

New Testament Studies

Gospel of John  
*(RVS Notes)*

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## John Introduction

**Authorship**—While the gospel never identifies the author, it is virtually certain that it was John, the beloved apostle. Evidence from the book itself points to John. The author was familiar with Jewish customs and opinions. He was a Palestinian Jew as demonstrated by his knowledge of the geography of the region (see 9:7; 11:18; 18:1). He was an eyewitness to the events he narrates (1:14; 19:35) and seems to have been acquainted with Jesus’ public career from beginning to end. The author’s identity appears to be generally acknowledged among readers. In a gospel that frequently highlights the disciples, John is referred to only as one of the sons of Zebedee and never mentioned by name.

Historical evidence and tradition consistently attribute the gospel to John. The Church fathers from Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (130-200), to Eusebius (265-340), the great Church historian, all agree that John the apostle wrote the gospel. Irenaeus plainly states as much and his testimony is corroborated by other early writers, such as Theophilus of Antioch (circa 165), Tatian (circa 175), Clement of Alexandria (circa 220), and the third century apologist Tertullian (155-220).

Objections to John’s authorship have usually taken three tracks. First, critics assert that an angler like John, the son of Zebedee, was incapable of composing such a profound gospel. Second, according to Philip of Side, a fifth-century writer, John the apostle died as a martyr during the early years of the Church. Finally, critics allege that the gospel was really written by a mysterious presbyter named John mentioned by Eusebius in discussing a statement made by Papias, a second century disciple of John the apostle.

To the first objection, it is true that the enemies of the faith characterized Peter and John as “unschooled, ordinary men” in Acts 4:13. However, that does not mean that they were illiterate or stupid. They did not have formal education in the Law that was the necessary ticket to advancement in the Jewish hierarchy. Peter and John were not ignorant of the content of the Old Testament or devoid of the ability to make cogent application of such knowledge. Indeed, they gave a particularly good account of themselves in the defense in Acts 4. Furthermore, by the time John wrote his gospel he had possibly fifty years of experience and doubtlessly gained in knowledge, depth of insight, and facility of expression.

Second, the assertion of John’s early demise runs counter to consistent testimony otherwise. Philip of Side was regarded as an arrogant and unreliable author by many of his contemporaries. Acts 12 records that only James died, and he was executed by Herod, who paid a terrible price for his crime. Philip of Side based his assertion on the testimony of Papias, John’s disciple in his later years, who could not have known John the apostle at all if Philip’s testimony of John’s early death was true.

Third, Eusebius, in discussing a statement by Papias, only appears to suggest that there were two authors named John—the John the apostle who wrote the gospel, and John the presbyter or elder who wrote Revelation. The quotation from Papias may have been garbled or misunderstood. Indeed, John was both elder and apostle and the two references could have been to the same

person. The suggestion that the so-called John the presbyter not only wrote Revelation but also the gospel takes the misunderstanding to another level.

John was a son of Zebedee (21:1) and Salome (19:25; Mt. 27:56; Mk 15:40). Since Salome was a sister of Jesus' mother Mary, Jesus and John were cousins. John seems to have possessed a passionate and volatile temperament. He and his brother James were nicknamed "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17) by the Lord himself. Their father was in the fishing business in Galilee and his two sons were among the Galileans who followed John the Baptist until they were called by Christ at the beginning of his public ministry. They became the Lord's full-time disciples (Lk. 5:1-11) and were among the twelve selected to be his apostles (Lk. 6:12-16). After the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord, John was continually active in the ministry in and around Jerusalem (see Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14). Paul describes John, James, and Peter as the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). Tradition says that John went to Ephesus shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and had a long and fruitful ministry in Asia Minor. The composite personality of John that emerges from the New Testament is a passionate man of courage, fervor, loyalty, spiritual perception, humility, and love.

**Date and Occasion of Writing**—The dates most often suggested for this gospel are either sometime prior to the Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 or near the end of the first century (85-95). Tradition and the weight of the evidence favors the later date and assigns Ephesus as the place of composition. Until recently, it was popular to propose a second century date for the book and thus undermine Johannine authorship. However, the discovery of the Rylands papyrus, containing a fragment of John 18:31-33 and 37-38, has undermined this critical conjecture. This fragment dates to about 135 and a considerable period of time must have passed for the gospel to have circulated and copied before it reached Egypt, where the papyrus was found.

**Distinctives and Guiding Concepts**—The four gospel writers give us snapshots of our Lord's earthly sojourn, for no complete biography of his life and significance could be written (see 21:25). John's snapshot was penned for both Jews and Gentiles and presents Jesus as the unique Son of God. John states his purpose for writing in unequivocal terms in 20:31: "But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John draws primarily upon events and discourses not found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to prove to his readers that Jesus is God in the flesh, the eternal Word of God come to earth, born to die as God's substitutionary sacrifice for human sin. The human response elicited is faith in his person and work. While working out his purpose, the apostle reiterates a number of major themes:

**Belief**—The word "believe" (*pisteuo*) appears almost one hundred times in this gospel and is the major theme of the book. All the various episodes and teachings of the gospel are subordinate to the definition and development of this concept. One commentator has suggested the following outline to show John's development of this central theme:

- Prologue: Proposal for Belief (1:1-18)
- Presentation for Belief (1:19-4:54)
- Reaction of Belief and Unbelief (5:1-6:71)
- Crystallization of Belief and Unbelief (7:1-11:53)

- Crisis of Belief and Unbelief (11:54-12:50)
- Assurance for Belief (13:1-17;26)
- Rejection by Unbelief (18:1-19:42)
- Vindication of Belief (20:1-31)
- Dedication of Belief (21:1-25)

Belief is equated with receiving (1:12), following (1:40), drinking (4:13-14), responding (4:50-51), eating (6:57), accepting (6:60), worshipping (9:38), obeying (11:39-41), and committing (12:20-11). John chooses seven miracles (five of them unique to this gospel) to communicate truth about Jesus designed to invoke belief in him. He is setting up a series of signposts to take us through the story. The whole point of signs is that they are moments when heaven and earth intersect with each other. These “signs” include:

- Water changed to wine (2:1-11);
- An official’s son healed (4:46-54);
- An invalid healed at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15);
- Feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15);
- Walking on water (6:16-21);
- Blind man healed (9:1-12);
- Lazarus raised from the dead (11:1-44) .

**Christ’s person**—John’s gospel emphasizes both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. John clearly asserts Christ’s deity identifying the Word made flesh as God (1:1, 14), recording the Lord’s claims to eternal pre-existence (8:58), his declaration of oneness with the Father (10:30), his assertion of his being as the sum and essence of the Father (14:9), and his acknowledgment of Thomas’ assertion of his deity (20:28-29). His humanity is also stressed. He was weary (4:6), thirsty (4:7), wistful (6:67), deeply sorrowful (11:35), appreciative (12:7), troubled (12:27), loving 13:1ff), and loyal and courageous (18:8).

Jesus makes a series of “I am” statements that shed light on the identity of his person and what his person means to the believer.

- Bread of life (6:35);
- Light of the world (8:12; 9:5)
- Gate for the sheep (10:7);
- Good shepherd (10:11, 14);
- Resurrection and the life (11:25);
- The way, the truth, and the life (14:6);
- True vine (15:1, 5).

Each of these statements teaches truth about the nature of the believer’s union with his or her eternal Lord.

John also declares Jesus’ pre-eminence with several “greater than” statements:

- Jesus is greater than the angels (1:51);
- Jesus is greater than Abraham (8:56-58);

- Jesus is greater than Jacob (4:11-14);
- Jesus is greater than Moses (6:49-51);
- Jesus is greater than the Law (1:17; also see 8:1-11);
- Jesus is greater than the Sabbath (7:21-23; also see 5:8-15; 9:14-33);
- Jesus is greater than the Temple (2:18-21).

**Christ's work**—The movement of the entire gospel points to Christ's cross and resurrection. John the Baptist introduces the Lord Jesus as the sacrificial "lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Jesus tells Nicodemus that "just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). He speaks of giving his flesh "for the life of the world" (6:51). His cross is seen as the death of the shepherd for his sheep (10:11), the sacrifice of one man for the nation (11:49-52), the triumph of the obedient Son who bequeaths his life, joy, peace, and Spirit to his own (14:1ff). While the doctrine of the atonement is not articulated as explicitly in John's gospel as it is in some of Paul's letters, it is undeniably present throughout the text.

**Holy Spirit**—John's gospel contains particularly important teaching on the person and functions of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's intermediary relation between Christ and the believer and his functional relation to God, the believer, and the world are described in Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples (see 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7-15). In that discourse, Jesus makes it clear that the heavenly Counselor is given in consequence of Jesus' death and exaltation.

**Jesus' personal ministry**—Jesus' personal ministry with the disciples is given significant attention. Andrew (1:40; 6:8), Peter (1:41-42; 6:67-69; 13:6-9, 36-38; 18:11; 21:15-22), Philip (1:43; 6:5; 12:21-22; 14:8-10), Nathaniel (1:47-51; 21:2), Thomas (11:16; 14:5-7; 20:24-29), and other followers received Jesus' personal counsel and attention during important stages in the growth of their faith. The Lord's powerful public discourses accompanied an intensive interpersonal ministry. Numerous personal interviews are distributed throughout the text illustrating the mature and consequence of belief (see interviews with Nicodemus (3:1-15), the Samaritan woman (4:1-26), a paralytic (5:1-15), a man blind from birth (9:1-38), and Mary and Martha (11:17-37). The Lord's intensely personal ministry did not shy away from conflict. John records a number of interviews and exchanges with hostile persons and/or groups to illustrate the nature of unbelief (see 2:18-20; 5:16-47; 6:41-59; 7:14-44; 8:31-59; 10:22-39).

**Relation to the other (Synoptic) gospels**—The term "Synoptics" is one used to refer to the similarity of the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The term is derived from the Greek word *synoptikos*, meaning "to see together." John wrote independently of these other gospels, not because he didn't know about them, but because he had a different purpose in writing and was addressing a different audience. Noting the differences between the Synoptics and John, one writer has said that the Synoptics contain the fundamental facts and words for the infant church which experience afterwards interprets, while John reviews the facts considering their interpretation for a maturing church. While this seems an accurate observation, it is also true that John consciously supplements the Synoptics, emphasizing the Lord's Judean ministry, his personal ministry with individuals as well as his longer discourses, and largely omitting the parables and the theme of God's kingdom. Apparently, John thought the other gospels had presented enough information about these aspects of Jesus' life and teaching. John also

supplements the Synoptics by making it clear that Jesus' public ministry lasted longer than a reading of the Synoptics might suggest. The Synoptics only mention the last Passover when Jesus died, but John mentions three and possibly four Passovers during the time of Jesus' public ministry.

## **John Summary Outline:**

- I. Prologue: Jesus as Explaining the Father (1:1-18)
- II. Jesus' Revelation of God to the World (1:19-12:50)
  - A. Initial witness and first disciples: Behold the Lamb of God (1:19-51)
  - B. Presentation of Jesus for consideration: Cana to Cana (2:1-4:54)
  - C. Continued revelation of the Father by the Son: Increasing controversy and conflict (5:1-11:53)
    1. At Jerusalem: Jesus' claims presented (5:1-47)
    2. In Galilee: Jesus, the bread of life (6:1-71)
    3. At Jerusalem for the feasts (7:1-10:39)
    4. In Judea: Lazarus raised (11:1-53)
  - D. Preparation for and prediction of Jesus' death (11:54-12:50)
- III. Jesus Further Revelation of God to the Disciples (13:1-17:26)
  - A. Foot-washing: Love in redemptive service (13:1-17)
  - B. Betrayal predicted and betrayer dismissed (13:18-30)
  - C. Farewell discourse (13:31-16:33)
    1. Discourse in the upper room (13:1-14:31)
    2. Discourse along the way (15:1-16:33)
  - D. High priestly prayer of Christ (17:1-26)
- IV. Death and Resurrection of Jesus: Culmination of Conflict Between Belief and Unbelief (18:1-20:31)
  - A. Judas betrays Jesus (18:1-11)
  - B. Ecclesiastical trial before the chief priests (18:12-27)
  - C. Civil trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16)
  - D. Crucifixion and burial of Jesus (19:17-42)
  - E. Resurrection of Jesus and initial post-Resurrection appearances (20:1-29)
  - F. Purpose of book stated: That you may believe (20:30-31)
- V. Epilogue: Restoration of Peter and Commissioning of the Disciples (21:1-25)

## John Detailed Outline:

- I. Prologue: Jesus as Explaining the Father (1:1-18)
  - A. Nature and function of the Word (1:1-5)
  - B. Witness of John the Baptist (1:6-8)
  - C. Human reception of the Word (1:9-13)
  - D. Incarnation of the Word (1:14-18)
  
- II. Jesus' Revelation of God to the World (1:19-12:50)
  - A. Initial witness and first disciples: Behold the Lamb of God (1:19-51)
    1. John the Baptist's testimony (1:19-34)
    2. First disciples called (1:35-51)
  - B. Presentation of Jesus for consideration: Cana to Cana (2:1-4:54)
    1. In Cana of Galilee: Water into wine (2:1-11)
    2. In Judea (2:12-3:36)
      - a. Jesus cleanses the temple in Jerusalem (2:13-25)
      - b. Interview with Nicodemus (3:1-21)
      - c. John the Baptist's final testimony (3:22-36)
    3. In Samaria (4:1-42)
      - a. Departing to Samaria (4:1-4)
      - b. Interview with woman at the well (4:5-26)
      - c. Conversation with disciples on doing God's will (4:27-38)
      - d. Witness among the Samaritans (4:39-42)
    4. Return to Cana: Nobleman's son healed at a distance (4:43-54)
  - C. Continued revelation of the Father by the Son: Increasing controversy and conflict (5:1-11:53)
    1. At Jerusalem: Jesus' claims presented (5:1-47)
      - a. Healing of paralytic on the Sabbath (5:1-15)
      - b. Jesus claims equality with the Father (5:16-30)
      - c. Witnesses to Christ (5:31-47)
    2. In Galilee: Jesus, the bread of life (6:1-71)
      - a. 5,000 fed in the wilderness (6:1-15)
      - b. Jesus walks on water (6:16-21)
      - c. Bread of life discourse (6:22-71)
    3. At Jerusalem for the feasts (7:1-10:39)
      - a. Teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-52)
      - b. Jesus forgives an adulterous woman (7:53-8:11)
      - c. Jesus, the light of the world (8:12-9:41)
      - d. Jesus, the good shepherd (10:1-21)
      - e. Feast of Dedication: Jesus' assertion of deity (10:22-42)
    4. In Judea: Lazarus raised (11:1-53)

- a. Departure to Bethany delayed (11:1-16)
  - b. Dialogues with Martha and Mary (11:17-37)
  - c. Scene at the tomb: Lazarus raised (11:38-44)
  - d. Reaction of Jewish authorities: Plot to kill Jesus (11:45-53)
- D. Preparation for and prediction of Jesus' death (11:54-12:50)
  - 1. Withdrawal to Ephraim (11:54-57)
  - 2. Anointing for burial (12:1-11)
  - 3. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19)
  - 4. Greeks seek Jesus: Death prediction (12:20-36)
  - 5. Jesus' last general appeal to believe (12:37-50)
- III. Jesus Further Revelation of God to the Disciples (13:1-17:26)
  - A. Foot-washing: Love in redemptive service (13:1-17)
  - B. Betrayal predicted and betrayer dismissed (13:18-30)
  - C. Farewell discourse (13:31-16:33)
    - 1. Discourse in the upper room (13:1-14:33)
      - a. Impending departure announced (13:31-35)
      - b. Peter's questions: Denial predicted and eternal dwelling assured (13:36-14:4)
      - c. Thomas' question: The way to the Father (14:5-7)
      - d. Philip's question: Revelation of the Father (14:8-21)
      - e. Judas' question: Special disclosure to the disciples (14:22-24)
      - f. Holy Spirit and peace: Continuity of comfort and instruction (14:25-31)
    - 3. Discourse along the way (15:1-16:33)
      - a. Christ and the disciples: Abiding in the vine (15:1-11)
      - b. Disciples' relation to one another: Loving one another (15:12-17)
      - c. Disciples' relation to the world: Witness amidst hostility (15:18-16:4)
      - d. Holy Spirit's ministry: Conviction, instruction, and revelation (16:5-15)
      - e. Disciples' sorrow turned to joy (16:16-24)
      - f. Purpose of the discourse revisited: Preparation for departure (16:25-33)
    - 4. High priestly prayer of Christ (17:1-26)
      - a. For himself: Glorify the Son (17:1-5)
      - b. For the disciples: Preservation and sanctification (17:6-19)
      - c. For future disciples: Unity (17:20-26)
- IV. Death and Resurrection of Jesus: Culmination of Conflict Between Belief and Unbelief (18:1-20:31)
  - A. Judas betrays Jesus (18:1-11)
  - B. Ecclesiastical trial before the chief priests (18:12-27)
    - 1. Before Annas and Sanhedrin (18:12-14, 19-24)
    - 2. Peter's threefold denial of Christ (18:15-18, 25-27)
  - C. Civil trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16)
    - 1. Jewish accusations against Christ (18:28-32)



2. Pilate's initial interrogation and release attempt: King of the Jews or Barabbas (18:33-40)
3. Scourging, crowning with thorns, and second release attempt: Behold the man (19:1-7)
4. Pilate's continued interrogation, final attempt, and reluctant judgment (19:8-16)
- D. Crucifixion and burial of Jesus (19:17-42)
  1. Crucifixion, inscription, and scene at the Cross (19:17-27)
  2. Death agony of Christ (19:28-37)
  3. Burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-42)
- E. Resurrection of Jesus and initial post-Resurrection appearances (19:17-42)
  1. Discovery of the empty tomb (20:1-9)
  2. Initial post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus (20:10-29)
    - a. To Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)
    - b. First appearance to the disciples (20:19-23)
    - c. Second appearance to the disciples: Thomas as climactic illustration of triumph of belief (20:24-29)
  3. Purpose of book stated: That you may believe (20:30-31)
- V. Epilogue: Restoration of Peter and Commissioning of the Disciples (21:1-25)
  - A. Miraculous catch and a Lord-cooked breakfast (21:1-14)
  - B. Restoration and instruction of Peter (21:15-23)
  - C. Conclusion (21:24-25)

## John: Believe and Have Life

**I. Prologue: Jesus as Explaining the Father**—One of the unique features of John’s gospel is the highly theological introduction or prologue. The prologue serves to introduce the book by stating the nature and mission of its principal character, Jesus Christ. It speaks of his essential identity as God in his pre-existence and incarnation, constitutes a commentary on creation in light of the new creation, describes the struggle between light and darkness, belief and unbelief, and tells us how a witness to God can be made among sinful people. God and glory, people and darkness, Word and light, and an anointed one who “dwells with us” all suggest a redemptive movement from God to people designed to give his people one blessing after another. In short, it is a cogent theological statement of the themes that John will develop throughout his gospel.

**A. Nature and function of the Word (1:1-5)**—These opening verses make three essential points: (1) the pre-existence and nature of the Word (1:1-2); (2) the Word’s place in creation (1:3); and (3) the Word’s life-brining and illuminating function (1:4-5).

**1:1-3**—John makes clear that the Word is the pre-existent God, a living, active, and intelligent personality. The pre-existence of the Word is cogently stated in the phrase “In the beginning was the Word”, which could be rendered “When the beginning began, the Word was already there.” The phrase “The Word was with God” could be rendered “face to face with” and indicates both equality and distinction of identity along with association.

In applying the term “Word” (*logos*) to Jesus Christ, John used a term meaningful to both Jews and Greeks. In the Old Testament, the term referred to God’s unique communication to people, the self-assertion of divine personality, or the personification of godly wisdom. Pagan philosophers spoke of the word (*logos*) as a kind of principle of rationality, lying deep within the whole cosmos and within all human beings. The early church fathers focused on the idea of the *logos* in utilizing Greek philosophy to unpack Christian truth. *Logos* in John is an expression of God himself in his creative power and divine personality which called the universe into being (see Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

The first words of John’s gospel repeat the opening words of Genesis, and in verse 3, the writer makes a summary statement of the Word’s creative work much like that of Gen. 1:1. However, the focus of John’s account is not creation, but a commentary on creation in light of God’s new creation in Christ. John’s purpose is not to expand upon the Genesis cosmology, but to show how the agent of creation, Jesus Christ, engages in fulfilling the Father’s plan of redemption for the fallen human race.

**1:4-5**—This creative Word brings life (*zoe*), a term that most often refers to the vitality of our existence or to spiritual (e.g. eternal) life. *Zoe* is embodied in the person of Christ. He is life and light, humanity’s vital dynamic and our illumination to our dire spiritual need. Jesus’ offer of life and light and people’s willful refusal and inability to comprehend the significance of that offer is focal through the gospel. Note how often John contrasts life and death, belief and unbelief, and light and darkness.

**B. Witness of John the Baptist (1:6-8)**—John the Baptist is mentioned almost ninety times in the New Testament. His is the special privilege of being the human agent for introducing the Word to people. John stresses his function as a witness to Christ and is careful to portray himself as subordinate to the Word (see 1:15, 29-31).

Verses 6 through 8 are not alien to the context of 1:1-18. As the Word came to bring heavenly light to humanity, so John came to speak from a human level to awake people to their need for God's revelation. "Witness" appears as a noun fourteen times and as a verb (testify) over thirty times in John. One of the gospel's central concerns is how a witness to God is made among sinful people.

**C. Human reception of the Word (1:9-13)**—The illuminating Word entered the created order and generated strong reactions among people, either in rejection (1:11) or in reception (1:12-13). John initially defines believing as receiving. He speaks of a change in people receiving the Word. People do not become children of God by any natural means, whether by parentage, blood line, religious effort, or by the desire to be saved. They become God's *tekna* (born ones) by being begotten of God (1:13; see 3:3 where "born again" literally means "born from above"). The emphasis is not on ethnic descent but on spiritual rebirth.

**1:9**—This verse has been called the Quaker (inner light) text. However, the verse does not mean that Christ has already illumined everyone, but that he would be light to everyone his ministry touched.

**1:10-11**—The word "world" (*kosmos*) appears almost eighty times in John and is one of the gospel's recurring themes. The term can refer to the created order, people in general, people opposed to God, or the entire system opposed to God's purposes. John makes it clear that the world as a system has no comprehension of the Word as manifested and no place for him. God sends the Word into the world and to his people, and the world and his people do not recognize Him. This is the central problem that dominates the entire gospel.

**D. Incarnation of the Word (1:14-18)**—Deity became manifest to humanity and available to its need by the Incarnation. The Word incarnate functions as the definitive explanation of the Father to people (see 14:8-9). John 1:1 speaks of the eternal nature and relation of the Word to God the Father; John 1:14 speaks of a change in the Word's relation to the world of people. The Word "made his dwelling" with people. The Greek word conveys the sense that the Word "tabernacles" or "pitched his tent" with people, harkening Jewish readers back to the nation's wilderness experience recorded in the Old Testament and focused on the Tent of Meeting. The glory of God filled that tent (see ex. 40:34-35). This is the first text in John to build on a wilderness motif. Note how Jesus is described as, or intimated as being, the true tabernacle (1:14), the true brazen serpent (3:14-15), true manna (6:30-35, 40-48), the true rock (7:37-39), the true light (cloud of glory?) (8:12), and the true paschal lamb (1:29; 11:49-52; 19:16ff).

**1:14**—The "one and only" translates the Greek *monogenes*, which means "one of a kind, unique". Older translations rendered this text as "only begotten", which implied a derivativeness to Jesus' existence that seems at variance to the teaching of 1:1. The thought in the original language is centered on the personal and completely unique being of the Son, not in his

generation. Most Jews so emphasized that a human being could not become a god that they never considered that God might become human. The very idea was inherently blasphemous.

“Made his dwelling” or “dwelt” is literally “tabernacled.” As God tabernacled with his people in the wilderness, so the Word tabernacled among his people in the person of the Lord Jesus.

**1:15-18**—John’s message is summarized: Jesus is eternal (1:15), the fullness of grace and truth (1:16-17), and the definitive explanation of God the Father (1:18).

**1:18**—Note how the title the Word (*logos*) identifies Jesus’ main ministry to people. Jesus came to explain or exegete the Father. “Has made him known” (*exegesato*) comes from the verb from which our term “exegesis” is derived, meaning to explain or interpret. Older manuscripts read “one and only God” (*monogenes theos*) where more modern translations read “one and only”. There can be little doubt that this text directly asserts the deity of Jesus Christ.

**II. Jesus’ Revelation of God to the World (1:19-12:50)**—This portion of the book deals with Jesus’ public ministry. Chronologically, it is tied to the feasts of the Jewish calendar and is keyed to John’s “signs” or miracles that Jesus performed for the purpose of drawing out belief and unbelief. Jesus’ popularity peaks with the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6. After that sign, there is a series of confrontations between the Lord and those who will not believe which function to sort out those open to the truth from those set in their resolve to suppress it.

**A. Initial witness and first disciples: Behold the Lamb of God (1:19-51)**—This segment introduces John the Baptist and clarifies his relation to Jesus (1:19-28) and his function as the forerunner bearing witness to the Word (1:29-34). This chapter closes with John’s account of how Jesus recruited his first disciples (1:35-51).

**1. John the Baptist’s testimony (1:19-34)**—This section describes John’s view of his own life and ministry (1:19-28) and his witness to the identity and function of Jesus (1:29-34). John denied that he was the Messiah (1:20), Elijah (1:21), or the Prophet (1:21). The Jews expected the return of Elijah to precede the advent of Messiah (see Mal. 4:5-6) and that an appearance of a prophet like Moses would occur in the last days (see Deut. 18:15). John merely claimed to be a forerunner preparing the way for the Lord (1:23, see Isa. 40:3). John’s positive testimony to Jesus identifies him as the Lamb of God (1:29). This image of a lamb combines two Old Testament ritual sacrifices in the person of Christ: the Passover lamb (Ex. 12) and the scapegoat (Lev. 16:7-10). The Baptist, by the Spirit, was clearly saying that Jesus would be the atonement offering for sin.

John is getting people ready for someone else. All Christian ministers are called to have that same spirit. They are not to proclaim themselves but Jesus as Lord, and themselves as servants of others for the Lord’s sake (2 Cor. 4:5).

**1:26**—John’s baptismal practice followed the pattern of proselyte baptism. The baptized person renounced all evil, was immersed in water, and then reclothed as a member of the holy

community of law-keepers. Proselyte baptism was the most significant of the various ceremonial washings in Jewish religious practice of the day. Gentiles were usually baptized when they converted to Judaism. The Baptizer seems to treat Jews like pagans, a rare practice.

**1:27**—John's witness places Jesus far above himself. His reference to untying sandals was drawn from the practice of using the lowest slave of a household to remove the sandals and wash the dusty feet of guests.

**1:32-34**—Another aspect of John's witness related to the work of the Holy Spirit, who authenticated Jesus' mission and who was the seal of his work in individual lives (see 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, 4:30). Jesus is the one upon whom God's Spirit comes down and rests. John's baptism with water signified repentance and confession of sin; He did not pretend to impart the Spirit but only announced that Jesus would. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a reference to an ecstatic experience but is the inauguration in a person's life of the indwelling ministry of the Spirit, the seal and dynamic of life from above. We hear of the Spirit intermittently in John's gospel, particularly in 7:37-39 and in the farewell discourse in John 14-16. On the evening of the first Easter, Jesus breathes on his disciples giving them his own spirit (20:21-23).

Most Jews thought that the prophetic endowments of the Spirit had ceased with the deaths of the last Old Testament prophets. For John's hearers, a claim that the Spirit's activity was being restored, would be a claim that the messianic era was at hand.

**1:34**—Note the personal recognition of the deity of Christ by other people in John's gospel: John the Baptist (1:34); Nathaniel (1:49; Peter (6:69); Martha (11:27); Thomas (20:28); John the apostle and evangelist (20:31).

**2. First disciples called (1:35-51)**—The development of faith in the first disciples followed a definite pattern. First came the testimony of John the Baptist (1:30), who may have been their mentor. Then came the desire for fellowship or companionship with Jesus (1:37-39) and activity on his behalf (1:40-51).

**1:35-37**—To recommend disciples to another teacher was exceedingly rare, requiring great humility and confidence in the other teacher's superiority.

**1:40-42**—The activity of Andrew (1:41) and Philip (1:45) is a model for friendship evangelism. The picture John gives of Andrew is one of a person bringing people into contact with Jesus: his brother, Peter (1:41-42), the boy with the loaves and fishes (6:8), the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (12:20-21).

"Operation Andrew" was a strategy employed by Billy Graham's evangelistic association to encourage Christians to invite their unsaved friends and family to his crusades. The name is derived from the biblical figure Andrew, who is known for bringing others to Jesus. The core idea is to mobilize individuals to share their faith and actively invite others to hear the Gospel message.

Note that “Messiah” means “anointed one” and that *messias* in Hebrew is the equivalent of *christos* in Greek. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and set apart for special service. The Jews expected a specially anointed one of God to come to them but were confused as to the nature of his coming. Some Old Testament texts pictured Messiah as a suffering servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12) while others portrayed a conquering king (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-16). The majority of the Jews focused on this second image and expected a military/political deliverer. Throughout his ministry, Jesus would explain repeatedly that the cross must come before the crown, that suffering precedes glory.

**1:42**—“Cephas” in Aramaic and “Peter” in Greek mean “rock. This verse is a mini-summary of Peter’s career: out of the impulsive, wavering Simon, Jesus made a stable, rock-like Cephas.

**1:45**—The other gospels do not mention Nathaniel, but do list Bartholomew in close proximity to Philip (see Mt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:14). Many Bible students believe that Nathaniel and Bartholomew are the same person.

**1:47-51**—Jesus’ omniscience is on display here. Nathaniel seems to have been sitting under a fig tree reading and meditating on Genesis 28:12-17, the account of Jacob’s dream of a stairway to heaven, angels ascending and descending, and the Lord re-affirming his covenant loyalty with this far from pristine patriarch. Jesus challenges Nathaniel with the progressive possibilities of faith with Jesus as the surer link between heaven and earth than Jacob’s nocturnal stairwell.

**1:51**—“Son of Man” was one of the Lord’s favorite titles for himself. It is used over eighty times in the gospels and thirteen times in John alone. The title speaks of both the humanity and deity of Jesus. Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7 presents the title in a definite Messianic setting (see Dan. 7:9-14), and Jesus certainly used the title in that fashion at his trial before the High Priest (see Mt. 26:64).

**B. Presentation of Jesus for consideration: Cana to Cana (2:1-4:54)**—Jesus’ witness to God begins with two signs and three interviews designed to bring people from various backgrounds to faith in him. These surround another testimony by John the Baptist to the nature of the person and mission of the Lord (3:22-36). The first of John’s seven signs involves changing water into wine (2:1-11) which is followed by Jesus cleansing the temple (2:12-22). The inadequate faith of many who superficially trust him at this juncture of his ministry (2:23-25) sets the stage for three interviews: (1) Jesus and Nicodemus, the Jewish leader (3:1-15), which John utilizes as a starting point for an extended comment on Jesus’ mission and the nature of belief (3:16-21); (2) Jesus and the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), which confronts attitudes of Jewish exclusivism; and (3) a royal (and probably Gentile) official (4:43-50a) before concluding the section with a second sign, the healing of the official’s son (4:50b-54). Thus, in a parochial jaunt beginning and ending in the small Galilean town of Cana, Jesus’ initial ministry touches Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile and challenges representatives of each of these classes of people to faith in him.

The three interviews result in three people with real confidence in Christ. The cautious, judicious venture of Nicodemus grows into a sympathetic interest (7:50-52) and finally into open identification (19:39). Jesus’ persistent probing of the Samaritan woman yields a wistfully

yearning woman turned evangelist (4:39-42). The desperation of the nobleman is brought to a crisis point—would he take Jesus at his word and return home to his son? Jesus’ deft handling of three entirely different people at their point of need opens John’s presentation of our Lord’s public ministry.

Jesus was ever conscious of individuals. Yes, he ministered to the masses, but John’s gospel highlights his individual ministry. God’s servants today, in a world whose streets are thronged with faceless people, must be constantly reminded of their call to minister faithfully to the individuals who cross their paths.

In this section and in the one immediately preceding it, John clearly reveals that there is a new sacrifice (1:29), a new temple (2:19-21; 4:20-24), a new birth (3:1-7), and a new source of life-giving sustenance (4:11).

**1. In Cana of Galilee: Water into wine (2:1-11)**—Jesus performed his first sign in the backyard of his childhood. Cana was located in Galilee about nine miles north of Nazareth. The miracle was done at the request of his mother to avert a major social embarrassment for the bride and groom. This is the first of seven “signs” (*semeia*) in John (see the discussion in the Introduction under Distinctives and Guiding Concepts). They are called signs because they point to something beyond themselves. While they demonstrate Jesus’ power over different areas of human experience, their significance lies in Jesus’ ability to perceive and meet all human needs, not in their impressive pizzaz. Note how often they are followed by confessions of faith by those witnessing them (see 2:11; 4:53; 6:69; 9:38; 11:45).

There are two things to note about this first sign. First, wine is often used in the Bible as a symbol of joy. The world’s sense of happy times always runs down and cannot be regained. Jesus gives a true sense of joy that is far more than merely pleasant circumstances. The wedding is a foretaste of the great heavenly feast in store for God’s people (Rev. 21:2). The transformation of water to fine wine is meant by John to signify the effect that Jesus can have on people’s lives, then and now. Second, this sign involved cooperative service. The water turned to wine as the servants did as Jesus said. Several signs in John involve people’s cooperation with God’s activity. It’s as if God is asking—Will you choose to believe and act on that belief?

**2:3-5**—Wedding celebrations often lasted seven days. To run out of wine at these celebrations was a major faux pas. Jesus was not being rude to his mother, as evidenced by her response in 2:5, but was making it clear that he would not perform miracles simply because there were needs (there would always be needs). He performed miracles according to the Father’s purpose in relation to the Son’s appointed time (“hour” in the older translations). Jesus lived on a heavenly timetable, marked out by the Father. He was very conscious of his “time” (see 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

This is the first of only two occasions where we meet Jesus’ mother in John’s narrative. The other is at the foot of the cross (19:26-27).

**2:6-7**—These large stone jars were for ritual washings and using them for another purpose would defile them, at least temporarily. Jesus shows more concern for his friends' wedding than for ritual protocol.

**2. In Judea (2:12-3:36)**—This section encompasses Jesus' cleansing of the temple (2:13-22), his interview with Nicodemus (3:1-21), and the final witness to Jesus by John the Baptist (3:22-36).

**2:12**—According to Mark 6:3, Jesus had four brothers and an unspecified number of sisters. John alludes to them here and in 7:2-10. Roman Catholic theologians, driven by the need to contend for the Church's dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary, have suggested that they were either Joseph's children by a previous marriage or they were really Jesus' cousins. The most logical and straightforward interpretation is that these brothers and sisters were indeed Jesus' siblings, younger children of Joseph and Mary born after Jesus.

**a. Jesus cleanses the temple in Jerusalem (2:13-25)**—Jesus casts out of the temple the moneychangers and others using the ritual requirements of the Law as an opportunity for profit. This is the Lord's protest of the commercialization of the spiritual heritage of Judaism. The temple cleansing demonstrates how easily selfishness and greed can be cloaked in piety and propriety. No doubt, this "religious market" began as a convenience for Jews coming long distances to worship at the temple. But in time, "convenience" became a business, not a ministry. It is certainly possible for churches today to commercialize and secularize worship in the same way as the Jews did in Jesus' day.

The temple was the beating heart of Judaism. It was the center of worship and music, of politics and society, of national celebration and mourning. Here is this unknown prophet from Galilee turning everything upside down. What is this about? Jesus' act in clearing the temple presupposed the authority to do so. Jesus is the true temple. He takes the traditions and applies them to himself. He is the reality to which the temple points. The Lord's resurrection is the chief proof of the authoritative nature of his life and ministry (2:18-22).

This narrative poses a chronological puzzle when relating it to the other gospels. The Synoptics record this event as occurring during Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem just before his death (see Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-46). John records it early in Jesus' ministry. Explanations vary around two general approaches: (1) John transplants the account for topical or theological reasons (John's writing is theologically, not chronologically, driven); or (2) there were two such occasions, one of which was recorded by John and the other by the Synoptics. Note that the Synoptics only record one visit by the Lord to Jerusalem. So naturally they recorded the cleansing of the temple upon that visit.

**2:13**—The feasts mentioned by Jesus are Passover (2:13; possibly 5:1; 6:4; 12:1), Tabernacles (7:2), the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (10:22), and possibly Purim (5:1).

**2:17**—This verse quotes Psalm 69:9. Psalm 69 is a Messianic psalm quoted a number of times in the New Testament (69:4 in Jn. 15:25; 69:8 in Jn. 7:3-5; 69:9 in Jn. 2:17 and Rom. 15:3; 69:21 in Mt. 27:34, 48; and 69:22 in Rom. 11:9-10).



**2:18-22**—The Jews demand to know by what authority Jesus acts. The Lord points to his resurrection, to the Jews' consternation. John records several instances where Jesus says things that he knows will confuse people to make them think. He deliberately introduces confusion to lead them through their misconceptions (see also 3:3; 4:10, 32; 5:45-47; 6:26-27; 7:28-29). In these instances, people are blocking the conceptual movement from the physical to the spiritual, from the outward to the inward, from Jesus the man to his identity of the very Son of God. People were (and are) in a mindset fascinated by signs and pizzaz, all the while failing to see what the signs signify.

**2:19-21**—Here, the Jews thought that Jesus was referring to the literal temple, but John informs us otherwise. On at least two occasions the misunderstanding was repeated. At his trial, The Lord was accused of saying that he would destroy the temple and raise it up again (see Mt. 26:60-61; Mk. 14:57-59). In addition, the mockers repeated this charge as Jesus hung dying on the cross (see Mt. 27:40; Mk. 15:29). Talk about missing the point and missing it repeatedly!

**2:20**—Herod the Great began work on the Temple in 20-19 B.C. The forty-six years mentioned in this verse would place Jesus' words around 27.

**2:23-25**—The text says that the people saw the miraculous signs and believed. However, Jesus knew the hearts of people and could evaluate their so-called faith precisely. He was not entrusting himself to them for good reason. Many of these “believers” would soon desert the Lord (6:66). Jesus' knowledge of what was in the hearts of people is on display throughout this gospel – Simon's character (1:42); Nathaniel's thoughts (1:46ff); the hearts of the Jewish leaders (5:42; 8:40ff); Judas' heart (6:64), the repentance of the adulteress (8:10-11). This knowledge takes on specific application in the following two interviews (3:1-15; 4:1-42).

**b. Interview with Nicodemus (3:1-21)**—Nicodemus was a gentleman and a thinker. His approach to the Lord was an intellectual one. Jesus' knowledge of what was in people (2:23-25) manifests itself in his deft handling of this Jewish leader. Nicodemus was seeking after the kingdom of God and Jesus knew it. The Lord ignored Nicodemus' circuitous approach and bluntly answered his underlying question before it was asked, asserting that without a complete change (being “born again” or “born from above”) people cannot enter the kingdom. Nicodemus was slow on the uptake, which prompted the Lord to discuss the regeneration of the Spirit (3:5-8) and his own atoning work (3:14-15). John expands upon this in an extended comment (3:16-21).

**(1) Jesus' interview with Nicodemus (3:1-15)**—Here we have the famous “born again” or “born from above” passage. Jesus uses three different illustrations to instruct Nicodemus concerning salvation: physical birth (3:1-7); wind (3:8-13); and the bronze serpent (3:14-18). A fourth illustration of light and darkness is used in John's extended comment (3:19-21). Nicodemus' response to Jesus' statement that entrance into the kingdom is dependent on regeneration (3:3) is either one of complete misunderstanding or a “I'm too old to change” kind of remark (3:4). Likewise, he seems incredulous (3:9) after Jesus elaborates on the need for Spirit regeneration (3:5-8). Nicodemus should have understood these things (3:10-12) for the Old Testament witnesses to this deep need of people in the teaching related to the New Covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). The interview closes with Jesus pointing to a person's reliance on the Lord's atoning work as the sine qua non of entrance into the kingdom, using an Old Testament illustration (the bronze serpent episode in Numbers 21) to highlight his point (3:14-

15). What happens to Nicodemus? This interview seems to have spawned a cautious, yet growing faith (see 7:50-52; 19:38-42).

**3:3-4**—The phrase “to be born again” (*anathern*) can be translated “born from above”. Indeed, John’s other uses of this term warrants the idea of birth “from above” (see 3:31; 19:11, 23). Nicodemus should have understood Jesus was referring to conversion and not have taken “born again” literally. However, it never occurred to Nicodemus that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel.

**3:5**—What did Jesus mean by “born of water and the Spirit” in 3:5? Various views have been suggested:

- Roman Catholicism asserts that this text teaches baptismal regeneration. For the traditional Catholic, the sacrament of baptism is the rite of regeneration, which causes a person to be initially justified. That is to say that the physical administration of water brings a person from spiritual death to spiritual life. The Council of Trent described baptism as the “laver of regeneration”. Baptism by a priest is necessary for salvation in Rome’s view (Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994 Ed.) par. 1257, p. 320, citing Jn. 3:5). That baptism regeneration is not the teaching of the Lord here is clear by the emphasis upon the Spirit’s work in 3:6-8 without further reference to water. The contrast is between Spirit and physical flesh. The need is for birth from above. The human activity emphasized in the extended passage is faith. Note 3:14-15: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Everyone who believes has eternal life without reference to water baptism (3:16-18). It is clear in the extended passage that water baptism is not a necessary condition for regeneration. The touchstone of salvation is belief in Christ and reliance on his atoning work, not the ritual application of water. Note John’s emphasis on faith as the only condition to the reception of eternal life that Jesus offers in 5:24, 6:47, 7:38, 8:24, 9:35-39, 11:25-26, 12:44-48, and 20:31.
- The word “water” refers to being born physically and the word “Spirit” to being born from above or spiritually. According to this view, what Jesus is saying is that unless you are born by water (physical birth) and again by Spirit (spiritual birth), you cannot be saved. This seems to fit the statement Jesus makes in 3:6: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit.”
- The word “water” refers to the purifying power of the Word of God. Advocates of this view understand “born of water” to refer to “the washing with water through the word” (see Eph. 5:26) and point to Peter’s reference to being “born again ... through the living and enduring Word of God” (1 Pt. 1:23). The argument is that this regenerative process is the very thing under discussion in 3:3-8.
- The word “water” is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, making Jesus’ statement in 3:5 akin to his proclamation in 7:37-39. Advocates of this view note that the emphasis throughout 3:3-8 is upon the Spirit, first compared to water (3:5) and then to wind (3:8). The key contrast is between the supernatural (Spirit) and the natural (flesh) in 3:6. So “born of

water” is taken as synonymous with “born of Spirit”. The conjunction “and” (*kai*) in 3:5 is understood as an instance of the ascensive use of the word and should be translated “even.” Thus, 3:5 would read: “unless he is born of water even of the Spirit”.

- The phrase “born of water” refers to the repentance ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus was attempting to clarify things for Nicodemus and referred to something with which Nicodemus was familiar, the ministry of the Baptist. The words “born of water” signifies a change of heart based on faith in Christ. John the Baptist himself gave testimony to Christ in similar terms in 1:32-34. Thus, the new birth is conditioned on individual repentance in response to God (born of water) and the transformation of the person’s life by God’s regenerative work in the Spirit (born of the Spirit).
- The words “born of water” refers to Christian baptism, not a ritualistic rite that transforms the unsuspecting, immature, or otherwise bewildered by its mere application, but as a visible sign to a spiritual grace. It is not that they who are baptized are saved by baptism’s application, but that they are saved by the new birth wrought by the Spirit and signified by the application of water.

**3:8**—Jesus’ discussion of the Spirit’s work utilizes a play on words applicable in both Greek and Hebrew. The word of “spirit” (Hebrew—*ruah*; Greek—*pneuma*) is also the word for “wind” in both languages and can be translated either way depending on the context. Thus, 3:8a could be “The wind blows wherever it pleases” or “The Spirit breathes wherever he wills”.

**3:14-15**—Jesus selects the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21 and makes a direct comparison with himself. The serpent entwined around a pole became a symbol of healing. The bronze serpent points to the death of Jesus as the healing event for the people. In making that comparison, John is not suggesting that Jesus was akin to poisonous snakes attacking the people. What he is saying is that the evil that was and is in the world, deep-rooted within us all, was allowed to take its full force on Jesus on the cross. Humankind has been smitten with a deadly disease and the only cure is to look to the Son of Man dying on the cross. The brazen serpent pointed to Christ in several ways—

- It was prepared by God’s command;
- It symbolized God’s way of saving people from sin and its ravages;
- It illustrated that redemptive power is available based on faith;
- It was lifted on a standard; and
- It represented God’s judgment of sin.

The bronze serpent was stored in the Tabernacle as a sacred object and much later, in the time of Hezekiah, was broken into pieces when the king discovered that the people were worshipping it (2 Ki. 18:4).

**(2) John’s extended comment (3:16-21)**—Bible students are divided as to whether this segment is a direct continuation of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus or whether it represents John’s comment of Jesus’ teaching. Either way, the text clearly expresses that salvation is a gift received by believing God. God’s great love prompted him to give his most

precious gift, his Son, to meet our most dire need. Belief is the only proper response to such love (3:16), and judgment is the eminently logical and deserving consequence of unbelief (3:18-20).

**c. John the Baptist's final testimony (3:22-36)**—John and Jesus were both baptizing in the Judean countryside. John is informed that Jesus' ministry is trumping his own. John's greatness can be seen in his reaction—"he must increase, but I must decrease." John is the friend of the bridegroom, the forerunner of the one to come, and the one from below who gave witness to the one from above. He was content with his role and did not reach beyond. Different characters of the story have separate roles to play. As C.S. Lewis said, what we have to learn is to play great parts without pride and small parts without shame.

There is no room for rivalry in the ministry. Yet, there are so many instances of it. John is a testimony to proper ministerial demeanor. In 1:23, he is content to be a voice in the wilderness calling for repentance. Here, he is satisfied with the subordinate and temporary character of his mission (3:29-30). People face the problem of comparison and competition in Christian work. Consider the reactions of John the Baptist in this passage (3:26-30), Moses in Numbers 11:26-30, Jesus in Luke 9:46-50, and Paul in Philippians 1:15-18. Thinking of healthy, mature, and spiritually sound reactions to competitive ministerial posturing, is a most salutary practice.

**3:25-26**—The theme of ceremonial purification comes up frequently in John's gospel (the stone jars at Cana (2:6), proselyte baptism (3:5), ceremonial washing (3:25-26), the healing waters of Bethsaida (ch. 5), Siloam's pool for the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-38), and perhaps at the foot-washing (13:5-11).

**3:30**—Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, once opened a sermon that followed a glowing introduction with the following remark: "Dear friends, I am a little servant of an illustrious Master." Then he prayed and preached Christ lifted up. John the Baptist would have approved.

**3:31-36**—John editorializes upon a conversation. He declares in definite terms that:

- Jesus came from heaven and spoke with higher authority than those on earth;
- He spoke from observation and direct knowledge, not from theory;
- He spoke the very word of God; and
- The Father's love caused him to endow the Son with complete authority to execute the Father's purpose.

Although John the Baptist came as an important messenger from God, Jesus was superior to John in every way.

### **3. In Samaria (4:1-42)**

In the section, we witness the Lord's approach to one of the basic ethnic divides of the region in that day. A strong rivalry and hatred existed between Jews and their northern cousins, the Samaritans. Thoroughbred Jews regarded Samaritans with contempt, as political, cultural, and religious "mutts." The Samaritans, for their part, had had their fill of Jewish arrogance and assumed superiority.

In understanding Jewish-Samaritan animosity, a page of history is worth a volume of logic. After Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., they deported many Israelites from their land and resettled Samaria with captives from other countries. The Jews that remained in the land intermarried with the foreign transplants. Over time, these foreigners combined elements of their religious practice with the worship of Yahweh and Baal and developed a mongrel religion. After Judean Jews returned from the Babylonian exile around 536 B.C. and renewed their commitment to the Law, they discovered a complete cultural, political, and religious rift between themselves and the Samaritans. In the time of Nehemiah (around 450 B.C.), the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, attempting to keep the Jews in a weak and vulnerable position. In Maccabean times (around 160 B.C.), the Samaritans made themselves particularly odious to the Jews by accepting the Hellenization of their religion and dedicating their temple on Mount Gerizim to Zeus Xenios. In summary, the Jews and the Samaritans "went way back". Long memories fed mutual disdain.

**a. Departing to Samaria (4:1-4)**—Jesus departs from Judea because the scope of his ministry had become apparent to the Pharisees and to keep a divine appointment in Samaria. Jesus "had to go through Samaria" not because it was the only way to get to Galilee. In fact, most Jews traveling to Galilee from Judea specifically avoided the way Jesus chose. Jesus had to go through Samaria because of the underlying compulsion of the divine will seeking an entrée to this despised race. The gospel was to be preached to all, unshackled by the bias of Jewish exclusivism.

**b. Interview with woman at the well (4:5-26)**—This section is a testimony to the grace of God in Christ. This interview is vastly different from the previous one with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a learned Jewish rabbi; the Samaritan was an ignorant woman of a mongrel race. Nicodemus was morally upright; the Samaritan woman an immoral outcast. He was wealthy, a member of the Jewish ruling class; she was poor, downtrodden "pass around Pat." He was serious and dignified; she was boisterous and flippant. He sought Jesus out, attempting to understand the Lord; she was sought by Jesus and only really listened to him when she understood how perfectly he understood her. The picture of the tired, thirsty Lord of glory, sitting by a well (4:6), wearied by a trip divinely compelled (4:4), waiting patiently for a jaunty, despised woman beyond shame, but by divine design not beyond hope, is one of the finest portraits of God's grace in all the Scriptures.

The Lord models the process of soul-winning in this passage. He began by asking her for a favor appealing to her sympathy (4:7). Then he appeals to her curiosity (4:10), to her desire for rest and provision (4:13-14), and finally to her conscience (4:16). Her estimate of Jesus rises precipitously throughout the conversation. In 4:9, she sees him as merely a Jewish man and saucily chides him for asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. In 4:12, she suggests the possibility that he might be greater than Jacob. In 4:19, she calls him a prophet. By 4:29, she was inquiring whether Jesus could be the Messiah.

This is also an opportunity to observe that we are never alone in the work of the Lord, and must never look back at any opportunity for witness as wasted time and effort. It takes faith to plow the soil and plant the seed, and God promises a harvest (Gal. 6:9). The Samaritan's woman's testimony produced a harvest of interest and some converts. However, a few years after this

incident, Philip, Peter, and John would participate in another, and far greater harvest among the Samaritans (see Acts 8:4-25).

**4:6**—The site of Jacob's well is still well-known and is within view of Mount Gerizim. The sixth hour normally was noon. Jesus had probably been walking for about six hours.

**4:7-26**—This story would be a non-starter for many Jews at the time. Devout Jewish men would not have allowed themselves to be alone with a woman. Jesus waits for a woman while alone. Not only a woman, but a Samaritan woman. Good Jews had nothing to do with that mongrel race. And worse yet, this was a woman of ill-repute. The Samaritans themselves would not associate with her. The Samaritan woman came to draw water alone at the height of the mid-day heat. Even asking her for a drink of water could be seen by the Jewish poobahs as flirting with her, especially considering her reputation for looseness.

**4:16-18**—Jesus' request for the woman to call for her husband was both proper and strategic. It was proper in that it was not regarded as good etiquette for a woman to speak with a man unless her husband was present. It was strategic because it placed her in a dilemma from which she could not free herself without admitting her guilt and her need.

**4:19-20**—His probing had become uncomfortably personal and his knowledge of her was unnervingly incisive. So, she began to argue a religious issue (whether worship should be offered on Mount Gerizim or at Jerusalem) as a decoy to move away from this morality stuff. The Samaritans argued for Mount Gerizim on the basis that Abraham and Jacob built altars there (see Gen. 12:7; 33:20) and Moses commanded and Joshua performed antiphonal readings of the Law from Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (see Deut. 27:1-28, 68; Josh. 8:30-35). The Samaritans held Mount Gerizim to be most sacred, building a temple on the site around 400 B.C. which the Jews destroyed in 128 B.C.

**4:24**—"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." A classic text on true, Spirit-originated worship. True worship has nothing to do with territory and everything to do with spirituality and truth. Arguments about the proper place of worship were missing the point (4:21)!

**4:25-26**—The Samaritan concept of messiah, the *Tareb* or restorer, was a prophet like Moses. This is the only occasion that Jesus specifically said that he was the Messiah before his trial. Perhaps he spoke plainly on this occasion because the notion of Messiah did not have the political overtones in Samaria that it did in Judea.

**c. Conversation with disciples on doing God's will (4:27-38)**—The disciples were surprised by Jesus' breach of etiquette in striking up a conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:27-28). The subsequent conversation discloses Jesus' consciousness of his mission and his desire that the disciples share in the task of bearing witness to God (4:35-38), a task they would later be commissioned to do. The chief passion of our Lord was to do the Father's will (4:31-34).

**d. Witness among the Samaritans (4:39-42)**—The disciples' future role and work is modeled for them by none other than the recently enlightened Samaritan woman. Here is a

woman who, a matter of an hour or so before, was trapped in a life of immorality and a complete social outcast, and now became the first Samaritan evangelist. The witness of a woman of ill-repute would normally be regarded as worthless. Yet there is a significant response. In the words of one commentator, she had been transformed into a carrier of the real disease!

The Lord's decision to stay with the Samaritans and necessarily eating with them would be the equivalent of defying racial segregation in the United States in the 1950s or apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s.

**4:42**—The phrase “Savior of the world” appears here and in 1 John 4:14. The thought is in harmony with John the Baptist's initial pronouncement of Jesus' function—the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1:29).

**4. Return to Cana: Nobleman's son healed at a distance (4:43-54)**—After a cordial welcome back in Galilee (4:43-45), Jesus returns to Cana where he meets a desperate nobleman whose son was dying (4:46-54). Jesus comments on the attraction of the people to his power rather than his person (4:48). He did not want to be known as a miracle worker while the message of his person and work went unheeded or was rejected. In 4:50, Jesus responds to the nobleman's pleading by putting him in a position of demonstrating real faith. The Lord does not return with the nobleman but heals his son at a distance. Long-distance miracles were rare by Old Testament standards. Here it puts the nobleman's faith to the test and suggests to the reader the extraordinary power of the Lord Jesus. Believing because you have seen something and believing on the strength of Jesus' word is a distinction that will play out in this gospel. It reaches its finale with Jesus' gentle rebuke of Thomas in 20:29.

Imagine the raging conflict that must have been going on inside this man! His decision to return home based on Jesus' word alone (that his son would live) reveals a faith in Christ's power (4:50) that deepens into a faith in Christ's person after he sees his son healed (4:53). Note how the Gentile nobleman's faith progressed:

- Crisis faith (4:47)—He came to Jesus because he had nowhere else to turn;
- Confident faith (4:50)—He took the Lord at the Lord's word and went on his way;
- Confirmed faith (4:53)—His confidence in Jesus was vindicated after careful inquiry;
- Contagious faith (4:53)—His whole household believed.

**C. Continued revelation of the Father by the Son: Increasing controversy and conflict (5:1-11:52)**—This section covers approximately two years of Jesus' public ministry, marked by growing hostility on the part of the Jewish leaders. Jesus continues to reveal truth about the Father, demonstrates his authority, and invites belief. The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities crystallizes in the death plots of the Jewish chief priests which concludes this section (11:47-52).

**1. At Jerusalem: Jesus' claims presented (5:1-47)**—The healing of the paralytic at the pool at Bethsaida (5:1-15) was performed on the Sabbath. This triggers opposition which Jesus quickly transforms into a Christological question, one regarding the nature of his Sonship to the Father (5:16-30). These central Christological claims give rise to the treatment of witnesses to Jesus (5:31-47).

This chapter is a severe rebuke to legalistic religion and to unbelief. Just as Jesus healed the man crippled for thirty-eight years, so too he could heal a nation long wandering in self-righteous stuffiness. The paralytic gave no indication of gratitude; the nation's leadership no indication of insight.

Christians can allow their religious traditions to blind them to the truth of God's Word. Does our Bible knowledge drive us to increased devotion to Christ, or lead us down cognitive side alleys, emphasizing inane particulars? Does it yield humbled and affectionate hearts of gratitude, or proud, petty, puffed up posturing?

**a. Healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath (5:1-15)**—Jesus went to Jerusalem to attend one of the three pilgrimage feasts of the Jewish calendar and while there, healed a paralytic laying by the pool at Bethsaida. This third sign illustrates the power of the Lord over the ravages of sin. The sign was performed on the Sabbath which brought Jesus into conflict with the legalistic religious authorities. Rabbinical application of the Fourth Commandment involved the overdrawn banning of activities on the Sabbath. Jesus frequently ruffled the rabbis' feathers over this issue (see Mt. 12:1-14; Mk. 2:23-3:6; Lk. 6:1-11). The concern of the Jewish leaders was not for a hopeless disabled person who had been healed by the hand of God himself, but for the continuation of their elaborately regulated and barren institutionalism.

**5:1**—The occasion was one of the pilgrimage feasts at Jerusalem—Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles (see Lev. 23). A devout Jew was expected to attend these. The identity of this feast is important in gauging the length of Jesus' public ministry. If this was the Passover, then Jesus' ministry spanned four Passovers (mentioned in 2:13, 23; 5:1; 6:4; 11:55; and 12:1).

**5:5**—John notes that the invalid had been ill for thirty-eight years, precisely the length of time the Israelites wandered in the wilderness after their fateful choice at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13:1-14:45) prior to entering the Promised Land (Deut. 2:14-15). John constructs a parallel between the invalid and the nation at the outset of this section, which chronicles the growing opposition to the Lord among the Jewish leaders (5:1-11:52). A stiff-necked people had not learned the lessons of history! And what about us?

I mentioned earlier that John builds a wilderness motif throughout his book. Here, the reference to thirty-eight years recalls the wilderness wanderings of a rebellious people who are once again resisting God. Also note how Jesus is described as (or intimated as being) the true tabernacle (1:14), the true brazen serpent (3:14-15), the true manna (6:30-35, 48-58), the true rock (7:37-39), the true light (cloud of glory?) (8:12), and the true paschal lamb (1:29; 11:49-52; 19:16ff).

**5:6**—Who would not want to be healed from utter helplessness? Why ask that? The question appeals to the paralytic's will, anesthetized by discouragement through the long years of physical paralysis. This man needed to be healed psychologically as well as physically and spiritually (see 5:14).

**5:9-10**—Work was forbidden on the Sabbath. However, rabbinical rules went much further, forbidding even carrying things on the Sabbath.



**5:14-15**—The command to stop sinning indicates that the paralytic’s affliction may have been caused by his own sin. Note that there is no indication that the encounter with Jesus led to faith in the paralytic or even gratitude for being healed (hard as that is to imagine). The paralytic’s concern after being healed seems to have been to mollify the religious authorities.

**b. Jesus claims equality with the Father (5:16-30)**—Jesus claims to be equal with the Father in nature (5:17-18), in power (5:19-21), and in authority (5:22-30). All judgment (5:22) and all true, fulfilled, resurrected life (5:24) are in the Lord’s hands. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of those who are his and also obligates those who are not (5:28-29). The magnitude of Jesus’ claims in this section leads to the substantiation of them in the next.

**5:17-18**—Sabbath offenses soon took a back seat to Jesus’ own claims in rousing the ire of the legalistic Jews. They clearly understood Jesus as claiming equality with God.

**5:24-29**—Jesus mentions three resurrections: (1) lost people to eternal life in Christ (5:24-25; Eph. 2:1-10); (2) his own physical resurrection (5:26); and (3) the final, general resurrection and judgment (5:28-29).

**c. Witnesses to Christ (5:31-47)**—This section presents a fourfold witness to the reality of Jesus’ claims: (1) that of John the Baptist (5:32-35); (2) that of Christ’s own works (5:36—“work” (*erga*) often refers to activity illustrative of character in John); (3) that of the Father (5:37-38); and (4) that of the Scriptures (5:39-40; 45-47). The fourfold witness easily met the Law’s requirement for two or three witnesses (see Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6).

John’s account of Christ’s first advent is steeped in Old Testament references and allusion (see 1:23 (Isa. 40:3); 1:51 (Gen. 28:12); 2:17 (Ps. 69:9); 3:14 (Num. 21:8-9); 6:31 (Ex. 16:4; Neh. 9:15); 6:45 (Isa. 54:13); 7:38 (Isa. 44:3; 55:1; 58:11); 7:42 (Mic. 5:2); 10:34 (Ps. 82:6); 12:15 (Zech. 9:9); 12:38 (Isa. 53:1); 12:40 (Isa. 6:10); 13:18 (Ps. 41:9); 19:24 (Ps. 22:18); 19:28-29 (Ps. 69:21); and 19:33, 36 (Ps. 34:20)). The unfolding of the implications of the Old Testament Scriptures leads to faith in Christ as the true fulfillment of them (see Lk. 29-31).

**5:31**—In this text, Jesus says that his own testimony concerning his identity is invalid, not because his testimony is unreliable (indeed, 8:14 asserts that it was absolutely reliable), but because his testimony was not judicially admissible as proof of his own claims.

**5:37-38**—The witness of the Father may refer to the voice from heaven, which is recorded as having spoken three times in Jesus’ public ministry: (1) at his baptism (see Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22); (2) at his transfiguration (see Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35); and (3) at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Jn. 12:28).

**5:39-40**—It is possible to allow the study of the text of Scripture, of different interpretations and nuances of insight into the text, to become a substitute for allowing the text of Scripture to bring us into the presence of the living God. We need to bring our mental A game to our study of the text but always be ready to pass intellectual insight into personal knowledge, into adoration, and into prayer and praise.

**2. In Galilee: Jesus, the bread of life (6:1-71)**—The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15) and the incident of the Lord walking on water (6:16-21) introduce the Bread of Life discourse (6:22-59), in which Jesus claims that he is the true manna (6:27-34), the bread of life (6:35-48) that must be partaken to receive life from God. The resultant opinion is sharply divided. His so-called disciples turn against him (6:60, 66). However, the Lord retains the initiative in determining those who are truly his own (6:61-71).

It is interesting to note the implications of this passage for the training of the Twelve:

- Priority of fellowship with Jesus (6:1-4);
- Understanding one's own impotence (6:5-9);
- Requirements of service (6:10-13);
- Necessity of solitude (6:14-15); and
- Crunch of commitment (6:67).

**a. 5,000 fed in the wilderness (6:1-15)**—This is the only miracle, apart from the Lord's own resurrection, recorded in all four gospels (see Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:35-44; Lk. 9:12-17). It reveals Jesus as the one who meets human need at its most basic level and sets the stage for the explanation of the significance of the miracle in the Bread of Life discourse (6:25-59). Possible solutions to the problem of the hungry crowd are eliminated until there is only the option of trusting Jesus. The first option, recorded by the Synoptics, was to send the crowd away, that is to get rid of the problem. Jesus rejects this solution out of hand (Mt. 14:15-16; Mk. 6:35-37; Lk. 12:13). The second option is a prospective infusion of funds in response to Jesus' test question (6:5-7). The third option brings what meager resources they had, but without any real expectation that the need will be met (6:8-9). The solution lay in the miraculous multiplication of resources in the hands of the Lord (6:10ff). Philip (6:5), Andrew (6:8-9), and the rest of the disciples (6:12-13) have their neophyte faith tested and strengthened. This sign marks a pivotal point in Jesus' career where his popular favor declines (6:66) while the individual faith of the disciples begins to fully emerge (6:67-69).

Jesus performs a miracle that leaves the crowd expecting a new prophet like Moses. Jesus is the new Passover, new manna greater than Moses.

**6:4**—There may have been a year between the events of chapter 5 and those of chapter 6 (compare 5:1 with 6:4). It is interesting to note that the Synoptics record several events between the healing of the paralytic and the feeding of the 5,000 (see Mk. 3:1-6:30; Lk. 6:1-9:30), including the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) and the parables of the Kingdom (Mt. 13).

**6:7-8**—Philip and Andrew seem to have been the disciples most likely to be in touch with and establishing friendly relations with people outside the circle of the Twelve. We see that phenomena again when the Greeks come seeking Jesus at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see 12:20-22).

**6:10**—The number involved was 5,000 "men", a gender specific term. The whole crowd, including women and children, may have been four times that number.

**6:14-15**—The allusion to the Prophet recalls Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses predicts that a prophet like himself would command their hearing. Since Moses had provided food and water in the desert (see Ex. 16:11-36; 17:1-6; Num. 11:4-33; 20:2-11), the people expected the predicted prophet would do the same. Jesus performs a miracle that leaves the crowd expecting a new prophet like Moses.

Jesus will correct the error of attributing to Moses what was clearly God's activity in the following discourse, but he initially withdraws because he does not want his kingdom to be promoted by force or by the promise of free lunch to all who would flock to his banner.

**b. Jesus walks on water (6:16-21)**—This sign, the fifth in a series of seven, reveals Jesus' power over nature. He is El Elyon, the strongest strong one, able to bring peace and safety in the life of the imperiled disciple. The lake is twelve miles long and seven miles wide at the widest point. The disciples had rowed for some time through the storm when Jesus came waking on the water. They took the Lord into the boat and were at their destination instantly. Sometimes we are caught in storms of our own making or fault (such as Jonah did). At other times, the storm comes because of, or despite our obedience to the Lord. He allows these for his own good reasons and purposes.

In this instance, perhaps the peril was to prevent the occasion of undue pride in the minds of the disciples. They had just participated in a thrilling miracle. What power was manifested through them! After all, they were the ones who delivered the goods to the hungry crowd! Now they faced a sudden peril and had to learn again to trust the Lord in a situation which was clearly beyond them. When in similar perplexing circumstances, whether due to our own fault or not, the solution in such times of trial is to look to the One who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or think (Eph. 5:20).

It is difficult to know how far to press John's wilderness motif (see notes under 1:14-18), but it certainly seems operative in this text. It was the time of the Passover (6:4), and there was a natural association between leaving Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and wandering in the desert with God's provision for his people in the wilderness (the giving of manna). In like manner, John associates the feeding of the 5,000 with Jesus crossing over the water (6:16-21) before elaborating on his person as the true manna that sustains spiritual life (6:22-59). Christ is revealing himself as our Passover (see 1 Cor. 5:7-8).

**6:18**—The Sea of Galilee is six hundred feet below sea level, considerably lower than the surrounding hills. When the sun sets and the air cools, the cooler air from the west descends over the hillside and churns the water. The temperature variation triggers violent weather patterns, and the water activity compounds the difficulty of guiding a boat.

**c. Bread of life discourse (6:22-71)**—Jesus deals with three types of listeners in this audience: (1) the multitudes (6:22-40); (2) the Jews (6:41-59); and (3) the disciples (6:60-71). The purpose of the discourse is to test those professing faith and to point to Jesus as the only adequate sustainer of true life.

**(1) Dealing with the multitudes (6:22-40)**—This section follows the Lord's feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15) and his walking on water (6:16-21). The crowds were responding to miraculous

signs but were missing the significance of these signs for the signs themselves. The Bread of Heaven dialogue underscores this reality. The crowds were looking for more razzmatazz, but Jesus points them to himself and to union with him as the foundational spiritual reality. The dialogue unfolds in three parts:

- Jesus interacts with the multitudes seeking to focus their attention away from their need for physical sustenance and his ability to supply it to their need for spiritual sustenance and the reality of that need met by his person.
- Jesus' exchange with the Jewish grumblers who challenge his claims (6:41-59).
- Jesus' interaction with his own disciples which leads up to Peter's confession (6:60-71).

Jesus attempts to jar the multitudes from their complacency by statements contradictory to their governing assumptions. He attempts to disillusion them with their traditionalism and self-satisfaction by telling them that their motives are wrong, their methods are wrong, and their matrix of understanding is wrong. They are looking for earthly rather than heavenly food (6:26-27), to establish their own righteousness rather than receive God's (6:28-29), to be wowed by more miraculous signs rather than to comprehend the significance of the sign they just witnessed (6:30ff). This type of confronting teaching is not meant to deter the earnest seeker, but to awaken the self-satisfied to their deep need.

**6:28-29**—Steeped in legalistic religion, the Jews thought they had to do something to merit eternal life. Jesus made it abundantly clear that the only “work” necessary was to believe. This requirement needs to be understood in the context of the discussion in 6:37-40. God's choice is before and behind a person's choice. Indeed, God's choice is what makes a person's choice possible at all.

**6:32-36**—Jesus claimed to be the genuine and only source of spiritual nourishment. Just as physical food is necessary for physical life, so spiritual food is necessary for spiritual life. Jesus' claim to heavenly origins is unmistakable in this discourse. Six times he says that he “came down from heaven” (see 6:33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58). He claimed to be the only permanent satisfaction for human need (6:35ff). This offer of provision hinges on faith, not the mere acceptance of the Lord's competence based on his miracles, but on commitment to his person.

**6:37-40**—Jesus makes two assertions:

- The divine element of choice, which is God's election secured by the work of the Son (6:37-39); and
- The human element of choice, which is beholding, believing, and coming to the Son (6:40).

The assertion that God's choice is before, behind, and beyond a person's choice does not make the latter meaningless. The choice of God is all that makes a person's choice possible and effectual.

**Illustration**—C.S. Lewis was once interviewed and pressed with how he made “his decision for Christ”. Lewis kept insisting on using other terminology, that “God closed in on him and he

could not escape” and that “he was decided upon”. Later in *Surprised by Joy*, he described it as “[h]is compulsion is our liberation”.

From our limited perspective, we have difficulty understanding how divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together. Once a church member approached Charles Spurgeon with the question of how he reconciled the two. The great preacher replied: “I never try to reconcile friends.”

**(2) Dealing with the Jews (6:41-59)** – Two questions agitated the Jews: (1) Jesus’ claim of heavenly origin (6:42); and (2) the meaning of statement concerning eating his flesh (6:52). Jesus clearly regarded himself as supernatural in origin and calling, and superior to the Mosaic revelation. He was the bread of heaven, the sustainer and the sum and essence of spiritual life. Over this claim the Jews grumbled.

The terms for “eating” and “drinking” are physical terms often used by Greek speakers to mean something like “munch” or “chew.” The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament in which Jesus’ body and blood are, in a mysterious way, offered to believers to be eaten or drunk. This is a graphic way to show and celebrate our union with Christ.

**6:48ff**—Roman Catholic apologists point to this passage as substantiating their claims that at the epiclesis (consecration) of the Eucharist the bread and wine becomes the Lord’s body and blood. This is the doctrine of transubstantiation. It is based on an Aristotelian distinction between the essence (*substans*) and the attributes (*accidens*) of a thing. At the consecration of the host and wine by the priest, the *substans* of the bread and wine change to the body and blood of Christ while their *accidens* remain the same. They look, feel, and taste like bread and wine, but they are in true essence the body and blood of Christ.

Roman Catholics make the following arguments for taking this passage in a very literal manner to support the dogma of transubstantiation:

- From the nature of the words used. They point to the realistic expressions in 6:55—*alathas brosis* (true, real food); *alathas posis* (true, real drink). They also point to the use of the verb *trogein* (to gnaw, to chew, to eat) throughout 6:54 et seq.
- From the difficulties created by a figurative interpretation. They assert that in the language of the Bible, to eat a person’s flesh and drink his blood metaphorically means to persecute him in a bloody fashion to destroy him (citing passages like Ps. 26:2; Isa. 9:20; 49:26; Mic. 3:3). It is obvious from the context of the passage that Christ did not mean to speak metaphorically in such a fashion.
- From the reactions of the listeners, which Jesus does not correct, as he had done in previous cases of misunderstandings (see Jn. 3:3 et seq.; 4:32 et seq.; Mt. 16:6 et seq.). They assert that Jesus confirms the disciples’ literal acceptance of the Lord’s words.

To the first of these arguments, it suffices to reply that the vividness of the phrases used do not prove the intent that they be understood literally. The Bible is full of vivid figures of speech and frequently uses ingestion in the figurative sense. The psalmist exhorts “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:9) in a clearly figurative use. John records his own consumption of a scroll

noting “when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour” (Rev. 10:9-10). A graphic picture is clearly, in context, a figurative one for John’s reception of God’s prophetic word. Peter counsels his readers to “long for the pure milk of the Word (1 Pt 2:2) and the author of the book of Hebrews urges his readers to desire “solid food” as befits maturity (Heb. 5:4). Neither author was requesting their audiences to physically devour the pages of the Bible. The realistic terms in 6:55 (*alathas brosis*, *alathas posis*) do not require such crass literalism. What requires this literalism is a medieval dogma based not on Scripture but upon the scholastic distinctions of an ancient pagan philosopher. Later in John’s gospel, Jesus describes himself as a true grapevine (*ampelos alethine* in 15:1) and Roman Catholic exegetes do not understand this phrase in a literal sense. Yet the context of that portion of John 15 is concerned with the abiding union of a believer with the Lord, the same thrust that a reader finds in John 6.

To the second argument, evangelicals reply that the figurative sense does not create insuperable difficulties but makes good sense, accurately tracking the Lord’s insistence that his audience grapple with the spiritual significance of miracles of physical provision. The idea that the figurative use of eating and drinking one’s flesh and blood can only signify the persecution of the one consumed is just an exegetical straightjacket of Roman Catholic assertion. Ingestion has a richer metaphorical meaning which Catholic expositors are missing because it is analytically convenient to do so.

To the third argument, that the Jews took Jesus’ words literally (6:52) without the Lord’s immediate rebuke, does not prove the Roman Catholic literal argument. First, there are many instances in the Lord’s career where he was misunderstood and did not clear up the misunderstanding immediately. Secondly, Jesus did not need to rebuke the Jews since a literal interpretation was absurd under the circumstances. He was standing in flesh and blood right before them and was not demanding that his person be cannibalized if the faith he was eliciting from them was to be embraced.

In addition, it is important to note that John, among the gospel writers, frequently employs metaphors. In John’s gospel, Christ makes a series of “I am” statements that probe the believers’ understanding of the Lord’s person and claims. In John 6, the Lord says, “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 48). Elsewhere in the gospel the phrase “I am” is attached to “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “gate for the sheep” (10:7, 9), “good shepherd” (10:11, 14), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6), and “the true vine” (15:1, 5). Obviously, Jesus was not saying that he was literally a loaf of bread fresh out of the oven, the sun in the sky, a gate to a sheep pen, a continuing existential resurrection event, a roadway, or a grapevine. In the context of John 6, Christ’s own explanation in 6:63 is that his words are “spirit and life”. These metaphors are meant to elicit from his hearers a deeper understanding of the nature of a relationship with Christ. Roman Catholic expositors are not blind to these obvious metaphors elsewhere. Why the sudden cataracts when the meaning of John 6:48ff is in issue?

Note the contextual argument of the passage. The people see the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15) and begin wondering aloud if Jesus was “the Prophet who was to come into the world” (6:14). Moses had prophesied that a prophet like himself would come (Deut. 18:15-17) and the Jews attached political and material expectations to this person (see 6:15, where the people were about to make Jesus king). The multitudes are clearly making hay with the sign of

the miracle (and speculating about political and material provision) and utterly missing its significance in pointing to the person of Christ as the source of provision for both physical and spiritual need. Jesus knows this and the dialogue opens with the Lord telling the multitudes not to look for signs that fill their stomachs but to consider the import of the sign considering their spiritual need (6:25-27). This leads naturally to their need to believe on Christ (6:28-29) which invokes yet another demand for signs (6:30). Since the multitudes were thinking of Jesus in terms of a prophet like Moses (6:14), their demand was for a sign in kind if you will. Moses provided manna when the nation wandered in the wilderness; what was Jesus going to do for them (6:30-31)? Jesus corrects their false premise. It was the Father, not Moses, who physically sustained their ancestors with manna in the wilderness (see 6:32; Ps. 78:24). Just as manna came down from heaven and sustained the people of Israel in their wandering years, so too the Father sent Jesus from heaven to be spiritual sustenance for God's people (6:33-40). Jesus utilizes a symbolism, referring to the sustenance of physical manna to the sustenance that Christ supplies to those who have faith in him. The Lord is pushing the understanding of the multitudes from the sign to its significance, from the physical to the spiritual, from their stomachs to their souls.

In the section where John 6:48ff is nestled, the Jews begin to grumble about Christ's heavenly claims (6:41-42). Jesus tells them to stop grumbling and informs them that no one comes to faith in him but that the Father first draws that person (6:43-47). Believing in Christ and the believer's association with the Lord is Jesus' focal point here. When he moves again to language of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is using a vivid word picture for assimilation of his person that the faith to which he is summoning them demands (6:48-54). While the image suggests the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, let us remind ourselves that the institution of the sacrament is still as many as two years down the road.

**6:50-52**—Jesus asserts that he is the life-sustaining bread out of heaven. He does not answer the Jews' question in 6:52: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat" because they were not ready to hear and he was not going to press upon them truth which they would only reject or pervert. The language about the Lord's Supper sounded like cannibalism to the Jews and to opponents of Christianity later in history. It aroused misunderstanding and even persecution.

**6:51**—The substitutionary death of Christ is a key doctrine in John. John states that Jesus would die for the world (3:16; 6:51), for his sheep (10:11, 15), for the nation (11:50-52), and for his friends (15:12).

**6:53-58**—The metaphor of eating and drinking is the best possible one to express the assimilation of one substance by another, where life is transferred from the eaten to the eater. In 6:56, Christ and the believer are described as mutually abiding, similar to Christ's relationship with the Father (see 14:10-11; 15:1-11).

The upshot of this teaching is not the doctrine of transubstantiation, but the reality that the believer's intimacy with the Lord parallels the Son's intimacy with the Father. The mystical union of the believer with the Lord is a wonderful privilege and vital necessity for spiritual growth.

**(3) Dealing with the disciples (6:60-71)**—The progressive nature of unbelief is seen in the so-called disciples. First, there is offense taken at Jesus’ teaching (6:60-61), then defection (6:66), and finally betrayal (6:70-71). However, the discourse also functioned to galvanize the faith of the twelve. Peter, as their spokesman, affirms their faith in Christ. Christ’s discourse had tested their faith and directed their hearts to the Lord alone.

**6:60-61**—His followers were scandalized by the Lord’s teaching, both that he came down from heaven and that he utilized the metaphor of ingesting his body and blood to point to their need for spiritual sustenance.

**6:65**—Jesus implies that faith is the result of God’s enabling. The Holy Spirit must awaken and empower us to believe in the first instance.

**6:69**—“We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” says more in the original than the English translation suggests. The first person plural (we) is emphatic, implying a contrast between the Twelve and those who had just deserted Jesus. The verbs “believe” and “know” are in the perfect tense. This tense is used of past, completed action with continuing ongoing effects. The disciples had believed and had known with the result that they were continuing to believe and continuing to know. The English present tense is an appropriate translation if we understand that Peter’s statement speaks of a resultant, ongoing state of mind that is not the product of impulsive immediacy, but of fixed and settled decision. These words of Simon Peter parallel his great confession in the Synoptics (see Mt. 16:16; Mk. 8:29; Lk. 9:20).

**6:70-71**—How Judas’ betrayal must have weighed on the Lord! How someone could share life with the Lord of glory for three whole years, only to toss him to the wolves for thirty measly pieces of silver speak volumes about human depravity.

**3. At Jerusalem for the feasts (7:1-10:39)**—John continues to describe the parallel development of belief and unbelief. Unbelief continued to harden in its willful rejection of the Lord culminating in the death plots of the priests (11:45-54) recorded in the next major section of the book.

**a. Teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-52)**—When Jesus healed the invalid in Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders sought his life (5:18). Jesus returned to Galilee to continue to minister relatively unhindered (6:1-7:1). When the Feast of Tabernacles was at hand (in September-October of our calendar), Jesus’ hour of death was only six months away (April). Jesus returns to minister in Judea and Jerusalem, even though there would be a constant threat to his life from then on. It is interesting to note how often John mentions Jesus’ consciousness of his “time” in this chapter (7:8, 29, 30).

Skepticism towards Jesus and his claims continues, even among members of his own family (7:1-13). Jesus confronts this skepticism in his teaching, which climaxes with the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Lord’s exaltation (7:14-44). While an attempted arrest of the Lord is frustrated, the result of this round of teaching is the first manifestation of organized opposition by the unbelieving Jewish leaders (7:45-52).



**(1) Going to up the feast: Doubting family and grumbling crowds (7:1-13)**—Jesus’ own family did not believe in him (7:5) and merely gave him the pragmatic (and dangerous) counsel that it pays to advertise (7:3-4). His brothers advise opportunistic and worldly promotion; Jesus was concerned about the time (*kairos* in 7:6, 8) for his public manifestation according to the will of the Father. This concept of his time explains why Jesus made a point of such a seemingly short delay in departing for the Feast. Meanwhile, the crowds gossiped and debated (7:11-13). Some wanted to kill him (7:1, 11); others defended him (7:12a); still others considered him an imposter and deceiver (7:12b).

**7:2**—The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated “on the fifteenth day of the seventh month” (Lev. 23:34), roughly sometime in September or October on our calendars. This was one of three pilgrimage feasts of the Jewish liturgical calendar (Passover and Pentecost were the other two). The Feast began five days after the Day of Atonement and lasted eight days. Each family lived in a temporary shelter for the period of the Feast to remind the people of the years of wandering in the wilderness prior to entering the Promised Land (see Lev. 23:33-36); Deut. 16:13-17). The temple area was illumined by large candlesticks that reminded the people of the guiding pillar of fire during the exodus from Egypt. In addition, on each day of the Feast, the priests would carry water from the pool of Siloam and pour it out on the altar, reminding the people of the miraculous provisions of water from the rock in the desert.

**7:3-5**—Roman Catholics assert that references like this one to Jesus’ siblings are to be understood as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary, who they assert remained a virgin all her life. The “brothers of Jesus” were the sons of another Mary (citing Mt. 13:55). Thus, they are close relations of Jesus, not siblings, according to the Church.

However, the Scripture references to Jesus’ brothers and sisters certainly mean his actual blood siblings. The terms *adelphos* and *adelphe* are used here and elsewhere in the New Testament and they consistently refer to literal blood brothers and sisters. There is a Greek word for cousin (*anepsios*), used for example in Colossians 4:10 to describe Mark as a cousin of Barnabas, but this term is never used to describe Jesus’ brothers and sisters.

**7:10**—The Father had a plan and a time for the Son. Jesus did not push the issue and rush to the Feast, nor did he lag behind when the proper time came.

**7:12**—There was debate about Jesus. “One who deceives people” was a serious charge. Deuteronomy 13 prescribes death as the penalty for such a person.

**(2) Christ’s heavenly claims and crowd reaction (7:14-44)**—Jesus confronts the narrowness of the people’s perspective concerning his origins and identity (7:14-18, 27) and concerning his activity on the Sabbath (7:19-24). Jesus’ statements create uncertainty in the crowd (7:25-36), which serves as preparation for his offer of the Spirit and of true life (7:37-39). The discourse results in continuing perplexity among the casually interested (7:40-44) and increased hostility among the Jewish leaders (7:45ff).

There are three groups involved in this dialogue/debate:

- Jewish leaders opposed to Christ and determined to get rid of him;

- People just coming to the Feast (7:12, 20, 31-32), who were “catching up” on Jesus as well as the official gossip that he was a lawbreaker “by those who should know” (i.e. the Jewish honchos);
- Jews of Jerusalem (7:25) who were on board with the official line on Jesus but curious as to why the ax was taking so long to fall.

**7:17**—The Jews depended on education, credentials, and rabbinical authorities and received their religious doctrine second-hand. Jesus is insisting that doctrine ought to be experienced firsthand and must wear skin. Proper cognition and obedience go together (see 14:21). This verse is eliciting a settled and determined purpose to obey God. Obedience, rather than defiant cross-examination, yields revelation of the truth. G. Campbell Morgan hit the nail on the head when summarizing this text: “When [people] are wholly, completely consecrated to the will of God and want to do that above everything else, then they find out that Christ’s teaching is divine, that it is the teaching of God.”

This tests us today as well. Are we speaking the truth, or are we only doing it to boost our own status, prestige, or wealth? This also applies to the listeners. Accusing preachers of hypocrisy or blaming the church for just about anything often is just a convenient way to ignore God’s costly and demanding call.

**7:21-24**—The argument centers on the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (see 5:1-15). If Moses allowed circumcision on the Sabbath, why shouldn’t a man be healed on the Sabbath? The legalistic regulations of the Jewish rabbis did not make sense.

**7:25-36**—The popular response to Jesus was confused. Some wanted him arrested (7:30, 32), while others thought he might be the Messiah (7:25-27). Still others were entirely baffled (7:35-36). In contrast to this bewilderment, Jesus is very sure of himself, his origin, his mission, and his destination (see 7:28, 29, 33, 34).

**7:37-39**—The public reading of Scripture at this feast included a passage from Zechariah 14, emphasizing the necessity of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles and interpreting it in light of Ezekiel 47 which speaks of a river flowing from the temple.

On each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests took water from the pool of Siloam and poured it out on the altar, recalling the incident of the water from the rock (see Ex. 17:1-7). The offering of water memorialized God’s provision for his people in the wilderness, but the water left them unsatisfied. In this text, Jesus claims to be the spiritual water that truly satisfied and John links this claim to the giving of the Spirit. Throughout this gospel, the dynamic of true human spirituality and worship is linked to the presence of the Spirit (see 3:5-8; 4:10-15, 23-24; 7:37-39), a theme that is elaborated upon in the farewell discourse (see 14:16-17, 25-26; 16:12-15).

**7:38**—Jesus does not quote any particular Old Testament verse, but gives the essence of a number of texts that describe miraculous waters flowing from God (see Ex. 17:16; Isa. 44:3-4; 58:11; Ezek. 47:1-9; Joel 2:23; Zech. 14:8).

**(3) Reaction of the Jewish leaders (7:45-52)**—There is a variety of reactions to this discourse and dialogue. The multitudes have a mixed and confused reaction (7:40-44). Temple guards are in awe of the commanding presence of the Lord (7:45-46). The chief priests and Pharisees have nothing but contempt for Jesus (7:47-52). And Nicodemus—remember the interview in John 3—urges a reasonable and careful consideration (7:50-51), advice which is arrogantly brushed aside. The focus is on the reaction of the Jewish leaders. Their unveiled hostility (7:45-49) stands in stark contrast with the emerging faith of Nicodemus, technical though it was at this point. We should not be surprised when the intelligentsia of the age mocks faith. God tells us that “the wise and the prudent” are often blind to the truth revealed to humble folk who yield to the Lord (see Mt. 11:25-27; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

**7:45-46**—Powerful speech was highly regarded in antiquity. The temple guards would have heard many teachers. Yet they were particularly impressed with the Lord Jesus.

**7:52**—The prideful statement of the Jewish leaders (that no prophet arises from Galilee) was not true. Jonah (2 Ki. 14:25), Hosea, and possibly Nahum came from Galilee. They prided themselves on their knowledge and that knowledge was faulty. Their attitude reflected regional prejudice rather than Scriptural knowledge.

**b. Jesus forgives an adulteress woman (7:53-8:11)**—This section is not included in the gospel in the earliest and best manuscripts. While it is probably not a genuine part of John’s gospel, its tenor is in keeping with Jesus’ character and ministry.

The question in 8:5: “Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women [caught in adultery]. Now what do you say?” was a deliberate attempt to trap Jesus. The Mosaic Law required that when a man committed adultery with another man’s wife, both parties were to be put to death (Lev. 20:10) by stoning (Deut. 22:22-24). The woman’s accusers were attempting to put Jesus in a no-win situation. He could choose to let the woman go and contradict God’s Law or have her stoned (which the Romans would not allow anyway) and lose his reputation for compassion with the people as well as place himself on the wrong side of Roman law. Jesus responded by writing on the ground (8:6b, 8) before stating the requirements [being without sin] of being the woman’s judge (8:7). One by one the woman’s accusers excused themselves (8:9).

The difference in attitudes between Jesus and the Jews toward the guilty woman is noteworthy. Her accusers brought her as a captive to Jesus (8:3); he questioned her as a free person (8:9-11). The Jews regarded her contemptuously as a necessary casualty to their plot (8:6); Jesus respected her as a human being (8:10-11). The teachers were only interested in the woman’s past act (8:4); Jesus thought in terms of her future (8:11). The Pharisees wanted her stoned (8:5); Jesus forgave her (8:11).

**8:4-5**—It seems most unlikely that the Jews would so conveniently catch a couple “in the act” to put Jesus in a Catch 22 situation. Furthermore, since the Law required both guilty parties to be stoned, why didn’t the Jews bring the guy as well? Perhaps he was an accomplice to a chumsville deal to ensnare the Lord. He may even have been inconspicuously present to conveniently supply evidentiary details, if necessary. If you are tempted to think that this scenario really stinks, you are getting the picture!

**8:7**—Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on the judges. The Law specified that the accusers cast the first stone (Deut. 17:7). However, the accusers were probably the very people involved in setting this sorry trap from the very beginning with this embarrassed, used, and guilty woman as just necessary baggage for their deceit. Jesus was, in effect, looking straight through them and asking them just how seared their consciences really were.

**8:11**—Jesus’ gracious forgiveness does not excuse or soft pedal sin. Jesus does not say the Mosaic Code was wrong; only that if you’re going to be serious about it, we should all find ourselves guilty. This does not mean that adultery does not matter. She was rescued from death by forgiveness, and she must live by that forgiveness and forsake sin. Forgiveness is not tolerance. Forgiveness means that sin does matter, but that God is choosing to set it aside. The Lord will soon die as the perfect atonement for such sin. His great mercy emblazoned his good counsel upon this woman’s mind and soul: “Go, and sin no more.”

**c. Jesus, the light of the world (8:12-9:41)**—This episode is the second round of rhetorical exchanges between Jesus and his opponents at the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus proclaims himself the light of the world (8:12-30), setting off an argument that escalates to the point of Jesus telling the authorities that they were children of the devil (8:42-47), claiming the sacred name (“I am) of God as his very own (8:58), and evading their attempt to stone him (8:59). Light is linked with sight in the sixth sign of John’s gospel, the healing of the man born blind (9:1-12). The Pharisees’ investigation of the miracle and interrogation of the healed man climaxes with the exposure of the blindness of those claiming to see (9:13-34, 39-41). The formerly blind man gains spiritual as well as physical sight (9:35-38). This section develops the idea of conflict between light and darkness first mentioned in the Prologue (1:4-5). The function of light is to enable people to see themselves as God sees them.

This passage records events that occurred on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37). One of the most spectacular celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles involves torches that light up the city. This feast and Hanukkah (10:22) were known for their splendid lighting. Jesus uses this context for his teaching of himself as the Light of the World.

**(1) Pharisees addressed (8:12-30)**—The Lord’s testimony begins with the second of the great “I am” statements of this gospel: “I am the light of the world”. Jesus professed to be both an inexhaustible source of spiritual nourishment (7:37-39) and the genuine light by which all truth and falsehood could be gauged (8:12; 9:5). The Pharisees challenged Jesus’ testimony on legal grounds, for no one on trial in a Jewish court was competent to prove a fact by merely testifying to it. Jesus testifies based on the assured competence of his person. He had perfect self-consciousness (8:14). His estimate of people was based on immediate, intuitive, flawless knowledge (8:15-16). His origins were heavenly, not earthly (8:16, 23).

**8:14**—In contrast to 5:31, personal competence rather than judicial competence is in issue. Jesus knew what he was about, regardless of whether his testimony would carry the burden of proof in a court proceeding.

**8:21-30**—The insurmountable barrier between Jesus and his enemies was unbelief. Unbelief is not simply the unwillingness to accept a statement of fact; it is resistance to the revelation of God

in Christ. There is similarity between this passage and 3:1-21. Both interpret belief and unbelief as light and darkness, respectively, and both present the cross (the lifting up of the Son of Man) as the point of separation between the two (compare 8:28-29 with 3:14-15).

**(2) So-called believing Jews challenged (8:31-59)**—Jesus’ teaching stirred the resentment of those Jews who seemed receptive to his teaching on three significant points of divergent understanding:

- Freedom (8:33-36)—Their boast (8:33) was an idle one on the surface of it. The Jews had been enslaved by seven different nations in the time of the judges. Then the Northern Kingdom was carried away by Assyria in 722 B.C. and the Southern Kingdom by Babylon in 586 B.C. Even after their return from exile, the Jews were subjugated by the Macedonians and their successors, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. At that time in the first century, they were in bondage to the Romans. Everyone knew that. What on earth was this posturing about? How difficult it is for a proud religious people (whether then or now) to admit their failures and need. However, Jesus spoke of a bondage infinitely deeper than a political or economic one. The worst bondage is the kind the prisoners themselves do not recognize. The Jews thought they were free, but they (like us in our fallen state) were slaves to sin (8:34), despite all their sanctimonious self-righteousness.
- Physical descent (8:39-41)—They assumed that their physical descent was the equivalent of an identity of spiritual character. They claimed to be God’s people, but their actions belied their claims (8:40-44, 47, 49). They wanted to kill Jesus, the Son of God; Abraham was the friend of God. They rejected the Lord’s teaching; Abraham listened to and believed God. The Jews’ actions and attitudes betrayed a more sinister patrimony (8:42-47).
- Prophetic outlook (8:56-59)—Seed expectation dominated Abraham’s perspective and life’s work (see Heb. 11:17-19). He believed God for a physical and spiritual heritage. His perspective was forward-looking, trusting Almighty God to do what he promised. Abraham’s descendants are here telling the One Abraham looked forward to that he was demon-possessed. The Jews did not share their venerable ancestor’s prophetic outlook or his spiritual passion. When Jesus says as much (8:55-56) and makes a statement asserting his own absolute, timeless existence (8:58), the Jews attempt to stone their God (8:59).

The hostility of the Jewish audience grows throughout this passage: from contradiction (8:13), to insinuation of dishonorable heritage (8:19), to denial of his teaching (8:33), to insults (8:48), to acidic sarcasm (8:53), and finally to violence (8:59). Often it is religious people who are the most difficult to reach with spiritual truth. In their pride and self-righteousness, they do not realize, or cannot admit, their need.

**8:34**—Literally, this verse reads in pertinent part: “[E]veryone who keeps on practicing sin is the servant of sin”. The thought is akin to that of 1 John 3:4-10.

**8:42-47**—Because his opponents wanted to kill Him (8:37, 40) and reject the truth (8:43, 46), they were displaying their true spiritual heritage. They belonged to the devil (8:44, 45). This issue of parentage was not ethnic, but spiritual.

**8:48**—For a Jew to be called a Samaritan was the grossest of insults. To add the charge of demon possession just piles on the affront.

**8:58**—The Jews immediately recognized Jesus' statement as a claim to deity and attempted to stone him for blasphemy (see Lev. 24:16). On the face of it, Jesus was claiming to exist at the time of Abraham's birth, some 2,000 years earlier. Furthermore, "I am" was recognized by the Jews as a title for God. When the God commissioned Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, He told Moses to tell the people that "I am" sent Moses to them (see Ex. 3:14).

In our day, the sophisticated critics accuse the Lord of nonsense or accuse John of making out that Jesus said and did things he could not have said and done, that it is all a pious fraud. John merely invites us to read on.

**(3) Healing a man born blind (9:1-41)**—The light imagery of the previous discourse (8:12-59) is applied experientially in this passage. The healing of the blind man illustrates the development of belief. The former blind man gains both physical and spiritual sight from Jesus, the light of the world (see 8:12; 9:5). Meanwhile, the Pharisees will not admit their need for light and remain spiritually blind.

Our Lord performed miracles to meet human needs, to use them as occasions to convey spiritual truth, to prove he was indeed Messiah, and to be the occasion for some to believe. In chapter 9, we see all these purposes coalesce in the healing of the man born blind.

**(a) Blind man healed (9:1-7)**—To the disciples, the man was the subject of a theological discussion concerning fate. Jesus corrects their misunderstanding and then uses the healing to illustrate the origination and development of faith.

**9:5**—The repetition of 8:12 is not superfluous. The healing of the blind man is a positive application of Jesus' teaching of himself as the light of the world in John 8.

**9:6-7**—Jesus used a method of healing that demanded the blind man's participation and some measure of trust.

**(b) Reaction of various groups to the healing (9:8-34)**—The miracle created a genuine sensation. John vividly describes its effects by the responses of the man's neighbors, the Pharisees, the man's parents, and the formerly blind man himself. The neighbors are motivated by curiosity (9:8-12) and the man's parents are dragged into a controversy they earnestly sought to avoid (9:18-23). People inquire about how the man was healed four different times (9:10, 15, 19, 26). The scribes and Pharisees ask the question three times, once addressed to the man's parents and twice to the formerly blind man himself. This was not a thorough and honest inquiry, but one attempting to evade the implications of the miracle. Meanwhile, people sense the political drift and are afraid to speak the truth. There is a complete refusal to face the evidence

honestly. The lesson from the healing comes in the interaction between the Pharisees and the formerly blind man, a duel between the deductions of a logical syllogism and those from obvious observation. For the Pharisees, the law forbade work on the Sabbath. Healing was work according to their regulations and Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. Therefore, Jesus was a Sabbath-breaker and a sinner ((;16, 24). As to his evident power in performing a miracle, its good result, and the obvious implications as to Jesus's identity and authority that flowed from such an act—well, never mind.

The formerly blind man reasoned from the fact of the miracle, not from the casuistic assumptions of rabbinical legal reasoning (9:25). Jesus had done something no mere man could do. The good result was undeniable. The act seemed to point to God's handiwork among them, not to sin (9:30-33). The unbelief of the Pharisees had no answer to this, and they resorted to ridicule (9:28), subtle slander (9:29), and excommunication (9:34).

**9:18-23**—The parents of the formerly blind man were afraid. The Pharisees were attempting to establish their legal fiction as the truth of the matter. Others had better agree if they knew what was good for them. The man's parents did not want to become grist for the mill and therefore answered evasively.

Here, the oppressive, angry fear of the Pharisees meets the anxiety of the blind man's parents and makes for a sorry tale. The Pharisees were afraid of the Lord Jesus, acting in the name of the one true God and doing things that upset their neat system. The parents are afraid of being put out of the synagogue, anxious for their social standing, their livelihood, and perhaps even their lives. Their fear causes them to allow their son to stand alone in the full blunt of the angry questioning of the religious authorities. The story speaks to dark places in our world today, where fear, resentment, shock, anxiety cripple our understanding, restrict our faith, and stifle our love.

**9:24ff**—The blind man testifies, insisting on his healing (he really was born blind), on Jesus as healing him, and on God being at work in and through Jesus. The Pharisees are unable to weasel out of the miracle so they attempt to separate Jesus from the healing, attributing it to God and asserting that Jesus could not be the healer since he worked (making clay out of mud and using spittle to do so) on the Sabbath. Devotees to their own extrapolations of the Mosaic Code, they are blind to what the law points to—the grace and truth that comes through the Lord Jesus.

**9:28-29**—The interrogators had made up their minds without thoroughly investigating the matter (they did not “even” know where Jesus was from by their own admission). The circumstances of a person accused of leading people astray should have been thoroughly canvassed.

There is a big difference between a conservative and a preservative. A wise conservative takes the best of the past, but is open to what God is doing presently and, in the future, (see Mt.13:52 for a succinct statement of this mindset). A preservative embalms the past and resists change, often without even really understanding what is being said or even allowing it to be said. The presumption is that God is not in anything that lacks traditional precedent. If the Jews had really been conservatives of their religious tradition and true disciples of Moses, they would have been open to Jesus' teaching and would have been honest inquirers.

**(c) Jesus reveals himself to formerly blind man (9:35-41)**—The formerly blind man experiences movement from darkness to light, both physically and spiritually. The man's understanding of Jesus' person progresses from "the man they call Jesus" (9:11) to "he is a prophet (9:17b), to a "man from God (9:33), to wondering about the identity of the "Son of Man" (9:35), to "Lord" (9:38). The story of the formerly blind man is a poignant illustration of Jesus as the light of the world.

The compassion of Jesus is noteworthy. Excommunication (9:34) meant that the man was cut off from friends and family and regarded by Jewish society as a "publican and sinner". The Good Shepherd did not leave the man in that state. Jesus sought him out and brought the miracle to a wonderful conclusion. Spiritual sight was added to the man's newfound physical sight.

Even today, there are those who must choose between Christ and family, Christ and their own. Perhaps God graced him with the privilege of seeing his fearful parents and many of his fair-weather friends come to the Savior.

**(d) Jesus, the good shepherd (10:1-21)**—Jesus' third and fourth "I am" statements come in this discourse—the gate for the sheep (10:7) and the good shepherd (10:11, 14). The shepherd symbolized God's care for his people. The Father Himself was called the "Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1; see Isa. 40:10-11; Ezek. 34:11-16) and had given to Israel's leaders responsibility as under-shepherds (see Isa. 56:9-12; Ezek. 34:2ff). The prophets had promised that a true messianic shepherd would arise to care for God's people (Ezek. 34:22). Jesus was now claiming to be that shepherd (10:11, 14), that his flock was the true people of God, that he knew his own and his own would follow him (10:4, 14), and that he would lay down his life as a vicarious offering for his sheep (10:15).

**10:1-10**—The imagery is based on the concept of a sheep pen. This was usually a cave in the hills or a stone or mud brick structure that served to protect the sheep from the elements and from predators. There was only one entrance to the pen. The shepherd stood at the entrance and counted and inspected as they left the pen in the morning and returned in the evening. After the sheep were all in the pen in the evening, the shepherd would lay down across the gate or doorway so that no intruder could enter and no sheep could leave without his knowledge.

**10:8**—Thieves (*kleptes*) and robbers (*lestes*) convey different threats. *Kleptes* implies subtlety and trickery; the need is to see through deceit. *Lestes* connotes violence and plundering; the need is for physical defense.

**10:12-13**—Hirelings are not concerned about the sheep but rather about payola. They can be irresponsible and cowardly. The Lord clearly has the Jewish leaders in mind. They were fundamentally interested in providing for themselves and in preserving their positions. The Pharisees were covetous (Lk. 16:14) and even took advantage of poor widows at times (Mk. 12:40). They adopted customs that turned the temple into a merchandising center (Mt. 21:13). Their concerns, as they plotted Jesus' murder, was to keep their own positions intact (11:49-53).



**10:14**—The word translated “good” means “intrinsically good, beautiful, fair”. It describes the ideal, the model that others are to imitate. In this passage, the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep (10:11-13), knows his sheep (10:14-15), brings other sheep into his flock (10:16), and takes up his life again (10:17-18).

**e. Feast of Dedication: Jesus’ assertion of deity (10:22-42)**—At the Feast of Dedication, Jesus’ claims to be both Messiah and God’s own unique Son (10:22-30) engender open opposition among the Jews (10:31-39), prompting him to make a strategic exit beyond the Jordan to the area where John the Baptist was baptizing earlier (10:40-42). The evangelist notes the Jewish opposition, the Baptizer’s witness to Jesus, and that many people were believing in Christ.

The entire section (7:1-10:21) probably occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles (circa October) while the events recorded in 10:22-42 occurred at Hanukkah (circa December). Thus, there is possibly a two and one-half month break between 10:21 and 10:22-42.

**10:22**—The Feast of Dedication, now celebrated as Hanukkah, was established to memorialize the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C. In 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes IV of Syria captured Jerusalem, plundered the temple, and sacrificed a sow to Jupiter on the temple altar. His attempt to Hellenize Judea provoked the Maccabean revolt, which successfully drove the Syrians out of Palestine.

**10:23**—The outer part of the temple had porches on all four sides. Solomon’s Porch was on the east side, so called because the Jewish people thought that it contained remains of Solomon’s original temple.

**10:28-29**—A great text on the security of the believer. The sheep are secure because of the power and presence of the shepherd, who will let no one take them from him. John affirms the security of the believer in several places in his gospel (3:16; 6:39; 17:12; 18:9).

**10:30-31**—“I and the Father” states the separate individuality of two persons in the triune God. The neuter pronoun “one” (*hen*) implies unity of nature and therefore equality. The reaction of the Jews (10:31) indicates that they knew exactly what the Lord meant. He was one with God in a unique way.

**10:33-36**—The Jews charged Jesus with blasphemy (10:33). If Jesus had not meant to claim deity, then he would have cleared up the Jewish misunderstanding. Instead, he uses an argument from the lesser to the greater (10:34-35). The picture presented in Psalm 82 is that of a court where God has assembled the judges of the earth to warn them that they too will one day be judged. *Elohim* in Hebrew can be translated “gods” or “judges” as in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9. If God addresses human judges as *elohim*, then why should the Jews stone him for applying the same title to himself. If such a term could be applied to mere mortals, how could Jesus be accused of blasphemy by applying it to himself when the Father had sent him apart for a special mission and position.

**10:37-39**—Jesus based his claims on his works. If his works demonstrated that he was exercising divine authority over people and the created order and showing forth divine mercy and compassion, then they were the accreditation of his claims.

**4. In Judea: Lazarus raised (11:1-44)**—The raising of Lazarus is a fitting climax to John's signs. The account demonstrates Jesus' power to give life, anticipates his own death and resurrection, and leads directly to the decision of the Sanhedrin to kill him (1:45-53).

**a. Departure to Bethany delayed (11:1-16)**

**11:3**—"[T]he one you love" reveals poignant insight into the heart of God. Let this insight fix our souls when we are perplexed by the hard edges of life. Informing the Lord of the sickness of a dear friend was a polite request for Lazarus to be healed.

**11:4-6**—Jesus was approximately two miles from Bethany, perhaps an hour away. The Lord loved Lazarus and Lazarus' situation was critical. Yet Jesus waits two full days (11:6) before setting out. Questions testing faith abound here:

- Why did he even allow Lazarus to get sick, if Jesus loved him so? Can't he just preempt hard situations from befalling his loved ones?
- Why did he delay so long in setting out?
- Why didn't he heal at a distance as he did in the case of the nobleman's son (4:43-54)?

Jesus' behavior seems a strange way to demonstrate his love. Doesn't love bring the relief it can to the ones it loves? There is at times a severe mercy to God's love. He allows us to go through hard times to accomplish his purpose, which does not always coincide with our comfort. Tough times can teach us things we otherwise would not learn or be loath to learn under normal circumstances. Sometimes God is doing something greater than we can grasp and our suffering is the seed of God's greater work of mercy. This latter assessment seems to be an accurate one for this incident (see 11:14-15).

**11:11-16**—The disciples seem clueless at times! The Lord has to explain to them that Lazarus had physically died and that this was allowed so that their faith could be confirmed. Thomas' reaction (11:16), though pessimistically heroic, vividly demonstrates the need for such confirmation.

**b. Dialogues with Martha and Mary (11:17-37)**—Jesus' dialogues with Martha (11:21-27) and Mary (11:32) challenged and strengthened their faith (11:39-41). Both women met him with an "if only you had been here, this terrible thing would not have happened" type of statement (11:21, 32). The raising of Lazarus illustrates that Christ's power to give life is not dependent upon his physical proximity.

Martha and Mary are on opposite ends of the service continuum: Martha, the active if too busy worker and Mary, the more contemplative and passive devotee. An old hymn prays that a balance between these two poles would be ours:

Faithful to my Lord's commands  
I still would choose the better part;

Serve with careful Martha's hands  
And loving Mary's heart.

**11:19-20**—The first week of deep grief after a close relative's death (called *shivah*) was spent mourning in the family home, usually sitting on the floor, visited by friends.

**11:25-27**—"I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25) is the fifth "I am" statement in John. Martha's response is one of faith; she calls him Lord, Messiah (Christ), and the Son of God in the space of one sentence.

**11:28-32**—Whenever Mary is portrayed in the gospel accounts, she is at the feet of Jesus listening to his word (Lk. 10:39), pouring out her sorrow (11:32), and worshipping extravagantly (12:3).

**11:33-35**—The Lord's deep emotion and compassion is expressed by three descriptive words: "deeply moved" (11:33, 38), "troubled" (11:33), and "wept" (11:35). "Deeply moved" (*enebrimesato*) is literally "to snort like a horse" and connotes anger. Jesus was angry at the ravages of death that characterizes the human condition because of sin. "Troubled" (*etaraxen*) implies a deep agitation of spirit over the loss of a dear friend that gave way to weeping. The idea of 11:35 is that Jesus burst into tears.

Here is Messiah bearing the grief of those He loves. "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). There was grief for Lazarus and for the wreck sin had caused. But was there also grief with respect to his own death coming soon? He was to soon share the common fate of humanity, in a most grizzly fashion, that the world could be saved. Is there a straight line from 11:35 to the death in which Jesus would share, not only the grief, but the doom of the world?

**c. Scene at the tomb: Lazarus raised (11:38-44)**—Typically, the body of the deceased would be tightly wrapped and left lying on the floor or elevated spot of the tomb's antechamber. After a year, family members would return and collect and put the bones into a box which would then slide into a slot in the wall. After four days, the decomposition would be well under way, explaining the odor.

At other resuscitations, there were just a few witnesses. At this one, there is a crowd. What a demonstration of divine authority! One paraphrase of 11:43 reads: "Lazarus! This way out." As if the Lord was directing his friend through a gloomy dungeon. With a word, the Lord reversed the process of death's corruption and Lazarus burst forth from the tomb alive.

**d. Reaction of Jewish authorities: Plot to kill Jesus (11:45-53)**—The Sanhedrin was scared of Jesus' popularity and of the possibility of a messianic revolt. Caiaphas scoffs at the hesitancy of some in recommending the death sentence, indicating that the death of one man could save the nation from Roman destruction. John takes Caiaphas' statement as an unintentional prophecy of Jesus' substitutionary atonement, shifting the focus from the physical to the spiritual. The self-preserving motives of the unbelieving Jewish rulers are contrasted with Jesus' self-sacrificing redemptive purpose.

This passage reveals the utter depravity of the human heart. The authorities were not seeking after truth; they were out to protect themselves and their position. They do not repent even when someone comes back from the dead (see Lk. 16:30). Instead, they plot the death of both the one who raised the dead (11:49-53) and the former dead man himself (12:9-11).

**11:47-50**—Those perceived as political messiahs threatened the power of the Jewish honchos and the stability of Judah, inviting Roman intervention. This was a persistent concern of the Jewish priestly aristocracy. Caiaphas maintained his office longer than any other high priest of the first century (18-36) because of his subservience to Roman authority and his ability to keep the lid on Jewish insurrection. His proposal is a matter of cynical, self-preserving politics from top to bottom. His statement was an unintentional prophecy as John notes (11:50-52). Sacrificing the few for the many may make good politics, but bad religion.

**D. Preparation for and prediction of Jesus' death (11:54-12:50)**—This passage brings things to a head. After an initial withdrawal (11:54-57), Mary anoints Jesus in anticipation of his death (12:1-11) and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem formally introduces the nation to its rightful king, albeit a type of king they were not anticipating (12:12-19). The questions of the Gentiles triggers Jesus' announcement of the dawning of the hour of his death and exaltation (12:20-36) which leads John to explain the significance of the growing conflict between belief and unbelief that his gospel has documented (12:37-50). This passage concludes with the people at a spiritual crisis. They are confronted with the claims and person of the Lord Jesus that must be resolved by personal decision.

**1. Withdrawal to Ephraim (11:54-57)**—The crowds are curious; the priestly class murderous. The end game has begun.

**2. Anointing for burial (12:1-11)**—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus host a dinner in Jesus' honor. Mary's devotion is shown in her extravagance in anointing Jesus' feet with spices and ointments that were worth a year's wages (12:5). In reply to Judas' objection to this, Jesus puts Mary's act in its true context. She was anointing him for burial (12:7). The contrast between Mary's loyalty and self-sacrificing, costly gift and Judas' treacherous and narrow perspective is stark. Mary's faith blossomed into devotion; Judas' unbelief soured into betrayal.

The account of Mary's anointing of Jesus is also found in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. The account in Luke 7:36-50, where a former harlot anoints Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee, is another incident altogether. Mary was not a former harlot, and this anointing occurs in Bethany of Judea, whereas the events recorded in Luke 7 occur in Galilee (see Lk. 7:2, 11).

Jesus puts himself at risk in enjoying this quiet evening with friends. Martha's work, Mary's devotion, and Lazarus' silent witness brought joy to his heart, a solace just before the storm. To think that our work, worship, and witness brings special joy to God is quite a thought and a great encouragement to keep on keeping on.

**12:3-8**—Mary's act of worship was public, spontaneous, sacrificial, extravagant, and unashamed. She took the place of a slave in anointing the Lord's feet. In letting her hair down in public, she did something that "good Jewish girls" just did not do. She was misunderstood and

criticized by a disciple so-called (Judas). It often happens that, when someone truly gives their best to the Lord, the first voices of complaint arise within the visible church itself.

Mary's anointing was prophetic, just as Caiaphas' comments were in 11:49-53. Both predict Jesus' redemptive sacrifice. However, there was a great difference between the heart of Caiaphas and the heart of Mary. Jesus affirms Mary's unselfish act. He does not support the bogus propriety of Judas (the thief who would have given the money to the poor) nor does he allow the pious parade to go on without a comment to put the real situation into perspective.

**12:9-11**—Lazarus was at risk for just being alive. The Jewish leaders threw the former blind man out of the synagogue (9:34), rather than allow him to bear witness to Christ. In this passage, they want to hasten Lazarus' second exit from this physical life for the same reason. His mere presence was a silent witness to the power of God in Christ. When the evidence clearly points to something you will not accept, and it just can't be explained away, then you just have to get rid of the evidence.

**3. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19)**—Jesus offers himself to the people as Messiah, king of peace. John couples the Lord's entry into Jerusalem with Psalm 118:25-26, which ascribed to Jesus a messianic title, with the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which announced that Israel's true king would appear humbly without pomp and ceremony. This account appears in all four gospels (see Mt. 21:1-11; Mk. 11:1-10; Lk. 19:28-40).

**12:13**—The crowd applied the words of Psalm 118:25-26 to Jesus. This psalm was customarily sung by Passover pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The crowd was ascribing to Christ a messianic title as the agent of the Lord, the coming king of Israel. Hosanna literally means "save". However, on this occasion, it was more an ascription of praise. Any desire for salvation by the masses was that of political deliverance of the nation, not a rescue from the bondage of sin.

Palm branches were one of the nationalistic symbols of Judea since the days of the Maccabees in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. They were used to celebrate military victories. On this occasion, they undoubtedly stirred political messianic hopes among the people. The scene combines Passover with Hanukkah (palm branch welcome), seeing Jesus as the true king coming to claim his throne and that he would set Israel free once for all. They mistake the manner of the king's presentment, expecting a conquering, not a suffering, Messiah.

**12:14-15**—Military heroes rode horses or were drawn in chariots. Jesus came as a meek, non-military figure as indicated in Zechariah 9:9, the verse quoted in 12:15.

**4. Greeks seek Jesus: Death prediction (12:20-36)**—A group of Greeks approach Philip to request an audience with Jesus. Jesus uses this occasion to announce a spiritual principle that new life comes by way of death (12:23-26) and to predict his own death (12:27-33). The crowd misunderstands, expecting a conquering, not a suffering, Messiah (12:34-36).

**12:20-21**—These Greeks were probably "God-fearers", people attracted to Jewish monotheism and ethics but repelled by narrow nationalism and onerous ritual requirements. Many early

converts to faith came from this group of people. Interestingly, they approached a disciple with a Greek name (Philip).

A friend of mine was invited to give the commencement address at his alma maters. When the time came for him to speak, he stepped to the podium and looked down at a plaque which quoted the words of John 12:21: “Sir, we would see Jesus.” There was a long, poignant pause before he began his address.

**12:24-26**—The seed principle is applicable to all believers in Christ. We must abandon ourselves to truly be who we are in Christ. Ironically, the one who attempts to preserve his life will lose it, while the one who loses his life for Christ will surely find it. The two words translated “life” in 12:25 are different. *Psuche* is the first one and denotes individual personality or soul. *Zoe* is the second word used and refers to spiritual vitality. The one absorbed with the fulfillment of his or her personality will forfeit a life bursting with God’s vitality and will pay eternal consequences.

The seed illustration probes significant spiritual truth. There is no crown without a cross, no glory without suffering, no fruitfulness without death, and no victory without surrender. If we are looking for comfortable lives, then we will protect our plans and desires, save our own lives, and refuse to be planted. However, if we yield our lives and let God plant us such as he will, we will be fruitful as he intends for us to be.

**12:28-30**—This is the first time John records a voice from heaven acknowledging the sonship and authority of Christ and endorsing his word, but it is the third such instance in the combined gospel narratives. The other two occasions were at the Lord’s baptism (see Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:21-22) and at his transfiguration (see Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35).

**12:32**—This is not a text teaching universalism. “[A]ll” refers to all people without distinction, regardless of race, ethnicity, or status of some other sort. The text assails the exclusive particularism of the Jew.

**5. Jesus’ last general appeal to believe (12:37-50)**—John quotes Isaiah 6:10 (12:40) as aptly summarizing the willful and culpable nature of unbelief. Unbelief is the illogical (12:37), predicted (12:38; see Isa. 53:1), and natural reaction of unregenerate people. Even among those who believed, there was a timidity that arose from loving the praise of people rather than that of God (12:42-43).

There is a judicial blindness that God allows to cover the eyes of people who do not take the truth seriously. Jesus had performed remarkable signs and John records the people’s astounding lack of genuine interest. Their eyes were shut, their hearts hard. They were so deep in sin and rebellion that God’s only course was judgment. The verse quoted in this text (from Isaiah 6:9-10) appears several times in the New Testament (see Mt. 13:14-15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Acts 28:25-27; Rom. 8:11).

Jesus’ final appeal (12:44-50) makes clear that God’s message in Christ is hope to the believer and condemnation to the unbeliever. Belief in Christ brings confidence in one’s standing before God (12:44-45) and results in light rather than darkness (12:46). Unbelief is the refusal to listen

to the truth and to acknowledge Christ's claims on one's life and results in condemnation (12:47-48). This is the last time Jesus speaks to the crowds. The next time they see him, he will stand as an accused prisoner before Pilate.

**III. Jesus' Further Revelation of God to the Disciples (13:1-17:26)**—This is the Lord's farewell address to his disciples, which climaxes with his intercessory prayer for them. This section depicts Jesus' self-disclosure to his disciples as he prepares them for his absence by comforting them with the promise of the Spirit and exhorting them to love, obedience, and witness accomplished in the Spirit's power. He begins by giving them an example of servant leadership by washing their feet (13:1-17). His prediction of his own betrayal (13:18-30) leaves no doubt that he is in charge of his destiny and lays his life down voluntarily. The farewell discourse that follows (13:31-16:33) explains the significance of his own death and exaltation and touches on the components of a life of faith. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15), the blessed hope of Christ's return (14:1-3), the believer's conflict with the world (15:18-27), the central idea of abiding in Christ (15:1-11), and his command to love one another (13:34-35; 15:9-17) are elaborated upon. The section closes with the Lord's high priestly prayer for the preservation and unity of the disciples (17:1-26).

**A. Foot washing: Love in redemption service (13:1-17)**—The scene is the Last Supper, but rather than reiterate the institution of the Eucharist recorded in the Synoptics (see Mt. 26:17-30; Mk. 14:12-26; Lk. 22:7ff), John recalls how Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Both love and down-to-earth humility comes through in this passage. Jesus loved his own to the end and to the uttermost. It is an object lesson to fix in the minds of the disciples that they are dearly loved by the Lord and that expressing that love for others necessarily involves sacrificial service.

Jesus knew there was a competitive spirit in the hearts of his disciples. They were or would soon be amid an argument over who among them was the greatest (see Lk. 22:24-30). The church is sometimes filled with worldly competition and criticism as believers vie with each other for position and influence. Christians may grow in knowledge, but a knowledge unaccompanied by love and humility. Prideful self-assertion and self-promotion, indistinguishable from the world, rules the day. It is only in love and humility that we grow in both the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus, and avoid the pitfalls of a cold, hard, proud, superior judgmentalism that has plagued the church many times through its history.

The sequence of lessons in this passage is important: humility (13:1-5), holiness (13:6-11), and joyful service (13:12-17). Submit to the Father, keep short accounts with the Lord, and serve others and the Lord will disclose his joy to your soul.

**13:3-5**—Ordinarily, the host delegated to a servant the menial task of removing the sandals of guests and washing their feet. None of the disciples voluntarily took on the role that served as an admission of inferior status. Indeed, Luke records the disciples entering the room arguing about who among them would be the greatest in the kingdom (Lk. 22:24).

John underlines that Christ's knowledge of his identity was a catalyst for his actions. We can take a servant's role without losing anything, for what we are in Christ is unassailable. Christian dignity comes through persistent, self-emptying service.

Think of it—Jesus also washed Judas’ feet. This passage is about love portrayed and love betrayed.

**13:10**—Jesus’ meaning is clear in the choice of words for “wash”. *Nipto* (13:5, 6, 8, 10) means to wash a part of the body. Bath (13:10) is derived from *louo*, which involves washing the entire body. Furthermore, there is a difference in the tense of the verbal phrase used. “A person who has had a bath” is *leloumenos*, a perfect participle which implies past action resulting in a settled state. “[T]o wash his feet” translates *nipsasthai*, which is the aorist tense and usually refers to a single act. The upshot of this is that the work of Christ has cleansed the believer once for all but there is need for washing for incidental defilement and for continuity in Christian growth in grace.

**13:12-17**—Lest the disciples miss the point, Jesus now explains his conduct to bring the lesson home. If the Lord of glory served the needs of others, so should they as his followers. Dedicated service is an essential element of sanctified living.

**B. Betrayal predicted and betrayer dismissed (13:18-30)**—Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will betray him to the utter bewilderment of the entire group. Judas is dismissed in a way that left some thinking that, as treasurer of the group, he was off to purchase additional provisions (13:29). The dismissal of the betrayer sets the stage for the discourse that follows (13:31-16:33). However, before we move past this sad episode, we should note the pain Judas caused the Lord (13:21) and the sorry descent that unbelief caused in Judas’ life (his unbelief noted in 6:70-71; portrayed as a flint-hearted thief in 12:6; prompted to betray Jesus by Satan in 13:2; and described as possessed by Satan in 13:27). John ends this section by describing Judas’ departure and noting that “it was night”. Indeed, it was, both physically and spiritually.

**13:18**—Jesus quoted from Psalm 41:9, which involved David lamenting the defection of a trusted confidante, probably Ahithophel, who had been David’s counselor and diplomatic advisor but deserted the king in Absalom’s rebellion (see 2 Sam. 15:12; 16:15-23; 17:1-4, 14, 23). Both Judas and Ahithophel committed suicide by hanging themselves (2 Sam. 17:23; Acts 1:18).

**13:26-27**—This was a custom of the day. Some bread was dipped in sauce and extended to another person as a token of friendship. Table fellowship was considered an intimate bond, and betrayal following it particularly perverse. This verse speaks to the depths of divine love and the tragedy of Judas’ betrayal. Judas did what he did deliberately. He had already met with the Jewish authorities and had agreed to turn Jesus over to them in such a way as to avoid a public disturbance (see Lk. 21:37-22:6).

**13:30**—That it was night when Judas left is not an irrelevant observation by John. The author has contrasted light and darkness since the beginning of the book (see 1:5). This conflict between light and darkness intensified through 5:1-12:50. Now the progress of spiritual conflict becomes particularly notable (see 13:27, 30; 14:30; 15:18ff; 17:15). Judas is used by the forces of darkness to bring a charge against the Lord Jesus, the messenger of light. John enhances the



drama of betrayal. Judas is dismissed into the night. So even in this scene, surrounded by his loyal, if immature followers, is betrayal.

**Judas illustration**—One commentator notes that when sheep are taken to be slaughtered, they seem to know intuitively that the slaughterhouse is not a place they want to be. They resist leaving the truck that transported them there. The operators of at least one slaughterhouse have a way of handling this. They keep a sheep on hand who is used to the place and is no longer fearful. They lead this sheep up the gangplank of the truck and then down again without incident and the other sheep follow to their demise. The workers call this sheep “Judas”.

**C. Farewell discourse (13:31-16:33)**—The farewell discourse, partly monologue and partly dialogue, is divided into two parts. One part occurs in the upper room (13:31-14:31) and the other takes place along the way to Gethsemane (15:1-16:33). Jesus speaks to his disciples of his upcoming death and its focal role in redemptive history, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord’s exaltation, and the themes of love, comfort, obedience, and witness in his absence. This is a conscious effort by the Lord to give his disciples final instructions. Note the occurrence of the phrase “these things I have spoken to you” (see 14:25; 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 25, 31).

**1. Discourse in the upper room (13:31-14:31)**—After Jesus’ announcement of his impending departure (13:31-35), the Lord utilizes questions by Peter (13:36-14:4), Thomas (14:5-7), Philip (14:8-21), and Judas, not Iscariot, (14:22-24) to comfort and instruct the disciples before concluding by pointing to the Holy Spirit as the one who would continue this comforting and instructing role in the Lord’s physical absence (14:25-31).

**a. Impending departure announced (13:31-35)**—Jesus warns the disciples of his impending departure which provokes a crisis in the group, which the rest of the discourse addresses. His emphasis to them is on unity and love, both in this initial discourse (13:34-35) and in his prayer (17:1-26).

**13:31**—This is the last of at least ten occurrences of the title “Son of Man” in John (see 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 62; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31). It is the title of the incarnate Christ who is the representative of humanity before God and the representative of deity in human form.

**13:34-35**—Love is an old command (see Lev. 19:18) and yet a new one due to a new standard and a new example: “as I have loved you.” This kind of love was to be the mark of Christ’s followers (see 1 Jn. 3:23; 4:7-8, 11-12, 19-21), created by God’s love for us (1 Jn. 4:19), the standard of what love truly is. Love is a keyword in this address. The word appears only twelve times prior to John 13, but forty-four times in John 13-21.

**b. Peter’s questions: Denial predicted and eternal dwelling assured (13:36-14:4)**—Peter’s protestation of loyalty is greeted by the Lord’s prediction of Peter’s coming denials (13:36-38). Undoubtedly, Peter and the rest of the disciples were reeling by this time, and the Lord moves on to comfort them (14:1-4). There is an abundance of comfort for the disciples in this chapter: we have an eternal dwelling place (14:2); the Lord will return for us (14:3); our prayers are heard and answered (14:13-14); we have One who is always with us (14:16); we are deeply loved (14:21); we will be instructed in what to do (14:26); we will have peace (14:27).

“Do not let your hearts be troubled” (14:1, 27) could be translated “Set your hearts at ease” in Christ. Our human destiny is secure in the person of Christ who goes to prepare a place for us.

**14:3**—“When I come back” probably means Christ’s return after the resurrection to bestow the Spirit upon them, rather than the Second Coming.

**c. Thomas’ question: Way to the Father (14:5-7)**—Thomas is clueless. How could they know the way when they did not know where the Lord was going? Jesus’ reply focuses on his person as the key to spiritual standing and understanding.

**Jesus is the way, the truth, the life**—this exclusive claim rubs moderns the wrong way. The acceptable word to the modern mind is that all religions are really the same or very much alike. That sounds nice and very democratic. To make an exclusive claim is arrogant and generates hostility. But the idea of a vague general truth, to which all religions bear some kind of oblique witness, is foreign to Christianity. This idea became common fare in the time of the Enlightenment. However, the truth and the life is Jesus himself and while Christians have presented that truth arrogantly at times, it is not an arrogant truth but a necessary one. We recover our true humanity in the person of Christ, the one who washed his disciples’ feet, gave his life as the shepherd of the sheep, who performed countless deeds of mercy along his earthly trek.

**d. Philip’s question: Revelation of the Father (14:8-21)**—In response to Philip’s question seeking revelation of the Father, Jesus points to himself—his personality (14:9), his words (14:10), and his works (14:11). The Lord claimed such unity with the Father that Jesus’ presence spoke of the Father’s character and reality. Jesus then continues his instruction of the disciples, stressing belief (14:12-14), obedience (14:15, 21), and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit (14:16-17) as imperatives in Christian work.

**14:9-10**—The Lord’s union with the Father was so natural that he was astonished that Philip had not noticed. In Greek, the construction of the Lord’s question in 14:10 assumes an affirmative answer. Philip did indeed believe that Jesus was in the Father and the Father in him. What he needed to do was flesh out the implications of that union in his own mind.

**14:12-14**—This is a staggering statement, yet the disciples were soon to experience the truth of it through the power of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent after his Ascension. There were many more converts following Peter’s first sermon than are recorded for Jesus’ entire ministry. The influence of the infant church turned the world upside down (see Acts 17:6 LB), whereas Jesus never traveled outside the boundaries of the Palestine and its immediate surroundings.

The works of the disciples are quantitatively greater because Christ’s work is multiplied through all His followers. This is an invitation to radical faith. Asking in his name refers to those seeking his glory and speaking accurately for him, who are genuinely his authorized representatives.

**14:16-17**—Counselor translates *parakletos*, which literally means “one summoned or called alongside”. It frequently referred to a legal advocate, an adviser, a mediator, or an intercessor.

When Jesus departed, the disciples were to experience the indwelling of this divine counselor. The Spirit strengthens us to face life resolutely and to keep walking in the truth.

**14:18**—God does not leave us as orphans, alone, abandoned, helpless, and hopeless. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes alongside with strength, comfort, empowerment, counsel, and guidance.

**e. Judas’ question: Special disclosure to the disciples (14:22-24)**—Judas asked “Why this special revelation to us?” In reply, Jesus connects love, obedience, spiritual insight, and abiding union with Christ. Love engenders obedience and progressive illumination of God’s word and purpose. An abiding sense of his presence is only possible where obedient receptivity to his word has been cultivated.

**f. Holy Spirit and peace: Continuity of comfort and instruction (14:25-31)**—Jesus leaves them his Spirit (14:26) who will teach them, and his peace (14:27), which will garrison their hearts. He tells them these things beforehand so that they will believe when they come to pass (14:28-29).

**14:26-27**—As Jesus demonstrated the personality and character of the Father to people, after his departure the Holy Spirit will make Christ real to his followers. The Holy Spirit is a teacher par excellence. Peace is not an exemption from conflict and trial. It is a calm confidence in God and a sense of well-being in the knowledge that we are in his hands and his good purpose will be accomplished.

**14:30**—“He has no hold on me” lacks the full punch of the Greek. “He has nothing on me” might be a bit colloquial, but more nearly renders the sense of the phrase.

**2. Discourse along the way (15:1-16:33)**—In this section, Jesus deals with the disciples’ relationships with himself (15:1-11), one another (15:12-17), and the world (15:18-16:4). It closes with a focus on the Holy Spirit’s ministry among them (16:5-15) and final preparation for the Lord’s departure (16:16-33).

**a. Christ and the disciples: Abiding in the vine (15:1-11)**—This first relationship is vital to every disciple, his or her union to the living Lord. Jesus uses an analogy from horticulture to illustrate this union, the vine and the branches. Such an analogy has several points of comparison with the disciples’ union with Christ.

- Right stock (15:1);
- Right vinedresser (15:2)—Growth is dependent on the vinedresser ruthlessly removing the dead wood and drastically cutting back the live wood;
- Right culture—Fruitfulness is seen in multiple aspects and dimensions of the disciple’s life, including prayer (15:7), joy (15:11), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), and the fruit of God’s redemptive harvest among people;
- Right contact—“Abide” or “remain” (*meno*) occurs 10 times in 15:4-7, 9-10 and speaks of a constant, active relationship with the source of life;

- Right fruit—Note the divine order of fruit bearing: fruit (15:2), more fruit (15:2), much fruit (15:5), and fruit that remains (15:16).

The vines in the Holy Land were large and strong. It was very difficult to break off a mature branch without injuring the vine itself. This picture of our union with Christ is a living (we will bear fruit), loving (we are invited to enjoy him), lasting (we need not fear even in the worst of times) one.

Abide (*meno*) is the key term in this passage. It appears ten times in 15:1-11. The text suggests some evidence of abiding in Christ—producing fruit (15:2), being pruned (15:2), answers to prayer (15:7), deeper love for Christ and others (15:9, 12-13), spiritual joy (15:11). What does “remaining in him” look like? One commentator suggests—

- We must be in community that knows, loves, and celebrates the Lord Jesus;
- We must remain individuals of prayer and worship in our own private lives;
- We must submit to pruning, to the Lord’s gracious discipline in our lives.

**15:2**—Pruning involves both cutting away dead wood which can breed insects and disease and trimming back live wood so that the life of the vine will not be dissipated in unfruitful growth. God cuts away our chaff and those things that may not be wrong but rob us of our spiritual vigor. He desires fruit, both quality and quantity.

**15:6**—Fruitfulness is normal for believers, and always accompanies sincere belief. However, this is not a uniform, equalitarian phenomenon. God will use us differently according to his will.

**b. Disciples’ relation to one another: Loving one another (15:12-17)**—The command to love one another frames this section. This love is to be modelled on Christ’s love for each disciple and should be sacrificial (15:13), imitate (15:14-15), and productive (15:16). The Lord emphasizes Christian love throughout this discourse (see 13:34-35; 14:15, 21, 23, 28; 15:12, 17) even as he charges them to embrace his mission.

**15:9-11**—Love unites believers to Christ as branches are united to the vine. Obedience and joy stem from such a relationship. Obedience marks the cause of the believer’s fruitfulness and joy its happy result.

**15:12-15**—The Lord underscores love in this discourse (14:15, 21, 23, 28). The disciples are to be characterized by unity instead of rivalry, trust instead of suspicion, and obedience instead of self-assertion. Christian love is more than a casual hello at a fellowship time or the breaking of cheesecake together near the coffee urn. It is a partnership in the gospel resulting in mutual esteem and affection.

The term “friends” (15:14-15) is a word that was used to describe the inner circle of an Oriental king. These people were close to the king and knew his thoughts and attitudes, but they were also subject to his commands. Loyalty, mutuality of concern, and confidence in disclosure characterize this type of friendship. The Old Testament called two people friends of God—

Abraham and Moses. This is the way we are friends of God—not chums shooting the breeze over a beer, but courtiers of majesty on high.

**15:16**—This friendship with God is not, in the first instance, our idea or initiative. We do not choose him; he chooses us. With the hymn writer we exclaim:

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend;  
For this, Thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever; and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for Thee.

**c. Disciples' relation to the world: Witness amidst hostility (15:18-16:4)**—Elsewhere in John, world (*kosmos*) may refer to the created universe or people in general. In this text, it refers to the masses of unbelievers, whose hostility to God and to his people is energized by the materialistic world system controlled by the evil one.

Jesus tells them plainly that the world will hate them because of

- its hatred for Christ with whom the disciples are closely associated (15:18; 20-21);
- the difference in nature between the disciples and the world (15:19; see 2 Cor. 5:17);
- the conviction of sin which Jesus brought upon the world (15:22-25); and
- the world's reaction to their Spirit-empowered witness (15:26-27).

This type of opposition is the natural result of unbelief, which blinds the world to the truth. Indeed, the worldlings will excuse their hatred with a false sense of sanctimonious piety (16:1-4). The disciples needed to brace themselves for this opposition. When they ran into it, it did not mean that something was wrong or that they ought to quit (see Acts 4:23-31; 5:41-42). The introduction of the Spirit in relation to the world's opposition (15:26) links this section to the next one where the Spirit's convicting ministry is in view.

**15:19**—The world system functions based on conformity. People get alone if they fall in line. They follow the fads and accept the values of those around them. The Scriptures strongly counsel us to do just the opposite: “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2).

**16:2-4**—The word “service” is *latreia* and conveys a sense of priestly service. The world will think of their cruel opposition as a sign of virtue. Saul of Tarsus certainly fit this description. He thought that he was serving God by ravaging the church (see Acts 7:57-8:3; 22:3-5; 26:9-11).

Christians in John's day (assuming he is writing in the 80s and 90s) were being expelled from local synagogues, perhaps under the influence of Palestinian Pharisaic propaganda. They may have been being betrayed by Jewish people who claimed that Christians were not Jews which left believers with no legal exemption from emperor worship.

**d. Holy Spirit's ministry: Conviction, instruction, and revelation (16:5-15)**—Three major aspects of the Holy Spirit's work are described:

- to the world—conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8-11);

- to the disciples—instruction and direction (16:12-13); and
- to Christ—revealing him more perfectly to and through the disciples (16:14-15).

The Spirit comes to the church, not to the world. The Holy Spirit does not minister in a void; he works in and through the body of Christ to accomplish his work. God fits us as his vessels and then uses us as his fingers and arms, feet and legs in the world today. He could have conveyed the message any way he chose. He chose messengers with skin on—you and me.

**16:8-11**—“Convict” (*elencho*) is a legal term which means to pronounce a judicial verdict whereby the guilt of the culprit is defined and fixed. The Holy Spirit does not merely accuse people of sin but brings them to a profound sense of guilt to bring some to realize their shame and helplessness before God. He does this in three areas:

- sin—basically that of unbelief;
- righteousness—people have an ingrained distaste for righteousness, innately sensing their lack of it; and
- judgment—that there is right and wrong and one who will declare it, or more precisely, who has declared it in the cross of Christ.

**16:12-13**—The Spirit will guide the disciples into truth. Believers’ relationship with the Lord Jesus in John’s day and for subsequent generations should be no less intimate than the disciple’s relationship with the Lord Jesus before the Cross.

**16:14-15**—The Holy Spirit will glorify Christ. He will show the Lord to the best advantage. The Spirit does not make himself prominent but instead magnifies the Son.

**e. Disciples’ sorrow turned to joy (16:16-24)**—Jesus predicts his death and resurrection (16:16-21) and then tells his disciples of the liberty, joy, and realized power it will bring to them (16:22-24). John 16:23-24 is one of the finest assurances of answered prayer in the Scriptures.

The disciples are overwhelmed. The back-n-forth of 16:16-19 makes that clear. The Lord’s message is that their sorrow will be turned to joy at the end of the matter. There is a principle behind godly joy. God brings joy to our lives by transformation, not by substitution. The illustration of the woman giving birth makes this clear. The same baby that causes the mother’s pain is also the source of her joy. God gives us joy, often by taking us through hard circumstances, not by averting them. The experience of going through hard times yields a centeredness on Christ that is fertile soil for the cultivation of a joyful heart.

**f. Purpose of discourse revisited: Preparation for departure (16:25-33)**—Jesus asserts again his authority (16:26) and his nature (16:28) and elicits from the disciples a firm belief in his assertions (16:29-30). His purpose in saying these things is their assurance of belief when testing comes (16:32-33).

**16:25**—Little is said in the gospels about the instruction Jesus provided for the disciples during the forty days prior to his Ascension. However, this most certainly was a time of “speaking plainly about the Father”. Those conversations are not on tape, but we do have the treasure of the

New Testament as evidence of the Lord's effective instruction, as prompted, guided, and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

**16:33**—The situation of the early Christians included their recognition of their final victory in Christ, but that triumph was inaugurated in present tribulation. Someone has defined peace as “the possession of adequate resources”. In Jesus Christ, we have all the resources we need for every occasion. They were to be a good cheer. Yes, the world will hate, persecute, and ridicule them. But the world has been defeated. Not just sidelined or downgraded but defeated. In him, we have peace.

**3. High priestly prayer of Christ (17:1-26)**—When the great Scottish preacher, John Knox, lay dying, he whispered to his wife, “Go read where I first cast my anchor.” Without further direction, she opened the Bible to John 17. This chapter is something of a “holy of holies” of prayers in the Bible. The Lord of glory, with the terror of the cross immediately him, prays for his own—their security, their joy, their unity, and their future glory. It is a heartwarming and encouraging prayer. One to return to again and again.

**a. For himself: Glorify the Son (17:1-5)**—“Glorify” is the keynote of these verses. This is not a personal horn-blowing session, but simply a request that the Father receive the Son back to the glory the Lord voluntarily set aside to accomplish the task of redemption (17:2-3). That glory includes the cross (17:4), for the cross is the sine qua non of his redemptive mission.

**17:1**—Jesus had a definite sense of his “time” and the Father’s sovereign control of his personal calendar. At Cana, the Lord was reluctant to intervene in a tense social situation and miraculously rescue some folks from embarrassment because “his time had not yet come” (2:4). He resisted his then unbelieving brothers’ advice that it pays to advertise because the right time had not yet come (7:8). Jesus backed off from intense conflict with his enemies on several occasions because his time had not arrived (7:30; 8:20). However, now the time of crisis had arrived (see 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). The event (the cross) to which his whole life pointed was at hand.

**17:5**—The Lord’s petition to return to pristine glory unmistakably implies his pre-existence and equality with the Father.

**b. For the disciples: Preservation and sanctification (17:6-19)**—This section addresses the inevitable conflict between the disciples and the world and centers on the God’s ability to keep believers from the evil one and preserve them for his own purposes. The Lord’s petitions for his disciples include those for their enlightenment (17:8), preservation (17:11-12, 15-16), joy (17:13; see also 15:11), sanctification 17:17, 19), and their commission as the Lord’s witnesses (17:18).

The Lord Jesus entrusts his disciples to the Father who he knows will care for them every bit as much he did. He prays that they be kept from being pulled back into the world with all its wickedness and rebellion. He asks the Father to preserve his people from evil, from the tricks and traps of the world and the flesh. He wants his disciples to be holy, that is set apart to God and his purposes. The way we use “holy” now has a sense of overly pious religiosity that is foreign to the New Testament.

**17:12**—In reviewing his care of the disciples, Jesus uses two verbs. “Protected” (*tereo*) conveys a sense of protection by conservation. “Kept them safe” (*phylasso*) connotes a defense against external attack. Jesus’ ability to keep his own secure was and is a full orb ed one.

The Lord kept all but the “one doomed to destruction” or “the son of perdition”. In the New Testament, this phrase is used only here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, where it is applied to the Antichrist. This observation has led some to speculate that the Antichrist of Revelation will be Judas resurrected. More sensibly, the phrase “one doomed to destruction” denotes one given over to evil and speaks of the wretched state of Judas’ heart. Judas set his mind on betrayal, growing sour in his unbelief, and reached the point of no return when he left the upper room. His was indeed the wretched soul described in Psalm 41:9, a close friend who turned on the Lord Jesus. Truly, it was night in his soul.

**17:13-19**—Jesus is praying for his disciples, treating them as the true remnant of Israel, the saved covenant community of the Jewish nation. Jesus’ word to the disciples brings joy (17:13), the assurance of love (17:14), power for set apart living (17:15-17), and provision for witness (17:18-19).

**17:15-16**—John stresses separation from the world that results from a different make-up. Separation is an identity issue before it is anything else. However, our new nature ought to clearly manifest itself in the lifestyle choices we make.

**17:17-18**—The disciples were to be sanctified and sent. “Sanctify” (*hagiazō*) means to set apart, usually for a good purpose or use. The believer is to be changed by the working of God’s Spirit and God’s Word, resulting in separation from evil and consecration to God’s service. “Sent” involves an equipping for a definite mission. The disciples were sent with authority (Mt. 28:18-20) to proclaim the message they had seen in him and heard from him.

**c. For future disciples: Unity (17:20-26)**—Our oneness in Christ spans the ages. Just as the Father and Son are one (10:30), so those called together in Christ have an essential unity in him that transcends all other differences, whether race, ethnicity, color, or gender. The unity of the Father and the Son should model the unity to be experienced by the people of God, in whom they dwell. The emphasis on unity for future disciples would resonate with John’s readers. The followers of the Lord Jesus then (80s or 90s) constituted a small minority in a hostile world and would need each other to survive.

**17:21**—Believers often exhibit a spirit of pride, self-assertion, competitiveness, and disunity. The Puritan preacher, Thomas Brooks, wrote long ago: “Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous.”



**17:23**—One of the things that most impresses the world is when Christians truly love one another and live in harmony with one another. They see of God what Christians disclose of him through their lives.

**IV. Death and Resurrection of Jesus: Culmination of the Conflict Between Belief and Unbelief (18:1-20:31)**—John’s record of the trials, passion, and resurrection of our Lord emphasizes the nature of Jesus’ kingship and his utter innocence of the charges levelled against him. Jesus was confronted by two different authorities in his trials. The ecclesiastical trial was before the Jewish Sanhedrin; the civil trial before the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. Each of these trials had three stages.

Ecclesiastical trial:

- Before Annas (18:12-14, 19-23);
- Informal trial by Sanhedrin before dawn (18:24; see Mt. 26:57-68; Mk. 14:53-65; Lk. 22:54-65);
- Formal trial after dawn (see Mt. 27:1; Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66-71).

Civil trial:

- First appearance before Pilate (18:28-38; see Mt. 27:2, 11-14; Mk. 15:1-5; Lk. 23:1-5)
- Before Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-12);
- Final appearance before Pilate (18:39-19:16; see Mt. 27:15-26; Mk. 15:6-15; Lk. 23:13-25).

**A. Judas betrays Jesus (18:1-11)**—John omits the agony in Gethsemane, so movingly pictured in the Synoptics. John has already shown how deeply troubled Jesus was at this time (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). Now he is ready and in command of the situation and everything around him. The presence of Jesus at this crisis is masterful. Armed to the teeth, a whole detachment of soldiers draws back and falls to the ground before an unarmed man (18:5-7). John emphasizes that Jesus knew exactly what was going on (18:4) and voluntarily gave himself up (18:7-8) in a way that protected his disciples (18:8-9).

**18:1**—The parallels with Absalom’s rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15) are striking. David crossed the Kidron Valley when rejected by the nation and betrayed by his son, Absalom. Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley after being rejected by the Jewish authorities and betrayed by his own disciple. Absalom was killed while hanging from a tree (2 Sam. 18:9-17). Ahithophel, David’s treacherous counselor, hanged himself (2 Sam. 17:23), as did Judas, the kissy-faced turncoat (Mt. 27:5; Acts 1:18).

“Kidron Valley” is literally “winter-swollen Kidron”. The brook only flowed in the rainy season, namely winter, so crossing it at this time (probably the equivalent of our April) would not involve even getting wet.

**18:3**—The detachment of soldiers was undoubtedly from the Jewish temple guard. Roman troops were rarely used for routine police action, and they certainly would not have taken Jesus to the house of Annas, the former high priest they had deposed.

**18:7-9**—The Lord's chief concern was not for himself, but to shield his disciples. Jesus sacrificed himself for their safety. The statement in 18:8 illustrates the principle of substitutionary atonement that pervades John's gospel (see 1:29; 3:14-16; 10:11, 15, 18; 12:32; 17:19).

**18:10-11**—John records Simon Peter's devotion in attempting to defend his Lord. Jesus short cuts this misdirected fervor. John does not record how Jesus healed Malchus, the servant whose ear was severed (see Lk. 22:51). The Synoptics record this event without naming the servant wounded or the person wielding the sword (Mt. 26:51; Mk. 14:47; Lk. 22:50). John alone supplies names.

**B. Ecclesiastical trial before the chief priests (18:12-27)**—John's record of the Lord's ecclesiastical trial has two main features: the questioning before the high priest (18:12-14, 19-24) and the denials of Peter (18:15-18, 25-27). The record of the trial itself illustrates its illegal and trumped-up nature. It was conducted at an illegal time and in an illegal manner (18:19-24) and it concluded by seeking the death penalty from Pilate for a poorly defined offense that the Romans did not even recognize (19:6-7). Peter's denials are painstakingly chronicled to substantiate Christ's prediction (see 13:38).

### **1. Before Annas and the Sanhedrin (18:12-14, 19-24)**

**18:12-14**—Annas served as high priest from 6-15 before being deposed by the Romans. Several of his descendants succeeded him as high priest as well as his son-in-law Caiaphas, who served from 18-36. Although others served as high priest, Annas seems to have been the power behind the throne. The trial was commenced at night because the Jewish authorities intended to execute Jesus the next day and Jewish law forbade the execution of a sentence on the day of the trial.

**18:19-24**—Jesus' statements (18:20-21, 23) serve to underline the illegal nature of the proceedings. First, Jewish trials did not begin with the judge's inquisition of the accused as in this instance (18:19). A charge should have been clearly stated and witnesses brought to establish guilt. The accused was not required to prove his innocence; a proper prosecution was required to prove the accused's guilt. Second, the accused was not to be subjected to physical abuse as here (18:22). The crime was to be charged and proven before punishment was inflicted.

Jesus' treatment in the house of Annas accords well with the Annas' reputed arrogance and unprincipled character. One judging the case should not be interrogating the witness. Interrogators were not supposed to force the accused to convict himself. Striking the accused was clearly against the law. The act shows how abusive and uninterested in any proper form of legality Annas was. His interest was political, not legal.

**2. Peter's threefold denial of Christ (18:15-18, 25-27)**—Peter's self-deceptive conceit pictures himself courageously loyal, standing before the dais of kings and emperors on behalf of

his Lord. Instead, he denies Christ three times before the high priest's servants while hiding in the shadows of the courtyard of the Sanhedrin. The best intentions of the flesh are powerless to keep us faithful. Note that in John's record of the Lord's reinstatement of Peter (see 21:15-19), the Lord elicits from Peter a statement of his devotion and affection three times, just as Peter denied him three times.

One commentator ponders the breakfast on the beach in John 21. Did the wood fire there (21:9) remind Peter of the fires around which he warmed himself in the high priest's courtyard just prior to his denials? Did the smell alone bring memories of that sad night?

**C. Civil trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16)**—Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea from 26-36. He was a subordinate of Vitellius, the Roman governor of Syria. He seems to have been a weak and indecisive man who could be petty and cruel. Several years after Christ's trial, Pilate was dismissed by Vitellius and sent to Rome to be examined by the emperor for misconduct in office. He was only saved from disgrace by the death of Emperor Tiberius (14-37) before his trial. At least one tradition records that he later committed suicide by jumping off a cliff in Switzerland.

John's record of this trial makes it seem more like an interview than a legal proceeding, focusing on Jesus' concern for Pilate and Pilate's oscillation and uncertainty. Seven times in this narrative Pilate goes out or comes in (18:29, 33, 38; 19:1, 4, 9, 13) as he vacillates between a public confrontation with the Jewish mob and a private interrogation of Jesus. The conflict that rages within Pilate is between the judge and the politician, between justice and expediency. He is reluctant to take part in these proceedings as evidenced by his pronouncement of Jesus' innocence (18:38; 19:4, 6), his proposed pardon (18:39), his repeated attempts to release Christ (19:5, 12), and his biting sarcasm (19:15). In the end, he succumbs to fear and condemns to death a man he knows to be innocent.

John highlights Jesus' innocence by the Jews' failure to articulate a coherent case against the Lord and by Pilate's repeated attempts to release him. The irrational hatred of hardened unbelief carries the day in order to accomplish God's redemptive purposes.

**1. Jewish accusations against Christ (18:28-32)**—John does not record the morning session of the Sanhedrin as do the Synoptics where Caiaphas illegally put Jesus on oath to declare whether he was the Son of God. After the Lord's assertion that he was the Son of God, Jesus was condemned on the charge of blasphemy (see Mk. 14:60-65). However, now there was a big problem. The Jews wanted the death penalty which only the Romans could inflict, and they wanted it for an offense that the Romans did not recognize. So, when Pilate asked for the indictment (18:29), the Jews started to obfuscate the issue (18:30). The vagueness of the charge was indicative of the weakness of the case.

**18:28**—John seems to conflict with the Synoptics here. According to the Synoptics, Jesus had already eaten with His disciples, whereas John indicated that the Jews refused to enter Pilate's place to avoid ceremonial uncleanness so they could eat the Passover later that day. The two most prominent explanations offered are: (1) several Jewish groups had different calendars and

did not celebrate the Passover on the same day; and (2) John may have been making symbolic point, insisting that Jesus was the Passover lamb, actually dying later that day.

**2. Pilate's initial interrogation and release attempt: King of the Jews or Barabbas (18:33-40)**—Pilate's question in 18:33 indicates that the Jewish charge against Jesus that had traction at Roman law was that of insurrection. The narrative makes clear that Pilate did not take that charge seriously. Barabbas, the person the Jews asked to be released instead of Jesus, was indeed an insurrectionist. Interestingly, "Barabbas" means son of a father. In place of this man, the true Son of the Father died.

Jesus was a king but his kingdom was not from this world. He was not bringing in a worldly kingdom but the truth. The truth stands in a person amid cynicism, local custom, misunderstandings, distortions and lies, plots and schemes, betrayals and denials, taking the death that should have fallen on a brigand, on Israel, on anyone alive at the time, on the entire world, on you and me.

**18:39-40**—Roman law permitted two kinds of amnesty, the *indulgentia* (pardoning a condemned person) and the *abolitio* (acquitting a person before judgment. The irony is that the crowd prefers releasing a true revolutionary to Jesus, a person denounced on a trumped-up charge of treason but who had no record of participating in an insurrection. Barabbas was precisely the kind of person the Roman authorities would want executed.

**3. Scourging, crowning with thorns, and second release attempt: Behold the man (19:1-7)**—Scourging normally accompanied crucifixion. The Roman scourge consisted of a wooden handle to which several rawhide thongs were fastened with pieces of metal or bone affixed. A few strokes could rip the flesh off a person's back. It was not unheard of for the victim to die in this ordeal and short-circuit the execution. Jesus was flogged, crowned with thorns, mocked, and made a public spectacle based on a charge Pilate had dismissed out of hand. In 19:5, Pilate appeals to the sympathy of a crowd hardened by unbelief and stirred up by the chief priests. The Roman procurator simply lacked the guts to do the right, albeit unpopular, thing.

Here's the man (19:5)! The true image of God who brought God's wisdom back into the world. Here is the living embodiment of God, the one who made the invisible God visible. And note the irony in the form in which he appears. Scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, ridiculed, the innocent king, the man who spoke truth. Here is the man!

The Romans and many other ancient empires populated their provinces with statues of their rulers. The locals were constantly reminded to whom they owed allegiance. God had placed such an image in the world He created—human beings created in his own image who were to rule wisely and lovingly. Things went south and the Son was on hand to restore things to their original intent.

**19:3**—"Hail" was sarcasm from the customary salutation of a Roman emperor.

**4. Pilate's continued interrogation, final release attempt, and reluctant judgment (19:8-16)**—Pilate's fear escalates when he hears of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. His

assertion of power to dispose of Jesus' case occasions Jesus' clear statement of God's sovereignty over this and all human events. Meanwhile, the Jewish crowd kept up the pressure on the vacillating Roman official. "[N]o friend of Caesar" (19:12) was more than a casual allusion to Roman loyalty and patriotism. The cry was a veiled threat that should Pilate exonerate Jesus, the Jewish officials would report him to Rome as refusing to bring a rival pretender to justice. Of course, the entire proceeding had nothing to do with justice.

**19:12**—Pilate's political sponsor in Rome was Sejanus, who fell from power in October, 31. If this proceeding was after this date, Pilate had much to fear from any bad reports about him. However, if this proceeding was before this date, the Emperor Tiberius was a most suspicious and paranoid person and any report of treason and the slightest evidence of Pilate releasing a self-proclaimed "king" could augur ill.

**19:15**—"We have no king but Caesar" was an astounding reply from the chief priests. Palestine was a hotbed of insurrection and one of the least desirable posts in the empire because of it. Here, the official heads of the Jewish people, who would have gladly welcomed independence if it occasioned no risk to themselves or their positions and property, put themselves on record as the abject subjects of a pagan potentate. Nothing reveals so clearly the chief priests' lack of spiritual principle as this sorry scene.

**D. Crucifixion and burial of Jesus (19:17-42)**—John records the act of crucifixion and the inscription on the cross (19:17-22), the scene at Golgotha (19:23-27), the death agony of the Lord, including his statement of his finished work (19:28-30), the piercing of his side (19:31-37), and the Lord's burial by Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-42). John's account focuses on fulfilled prophecy (19:23-24, 33-37), the Lord's care of his own (19:25-27), and Jesus' conscious and voluntary relinquishment of his life in accomplishing his mission (19:28-30).

**1. Crucifixion, inscription, and the scene at the Cross (19:17-27)**—Crucifixion was a terrible way to die. The victim carried his own cross to the place of execution where nails were driven through his wrists and feet to fasten him to a wooden cross. The victim was stripped of his clothing, exposed naked to mocking people, and was subject to the heat of the day and the chill of the night. The tension on the victim's arms caused by the weight of the body prevented normal breathing and caused the lungs to fill with fluid. Thirst, exposure, loss of blood, and impaired breathing due to slow affixation contributed to a lingering, painful death.

**19:18**—The probable site of Golgotha was just outside the city wall, not far from Herod's palace.

**19:19-22**—Pilate used the inscription to take a sarcastic barb at the Jews. John's point of recording this is to note this sarcasm was an ironic statement of the truth.

**19:23-24**—John records in detail the way the Lord's clothes were divided to show the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18.

**19:25-27**—Our Lord made seven statements from the cross. The first three focused on the needs of others: those who crucified him (Lk. 23:34); the believing thief (Lk. 23:29-43); and the care of

his mother in this passage in John. The fourth statement had to do with his relationship with the Father (Mt. 27:45-49). The last three focused on himself: his physical need (19:28-29) and the giving up of his spirit (19:30; see Lk. 23:46).

The women were there, but the men were not. The women could reveal themselves as part of Jesus' entourage. They were not perceived as a danger. Nobody was going to bother arresting them. The disciple Jesus loved was there, probably a reference to John himself. Why was he not endangered? Probably because he was too young to be seen as a threat.

Roman Catholic apologists have extrapolated from Jesus' entrustment of Mary to the apostle John's care in this scene as indicating that Mary had no other natural children and thus was perpetually a virgin, a dogma of that Church. However, 19:27 does not mean that Jesus had no siblings. Numerous texts clearly say otherwise (Mt. 12:46; 13:55-56; Mk. 3:31-35; Jn. 7:3-5; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19). The text only says that he commended his mother's well-being to one of his faithful disciples. His siblings were probably not present at his crucifixion, given their evident unbelief during his public ministry (see 7:3-5). Placing Mary with John left her in good hands.

**19:27**—For a disciple to be accorded a role in the teacher's family was a great honor. Jesus' mother was probably in her mid to late forties, a widow, and living in a society where woman rarely earned much income. She was and would be dependent on others.

**2. Death agony of Christ (19:28-37)**—Christ's cry of victory (19:28-30) and his manner of death in fulfillment of prophecy (19:31-37) is John's focus in this account.

**19:30**—"It is finished" (*tetelestai*) was a commercial term, used to signify the full payment of a debt. In this passage it is used in the perfect tense, which signifies past action with continuing ongoing results. When Jesus gave himself on the cross, he fully met the righteous demands of the law. The full debt of our sin was exacted from him. In addition, his work was completed, and it established a firm basis for faith for all believers, past, present, and future. This is not a cry of anguish or of relief, but a shout of victory from a most unlikely podium.

**19:31-37**—Romans often allowed the bodies of convicts to rot on the cross. However, Jewish sabbath sensitivities required that the executions be speeded up and the Roman accommodated these wishes especially during crowded festivals. This passage is important as evidence for the actual death of Christ and as literal fulfillment of two significant Old Testament prophecies. His bones were not broken as predicted by Psalm 34:20 (19:33, 36) and his side was pierced in fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10 (19:34, 37). In the unwitting fulfillment of these prophecies, the Roman soldiers did not do what they normally did (break the victim's legs) and did what they normally did not do (pierce the victim's chest cavity and thus possibly ending the death agony of the victim). The prolonging of the death agony was the very purpose of this brutally cruel execution method.

John records Jesus' death. He was an eyewitness. Stories later that Jesus did not really die, are debunked by direct eyewitness testimony. His testimony is very particular. The soldiers made sure he was dead by piercing his side with a spear. What emerged was not a flow of blood that

would indicate that Jesus was still alive, but a mixture of clotted blood and a watery substance. Jesus was already dead.

**3. Burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-42)**—Burial was one more piece of evidence of the Lord’s death. The account also marks the slow emergence of genuine faith in two members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea (see Mt. 27:57; Lk. 23:50-51) and Nicodemus (see 3:1-21; 7:50-52). We met Nicodemus earlier in John’s account, but this is our introduction to Joseph of Arimathea. He was rich (Mt. 27:57), a prominent member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:43), a good man who did not support the Sanhedrin’s action concerning the Lord (Lk. 23:50-51), one of the “believing minority” of Jews who awaited the Messiah (Mk. 15:43), and a secret disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews (19:38).

Burial customs were different from ours. There were no coffins or cremations. The tombs were usually caves hollowed out of rock. The cave would be big enough for two or more people to walk in. There would be ledges carved into the sides of the cave. The body would be laid on one of the ledges or the floor and wrapped with large amounts of spices and perfumes. When the decomposition was complete, the bones of the corpse would be placed in an ossuary (a bone box). Thus, burials took place in two stages. As much as a year might intervene between the two-stage burial.

**E. Resurrection of Jesus and initial post-Resurrection Appearances (20:1-29)**—This section includes an account of the discovery of the empty tomb (20:1-9), several post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus (20:10-29), teaching concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (20:19-22), and a clear cut assertion of Christ’s deity in Thomas’ confession (20:28). It is the empty tomb verifying the Lord’s distinctive claims that distinguishes Jesus’ career from that of other religious teachers and leaders.

The resurrection is an essential part of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3-8), a key doctrine of the Christian faith. It proves that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 1:4) and that his atoning work is both complete and effective (Rom. 4:24-25). Opponents of the faith have dealt with the stunning fact of the empty tomb with curious fictions. Some of these include:

- The Lord’s body was stolen by the disciples (see Mt. 28:11-15);
- The disciples had hallucinating visions of the risen Lord and interpreted them as evidence for the Resurrection;
- The disciples just went to the wrong tomb;
- Jesus never really died, but merely “swooned”. When revived by the cool tomb, this victim of crucifixion that his executioners wrongly mistook for being dead, pushed away the enormous rock that sealed the tomb, slipped by the Roman guard who stood to lose their lives if his body disappeared, and made his getaway.

Unbelief decrying the faith for its irrationalism, seems stunning irrational whenever one objectively looks at these theories. A moment’s thought blows any of them away.

The disciples really did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead, despite his direct teaching on the subject. He said “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19, 22). He compared himself to Jonah, who was in the whale for three days (Mt. 12:40) and clearly stated, on at least two occasions, that he would rise again after three days (Mt. 16:21; 20:19). Just a day before his death, he had promised to rise again and meet his disciples in Galilee (Mt. 26:32; also see Lk. 24:6-7). However, the disciples were slow to pick this up.

**1. Discovery of the empty tomb (20:1-9)**—John provides a detailed account for the on-site physical evidence for the Resurrection.

Modern critical scholars who suggest that the original disciples only meant that they had a spiritual experience but did not claim that Jesus rose bodily read their own culture into the text. In the New Testament, “resurrection” meant bodily resurrection. The skeptical proposal that Jesus only swooned and recovered does not explain how he could unwrap himself in the tomb, move the giant stone in his weakened state, and escape unnoticed. And to remain forever undetected?

**20:1-2**—The first witnesses of the Resurrection were believing women. Interesting, particularly considering the chauvinism of the day. The testimony of women did not much matter to the honchos of Jerusalem. “It is better that the words of the Law be burned”, said one of the prominent rabbis, “than be delivered to a woman.” Yet God entrusted the first word of the glorious news of the Resurrection to the gender the rabbis despised.

**20:5-8**—Three words are used to describe the visual perception of the disciples. In 20:5, John “looked in at (*blepei*) the linen clothes,” meaning that he himself physically saw the linen garments. In 20:6, Peter “saw” (*theorei*) the strips of linen, implying that he scrutinized the evidence, but he did not know how to interpret it. In 20:8, John “saw” (*eiden*) and believed, meaning that he perceived the significance of the empty tomb and the unoccupied grave clothes.

The way the grave clothes were discovered looked as though the body was not picked up and unwrapped, but that it just disappeared, leaving the clothes empty. Their initial thoughts possibly were that grave robbers had disturbed the tomb. But that seemed ridiculous with the tomb so neatly ordered. John takes it all in, astounded and with wild delight in God’s creative power, he saw and believed. I’m sure he remembered that moment ever afterward. Jesus had gone on, through death and into a new creation, a new life beyond, where death itself had been defeated.

**2. Initial post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus (20:10-29)**—The effect on the disciples of the Resurrection and the Lord’s subsequent appearances is electric: Mary Magdalene, mourner turned missionary (20:11-18), Peter, a penitent turned preacher (20:6-7, 19-23; Acts 2:14-41), John bereaved friend turned beloved apostle (20:5-8), the disciples generally, a timid group shrinking back from opposition turned bold heralds of a new movement (20:19-23; Acts 17:6 LB), and Thomas, doubter turned confessor (20:26-29).

**a. To Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)**—Mary Magdalene delivered the news of the empty tomb. Now, she is the first to meet the risen Lord. In her sobbing, emotional distraught state, she speaks to angels and answers their questions without stopping to ponder what was going on.



Then she sees someone else. Was he the gardener? Maybe he would know where the body was. Then he said her name. She cried out, whirled around, reached out, and tried to hold him tight. Oh, to be a bug on that cave wall! I tear up just imagining the scene! This stuff is almost too good to be true. If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a story of people seeing Jesus, they would never have given the star role to a woman, and certainly not to Mary Magdalene. Observing Mary linger in the Garden, it is difficult not to recall verses like Proverbs 8:17: “I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.” Or Psalms 30:5: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” The Lord delights to reveal himself to his true hearts.

**20:16**—Rabboni means “my teacher” and is more personal and less formal than “rabbi”.

**20:17**—“Do not hold unto me”. Here the verb is *hapto* which means to “clutch” or to “grip”, not merely to touch. The Lord is not protesting the outpouring of Magdalene’s devotion lest he be defiled but was instructing her not to unduly detain him because he would see her (and his other disciples) again. There may also be a sense of Mary clinging to her former relationship with Jesus before Calvary. Jesus wanted to remind her that the era of his glorification had begun.

**b. First appearance to the disciples (20:19-23)**—The legacy of peace, first given in the upper room discourse, is connected in this passage with the commissioning of the disciples in continuing the Lord’s redemptive work. Jesus’ words in 20:22-23 emphasize that the Spirit is not given to the church as an ornament, but to empower a redemptive ministry among people. The Lord galvanized the disciples’ courage by coming to them (20:19), reassuring them (20:19-20), commissioning them (20:21), and enabling them in the power of the Holy Spirit (20:22).

**20:22**—Jesus breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life.

**20:23**—This text does not mean that a select body of people have monopoly rights over the power to forgive sins. The disciples were not to provide for the forgiveness of others’ sins; they were to proclaim the gospel message and the forgiveness already achieved by Jesus’ atoning death.

**c. Second appearance to disciples: Thomas as climactic illustration of the triumph of belief (20:24-29)**—Thomas was a loyal, outspoken, pessimistic person (see 11:16; 14:5) who was absent when Jesus first appeared to his disciples (20:19-23). He would be satisfied by nothing less than hard, material evidence. His incredulity sets the stage for the Lord to graphically illustrate that the resurrection was not a hoax and was not the product of wishful thinking.

**20:27**—“Stop doubting and believe” could be translated “Stop becoming faithless and be believing”. There was the dangerous process of doubt in Thomas’ heart and the Lord wanted to put a stop to it.

**20:28**—Thomas, considering the Resurrection, applied to Jesus the titles of Lord (*kurios*) and God (*theos*), both titles of deity. For a Jew to call another human being “my Lord and my God”

was truly significant. Thomas' declaration is the last assertion of personal faith made in this gospel (see John the Baptist (1:34), Nathaniel (1:49), Jesus himself (5:25; 10:36), Peter (6:69), the formerly blind man who was healed (9:35), and Martha (11:27)). This declaration marks the climax of the book, presenting Christ as the risen Lord victorious over sin, sorrow, doubt, and death.

**F. Purpose of the book stated: That you may believe (20:30-31)**—John summarizes his purpose for writing in this text, tying together three persistent themes in the gospel: the “signs” demonstrating Christ’s nature and power; the response of faith exemplified, albeit slowly, in the lives of the disciples; and the new life found in a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

**V. Epilogue: Restoration of Peter and Commissioning the Disciples (21:1-25)**—This section records Peter’s restoration to service and establishes the disciples in their work of redemptive service among people. That service was to be both evangelistic and pastoral. They were to be fishers of people (21:1-14; Lk. 5:1-11, especially 5:10) and shepherds of souls (21:15-19). Those were activities that characterized followers of Jesus (21:19b-22).

**A. Miraculous catch and a Lord-cooked breakfast (21:1-14)**—John records the Lord’s post-Resurrection appearances around Jerusalem (in Jn. 20) and in Galilee (here, in Jn. 21). The Synoptics are fragmentary in their record of Christ’s appearances. Matthew and Mark speak of a Galilean manifestation, while Luke only records those appearances around Jerusalem.

The incident recorded here resembles the episode recorded in Luke 5:1-11 at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. However, it is not the same event. Note that here the disciples are still on the lake, not on land; Jesus was not recognized initially whereas Luke’s account records that Jesus had been speaking with them previously for some time; this event occurs at daybreak, while Luke’s account says that Jesus had been teaching for some time while the disciples mended their nets. The two are clearly different events. Indeed, the similarity of this occasion with the earlier one recorded by Luke is what prompted the disciples’ recognition of Jesus. The miraculous catch of fish revealed the presence and identity of the Lord just as Pentecost and subsequent “catches” of people would demonstrate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ in the upper room discourse. It is interesting to note how the Lord used similar miracles in initially calling Peter and the other disciples and then in establishing them in their future work.

**21:1**—The Sea of Galilee (Mt. 4:18; 15:29; Mk. 1:16; 7:31), the Lake of Gennesaret (Lk. 5:1), and the Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 6:1; 21:1) all refer to the same body of water.

**21:3**—Why go fishing? It is Peter’s idea, probably a case of right motivation but wrong judgment. He wanted to get on with life. Fishing is what they knew. They had some wonderful adventures, but now it was time to be responsible adults. Settle down and do something sensible, like make some money, catch some fish. They worked all night and—nothing. The time to catch fish was at night. Now, it was time to head for shore, get some chow, and catch some Zs. Then they see this dude on the shore, telling them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They caught 153 fish all at once. They must have remembered Luke 5:4-7, a similar huge catch. They knew in a flash, the man on the beach was the Lord Jesus.

Let's go in our minds' eye and be with the disciples in the boat. What projects have we labored over without any progress? Look for the figure on our shoreline. Let's listen to his voice. Let's do what he says.

**21:5-6**—The difference between complete failure and outstanding success was the width of a boat. The key to the difference between the twin imposters of success and failure was the Lord's direction. So too with us in our time.

**21:9**—One commentator wonders about the breakfast on the beach in John 21. Did the wood fire there (21:9) remind Peter of the fires around which he warmed himself in the high priest's courtyard just prior to his denials? Did the smell alone bring memories of that sad night?

**21:11**—Numerous attempts to find symbolic meaning in the number "153" have populated the annals of Bible interpretative history. Many of these attempts have been immensely fanciful! It seems more sensible to see in the reporting of this precise detail the faithful remembrance of an eyewitness who "heard, saw with his eyes, and touched with his hands the Word of life" (see 1 Jn. 1:1).

**B. Restoration and instruction of Peter (21:15-23)**—In this passage, Jesus restores Peter to the apostolic circle, giving him a threefold opportunity to affirm his love for Christ considering his threefold denial (18:15-18, 25-27). After each of Peter's avowals of love, Christ commands him to nurture and carefully watch over the flock of God. Peter will pass this charge on to the elders of local churches in his first epistle (see 1 Pt. 5:1-4). The Lord concludes by predicting Peter's violent death (21:18-19). Peter would, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be loyal to his Lord to the end, spending his life for God and sacrificing it to the glory of God.

**21:15-17**—Jesus asks Peter three times if the big fisherman loved him. Twice Jesus asked Peter "Do you truly love (*agapao*) me?" *Agapao* is a self-giving sort of love encompassing one's entire personality. The third time Jesus addressed Peter, he asked "Do you love (*phileo*) me?" *Phileo* describes a brotherly bond or deep-seeded fondness and is a less compelling description of love than *agapao*. Bible students have disagreed as to the upshot of this difference. Some see the Lord probing Peter's genuineness which deeply grieved Peter. Others discount this explanation, noting that *phileo* and *agapao* are used interchangeably in John for God's love for people (*agapao* in 14:23 and 17:23 and *phileo* in 5:20), for Jesus' love for people (*agapao* in 11:5 and *phileo* in 11:3), and the love of people for Jesus (*agapao* in 14:15, 21, 23-24, 28 and *phileo* in 16:27). These Bible students explain Peter's grief over Jesus' third question in his own recall of his previous denials.

Any work for the Lord is built on Peter's answer to the Lord's questioning—Do you love me? Somewhere, deep down inside, there is a love for the Lord Jesus. The good Lord knows we have failed him, let him down, many times, in many ways. The accuser will be on our shoulders in a heart's beat, pointing out those failures. The Lord wants us to find that love for him that is there, to give us a chance to express it, to heal the hurts and failures of the past, and to give us a new work to do.

Peter and the Lord had undoubtedly dealt with Peter's sin when the Lord appeared to the burly fisherman shortly after his Resurrection (Lk. 23:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). However, Peter had publicly denied the Lord and needed to be publicly restored. This is a good lesson on dealing with sin in the body of Christ. Sin should only be dealt with as publicly as it is known or as its foul consequences have affected. Private sins should be confessed privately, but public sin should be acknowledged before its proper audience.

This passage has been used by the Roman Catholic Church to buttress the authority claims of the papacy. Traditional Catholic teaching understands Mathew 16 as Jesus entrusting specific authority to Peter to govern the church and shepherd the whole people of God. John 21 is seen as confirming this pastoral and ecclesiastical mandate after Christ's resurrection. In my youth, I was taught that, based on this text, the pope was the ultimate pastor/authority, the vicar of Christ on earth. However, the context of John 21 undermines any idea of the conferral of special authority on Peter. Jesus specifically addresses Peter, not to confer papal authority upon him, but to restore him after Peter's denials of the Lord in the high priest's courtyard just prior to Christ's crucifixion (18:15-18, 25-27). First, note that the passage does not speak of infallible or even superior pastoral authority given to Peter. Nothing in the passage even begins to suggest that the other apostles were not likewise commissioned to feed and pastor the Lord's flock.

Second, the Lord specifically addresses Peter because he needed to be restored, not because he was being exalted. The brash, impetuous Peter had promised Christ at the last Supper that he would follow the Lord to the jaws of death itself. The Lord could bank on his loyal friend, Peter (13:37-38). However, after the Jews seized Jesus, Peter's cocky confidence waned. The persistent questioning of a servant girl, as Peter hid in the shadows of the high priest's courtyard, had elicited a threefold denial of Christ. Now, the Lord asks Peter three times if he loves him and then follows that query with the pastoral commands: "feed my lambs"; "take care of my sheep"; and "feed my sheep". The entire dialogue is restorative. It does not set Peter apart as the prince of the apostles. Jesus was not exalting Peter but simply restoring him to his apostolic place.

Third, if Roman Catholic claims are true, Peter himself seems to have missed the significance of John 21 to his personal authority. In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter reiterates Christ's pastoral charge to shepherd God's flock to his fellow elders. He addresses his fellow elders as one among them, not as their ultimate ecclesiastical superior.

**21:18-19**—Tradition records that Peter did indeed lay down his life for Jesus. However, what a different spirit he had than that of John 13:37! Legend has it that he asked to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

**21:20-22**—Peter's "what about this other guy" question is so common to our fallen state. Comparison with others invariably sidetracks us from Kingdom concerns. Whether we are tempted by pride to strut our stuff or by envy to begrudge others' success and our own relative obscurity, we have decidedly missed the point. The Lord's reply to that line of questioning is never a detailed explanation of individual circumstances, but the command "You must follow me".

**C. Conclusion (21:24-25)**—This is eyewitness testimony.

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