, as in English, the definite noun directs attention to the referent's *identity*, while the indefinite noun focuses on the *class* to which the referent belongs, its quality and character."¹⁴⁹ Therefore, proponents assert, the emphasis on the class, as opposed to the identity, of the referent argues for the institution. The second point advanced in favor of the institution is the historical setting of the prediction. The context is the need to distinguish between Canaanite and Israelite prophets. Israel is to reject the Canaanite institution and be faithful to that institution raised up by the LORD.¹⁵⁰

As solid as this evidence may appear, Khoo exposes its weakness by answering both assertions. The first, regarding syntax, takes a closer look at the distinction made by Waltke and O'Connor: the indefinite noun focuses on the "*class* to which the referent belongs." This does not refer to the class *per se*; it only shows that the referent will come from a particular class, in this case, the prophetic class. Moreover, although this is not always true, one should expect to

¹⁴⁸Jeffrey Khoo, "The Identity of the Moses-Like Prophet: An Exegetical Study of Deuteronomy 18:15 and Its Fulfillment Texts" (S.T.M. thesis, Biblical Theological Seminary, Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 1992), 12-13.

¹⁴⁹Bruce K. Waltke, and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 236.

¹⁵⁰Khoo, *op. cit.*, 15.

see *navi* ' in the plural instead of the singular.¹⁵¹ The second response, concerning historical setting, is that the information given in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and 20-22 is not new. The concept of a prophet already appears in Exodus 7:1, where the LORD appoints Aaron as Moses' spokesman or prophet, and in Deuteronomy 13, where the LORD commands that false prophets be put to death. Thus, the prophetic institution has already been established. Deuteronomy 18 moves beyond the institution to something more.¹⁵²

Khoo suggests that the text is about an individual, and that the lack of the definite article indicates that the Prophet's identity is left unknown. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22, *navi* ' contains the definite article four times, apparently contrasting these prophets with the one of vv. 15 and 18.¹⁵³ Moses says that the Prophet is going to be like him. Clearly this does not refer to the general prophetic responsibility of proclamation. There is something about Moses' role that renders him unique among Israel's prophets. It is true that other prophets were revealers in that they conveyed the will of the LORD to his people. But in the Old Testament economy, no one did this like Moses, for the LORD spoke face to face with Moses, just as one does with a friend (Ex. 33:11). But in addition to the special way in which Moses acted as a revealer to the people, he was also unique in his mediatorial role. In one sense, all the prophets acted as mediators in that they stood between Almighty God and the people who had broken the covenant of that God. If punishment was to be averted and blessing experienced, the people would need to heed the message of the prophets. But this mediation was not like that of Moses who, after the sin of the golden calf, mediated on behalf of the people's very lives, for the LORD threatened to act upon his righteous anger and destroy them (Ex. 32:9-14). Thus, the Prophet like Moses would be one who demonstrated a unique revelation and mediation.

It should also be mentioned that in the Evangelist's inclusion of Jesus as the true Prophet, because it hearkened back to Deuteronomy 18 and the promised Prophet like Moses, he

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

doubtless desires to give added support to the idea expressed in John 1:17: Jesus is greater than Moses. There it was because the grace and truth that he brought is superior. Here, because the Law shows that Moses himself looked for one greater. Jesus' opponents should therefore stop looking to Moses and instead come to the one to whom Moses pointed.

5.2 APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

Before considering the significance for the inclusion in the Gospel of John, it is first necessary to survey other occurrences of the idea in the broader Jewish world. This will aid in understanding the first century expectation that produced the two confessions in the Gospel.

Testament of Benjamin 9:2 mentions the exceeding glory of the latter temple. The twelve tribes, as well as all the nations, will be gathered there “until such time as the Most High shall send forth his salvation through the ministry of the unique prophet.”¹⁵⁴ The identity of the prophet is left unknown, but later, in the Testament of Moses (first century A. D.), language is used which strongly suggests that the unique prophet is Moses: “...that sacred spirit, worthy of the Lord, manifold and incomprehensible, master of leaders, faithful, the divine prophet for the whole earth, the perfect teacher in the world” (11:16).¹⁵⁵

There is a striking source cited by Meeks which attributes not only prophecy to Moses, but also kingship. “The Exodus” is a drama written in Greek by one Ezekiel, thought by Meeks to belong to the Greek-speaking Diaspora. The narrative is close to the LXX, while the audience is probably Jewish. The evidence for dating may safely place it in the second century B. C. In the drama Moses describes a dream in which he is given a scepter and crown, and he is told to sit on the royal throne. But he also bears a prophetic function, for he is given the ability to see all things in the past, present, and future, whether on earth, the underworld, or heaven.¹⁵⁶ Although later cited by Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria, the drama still seems rather obscure, and the

¹⁵⁴Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, 1: 827.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 1: 933-934.

¹⁵⁶Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 147-149.

content regarding kingship and prophecy does not resemble the Fourth Gospel. But it does provide a good example of the combining of these two characteristics in the person of Moses.

5.3 PHILO

Philo also combines in Moses the two features of prophet and king. Among other descriptions, he calls Moses the chief prophet,¹⁵⁷ but it is in his two-part biography on Moses where Philo's full view of Moses is seen. He is referred to as "the god and king of the whole nation,"¹⁵⁸ where "god" is to be taken in a representative or mediatorial sense. In the second part, Philo goes even further, saying that by the will of God Moses was "both a king and a lawgiver, and a high priest and a prophet." In each of these offices "he displayed the most eminent wisdom and virtue."¹⁵⁹

Earlier in the twentieth century, Goodenough suggested that in Philo the concept of Hellenistic kingship connected the kingly and priestly offices.¹⁶⁰ But as Meeks points out, not only does the idea of Hellenistic kingship fail to account for the combination of prophet and king, but given the emphasis on Moses as prophet, it is better to look to the Jewish tradition.¹⁶¹ Meeks is right to conclude: "In general the atmosphere of Philo's writings is far removed from that of the Fourth Gospel...Nevertheless, there are elements in Philo's portrait of Moses that may serve to illuminate the background of John. Significantly, the closest parallels appear just in those elements which Philo probably inherited from Jewish tradition."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷Philo, "On Dreams," Book 2, XXVIII, (189), *op. cit.*, 401.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, "On the Life of Moses," I, XXVIII, (158), 474.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, "On the Life of Moses," II, I, (3), 491.

¹⁶⁰Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 190-198.

¹⁶¹Meeks, *op. cit.*, 116.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 129.

5.4 RABBINIC LITERATURE

Rabbinic thought also stressed Moses as a prophet, calling him the “father of the prophets” and the “greatest of the Prophets.” More significant for the present study is Mosaic kingship, argued from Deuteronomy 33:5. Moses was held to be the primary prophet as well as a king by virtue of his ascent up Sinai to receive the Law. How much of this existed in the first century is certainly unknown. But it is difficult to believe that some core material, however minimal, did not exist during Jesus’ time.

5.5 SAMARITAN EXPECTATION

Accepting only the Pentateuch, the Samaritans rejected all prophets after Moses, except for the one spoken of in Deuteronomy 18. It was this one whom they regarded as the Messiah, or Taheb. Little is known about Samaritan theology before the fourth century A. D. Of the extant sources, while Moses was clearly known as a prophet, it is less clear that Moses was thought of as a king. In the receiving of the Law, terms are used that designate a kingly status, but in places where one would expect the word “king,” one instead finds “prophet.”¹⁶³ As for the Taheb, it was only in later sources, particularly fourteenth century hymns, where Deuteronomy 18:18 is applied to him as being both a king and a prophet.¹⁶⁴ The later dates for Samaritan sources preclude one from attempting to draw direct parallels to John’s Gospel. However, some of the views on Moses are common to both Jewish and Samaritan sources, causing Meeks to conclude that the relationship is not one of borrowing, but rather that “the evidence points to an area of overlapping traditions and mutual influence in the fluid situation in Palestine, perhaps as early as the first century.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 231-232, 237.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 250-251.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 257.

5.6 DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Qumran community was clearly looking forward to a future prophet who would serve a unique function, but it was not made clear who they believed he would be. Deuteronomy 18:18-19 is quoted in 4QTest. 1:5-8, but this does nothing more than prove such an expectation existed. However, 1QS 9:11 provides a bit more information, but admittedly not much. It too expresses the belief in the coming of the prophet, but makes a distinction between that individual and the two Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.¹⁶⁶ What is discovered from Qumran is of limited help because Moses (and therefore the Prophet like Moses) does not have both a prophetic and kingly significance. But what Qumran does provide is further understanding of the prophetic expectation in the first century, as well as an enhanced sense of varying opinions regarding the coming Prophet.¹⁶⁷

5.7 JOSEPHUS

Like the Dead Sea Scrolls, the value of Josephus is in his contribution to the knowledge of first century thought. Josephus does not use the word “king” for Moses, although his description of Moses’ functions has a regal connotation (military command, legislative authority, *etc.*). The reason for this, as Meeks suggests, is that Josephus prefers rule by aristocracy, with God as the only governor, or king.¹⁶⁸

Josephus reports on individuals who led insurrections against Rome. Two are noteworthy because, according to him, they actually claimed to be prophets and persuaded a large number of people to follow them. A certain Theudas was a magician who convinced people to follow him to the Jordan, where he told them he would divide the water. The procurator of Judea heard of this movement, sent soldiers, and killed many, including Theudas.¹⁶⁹ At another time, an

¹⁶⁶Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 139.

¹⁶⁷Meeks, *op. cit.*, 174.

¹⁶⁸Flavius Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews,” Book IV, VIII, 17, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, four vols., trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995, reprint), II: 269.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, Book XX, V, 1, IV: 124.

Egyptian (see Acts 21:38) came to Jerusalem, claiming to be a prophet. Many people came along with him to the Mount of Olives, where they listened to his bold prediction that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would collapse. When Felix the governor found out, he sent soldiers to crush the rebels. Many were killed, while the Egyptian escaped and apparently was not heard from again.¹⁷⁰

5.8 FIRST CENTURY SETTING

It has been suggested that prophets during this time could be of two types. The first, into which Theudas and the Egyptian belonged, was the action prophets. They attracted a large multitude in anticipation of eschatological redemption. The second was the preachers of oracles. Their messages were of either judgment or deliverance, and they were concentrated before and during the Jewish revolt of A. D. 66-70.¹⁷¹ Interestingly, the two occasions on which Jesus is called “the Prophet” resemble the two types. In the style of the action prophet, Jesus is declared to be such after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand in John 6. And in John 7, characteristic of the oracular preachers, some of the crowd conclude from Jesus’ teaching that he is the Prophet.

It is difficult to conclude with any kind of certainty which of these two types had more attention of the common people. Perhaps the oracular prophets gained more of a hearing as the atmosphere grew tenser as events moved toward the revolt. But it does seem that the focus among the people was on those charismatic leaders, at least sometimes viewed as anointed kings, who excited the masses with promises of divine eschatological liberation. This was not divorced from the strong nationalism already present against the Roman occupation; indeed, these movements raised the anti-Roman sentiment.¹⁷² Spiritual freedom was tied to national freedom, which is why the Roman government was quick to stamp out these brushfires of discontent, lest

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, Book XX, VIII, 6, IV: 136.

¹⁷¹Richard A. Horsley, and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 185.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 117, 171.

they turn into widespread insurrection.

It must be recognized that the desire for political deliverance was based on the new order that was prophesied in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 18 produced the belief among some that the coming prophet would be the Messiah as conceived along Mosaic lines. Others thought that the Prophet like Moses would actually be Moses returning as the forerunner of the Messiah. Still others pointed to Malachi 4:5-6 as support for their looking for the reappearance of Elijah.¹⁷³ But it went beyond these two figures to include other prophets in the people's eschatological hope. When Jesus asked the disciples in Matthew 16 who people said he was, they also mentioned Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Given this widespread belief in a coming prophet and the varied opinion as to his identity, it is little wonder that false prophets were present, each trying to gain notoriety and attract a following. Through Moses, God had warned the Israelites that false prophets would appear (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:18-22).¹⁷⁴ Jesus continued the same warnings in the Olivet Discourse when he said that many will come and deceive people into thinking that they are the Christ. Others would come—some of whom apparently were already at work—claiming to be prophets who knew the way in which the people should go (Matt. 24:5, 11, 24).

5.9 JESUS, THE TRUE PROPHET LIKE MOSES

Before considering this section of application, it will be helpful to summarize the discussion thus far. Enough evidence exists to show that the Prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18 is an individual rather than an institution. Several Semitic expressions were surveyed to show that an individual was expected, and while not always the case, at times the Prophet has a kingly

¹⁷³Glasson, *op. cit.*, 27. Given the importance of Moses and Elijah in first century expectation, on p. 28 Glasson remarks that for any who doubted Jesus as the Messiah, the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus during the transfiguration provided an effective response. For skeptical Jews, this event probably would not have carried much weight, since it was private rather than public. But for Christian readers of the Gospels that include it, it undoubtedly served as another confirmation of the truth of Jesus' person and work.

¹⁷⁴In John 7, it may be that even before some confessed Jesus to be the Prophet (v. 40) this idea was already being considered. In v. 12 the people are divided: some think he is a good man; others believe he leads the people astray.

function even though he is not always designated “king.” Not only was there disagreement in the first century over who this individual was, but also regarding the relationship between this prophet and the promised Messiah.

During the Feast of Tabernacles celebration, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the source of living water. This tied in perfectly with the use of water in the festival, which already directed the people’s minds to God’s provision of water through Moses to the Israelites while in the desert. They therefore saw Jesus as the Prophet of Deuteronomy 18 who, like Moses, would provide them with something wonderful. Still others present went further and concluded that he was the Christ, indicating that they were not the same person. This assertion was rejected by some who had incomplete information regarding Jesus’ birthplace.

This distinction between Prophet and Messiah may or may not exist in John 6. The result of Jesus’ miraculous feeding is the crowd’s belief that he is the Prophet, whom they desire to make king in v. 15. Perhaps they considered kingship here in a general sense in that Jesus’ miracle was a sign that he was the candidate to lead the Jews in a revolt against Rome. But it could also be that they equated the Prophet with the Messiah. Just as Moses had provided Israel with manna in the wilderness, so the Prophet like Moses had provided bread. Moreover, the magnitude of the provision was such that it was considered to be of messianic proportions. (As some who had come to believe in him asked in John 7:31: “When the Christ shall come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?”) Perhaps the crowd had picked up on the idea that since Moses was both king and prophet, the Prophet like Moses would also be a king. The Samaritans considered the Prophet and Messiah the same; it is possible that some of this spilled over into Jewish thought, as well.

The differences between the two confessions in John 6 and 7 do not indicate inconsistency in the stories, but the diversity of belief in first century Palestine. Jesus’ reaction, however, is important because it involves the significance of his miracles. In John 6 the people declare Jesus to be the Prophet solely on the basis of a miracle which they had witnessed, and it is this miracle that leads to their desire to make him king. Jesus rejects this desire and goes away. This was a

misapplication on the part of the people, for it appears that they failed to grasp the emphasis of Deuteronomy 18. They understood Jesus to be the Prophet based on a miraculous event.

Deuteronomy 18, to the contrary, places the test of the prophet not on what he does, but on what he says. In v. 15 God commands the people to listen to this Prophet. And in v. 18 the emphasis on the Prophet's words is even stronger: God says he will put his words in the Prophet's mouth, and the Prophet will speak everything that God commands him to speak. The crowd in John 6 did not focus on Jesus' words, and in this failure they misunderstood Jesus' work.

A different sense is perceived in John 7. There are no rash attempts to appoint Jesus king because those who see him as the Prophet do so not on the basis of some miracle, but on his teaching. Furthermore, the rejection Jesus displays in John 6 is directed toward the people's belief that because Jesus is the Prophet he should therefore be their political king. Like John 7, Jesus does not deny that he is the Prophet, but the meaning of it will be determined by himself, consistent with Old Testament revelation, not by nationalistic discontent and rebellion.

Although Teeple has argued that the superiority of Jesus to Moses shows that Jesus is not to be regarded as the Prophet like Moses,¹⁷⁵ the early church's use of Deuteronomy 18 undeniably proves that Jesus was considered the Prophet of whom Moses wrote. The first occurrence is in Acts 3:22-23, where Peter uses it to describe Jesus, whose power it was that healed the lame man. And because Jesus is the promised Prophet, the people should repent of their wickedness, manifested particularly in their part in Jesus' crucifixion, and believe in this Servant whom God has sent. The second application is used by Stephen in his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. In Acts 6:11 he was falsely accused of speaking "blasphemous words against Moses and against God." Thus, in his apology he spends a considerable amount of time reviewing the life of Moses, showing that his accusers' ancestors not only rebelled against Moses, but also the other prophets God had sent to them. In their rebellion, and in that of subsequent centuries, the Israelites not only rejected Moses, but the very Law of God given through him. Their

¹⁷⁵Howard M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1957), 95-96.

descendants were doing exactly the same thing. Revelation did not stop with Moses since he wrote of another Prophet to come whom the people were to obey (7:37). And now that this Prophet has come, the people rejected him just as they rejected all the other prophets God had sent, including Moses. The people therefore have no right to claim allegiance to Moses and the Law, for as Stephen says, “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit” (7:51a).

In the person of Moses can be seen the three offices of Jesus Christ which summarize his activity: prophet, priest, and king. As prophet, Moses brought to the nation of Israel the message that God desired to give to his people. As priest, Moses served as a mediator in pleading before God on the people’s behalf when they sinned. As king, Moses was the divinely appointed ruler who led the nation out of bondage to the land that God had promised on oath. Jesus alone is the fulfillment of all three offices. He did not only bring the message of salvation; he himself is the message. He did not merely serve a mediatorial role; he is the mediator who offered himself for the sins of the people. He did not merely serve as God’s representative ruler over the people; he is the divine ruler and the only king before whom all must bow. The Prophet like Moses has come, and his words must be obeyed. To those who ignore his words, believing he is not the Prophet, not only will no other prophet come, but Jesus, the true Prophet, will have no other message for them than that of judgment and death. But to those who hear his words and act accordingly, Jesus will speak words of pardon and life eternal.

6. TRUE BREAD

The previous section discussed the Evangelist’s reference to Jesus as the true Prophet, the basis of which was Deuteronomy 18. Because of Moses’ role in the LORD’s provision of manna for Israel, when Jesus performed the feeding miracle this was the crowd’s conclusion, which for them carried with it kingship of a political variety. To declare Jesus to be the Prophet based on this sign was not necessarily incorrect. But the error was made in drawing a conclusion based on the sign alone, rather than on the sign and the accompanying teaching that was going to follow.

The miraculous feeding of the multitude was of a material nature, which reminded the recipients of Moses. But just as the true significance of the miracle of the manna was in the sphere of redemptive history rather than in physical nourishment, so the meaning of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish lay in the spiritual nourishment that Jesus as the true bread of life alone can give. It is this to which the feeding miracle points, which is the reason why Jesus is the true Prophet. As the true Prophet, Jesus alone is the true bread who has come down from heaven to give life to the world. And like the concept of prophet, the idea of bread also possessed universal meaning, thereby enabling the Evangelist to make Christian application to a wide range of hearers.

6.1 THE CONTEXT OF JOHN 6

To better understand Jesus' discourse on the bread of life, it is helpful to summarize John's version of Jesus' overall ministry thus far. In the earlier chapters of the Gospel, Jesus' popularity increases. At the end of chapter 1 is recorded the calling of the first disciples, with Philip telling Nathanael that Jesus is the one of whom the Law and the Prophets spoke (v. 45), and Nathanael confessing Jesus to be the Son of God and the King of Israel (v. 49). Chapter 2 contains Jesus' first miracle, the result of which was that his glory was revealed and his disciples put their faith in him (v. 11). In chapter 3 the disciples of John the Baptist, observing Jesus' increasing number of followers, go to their teacher to inquire why all are coming to Jesus rather than to him. His answer was that Jesus must increase and he must decrease, for, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (v. 36). This popularity extends among the Samaritans as well. Jesus' revealing conversation with the woman at the well in chapter 4 led to her as well as other Samaritans' belief in him.

Beginning with chapter 5, however, the hostility toward Jesus begins to grow. Having told the lame man to carry his mat on the Sabbath, the Jews began to persecute Jesus for his Sabbath violation. His answer further enraged them: "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am

working” (v. 17). The location for this hostility is Jerusalem. Chapter 6 takes place in the region of Galilee, where Jesus also experiences opposition and rejection. But here, the reason is not alleged lawbreaking and blasphemy, both of which of course were untrue, but a difficult teaching regarding the nature of salvation and the demand for committed belief.

6.2 THE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAD

Bread was a staple for most people in the ancient Mediterranean. It thus had universal recognition as something that was necessary for life. Even if one were wealthy enough to afford other means of survival, it was still understood that for the vast majority of people bread was absolutely essential. Throughout the chapter, one finds rich Old Testament allusions that undoubtedly betray the Evangelist’s concern for those with a reasonably good knowledge of Judaism. The depth of Jesus’ argument is simply not going to be picked up by those whose understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures is minimal or nonexistent.¹⁷⁶

However, John’s inclusion of this discourse shows a broader range of concern than may at first appear. The sophisticated Jewish nuances of the discourse would not make much of an impression to secular Greeks, but the focus on bread and the clear presentation that Jesus himself is the only true bread that gives eternal life would connect with both Jew and Greek alike. As Craig Koester maintains: “Readers unfamiliar with Jewish tradition would miss many of the subtleties of this passage, but the repeated references to Jesus as bread fix attention on this image and depict his life-giving power in terms that would have been engaging and meaningful on a basic level to almost any reader in the ancient Mediterranean world.”¹⁷⁷

F. Merkel takes the above connection and goes further, stating that “behind the concept of the

¹⁷⁶Glenn Balfour is probably correct to conclude that John had a thorough knowledge of Jewish forms of exegesis. But that does not mean, as he asserts, that the message the Evangelist presents could only be understood by those acquainted with these Jewish forms of exegesis (“The Jewishness of John’s Use of the Scriptures in John 6:31 and 7:37-38,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46 [1995]: 368).

¹⁷⁷Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 97-98.

bread of life lies the ancient and wide-spread desire for a food which imparts everlasting life.”¹⁷⁸ He believes this to explain the people’s request that Jesus always give them this bread (v. 34). But it seems that something more specific stands behind the theme of the bread of life. The background for the idea of bread is clearly the manna provided for Israel during their wilderness wandering. That Jesus calls himself the “bread of life” is not because of a popular quest for eternal life through a certain food, but because of the distinction that Jesus wishes to make between the manna and himself. The manna was given for the sake of physical life; Jesus, on the other hand, is given for the sake of spiritual life.

6.3 THE STORM

After the multitude misinterpreted the feeding miracle, Jesus withdrew from them and returned to Capernaum. Admittedly, it is difficult to connect the miracle of the calming of the storm in the context of the bread of life discourse and the preceding sign. But one must disagree with Barrett’s view that “it has little to do with the Johannine context,” and that John probably included it merely because it was with the feeding miracle in the tradition and because Jesus needed to be brought back to Capernaum for the bread of life discourse.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps the best suggestion is that the miracle was performed for the encouragement of Jesus’ disciples. They had just seen him refuse an offer of kingship, and perhaps they were discouraged and confused. This miracle showed his authority and kingship not just in regard to the realm of nature, but over all.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, although his disciples would not understand it right away, the discourse will

¹⁷⁸F. Merkel, “Bread (*artos*),” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: The Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 250. Claus Westermann pulls the idea even further from the Old Testament in saying that vv. 50 and 51a, which talk about the living bread that if eaten will enable one to live forever, develop the Gnostic-dualistic teaching of immortality (*The Gospel of John in the Light of the Old Testament*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998], 37).

¹⁷⁹Barrett, *op. cit.*, 279. J. Becker goes even further, saying that the Evangelist included it only so that he could be faithful to the sign-source, and that he has no particular theological interest in it (*Das Evangelium des Johannes*, two vols. [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn and Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1979], 1: 195).

¹⁸⁰G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.),

indicate that the way in which Jesus' kingship is fully realized is in the giving of himself for the life of the world, that is, in his crucifixion (v. 51).

6.4 JESUS AS THE BREAD OF LIFE

It has been suggested that John 6 has received the most attention of any chapter in the Gospel. The majority of this attention has centered around the background and exegesis of vv. 31-32, as well as the meaning of vv. 51c-58, with many commentators perceiving a eucharistic significance. The goal of the rest of this discussion will be to look at these two areas and show what they teach regarding the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the true bread for the life of the world, and the need for all to have a faith so committed that the strongest way to describe it is that of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus' blood.

6.4.1 BACKGROUND OF JOHN 6:31

Among those arguing strictly for an Old Testament passage, the two leading options are Exodus 16:4, 15 and Psalm 78:24 (77:24 LXX). While the biblical narrative referred to in John 6 is the provision of the manna, recorded in Exodus 16, the wording of the same story in Psalm 78 is actually closer, which is why most commentators appeal to the psalm.¹⁸¹ Diana Swancutt adds another element in saying that Psalm 78 and Isaiah 55 join together in influencing John 6. She holds to the opinion that eating Jesus' flesh is synonymous with believing, and this idea is seen in Isaiah 55, causing her to conclude that it "provides a critical interpretive key to the

102-103.

¹⁸¹See M. J. J. Menken, "Provenance and Meaning of the Old Testament Quotation in John 6:31," *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988): 39-56. Bruce Schuchard argues for the same text on the grounds that the quotation in John 6:31 comes from the Old Greek version of Psalm 78:24 (*Scripture Within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 37). Finally, Georg Geiger has pointed out numerous parallels between Psalm 78 and John 6 ("Aufruf an Rückkehrende Zum Sinn des Zitats von Ps 78, 24b in Joh 6, 31," *Biblica* 65 [1984]: 460). Even if all parallels are not to be given equal weight, it still aids in pointing to Psalm 78. This is surely preferred to Reim's opinion that Exodus 16:4, 15 is the source, but it is quoted and exegeted incorrectly (*op. cit.*, 13-15).

discourse on the bread from heaven.”¹⁸²

In Exodus 16:4a God is speaking to Moses concerning the manna: “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.” One of the grammatical arguments against this passage as being behind John 6:31 is the presence of the first person, with God doing the speaking, whereas in the Gospel the quotation is in the third person. Jesus’ answer in v. 32 to the Jews’ quotation is a correction that it is not Moses who was responsible for the manna, but God. Since through the use of the first person the Exodus text clearly informs the reader that the manna is God’s doing, Psalm 78 is assumed to fit better because, like John 6:31, it too is in the third person. But the psalm’s immediate context is clearly showing that God is the one who rained down the bread from heaven. Jesus knew that in the quotation the multitude had Moses in mind because in challenging Jesus to perform a sign to back up his statement (v. 29), they were pitting him against Moses. Only if Jesus’ sign were greater than Moses’ manna would they believe him.

It seems reasonable that given the fact that Psalm 78:24 is closer to John 6:31 (in addition to the presence of the third person, only the psalm contains both *manna* and *artos*), it probably has a more prominent role than Exodus 16:4. Nevertheless, it is not identical, and it is therefore better to see a combination of the two in the Evangelist’s mind. It is not so much the specific reference that is of importance as the miracle that the passages recount.

6.4.2 WISDOM AND RABBINIC INFLUENCES

Other commentators have seen the discourse in John 6 as resembling the connection made between bread and the Law or Word of God. Lindars remarks that in Jesus’ reference to himself as the bread of life, “he is designating himself as the Wisdom of God and as the Word of God coming to mankind; as such, he is the fulfillment of the Law which was given on Mount

¹⁸²Diana M. Swancutt, “Hungers Assuaged by the Bread from Heaven: ‘Eating Jesus’ as Isaian Call to Belief: The Confluence of Isaiah 55 and Psalm 78 (77) in John 6:22-71,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 247.

Sinai.”¹⁸³ In Exodus 16:4 the LORD told Moses that the people were only to gather a day’s portion every day, “that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.” This is directly connected with the lesson as described in Deuteronomy 8:3: ... “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.” Here, it is not clear that bread is associated with divine instruction, but the line of thought is established for the later explicit connections. Personified Wisdom calls out in Proverbs 9:

“Come, eat of my food,
And drink of the wine I have mixed,
Forsake your folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding” (vv. 5-6).¹⁸⁴

The Evangelist may very well have in mind these ideas in Jesus’ declaration to be the bread of life. The identification with Wisdom, however, appears less likely given the similarity that seems to exist between John 6:35-48 and Isaiah 55. In v. 2 of Isaiah’s prophecy a rhetorical question is asked to direct one to obtain bread, which is what satisfies. The spiritual application is seen in the remaining verses. One lives by listening to God, who has established an everlasting covenant with his people (v. 3). What is involved in this promise is the need to seek the LORD and forsake wickedness (vv. 6-7). The spiritual blessings that follow come about by the sovereign word of God, which always accomplishes his purpose (vv. 10-11). John 6 is similar, for here Jesus is the bread, given by God, which alone is able to satisfy the spiritual need of eternal life (vv. 32-33). This life is obtained by believing on Jesus and being joined with him in a genuine abiding through his saving work (vv. 35, 53-56). Moreover, in Jesus all the Father’s redemptive purposes are achieved (vv. 37-39).

Micah refers to a future time of salvation, when miracles will occur, as in the days when

¹⁸³Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 250.

¹⁸⁴This identification of bread with the Law or wisdom, symbolized by manna, is seen in Sirach 24:8, 12, 19 and Wisdom 18:15. Philo also discusses this theme. He says that what nourishes the soul is the “word of God and the divine reason, from which flows all kinds of instinctive and everlasting wisdom. This is the heavenly nourishment which the holy scripture indicates, saying, in the character of the cause of all things, ‘Behold I rain upon you bread from heaven’” (“On Flight and Finding,” XXV, (137), *op. cit.*, 333).

Israel came out of Egypt (7:15). Perhaps working from this and other passages in the Prophets, 2 Baruch speaks of manna as being present in this future time (29:8). Rabbinic thought considered manna to be a symbol of the eschatological age of the Messiah. Just as the former redeemer (Moses) caused manna to descend, so the latter redeemer (messiah) would also cause manna to descend.¹⁸⁵ Peder Borgen sees haggadic traditions, in addition to the Old Testament, as contributing to John 6, including a homiletical pattern as an argument for the unity of the chapter. In his construction, bread is used to show a theophany (Torah), invitation (wisdom), and “juridical mysticism” (the halakic principle of agency, here in which one comes to God through belief in the Son).¹⁸⁶

6.4.3 EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS: THE BREAD OF LIFE

When the crowd found Jesus in Capernaum, he rebuked them for only coming after him for physical food. Rather than striving after food which perishes, they should pursue that enduring food which gives eternal life (vv. 26-27). The crowd naturally inquires as to what is required of them to obtain that which pleases God. His response is simply to believe in the one God has sent (vv. 28-29). Apparently the miracle they had just enjoyed was not enough to substantiate his claim; they required something even greater.

They appeal to what they regard as the Mosaic provision of manna during the wilderness wandering. If Jesus is to be received as one even greater than Moses, he must give a sign that surpasses that done by Moses in the desert (vv. 30-31). In vv. 32-33 Jesus corrects the multitude on three accounts. The first is that it is not Moses who gave the manna, but the Father—the very one who has given Jesus, the true bread. The second correction is that while God’s provision of the manna was temporary, having ended long ago, the true bread continues to be given, and God

¹⁸⁵*Midrash Rabbah*, VIII: 33.

¹⁸⁶Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 162-163. This idea of haggadic influence, especially in John 6:31, is supported in a recent contribution by M. Theobald (“Schriftzitate im ‘Lebensbrot’--Dialog Jesu [Joh 6]. Ein Paradigma für den Schriftgebrauch des vierten Evangelisten,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997], 330-331).

will never stop giving it. Third, manna was provided solely for Israel as God in the early period of redemptive history directed his covenant people to the land of promise. But the true bread who comes down out of heaven is given for all whom the Father gives to Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

Cheryl Wuensch observes what she calls a “progressively deepening disclosure of the breadth and width of the symbol of bread.” Modifying her pattern slightly, in the first stage Jesus, identifying himself as the Son of Man, says that he gives the food which is necessary for eternal life (v. 27). Then in the second stage, Jesus reveals himself as this bread of life, from whom one who feeds will never hunger again (v. 35). Moreover, Jesus further defines himself by informing his listeners that he has come down from heaven. He therefore reveals his heavenly and eternal origins.¹⁸⁷ For Jesus to declare himself to be the giver of bread from heaven would fit perfectly well with the Jewish eschatological expectation of the Prophet like Moses. But when Jesus progressively develops this theme by saying that he is this bread, one is now no longer in the realm of mere messianic expectation. It is only as God that one can claim eternal life for those who come to and abide in him.¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, in this development one can see Jesus’ view of the role of Scripture, as compared to his opponents. Like the Jews in the Sabbath controversy in John 5, Jesus could say here, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life” (John 5:39). In their appeal to Moses, the crowd would have maintained the same kind of attitude. In the discourse, however, Jesus shows that salvation does not lie in the Scriptures themselves, but in the Savior to whom they point. The Scriptures, in the ultimate sense, are not bread, but a witness to the saving truth of Jesus as the true and living bread. As Koester observes, this is significant since the discourse is taking place in a Jewish synagogue, where comments on the nourishment from the Law would be heard.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Cheryl A. Wuensch, “Bread As a Core Symbol: A Narrative Reading of John 6,” *Koinonia* 4 (1992): 223.

¹⁸⁸Dodd, *op. cit.*, 339-340.

¹⁸⁹Koester, *op. cit.*, 97.

Far from diminishing the importance of the Law, Jesus' teaching on the bread of life restores to it its divine function. Jesus is superior to Moses; the bread that he gives is greater than that given through Moses. The New Covenant, secured through the giving of Jesus' flesh and blood, is superior to the Old, patiently maintained through the sacrifices of insufficient victims. But as Pancaro concludes:

However, there is no disparagement of Moses, he rather is presented as the 'type,' the forerunner of Christ. The manna he gave has become (in Jn 6) the 'type' or figure of the bread Jesus gives. Moses and the OT lead to Jesus and the NT (Jn 5, 46f)...The final 'teaching' of God in Jesus is to be related to the Law only insofar as Jesus (his teaching) is the perfect revelation of God and, in this sense, the fulfilment of the Law...It surpasses in excellence the teaching (revelation) of the Law and brings it (as prophetic anticipation of Christ) to its perfection in a way which was completely new and unexpected.¹⁹⁰

6.4.4 EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS: JESUS' FLESH AND BLOOD

It is frequently pointed out that with v. 51 (specifically v. 51c) comes a change in the discourse, in which Jesus shifts the emphasis from his being the living bread come down from heaven which one must eat in order to obtain eternal life, to a more graphic description of the eating of this bread. To the confusion and, more than that, the disgust of some of his hearers, Jesus speaks of the need to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to abide in him and live forever. A number of commentators have seen a similarity between this and the words of institution, and have therefore suggested that Jesus' words are meant to be a reference to the Eucharist.

Bultmann, without any doubt, believes this to be the case, and that the verses were inserted by an ecclesiastical redactor.¹⁹¹ Dorothy Lee argues for the same eucharistic emphasis, but she begins the section at v. 53.¹⁹² Oscar Cullmann's commitment to the eucharistic meaning is so

¹⁹⁰Pancaro, *op. cit.*, 471-472.

¹⁹¹Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 218-219. Brown draws the same conclusion, maintaining that the content of vv. 35-50 is complete and therefore would seem "illogical for the discourse to start all over again in vs. 51" (*op. cit.*, I-XII: 284-287).

¹⁹²Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 136.

strong that it is to be seen not only in vv. 51-58, but in the entire discourse (vv. 26-65), as well as in the feeding miracle (vv. 1-13). He acknowledges that there is more of a focus on eating the body (bread) than on drinking the blood (wine). The rather weak answer given is that the wine has already been emphasized in the miracle at the wedding in Cana, found in John 2: “Both belong together and therefore the whole chapter 6 is to be placed alongside chapter 2 in respect of its content—in chapter 2 a wine miracle; here a bread miracle; but both, references to that wine and bread miracle, which is performed in the community in the Eucharist.”¹⁹³ What seems to be ignored is the rather glaring fact that there is absolutely nothing eucharistic about the miracle at Cana, and it is thus utterly insufficient to attempt to link the two events simply because one emphasizes wine and the other emphasizes bread.

Among those holding to a eucharistic understanding, better arguments than that of Brown and Cullmann have been put forward. Udo Schnelle gives four reasons for the eucharistic view. The first is that in the earlier part of the discourse, Jesus spoke of himself as the living bread. But in this latter part it is his flesh and blood which comprise this heavenly bread. Second, while in v. 32 the Father gives the bread, in v. 51 it is Jesus who gives it. The third reason is that here the reference to “eating” should be taken literally, as opposed to earlier, where it can only be understood symbolically. Finally, earlier the issue is Jesus’ heavenly origin. However, in vv. 51-58 it is his corporeality and humanity. It can be seen that for Schnelle the presence of *sarx* indicates what he calls a “far-reaching new insertion.” This is a theme independent of the bread of life discourse, which he considers to have ended in v. 51ab.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1953), 93-95.

¹⁹⁴Udo Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannesevangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 221-222. M. J. J. Menken accurately counters these four reasons. The first two simply do not support a eucharistic interpretation, and in the last two observations there are no real changes in Jesus’ teaching (“John 6:51c-58: Eucharist or Christology?” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997], 186). Focusing on the last two reasons, one can say that for the third, just because the “eating” of which Jesus speaks becomes more specific, this does not *a priori* show that therefore these latter references to “eating” should be taken literally. For the fourth reason, focusing on Jesus’ heavenly origins at one point of the discourse and on his humanity at another is not a shift to a eucharistic intention. Jesus is completing the teaching on himself by talking about his human nature in addition to his divine nature. Both must be understood to properly believe on him for the eternal life that

James Voelz opts for a mediating position in which eucharistic terms are used, but the meaning is not always solely eucharistic, for Jesus said previously in v. 47: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” Voelz goes on to say that some of the discourse (the verses before v. 51) applies to a more general spiritual eating, while the latter verses (v. 51ff) apply to eucharistic eating.¹⁹⁵

From this brief discussion of the representative arguments for some degree of eucharistic presence, the following general objections can be made. It is not necessarily seen in every proponent, but there is a separation that, either knowingly or unknowingly, occurs in marking off vv. 51-58 as eucharistic. In the worst sense, this is seen in those who treat it as a later insertion by a redactor. But even apart from this, the unity of the passage is harmed, for it has Jesus making a pretty significant shift in emphasis while still dealing with the same audience, as well as with the same basic subject matter, namely, that eternal life comes to those who truly believe in Jesus and who therefore commit themselves and are united to him. Jesus’ overall message is allowed to reach its intended force when the second half is understood as a further explanation of the first half.

The second objection is that at this point in Jesus’ teaching ministry, the institution of the Lord’s Supper had not yet occurred. And, for the sake of argument, even if it had been known prior to its formal institution, for Jesus to teach it to a group apparently a good number of whom did not believe in him is inconsistent with his formal institution of it in the upper room. Jesus refers to it as a “new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). The Lord’s Supper is thus only for those who by faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection share in the covenantal promise of salvation that he has brought. Moreover, this is consistent with Paul’s warning to the church at Corinth, who he says are to examine themselves so as not to eat and drink unworthily and in so doing be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (I Cor. 11:26-29). If this danger exists for those whom

he promises.

¹⁹⁵James W. Voelz, “The Discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6: Is it Eucharistic?” *Concordia Journal* 15 (1989): 34-35.

Paul addresses as “those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1:2), how much more true for those who are unbelievers (who have no right to the table at all), who were certainly present among the multitude in John 6.

The third objection is that Jesus repeatedly connects the eating and drinking of his flesh and blood with the obtaining of life, and salvation is not found in observing the Lord’s Supper.¹⁹⁶ Bultmann recognized this and tried to soften it by saying that “this food gives ‘eternal life,’ in the sense that the participants in the meal can be assured of the future resurrection.”¹⁹⁷ It is true that the Lord’s Supper points to the future resurrection, the great eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb. But Jesus does not say that this partaking merely points to the assurance of the coming resurrection. Rather, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves” (v. 53).

It seems better to take this portion of the discourse as further explaining what it means to believe in Jesus. It is not a shallow trust whereby one only comes to Jesus for his ability to satisfy physical needs. Genuine faith is the belief that Jesus is the divine Son of God and by his death and resurrection brings forgiveness of sins and the certainty of eternal life. This genuine belief brings with it the commitment to abide in him (v. 56). Only by sharing in him—in his life, death, and resurrection—can one enjoy the assurance of one’s own resurrection (v. 54).

Wuensch’s view that “flesh” refers to the incarnation and “blood” points ahead to the crucifixion is attractive,¹⁹⁸ for it would summarize the two central themes of Jesus’ message. First, although of divine origin, he has come down from heaven and become man such that the murmuring crowd was correct to regard him as the son of Joseph, even though he was obviously much more. Second, the point of his incarnation was the saving work of the crucifixion, alluded

¹⁹⁶James D. G. Dunn comments that when vv. 51c-58 are taken as eucharistic, too much is said because it makes eternal life dependent on the Lord’s Supper, and this kind of emphasis on physical elements is rejected in v. 63. At most, what can be said is that John uses eucharistic language in a metaphorical way and adds v. 63 to keep the language from being understood literally (“John VI—A Eucharistic Discourse?” *New Testament Studies* 17 [1970-1971]: 335).

¹⁹⁷Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 219.

¹⁹⁸Wuensch, *op. cit.*, 227.

to in Jesus' remark that his flesh will be given for the life of the world (v. 51), "flesh" functioning here as a synecdoche for his life. What would then be in view in the use of these two terms is nothing short of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As was pointed out earlier, John is the only evangelist to include this discourse in his account, and by the time it was written the Lord's Supper was of course in use in the Christian church. It seems likely that in choosing to use this material, John was well aware of the similarity between it and the words of institution. This suggests that when it was read by Christians, they were reminded of the union that they had with Jesus Christ by faith, and the necessary obligation to abide in him as a true disciple. Christianity is not about halfhearted affection and lukewarm commitment. To believe in Jesus is to love him with one's whole being. Furthermore, this spiritual union is the internal reality to which the visible celebration of the Lord's Supper points. The sacrament does not convey saving faith. The saving faith already exists, and the Lord's Supper serves to remind the participants of their identification with Christ and the tremendous price it cost God to procure it.

There is one more aspect of the early church context. Christianity was an illegal religion and like baptism, the Lord's Supper was a public statement of one's allegiance to Christ. Of course it was not observed openly for the authorities to see. But it was done in the context of public worship, and therefore served to remind the participants of their commitment not only to Jesus but also to each other. Martyrdom was a very real threat (as it still is in some parts of the world), and by bringing to mind one's union with Christ through the elements of communion, it also brought to mind the possible call of God to give up one's life for the name of Jesus Christ.

By way of summary, when Jesus taught the lesson on the bread of life, the reference to eating his flesh and drinking his blood was not about the Eucharist. Earlier in the discourse he had declared himself to be the true bread from heaven who gives life to the world. He is the fulfillment of the provision of manna. Just as God's people were given the manna to feed upon, now that Jesus has come people are told to feed on him. The terms "flesh" and "blood" may very well indicate the incarnation and crucifixion, and the need to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his

blood are thus metaphors for believing on him, which is the only way to receive eternal life. The one who does this truly abides in Jesus and experiences all the spiritual blessings he gives, not just in this life, but in the one to come. Finally, this message is not just for Jews—the initial recipients of the manna. Jesus is given for the life of the world. For those who were looking for the secret to immortality—whether through a certain food, religion, or philosophical system—this discourse, using a food that was common throughout the Mediterranean, showed to those people the sufficiency of Jesus to satisfy all spiritual hunger and thirst.

7. THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Jesus' earthly ministry is coming to a close, and in chapters 13 through 17 the Evangelist records Jesus' most intimate moments with his disciples, as he prepares them for the dramatic events that will soon take place. In chapter 13 Jesus celebrates his last Passover with the disciples in the upper room and informs them that one of their own will betray him (v. 21). After giving Judas Iscariot the morsel, Jesus, knowing Judas' wicked intentions, said to him, "What you do, do quickly" (v. 27). From this point on, the human events stemming from Judas' prior agreement with the chief priests (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11) began to move swiftly. It would not be long before Judas appears again, this time with religious leaders and Roman soldiers, to have Jesus arrested and to quickly move from trial to crucifixion. But it must not be forgotten that these are the mere human events, not opposing the plan of God, but actually being used to accomplish his redemptive purposes for his people. All this is obviously for the Father's glory, as well as the Son's, which is why Jesus said after Judas departed from the upper room, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately" (vv. 31-32).

After this, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. They are to love one another, for this is how disciples of Jesus are to be identified by the world. This new commandment is given in the context of disturbing news: Jesus is soon going away, and, for now, the disciples cannot follow. John 14 begins with Jesus' admonition not to be troubled, but to continue to believe in

the Father and the Son. Jesus must depart to prepare for the following of the disciples. In v. 4 Jesus tells them, “And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas responds, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?” Although the disciples did not understand Jesus’ reference to the destination in vv. 2-3, in v. 6 he not only repeats his destination, but he does so with emphasis on the way by which one must get there: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”

This “I am” statement is perhaps a bit different from the others in that it is not an absolute, and as a predicate it does not have a tangible object such as a prophet, bread, or vine. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that these identifiers are once again chosen by the Evangelist because of their broad appeal. The Christian conception of the way, truth, and life is not at all what the Greek mind would contemplate as this verse was read. But those ideas were part of the general thought-world of Greek culture, and John’s treatment of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ sought to guide them to a knowledge of this truth. Moreover, the message of Jesus is not merely a truth among many, nor even the best of the various religious and philosophical truths. It is the only truth. It is truth itself, which is why this verse is not talking about Jesus’ being truthful (although he is), but rather, that he is the truth. For this reason, he is also the only way to the Father, and the only means of obtaining eternal life.

7.1 JOHN’S ESCHATOLOGY

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, which are primarily concerned with the future aspects of the present kingdom of God, the Fourth Gospel focuses more on the present nature of eternal life, that it is a reality that is realized now. This does not mean that John was unaware of a future eschatology, still less that he knew about it but did not agree with it. John’s Gospel does contain future elements (5:28-29; 6:40, 54; 11:25-26). John 5 is particularly important because of the close relationship that realized and future eschatology together have with the very nature of Jesus as the Son of God. An hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will respond properly to Jesus and his words, and those who do so will live (v. 25). This clearly refers to those who were

spiritually dead, and have been made spiritually alive. But vv. 28-29 refer to something in the future, to an hour that is coming but is not yet. Jesus is talking about the physical, bodily resurrection in which all will participate, whether good or evil. Those who have done good will rise to a resurrection of life; those who have done evil will rise to a resurrection of judgment. Both destinies are determined by one's response to Jesus and his message (vv. 21, 24). This connection counters any idea that a future eschatology is to be explained as the work of an editor¹⁹⁹ or as the product of a later stage of Johannine tradition.²⁰⁰

For the Fourth Gospel to lean more toward a realized outlook is certainly not at odds with the Synoptics or other portions of the New Testament, especially since a final eschatology is not lacking. The emphasis on a realized perspective is perfectly consistent with the Fourth Gospel's unique stress on the fulfillment of God's revelation in the first advent of Jesus. And a final consummation in which the present spiritual realities are experienced in all their completeness, both for the righteous and the wicked, can in no way be considered inconsistent, let alone mutually exclusive.

7.2 THE WAY

The concept of a way, or specifically, "the way," has rich Old Testament significance, which is undoubtedly the reason for its presence in the Apocrypha (Tob. 1:3; Wisd. 5:6) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 8:13; 9:18). Here, the "way" or the "way of truth" pertains to the expounding of the Law. The Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly 1QS 9:18, took this idea further, maintaining that to understand the deep mysteries of the Law one needed to be identified with the community (*yahad*).²⁰¹ The basis for this identification of the Law with the way was the Old Testament (Deut. 5:32-33). The closest passage to John 14:6 is Psalm 86:11, where David asks the LORD to teach him his way, as a result of which David declares that he will walk in God's truth. This

¹⁹⁹Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 261.

²⁰⁰Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 219.

²⁰¹F. C. Fensham is correct to observe that the Qumran literature never identifies "the way" with the divine subject ("I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life," *Neotestamentica* 2 (1968): 84.

follows the more common use of “way,” that of a “manner of life or behavior, with probably some implication of goal or purpose.”²⁰² But the Gospel of John goes beyond this when Jesus calls himself “the way.” The Synoptic Gospels come closer, but still do not reach the heightened use of “way” in John.²⁰³ For John the term “way” functions as a title for Jesus, occurring as one of the *egō eimi* constructions. Thus, it is of a similar vein as the other metaphors acting as *egō eimi* predicates (for example, door, vine, good shepherd), and therefore is rooted in the Old Testament. As Jews and Jewish proselytes read of Jesus as the way, it is very probable that they saw this as a claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. Given all this, as D. Moody Smith points out, while this use of “way” may seem to be unprecedented, it is not surprising that John uses it in this manner.²⁰⁴

The idea of a way and its striking use in the Fourth Gospel is another example of the Evangelist’s concern for people not familiar with the Old Testament or the various Jewish writings springing from it. “The experience of travelling along a path is common to all cultures, and the metaphor would therefore be comprehensible to people who had never read the Septuagint.”²⁰⁵ If this concept were only known in the realm of ethical conduct, it is possible that Greek readers could miss the real meaning of Jesus’ statement. To be sure, those who identified themselves as Christians needed to give visible testimony to their profession by their conduct, and several passages in Acts refer to Christians as those belonging to “the Way” (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). But belonging to Jesus does not come about by following a moral code. It is in trusting him as the true Savior of sinners. However, Greek thought also conceived of a way or path in spiritual terms. Whether it was Middle Platonism’s ascent of the soul through knowledge of Aristotle’s Supreme Mind, gnosticism’s emphasis on obtaining the secret

²⁰²Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, two vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1: 506.

²⁰³Mark 1:2-3 cites Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. The “messenger” and the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” is John the Baptist, which means that Jesus is the “way of the LORD.” But this is not as explicit as in John.

²⁰⁴Smith, *op. cit.*, 269.

²⁰⁵Margaret Pamment, “Path and Residence Metaphors in the Fourth Gospel,” *Theology* 88 (1985): 119.

knowledge of the Gnostic redeemer myths, or any other expression that explained salvation in terms of some type of journey, Jesus' declaration would speak to those readers or hearers in terms with which they could identify. As Michaelis notes in his major discussion of *hodos* and related terms: "This suggestive and easily understandable metaphor offered itself independently in many different places when there was a need to illustrate spiritual processes and religious and ethical developments."²⁰⁶ Undoubtedly, the universality of this term and the ideas that resulted from it was a significant factor in the Evangelist's decision to include it. Furthermore, this assertion is strengthened when one observes that "way" is used in conjunction with "truth" and "life," also possessing broad appeal and used extensively in John's Gospel.

7.3 THE TRUTH

It is common when considering the unique meaning of truth in the Fourth Gospel to treat it functionally. For example, grace and truth are then seen to be realized in Jesus Christ (1:17) by virtue of the message of salvation that he preached and his work of redemption that is the ground of that message. Both of these are of course true and part of the Johannine view of truth. But this functional aspect can only exist because of the ontological reality that supports it. Jesus' words and work are salvific only because in his very nature he is truth. According to the prologue, Jesus is "full of grace and truth" because he is the preexistent Word who came to earth and revealed his glory (v. 14).

This relationship between God and the preexistent Word is best expressed in the familial language of the Father and the Son, which de la Potterie describes as "un des plus hauts sommets de la théologie johannique."²⁰⁷ Functionally, while Jesus says that he does everything the Father does and speaks everything the Father speaks (5:19; 8:26, 28; 17:8), there still exists a subordination of the Son to the Father (17:1-4). Ontologically, however, they are equal, not in

²⁰⁶Wilhelm Michaelis, "*hodos, ktl.*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 48.

²⁰⁷de la Potterie, *op. cit.*, I: 270. "...one of the highest summits of the Johannine theology."

the sense that they are identical, for they are still different persons (1:1), but with regard to their deity, glory, power, and authority. This equality is such that Jesus can say, “I and the Father are one” (10:30), and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). The Son is, as the Nicene Creed explains, “of one substance with the Father.” To speak of Jesus’ words and deeds as truth cannot be separated from Jesus’ very nature as truth.

7.4 THE LIFE

As is also the case with the ideas of way and truth, Jesus does not only speak the words that if understood and believed provide life (6:63, 68); he himself is life (11:25). Life is an important concept in John, occurring over thirty times.²⁰⁸ The same is true for I John, which uses the word approximately fifteen times. Jesus is the eternal Word of life (1:1-2). This is the basis for Jesus’ ability to give eternal life to everyone who believes (5:11-13).

The desire for life, either eternal life or the discovery of the ultimate fulfillment in one’s earthly life, was naturally a major topic within various religions and philosophies. Because of the fall, death became part of the human experience. Thus, all kinds of systems of thought would tend to include some kind of doctrine of life.²⁰⁹ Either the goal was to somehow ascend to the divine, an experience that would last forever, or the aim was to obtain as much happiness and pleasure from this life as one could. John’s view of life spoke to people within either of these categories, including anywhere in between. And John’s emphasis on life as being in some respects realized now certainly spoke to such a cosmopolitan city like Ephesus. Its opportunities for materialistic pursuit abounded, and with Artemis, the goddess of fertility, as its patron deity, erotic pursuits were just as available, especially at the annual festival in her honor. John’s

²⁰⁸J. C. Coetzee has rightly pointed out that the concept of life is not only central in the kerygmatic sections of John’s Gospel, but that it is a sustained theme throughout (“Life (Eternal Life) in John’s Writings and the Qumran Scrolls,” *Neotestamentica* 6 [1972]: 55).

²⁰⁹For example, Schnackenburg surveys some of the Gnostic material pertaining to life and believes that the Evangelist “was influenced to some extent by Hellenism and Gnosticism: the search for the origin, goal and meaning of human life was a common preoccupation of the period, and there was a variety of roads to salvation on offer” (*op. cit.*, 2: 360).

Gospel spoke directly to these empty attempts at contentment and meaning. Not only was eternal life promised in Jesus Christ (3:16), but the blessings of this future life are to some extent enjoyed now, as believers' lives are characterized by love for Jesus and one another, shown in obedience to his commandments and truly righteous conduct. That manner of life, lived to the glory of the only God, is the only kind that is fully satisfying (10:10).

7.5 THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

John 14:6 is surely one of the best known and most loved verses in the Gospel, and has been a source of comfort and assurance to Christians throughout church history. Schnackenburg explains the reason for this quite rightly: "After Thomas' uncertain question, Jesus' answer sounds like an extremely important revelation, a unique statement that has lost none of its sovereign power even now."²¹⁰

The difficulty of the verse lies in the relationship between the three predicates, and how these three predicates fit into the immediate context of Thomas' question, which itself is a reaction to the broader context of the opening subject of Jesus' final discourse, namely, his departure. There are a number of views, both from the ancient and modern eras.²¹¹ Of the various choices, three receive the most attention. The first is that the three terms should be understood as a semiticism, producing something like: "I am the true and living way." Although frequently mentioned, it appears to have little, if any, modern support. The second approach swings in the opposite direction by regarding the terms as rather independent of each other.²¹² The third option is a sort of mediating interpretation that does not see a semiticism, but given the context puts a greater emphasis on "way." "Truth" and "life" thus explain "the way."²¹³

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 3: 64.

²¹¹For a helpful survey, see Brown, *op. cit.*, XIII-XXI: 620-621.

²¹²This is the opinion of Bruce, who does not show how these three terms together speak to the context in which they are given (*op. cit.*, 299). Morris takes a similar position, but does a little more with the significance of the predicates for the surrounding context. He also applies all three to the impending crucifixion (*op. cit.*, 569-570).

²¹³See Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 472, and Carson, *op. cit.*, 491.

This third option seems best, for it allows the force that “truth” and “life” have in the Gospel to still be felt, while properly seeing the slight emphasis on “way” for the question at hand. In John 13:36 Peter asks Jesus where he is going, but Jesus does not answer the question until a few verses later (14:2), where he tells them he is going to the Father. Then, in v. 4, Jesus tells them they also know the way there. Thomas is only thinking in spatial terms, causing him to tell Jesus they do not know where he is going; how can they be expected, then, to know the way (v. 5)? In one sense there is a spatial aspect to the whole discussion. Jesus is going to physically leave them. But that is not what is important. What matters is that Jesus is going back to the Father after finishing the redemptive work God sent him to do. This will result in the sending of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus tells them is better than if he were to remain (16:7). Moreover, the way by which the disciples will follow Jesus is Jesus himself.

It is thus understood why “way” and “truth” are found in Jesus’ response. But not everyone has seen the same relevance for “life.” J. H. Bernard believes that although Jesus’ declaration, “I am the life,” would never be out of place anywhere in the Gospel, “it does not help the exposition at this point, where the thought is specially of Christ as the Way.”²¹⁴ However, not long before, Jesus had proclaimed, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (11:25-26). This was indeed a powerful statement describing Jesus’ authority over death. He had also alluded to his own death (3:14; 8:28; 12:32), and his anointment by Mary in chapter 12 looked forward to it. The Synoptic Gospels record Jesus’ explicit mention of his death and resurrection after Peter’s confession (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). If the disciples remembered this, Jesus statement in John 11:25 and thus 14:6 would be an encouragement to them. Even if they did not, this declaration, following “way” and “truth,” would be understood later after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

Granting this, however, does not prove that “life” is unconnected to the exposition. Jesus

²¹⁴Bernard, *op. cit.*, II: 537.

proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life with regard to the sadness over Lazarus' death. Here, the same promise is given for those who will soon be mourning Jesus' death. Jesus' departure to the Father and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit can only happen through his death. It is the only way that the disciples can escape eternal death, and it is the only way that the disciples can later follow Jesus to the Father. The death, and therefore also the resurrection of Jesus, is thus proleptic of the disciples' own spiritual life and resurrection, even though they die physically. That Jesus here tells his disciples he is the life is crucial to the instruction he is giving them in response to Thomas' question.

7.6 JESUS THE ONLY WAY

There is more than one level on which the second half of John 14:6 can be apprehended. The primary level is of course the context of the statement. Not only was Jesus going away, but very soon his disciples were going to scatter at his betrayal and arrest, which would be followed by his appearances before the Jewish authorities and Pilate, resulting in his scourging and crucifixion. In the midst of all that, including the confusion they experienced when after the resurrection the two disciples went into the empty tomb, Jesus was still the only means of access to the Father. The suffering and death followed by the resurrection and exaltation was all part of God's plan to fulfill his covenant of redemption.

Another level concerns the way that the Old Testament points to Jesus, particularly Moses, on whom Jesus' opponents relied in their rejection of him. Because Moses points to Jesus, how one responds to Jesus indicates whether or not one has really understood the preceding revelation. Though the Jews may claim to be the recipients of the blessing of the Law (and of the Old Testament revelation generally), if they reject Jesus they show themselves to be separated from the heritage and advantages they claim, which means they are actually outside the covenant and thus do not have God as their Father. Jesus is the culminating revelation of the Father. It is by him alone that one can rightly comprehend the Old Testament, not as an end in itself, but as

anticipatory to God's fullest disclosure.²¹⁵

Finally, this statement can be seen against the pluralistic background, not only of John's time, but of the present age, as well. Religious exclusivity is never appreciated, and in cultures where many different expressions exist, claiming that only one is true is deemed a threat to social coherence. But the real difficulty lies not in Jesus' words but in the presuppositions that are assumed to be true. It is assumed that each religion and philosophy is equally valid and all are merely different ways to get to God, regardless of how the process is described or how God is designated. This causes Jesus' declaration to be seen as restrictive.

However, the reality is that one does not have a whole list of equally successful choices, which Jesus is doing away with and thus rendering everyone else's thinking wrong and punishable. Rather, because of sin there is no way to God apart from Jesus' opening it (Rom. 5:10-11; Heb. 10:20).²¹⁶ Hence, Jesus is not to be seen as an exclusivist in this restrictive sense. It is true that he is the only way to the Father, but he is at the same time an inclusivist because all deserve to die in their sins, but instead he offers forgiveness to whoever will come (Matt. 11:28). John indicates the same when he writes, without qualification, that the signs recorded are done so with the hope that all who read or hear of them will come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and will then have life in his name (20:31).

8. TRUE VINE

Between chapters 14 and 15 the geographic location changes (14:31), although Jesus' discourse continues. It is possible that as Jesus described himself as the true vine his disciples could see the ornamental vine and branches at the temple, to which Josephus refers in his *Antiquities*. It is also possible that as the theme was discussed they saw actual vines while they made their way across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane. But neither of these geographic markers is needed to make the point, still less that they brought to Jesus' mind the metaphor that

²¹⁵Carson, *op. cit.*, 491.

²¹⁶Smith, *op. cit.*, 269.

he proceeded to use. The image was immensely important in Judaism, and given the Evangelist's concern to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament revelation, it is not surprising that he included Jesus' teaching on it.

However, the image of the vine was not restricted to the Old Testament. As Carson points out, this imagery is also seen, for example, in gnosticism, Mandaeism, Philo, and Palestinian Judaism. This of course has allowed commentators to see varying degrees of similarity from the widest scope of possibilities, which is why Carson rightly argues that superficial similarities do not necessarily indicate Johannine dependence.²¹⁷ Bultmann, holding to Gnostic and Mandaean emphases in the Fourth Gospel, agrees with Schweizer that the vine is the tree of life (just as the Evangelist speaks of the water of life, the bread of life, and the light of life) and concludes that the origin for such an understanding does not come either from the Old Testament or Jewish tradition, but from the Mandaean literature.²¹⁸ More recently, Thomas Brodie, in spite of arguing that ultimately it is the Old Testament that should be regarded as the source, maintains that "this does not exclude an incorporation of Gnostic elements, particularly those related to the Mandaean picture of the vine as the tree of life."²¹⁹ Nevertheless, the current consensus rejects Gnostic and Mandaean origins, or even influence, preferring instead to look to either the Old Testament, Jewish tradition, or both. But even though one should see a Jewish source, it is still true that John used a concept that would have been well-known by a variety of hearers. They would have understood something of the kind of relationship Jesus was describing based on the vine and branch metaphor, and also Jesus' warning based on their knowledge of the viticultural practices of the day. Because Jesus is the true vine, a crucial aspect of proper response to this truth is abiding with Jesus, which will demonstrate before the watching world who really is of the truth.

²¹⁷Carson, *op. cit.*, 513. For a discussion of the range of uses, see Rainer Borig, *Der Wahre Weinstock: Untersuchungen zu Jo 15, 1-10* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1967), 79-194.

²¹⁸Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 530 n. 5.

²¹⁹Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 475.

8.1 GOD'S CHOSEN VINE

Numerous passages in the Old Testament speak of Israel as the LORD's vine, chosen to bear fruit to his glory. However, Israel did not fulfill her divine purpose, choosing instead to have "degenerate shoots of a foreign vine" (Jer. 2:21). The nation abandoned the LORD and spurned the covenant he had made with her, considering it more desirable to follow the worthless gods of the surrounding nations. Israel therefore produced bad grapes, resulting in the righteous judgment of God in the form of two national captivities (Isa. 5:1-7; Ez. 15:1-8; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1-2).

There has been an attempt to more closely link the Fourth Gospel and Ezekiel by drawing attention to similarities concerning the work of the Paraclete.²²⁰ Although the similarities do not appear to be strong enough to make the connection, one should not overlook, as Borig notes, the use of the vine in Ezekiel 17. The first part of the chapter, vv. 1-10, constitutes the riddle, followed by the interpretation in vv. 11-21. Nebuchadnezzar had taken King Jehoiachin ("the top of the cedar," v. 3) and his princes ("the topmost of its young twigs," v. 4) to Babylon, replacing the king with Zedekiah, his regent. Rather than keeping the covenant made with Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah appealed to Egypt for help against Babylon. Because of this breach, as well as the violation of God's covenant, judgment was going to come upon Judah, with Zedekiah dying in Babylon.

But after such a terrible judgment, the third part, vv. 22-24, promises a future salvation. God promised to take a tender shoot from the cedar (that is, from the Davidic line), which when planted would become an impressive and fruitful tree, contrary to unfruitful Israel. Thus, Jesus, the promised Messiah, performs the role that Israel was intended to accomplish. It was Israel who was to declare God's glory and serve as a light for the Gentiles. Instead, it is the suffering Servant who takes the place of faithless Israel. The rich imagery of Ezekiel 17, particularly the

²²⁰Bruce Vawter, "Ezekiel and John," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 457-458.

messianic portion, may be one of the passages that lies behind John 15.

A final passage of consideration, which should most likely be considered more important than the previous references, is Psalm 80:8-17. Not only is Israel identified as a “vine” in vv. 8 and 14, and as a “son” in v. 15, but reference to a “son of man” is made in v. 17. These three terms combine to show how Jesus is the true vine, as opposed to Israel, who by her unfaithfulness and disobedience proved to be untrue to the calling she had received. Consequently, salvation does not lie in being attached to Israel, but to Jesus. This replacement represents not only a shift from the geopolitical nation to the spiritual people (Rom. 9:6-8), but also a shift in redemptive history. Jesus is the new Israel, and God’s true covenant people are all those who are regarded as being “in Christ,” that is, those who truly belong to him. “Theologically, then, John’s point is that Jesus now replaces Israel as the focus of God’s plan of salvation, with the implication that faith in Jesus becomes the decisive characteristic for membership among the people of God.”²²¹ This is the meaning behind Jesus’ statement that he is the true vine. It is unnecessary—and impossible—to determine which passage is most evident. The sum of the Old Testament teaching on Israel’s failing to be God’s vine testifies to the need for God to raise up one who will succeed in that responsibility. The passages therefore powerfully point to Jesus as the only one who could be this true vine.

8.2 JOHN 15

John 15 continues Jesus’ final words to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. The metaphor continues through v. 16, with the interconnected themes of abiding in Jesus, keeping his commands, loving one another, and producing fruit. The second half, vv. 17-27, contrasts the love found among Christians (and the resulting love for the world seen in the desire to bear witness to Jesus), with the hatred toward them from the world. Moreover, the “world” as it is used here does not seem to be primarily pure secularists who abhor all things religious. In v. 25

²²¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 159.

Jesus says that their hatred actually fulfills their Law, quoting from the Psalms. Chapter 16 continues the theme of hatred from chapter 15. Jesus describes those who will be the source of the disciples' persecution: "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2). Not only in this chapter, then, but the whole of the final discourse contains instructions, warnings, and encouragement for those who belong to him and who will soon begin a new age of redemptive history, that of the Holy Spirit and the period of the early church.

Given the themes of Jesus' discussion of the vine and branches, which are quite obvious from the text, there nevertheless exists considerable disagreement over its interpretation. The attention focuses specifically on v. 2 (and from there v. 6) regarding what Jesus is intending to communicate by his description of what happens to unfruitful branches. In fact, v. 2 has been called by one commentator the "key to understanding the metaphorical mechanism of this entire text."²²²

8.2.1 TAKEN AWAY OR LIFTED UP?

The whole discussion turns on the verb *airō*, which can basically be rendered as either "takes away" or "lifts up." While the major English translations opt for "takes away" or something equivalent—which is the more common of the meanings of *airō* in John's Gospel—it should be mentioned that approximately one-third of the occurrences indicate the idea of lifting or taking up. However, the lexical data at best can only give guidelines for proper translation, which means that ultimately the context will determine how best to translate *airō*.

If one adopts the majority position of "takes away," an immediate decision must be made regarding the fact that Jesus says that the branches are "in Me." The usual approach is that here Jesus is speaking of one possessing a merely external identification, rather than of one who is truly saved. The example that most readily comes to mind is Judas, who not long before left the

²²²Jan G. van der Watt, " 'Mataphorik' in Joh 15, 1-8," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 38 (1994): 73.

company of Jesus and the disciples to carry out his betrayal. He was a member of Jesus' close circle of disciples, but in reality he was a devil, doomed to perdition (John 6:70; 17:12). This is certainly a possible understanding of "in Me," but it does not seem to fit the character of these last discourses to address people who are unsaved. In chapter 14 Jesus said to his disciples, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20). And in v. 30 a contrast is seen in Jesus' referring to the coming ruler of the world, who "has nothing in Me."

J. Carl Laney adopts the above view of *airō*, given the reference to the destruction of the branches in v. 6, but does something different with "in Me." He points out that although the usual way of interpreting it is adjectivally, thus modifying branch, he observes that of the other five times that the phrase occurs in John 15:1-7, all are used adverbially. The first clause in v. 2 would then be, "every branch that does not bear fruit in Me." This distinction is considered by Laney to be important because if the "in Me" is seen adjectivally, as is the case in most if not all major English translations, then the reference to the branches' destruction in v. 6 is problematic given the Johannine teaching of perseverance in chapter 10.²²³ But this does not solve the problem because it merely pushes the focus away from the source. One cannot produce fruit that is said to be "in Me" if the actual individual is not already spiritually connected to Jesus. Only the person who is truly in Christ is capable of producing fruit that is said to be done in Jesus. On the other hand, one who is nothing more than a professing Christian can never produce fruit that can be characterized as being done in Jesus. The fruit might be a commendable activity and beneficial to humanity, but if that person is not a genuine believer, the works performed cannot be described as being done "in Me," which in John is true only of those connected to Jesus by saving faith.

The argument that *airō* be seen as "takes away" appears to be heavily dependent on the assumption that it is the same branches that are taken away in v. 2 as are burned in v. 6, thus

²²³J. Carl Laney, "Abiding is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 63-64.

treating the two verses as different parts of the same action. Taking v. 2 to be talking about unbelievers with some measure of external connection, the burning would then designate eternal judgment.²²⁴ But as will be discussed shortly, it may be that in vv. 2 and 6 Jesus is alluding to two different seasons in the viticultural process. This would argue, not just for the meaning of “lifts up,” but consequently for a different emphasis and concern in the vine and branch section.

To view *airō* as “takes away” does not mean that this part of the chapter now becomes concerned exclusively with salvation and how in the bearing of fruit one can have assurance that he or she really does belong to Jesus, rather than possessing mere outward connection. But at the very least it allows for, or even encourages, that kind of interpretation, which simply does not fit the purpose and content of Jesus’ final discourse. It is certainly true that in this kind of extended metaphor it is not necessarily appropriate to assign a meaning to every aspect.²²⁵ But the number of occurrences of “in Me” within a few verses shows that the idea is important, and it would then seem that it does have an attachment to the image Jesus is using. If this is true, then the suggestion that *airō* be translated as “lifts up” deserves another hearing.

If “lifts up” is to be preferred, then one immediately moves from thoughts of salvation to sanctification and discipleship, which, as has been said before, is closer to the point of the final discourse.²²⁶ This would mean that Christians who are not bearing fruit at the time need to be spiritually strengthened and encouraged by God himself to bear fruit. If this is correct, then the reference to “fire” and being burned in v. 6 must mean something other than the final judgment of the unsaved. Indeed, Paul uses identical language to describe the person who, although a Christian, nevertheless experiences the burning up of those works that are inconsistent with the solid foundation of Christ (I Cor. 3:11-15). Admittedly, John does not make the distinction between the person and the works, but the same kind of idea may be present. The issue, then, in

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 65. Robert Kysar observes that such a view of “fire” is generally absent in John. “It is better to understand the verse to describe more generally the meaninglessness of a human life separated from Christ/God” (*John* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986], 237).

²²⁵Carson, *op. cit.*, 515; Morris, *op. cit.*, 594.

²²⁶J. C. De Smidt, “A Perspective on John 15:1-8,” *Neotestamentica* 25 (1991): 255.

v. 6 is not salvation, but usefulness and service to God.

This approach also changes the significance of “in Me.” Joseph Dillow believes that it refers to being in fellowship with Christ and living obediently. “Therefore it is possible for a Christian not to be ‘in Me’ in the Johannine sense.”²²⁷ Both Laney and Robert Peterson correctly pick up on the potential problems with this, namely, that one could be a Christian and yet have no fruit.²²⁸ But the difficulty may be overcome if one regards this fruitlessness as lasting for a period of time rather than as a characteristic of one’s entire life. Earlier, it was mentioned that among those who consider v. 2 to be about mere external connection, Judas is sometimes given for an example. However, for the approach that is being advanced here, it seems that Peter serves as a better example. Not only is this example consistent with the emphasis on sanctification, but it could also tie in with his reinstatement by Jesus, which is only recorded in the Fourth Gospel. When Peter denied that he even knew Jesus, he was anything but fruitful. But he was still a branch. In John 21 he received encouragement from the risen Christ, and Peter went on to be a bold, effective, and fruitful witness in the decades following Jesus’ ascension. This could lead one to approach v. 6 in the following manner: while the Johannine doctrine of perseverance assures Christians that they will never finally fail to abide, Jesus’ statement nevertheless acts as a sober warning for all Christians individually to evaluate their own spiritual life to make sure that they really are in the faith. As Peter himself warned in his second epistle: “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain His calling and choosing you” (1:10a).

If this interpretation of the passage, based on the proposed translation of *airō*, is the spiritual application of what was actually done to vines during the growing season, then its ability to connect with a diverse readership is even stronger. As far as the author is aware, Gary Derickson provides the fullest account of historical and cultural data. He cites Pliny for evidence that at the

²²⁷Joseph C. Dillow, “Abiding is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 47.

²²⁸Laney, *op. cit.*, 65; and Robert A. Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” *Presbyterion* 17 (1991): 107-108.

beginning of the season, which is spring, plants that were unfruitful and trailing on the ground were lifted or propped up to increase their chances of producing grapes (*Natural History*, 17.35 [Loeb edition]). The Romans appear to have introduced the method of lifting vines up by means of a trellis to keep them off the ground in order to prevent them from contacting the soil. While there was some removal of unfruitful branches in the spring, some were left intentionally for future productivity. Meanwhile, the fruitful branches were pruned or cleaned, so as to increase their fruitfulness. This is the spring practice to which Jesus is referring in v. 2. After the harvest, which occurred in August or September, there was a more severe pruning which was done in order to induce dormancy over the winter. This included burning all the wood that was not attached to the vine.²²⁹ It is this season-ending practice that is in mind in v. 6. Thus, vv. 2 and 6 are not describing the single activity of the taking away of dead or unproductive branches and their subsequent burning. Rather, each verse describes a distinct practice, performed at different seasons of the viticultural process.²³⁰

8.2.2 CLEANSING AND ABIDING

Jesus assures his disciples in v. 3 that they are already clean and therefore do not have to worry that they themselves are presently unfruitful and need to be lifted up. In declaring them already clean, Jesus is not suggesting that they are incapable of bearing any more fruit than they already are. Nor is he implying that none of them will ever require spiritual encouragement. But they have heard and properly responded to the message of redemption that Jesus came to bring and, indeed, is in his very person. As Carson puts it, the life of the vine is pulsating through them.²³¹ As this manifests itself in increasing measure, a result will be a “growth in love which

²²⁹Gary W. Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 44-49, 52.

²³⁰This is contrary to Dodd, who holds that actual viticultural practice contains little significance for the meaning of the symbolism: “The symbol is almost absorbed into the thing signified. The meaning of the ‘allegory’ is only to a slight extent to be understood from a knowledge of what vines are as they grow in any vineyard; it is chiefly to be understood out of a rich background of associations which the vine-symbol had already acquired” (*op. cit.*, 137).

²³¹Carson, *op. cit.*, 515.

binds the Christian to Jesus and spreads life to others.”²³²

Proper response is necessary because cleansing does not magically come about simply by hearing the words which Jesus has spoken. Other people heard Jesus’ teaching and concluded he was demon-possessed (John 8:48). Ridderbos describes Jesus’ word as exerting a “redeeming, life-creating, continually purifying, and dividing effect.”²³³ It is this last effect that pertains to both believers and unbelievers because it is only through a positive response that the other effects can mark an individual’s life. A negative response casts one into the category of death and condemnation.

The relationship between abiding and bearing fruit is such that neither can exist without the other. One cannot produce fruit without genuine belief and the resulting intimate fellowship. Likewise, if one really does abide in Jesus, fruit will necessarily follow. And all of this is because of Jesus, apart from whom one can do nothing (v. 5). Of course, soon Jesus was going away, but that by no means severed the disciples’ relationship with him. They would still continue to abide in him, and he in them, and therefore produce fruit, because of the promised Holy Spirit. In chapter 14 Jesus told them that he will ask the Father, who would then send the Paraclete, whom Jesus said would be with them forever (v. 16). Moreover, the language used to describe the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the disciples is nearly identical to that used for Jesus and the disciples. The Spirit of truth is known by the disciples because “He abides with you, and will be in you” (v. 17). After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples that he would continue to be with them always, even to the end of history and consummation of the kingdom of God (Matt. 28:20). John completes this idea by saying that it is the Holy Spirit, whom Paul calls the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9), who will remain with the disciples forever. This divine presence cannot but result in loving and obedient fellowship and the bearing of much fruit, all to the glory of God the Father.

²³²Brown, *op. cit.*, XIII-XXI: 676.

²³³Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 516.

Malatesta has suggested, in relation to I John, that the phrases “to remain in” and “to be in” indicate new covenant theology. In the LXX *menō* and its cognates are associated with the covenant and the need to be faithful to the LORD. And the Old Testament new covenant passages speak of a new heart and a new spirit given to Israel, which will cause them to love God and obey his commandments. For God will be their God, and they will be his people (Deut. 30:1-10; Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 11:14-20; 36:22-36; 37:21-28).²³⁴ Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that in order to see the kingdom of God he needed to be born again from above (v. 3). Furthermore, this new birth, which is both a cleansing and a new nature, can only come about by the Holy Spirit (vv. 5-8). It is this recreation that produces in one the desire to do that which Jesus is exhorting his disciples to do in John 15.

Finally, the blessings of the new covenant would also be for all who would come to Jesus Christ for salvation. Joel prophesied of the day when God would pour his Spirit on all people (2:28). At Pentecost this prophecy was fulfilled as Jews from all different countries heard the Gospel in their own language (Acts 2). But Joel’s prophecy reached its fullest fulfillment as the church came to understand that the Spirit was not only to be given to Jews and Jewish converts, but also to Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11). In receiving the saving message of Jesus, they too became branches as strongly attached to the vine as the disciples themselves. They too were to abide in Jesus, through the enduring fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and be characterized by that love and obedience which proves the fruitfulness and discipleship of all who truly belong to the universal covenant community of the Father’s vineyard.

CONCLUSION

At this point it is important to summarize the current state of this study. Chapter one sought to discuss those introductory matters necessary to understand both past and present New

²³⁴E. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 310-317. J. W. Pryor applies this idea to the Fourth Gospel and the need for genuine discipleship, expressed in abiding in Jesus (“Covenant and Community in John’s Gospel,” *Reformed Theological Review* 47 [1988]: 49-50).

Testament scholarship regarding truth in the Fourth Gospel. This introductory chapter concluded by suggesting that the number of Old Testament quotations and allusions strongly argues for the Old Testament as the driving force of the Evangelist's content. This would mean that the Gospel's primary audience would be Jews and Jewish proselytes—those most likely to appreciate the sophisticated and nuanced use of the Scriptures and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But it is also true that John contains words and ideas that would speak to those less connected with Judaism. Among them would be God-fearers, people who apparently had varying degrees of interest in Jewish religion (or at least monotheism), but who were less familiar with its tenets and who therefore would perhaps not catch all of John's Old Testament arguments. Specifically, the longer discourses, universal ideas like *logos*, light, life, way, prophet, vine, and truth, as well as the translation of Semitic terms, all argue not only for an evangelistic concern for God-fearers, but also Greeks still very much interested in pagan religion and secular philosophy, but who would be open to a reading or hearing of John's Gospel.

Chapter two attempted to define and explain the Johannine concept of truth. Truth is the person and work of Jesus Christ. His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and return to the Father constitute the truth that must be known and believed in order to receive eternal life. The chapter discussed eight ideas that explain John's view of truth, showing not only their Old Testament origin and how Jesus is the fulfillment of these ideas, but how they would connect with those less familiar with biblical thought. The terms that John uses are not exclusively Jewish terms, which suggests that they have been deliberately included by the Evangelist with an aim of reaching the larger Hellenistic world. At the same time, he employs them in a sophisticated argument of Old Testament fulfillment for those a part of, and deeply interested in, Judaism.

Chapter three will address the theme of witnessing to the truth. Because truth comes only from God, it must be made known since human beings are unable to acquire it on their own. Hence, there is the need for revelation. It follows, then, that if this revelation is going to be recognized for what it is, there must be witnesses who testify to it. Thus, one cannot talk about

truth in John without also talking about the need for the revelation of it. And one cannot recognize, let alone understand, this divine revelation without the corresponding need for witnesses to this truth.